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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 29 August 2013

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Syria and the Use of Chemical Weapons not later than 10pm or six hours after their commencement, whichever is the later; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Mr Lansley.*)

Syria and the Use of Chemical Weapons

[*Relevant document: Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 16 July 2013, on Developments in UK Foreign Policy, HC 268-i.*]

Mr Speaker: We now come to the motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Syria and the use of chemical weapons. The text of the motion that was submitted yesterday, as it appears on the Order Paper, was incorrect. A few words were omitted from line 16. As they are purely factual, I am content that the motion should be moved in a corrected form, a copy of which is available in the Vote Office.

I inform the House that I have selected manuscript amendment (b), which was submitted this morning in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. The text of the manuscript amendment is also available from the Vote Office.

I should also inform the House that I have set a five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches in the debate.

2.36 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I beg to move,

That this House:

Deplores the use of chemical weapons in Syria on 21 August 2013 by the Assad regime, which caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries of Syrian civilians;

Recalls the importance of upholding the worldwide prohibition on the use of chemical weapons under international law;

Agrees that a strong humanitarian response is required from the international community and that this may, if necessary, require military action that is legal, proportionate and focused on saving lives by preventing and deterring further use of Syria's chemical weapons;

Notes the failure of the United Nations Security Council over the last two years to take united action in response to the Syrian crisis;

Notes that the use of chemical weapons is a war crime under customary law and a crime against humanity, and that the principle of humanitarian intervention provides a sound legal basis for taking action;

Notes the wide international support for such a response, including the statement from the Arab League on 27 August which calls on the international community, represented in the United Nations Security Council, to "overcome internal disagreements and take action against those who committed this crime, for which the Syrian regime is responsible";

Believes, in spite of the difficulties at the United Nations, that a United Nations process must be followed as far as possible to ensure the maximum legitimacy for any such action;

Therefore welcomes the work of the United Nations investigating team currently in Damascus, and, whilst noting that the team's mandate is to confirm whether chemical weapons were used and not to apportion blame, agrees that the United Nations Secretary General should ensure a briefing to the United Nations Security Council immediately upon the completion of the team's initial mission;

Believes that the United Nations Security Council must have the opportunity immediately to consider that briefing and that every effort should be made to secure a Security Council Resolution backing military action before any such action is taken, and notes that before any direct British involvement in such action a further vote of the House of Commons will take place; and

Notes that this Resolution relates solely to efforts to alleviate humanitarian suffering by deterring use of chemical weapons and does not sanction any action in Syria with wider objectives.

May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for agreeing to our request to recall the House of Commons for this important debate?

The question before the House today is how to respond to one of the most abhorrent uses of chemical weapons in a century, which has slaughtered innocent men, women and children in Syria. It is not about taking sides in the Syrian conflict, it is not about invading, it is not about regime change, and it is not even about working more closely with the opposition; it is about the large-scale use of chemical weapons and our response to a war crime—nothing else.

Let me set out what the House has in front of it today in respect of how we reached our conclusions. We have a summary of the Government's legal position, which makes it explicit that military action would have a clear legal basis.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Will the Prime Minister give way on that point?

The Prime Minister: In a moment.

We have the key independent judgments of the Joint Intelligence Committee, which make clear its view of what happened and who is responsible. We have a motion from the Government that sets out a careful path of steps that would need to be taken before Britain could participate in any direct military action. Those include the weapons inspectors reporting, further action at the United Nations and another vote in this House of Commons. The motion also makes it clear that even if all those steps were taken, anything that we did would have to be

"legal, proportionate and focused on...preventing and deterring further use of Syria's chemical weapons".

Caroline Lucas: I am very grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. Will he tell the House why he has refused to publish the Attorney-General's full advice?

[Caroline Lucas]

Why has he instead published just a one-and-a-half-side summary of it, especially when so many legal experts are saying that without explicit UN Security Council reinforcement, military action simply would not be legal under international law?

The Prime Minister: There had been a long-standing convention, backed by Attorney-Generals of all parties and all Governments, not to publish any legal advice at all. This Government changed that. With the Libya conflict, we published a summary of the legal advice. On this issue, we have published a very clear summary of the legal advice and I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to read it.

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I will make some progress and then I will take a huge number of interventions.

I am deeply mindful of the lessons of previous conflicts and, in particular, of the deep concerns in the country that were caused by what went wrong with the Iraq conflict in 2003. However, this situation is not like Iraq. What we are seeing in Syria is fundamentally different. We are not invading a country. We are not searching for chemical or biological weapons. The case for ultimately supporting action—I say “ultimately” because there would have to be another vote in this House—is not based on a specific piece or pieces of intelligence. The fact that the Syrian Government have, and have used, chemical weapons is beyond doubt. The fact that the most recent attack took place is not seriously doubted. The Syrian Government have said it took place. Even the Iranian President said that it took place. The evidence that the Syrian regime has used these weapons, in the early hours of 21 August, is right in front of our eyes. We have multiple eye-witness accounts of chemical-filled rockets being used against opposition-controlled areas. We have thousands of social media reports and at least 95 different videos—horrific videos—documenting the evidence.

The differences with 2003 and the situation with Iraq go wider. Then, Europe was divided over what should be done; now, Europe is united in the view that we should not let this chemical weapons use stand. Then, NATO was divided; today, NATO has made a very clear statement that those who are responsible should be held accountable. Back in 2003, the Arab League was opposed to action; now, it is calling for it. It has issued a statement holding the Syrian regime fully responsible and asking the international community to overcome internal disagreements and to take action against those who committed this crime.

Mr Arbuthnot: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. As he knows, a couple of days ago I expected to oppose the Government tonight, but is he aware that his determination to go down the route of the United Nations and his willingness to hold a further vote in this House will be extremely helpful to me in making up my mind tonight?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. In drawing up my motion I want to unite as much of the country and of this House as possible. I think it is right, on these vital issues of national and international importance, to seek the greatest possible consensus. That is the right thing for the Government to do and we will continue to do it.

The President of the United States, Barack Obama, is a man who opposed the action in Iraq. No one could in any way describe him as a President who wants to involve America in more wars in the middle east, but he profoundly believes that an important red line has been crossed in an appalling way, and that is why he supports action in this case. When I spoke to President Obama last weekend I said we shared his view about the despicable nature of this use of chemical weapons and that we must not stand aside, but I also explained to him that, because of the damage done to public confidence by Iraq, we would have to follow a series of incremental steps, including at the United Nations, to build public confidence and ensure the maximum possible legitimacy for any action. These steps are all set out in the motion before the House today.

I remember 2003. I was sitting two rows from the back on the Opposition Benches. It was just after my son had been born and he was not well, but I was determined to be here. I wanted to listen to the man who was standing right here and believe everything that he told me. We are not here to debate those issues today, but one thing is indisputable: the well of public opinion was well and truly poisoned by the Iraq episode and we need to understand the public scepticism.

Dame Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I am most grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. My reading of his motion tells me that everything in it could have been debated on Monday. I believe that this House has been recalled in order to give cover for possible military action this weekend. Has the Prime Minister made it clear to President Obama that in no way does this country support any attack that could come before the UN inspectors have done their job?

The Prime Minister: I wanted the recall of this House in order to debate these absolutely vital national and international issues. I will answer the right hon. Lady's question directly: it is this House that will decide what steps we next take. If Members agree to the motion I have set down, no action can be taken until we have heard from the UN weapons inspectors, until there has been further action at the United Nations and until there is another vote in this House. Those are the conditions that we—the British Government, the British Parliament—are setting and it is absolutely right that we do so.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: Let me make a little more progress and then I will take interventions from across the House.

The deep public cynicism imposes particular responsibilities on me as Prime Minister to try to carry people in the country and people in this House with me. I feel that very deeply. That was why I wanted Parliament recalled, and I want this debate to bring the country together, not divide it. That is why I included in my motion, the Government motion, all the issues I could

that were raised with me by the Leader of the Opposition and by many colleagues in all parts of the House—from the Liberal Democrat party, the Conservative party and others. I want us to try to have the greatest possible unity on the issue.

I have read the Opposition amendment carefully, and it has much to commend it. The need for the UN investigators to report—quite right. The importance of the process at the United Nations—quite right. The commitment to another vote in this House before any British participation in direct action—that is in our motion too.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: This is important; let me make this point.

However, I believe that the Opposition motion is deficient in two vital respects. First, it refers to the deaths on 21 August but does not in any way refer to the fact that they were caused by chemical weapons. That fact is accepted by almost everyone across the world, and for the House to ignore it would send a very bad message to the world.

Secondly, in no way does the Opposition motion even begin to point the finger of blame at President Assad. That is at odds with what has been said by NATO, President Obama and every European and regional leader I have spoken to; by the Governments of Australia, Canada, Turkey and India, to name but a few; and by the whole Arab League. It is at odds with the judgment of the independent Joint Intelligence Committee, and I think the Opposition amendment would be the wrong message for this House to send to the world. For that reason, I will recommend that my hon. Friends vote against it.

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to go through the UN process, but will he confirm to the House that were we to find during that process overwhelming opposition in the General Assembly and a majority against in the Security Council, as occurred 10 years ago, we would not then just motor on?

The Prime Minister: I think it would be unthinkable to proceed if there were overwhelming opposition in the Security Council.

Let me set out for the House why I think this issue is so important. The very best route to follow is to have a chapter VII resolution, take it to the UN Security Council, have it passed and then think about taking action. That was the path we followed with Libya.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I want to make this point, because I think it is very important.

However, it cannot be the case that that is the only way to have a legal basis for action, and we should consider for a moment what the consequences would be if that were the case. We could have a situation where a country's Government were literally annihilating half the people in that country, but because of one veto on the Security Council we would be hampered from taking

any action. I cannot think of any Member from any party who would want to sign up to that. That is why it is important that we have the doctrine of humanitarian intervention, which is set out in the Attorney-General's excellent legal advice to the House.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend for taking the time to listen to the concerns of residents of Shrewsbury about yet further British military intervention in the middle east. However, why cannot our allies in the middle east, such as Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait, take military action? Why does it fall on us yet again?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and let us be clear that no decision about military action has been taken. It would require another vote of this House. However, if we wanted to see action that was purely about deterring and degrading future chemical weapons use by Syria—that is the only basis on which I would support any action—we would need countries that have the capabilities to take that action, of which the United States and the United Kingdom are two. There are very few other countries that would be able to do that.

Sir Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): On the matter of international law, did not the world leaders and the UN sign up unanimously in 2005 to the doctrine of the responsibility to protect, which means that if countries default on their responsibility to defend their own citizens, the international community as a whole has a responsibility to do so? Syria has defaulted on its responsibility to protect its own citizens, so surely now the international community and ourselves have a responsibility to undertake what we agreed to do as recently as 2005.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very important point that relates to what happened in Kosovo and elsewhere, but let me be clear about what we are talking about today: yes it is about that doctrine, but it is also about chemical weapons. It is about a treaty the whole world agreed to almost 100 years ago, after the horrors of the first world war. The question before us is this: is Britain a country that wants to uphold that international taboo against the use of chemical weapons? My argument is that yes, it should be that sort of country.

Mr Bob Ainsworth (Coventry North East) (Lab): The Prime Minister cites the issues relating to Iraq and the impact they have on decisions today, but the perception—a justifiable perception in my opinion—of his own preparedness to get involved in this conflict long before the current incident surely has an impact on the decisions of today.

The Prime Minister: What I would say to the right hon. Gentleman is that the case I am making is that the House of Commons needs to consider purely and simply this issue of massive chemical weapons use by this regime. I am not arguing that we should become more involved in this conflict. I am not arguing that we should arm the rebels. I am not making any of those arguments. The question before us—as a Government, as a House of Commons, as a world—is that there is the

[*The Prime Minister*]

1925 post-first world war agreement that these weapons are morally reprehensible, so do we want to try to maintain that law? Put simply, is it in Britain's national interest to maintain an international taboo about the use of chemical weapons on the battlefield? My argument is: yes, it is. Britain played a part in drawing up that vital protocol—which, incidentally, Syria signed—and I think we have an interest in maintaining it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: Let me take an intervention from the Democratic Unionist party.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I thank the Prime Minister for giving way. I doubt there are many people in this House who do not believe that the debate is a prelude to a decision that will eventually see us involved in Syria. Will he explain why if, as the briefing states there have already been 14 instances of chemical weapons use, 100,000 people dead and 1.2 million people displaced, it is only now that the Prime Minister thinks that this is the time for greater intervention?

The Prime Minister: The point for considering this tougher approach is that we know there are the 14 uses of chemical weapons on a smaller scale—at least 14—and now we have this much larger use. This seems to me—and to President Obama, to President Hollande and to many others—an appropriate moment to ask whether it is time to do something to stand up for the prohibition against the use of chemical weapons. I cannot be accused on the one hand of rushing into something, while, on the other hand, being asked, “Why have you waited for 14 chemical weapons attacks before you do something?”

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: Let me make a little progress.

In my speech I want to do three things: explain what we know; set out the path we will follow; and try to answer all of the difficult questions that have been put to me. Let me try to make some progress and I promise I will take interventions as I go along. Let me set out what we know about what happened.

Médecins sans Frontières reported that in just three hours, on the morning of 21 August, three hospitals in the Damascus area received approximately 3,600 patients with symptoms consistent with chemical weapons attacks. At least 350 of those innocent people died. The video footage illustrates some of the most sickening human suffering imaginable. Expert video analysis can find no way that this wide array of footage could have been fabricated, particularly the behaviour of small children in those shocking videos.

There are pictures of bodies with symptoms consistent with that of nerve agent exposure, including muscle spasms and foaming at the nose and mouth. I believe that anyone in this Chamber who has not seen these videos should force themselves to watch them. One can never forget the sight of children's bodies stored in ice, and young men and women gasping for air and suffering the most agonising deaths—all inflicted by weapons that have been outlawed for nearly a century.

The Syrian regime has publicly admitted that it was conducting a major military operation in the area at that time. The regime resisted calls for immediate and unrestricted access for UN inspectors, while artillery and rocket fire in the area reached a level about four times higher than in the preceding 10 days. There is intelligence that Syrian regime forces took precautions normally associated with chemical weapons use.

Examining all this evidence, together with the available intelligence, the Joint Intelligence Committee has made its judgments, and has done so in line with the reforms put in place after the Iraq war by Sir Robin Butler. Today, we are publishing the key judgments in a letter from the Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee. The letter states that

“there is little serious dispute that chemical attacks causing mass casualties on a larger scale than hitherto...took place on 21 August”.

On the Syrian opposition, the letter states:

“There is no credible intelligence or other evidence to substantiate the claims or the possession of CW”—

that is, chemical weapons—

“by the opposition.”

The Joint Intelligence Committee therefore concludes:

“It is not possible for the opposition to have carried out a CW attack on this scale.”

It says this:

“The regime has used CW on a smaller scale on at least 14 occasions in the past. There is some intelligence to suggest regime culpability in this attack. These factors make it highly likely that the Syrian regime was responsible.”

Crucially, the JIC Chairman, in his letter to me, makes this point absolutely clear. He says

“there are no plausible alternative scenarios to regime responsibility.”

I am not standing here and saying that there is some piece or pieces of intelligence that I have seen, or the JIC has seen, that the world will not see, that convince me that I am right and anyone who disagrees with me is wrong. I am saying that this is a judgment; we all have to reach a judgment about what happened and who was responsible. But I would put it to hon. Members that all the evidence we have—the fact that the opposition do not have chemical weapons and the regime does, the fact that it has used them and was attacking the area at the time, and the intelligence that I have reported—is enough to conclude that the regime is responsible and should be held accountable.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I am most grateful to the Prime Minister. What has convinced him—where is the evidence?—that an action by the international community would cease the use of chemical weapons within Syria, a country where the combatants have accepted 100,000 dead, millions of refugees and the continuing action that is totally destroying that country? Where is the evidence that convinces the Prime Minister that the external world can prevent this?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes an extremely serious point. As I have just said, in the end there is no 100% certainty about who is responsible; you have to make a judgment. There is also no 100% certainty about what path of action might succeed or fail. But let me say this to the hon. Lady. I think we can be as certain as possible that a regime that has used chemical weapons on 14 occasions and is most likely responsible for this

large-scale attack, will conclude, if nothing is done, that it can use these weapons again and again on a larger scale and with impunity.

People talk about escalation; to me, the biggest danger of escalation is if the world community—not just Britain, but America and others—stands back and does nothing. I think Assad will draw very clear conclusions from that.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Prime Minister is making a very powerful and heartfelt speech. Could he explain to the House why he thinks President Assad did this? There seems to be no logic to this chemical attack and that is what is worrying some people.

The Prime Minister: That is a very good question. If my hon. Friend reads the JIC conclusions, he will see that this is where it finds the greatest difficulty—asccribing motives. Lots of motives have been ascribed. For my part, I think the most likely possibility is that Assad has been testing the boundaries. At least 14 uses and no response—he wants to know whether the world will respond to the use of these weapons, which I suspect, tragically and repulsively, are proving quite effective on the battlefield. But in the end we cannot know the mind of this brutal dictator; all we can do is make a judgment about whether it is better to act or not to act and whether he is responsible or not responsible. In the end, these are all issues of judgment and as Members of Parliament, we all have to make them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I will take a question from the Scottish National party.

Mr MacNeil: I am very grateful to the Prime Minister. Does he know whether there were any plans over the last few days for any military action, before next week, planned at all against Syria?

The Prime Minister: One obviously cannot discuss the details of potential action in detail in front of this House, but I can tell the House that the American President and I have had discussions, which have been reported in the newspapers, about potential military action.

We have had those discussions and the American President would like to have allies alongside the United States with the capability and partnership that Britain and America have. But we have set out, very clearly, what Britain would need to see happen for us to take part in that—more action at the UN, a report by the UN inspectors and a further vote in this House. Our actions will not be determined by my good friend and ally the American President; they will be decided by this Government and votes in this House of Commons.

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): I agree with the Prime Minister about the horror of chemical weapons, but the vast majority of the 100,000 killed so far in this civil war in Syria have died as a result of conventional weapons. Can he convince the House that military

action by our country would shorten the civil war and help herald a post-war Government who could create stability?

The Prime Minister: It is a good question, but I am afraid that I cannot make any of those assurances. Obviously, we have not made that decision, but were we to make a decision to join the Americans and others in military action, it would have to be action, in my view, that was solely about deterring and degrading the future use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime—full stop, end of story. By the way, if we were aware of large-scale use of chemical weapons by the opposition, I would be making the same argument from the same Dispatch Box and making the same recommendations.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for standing tall and for supporting Britain's historical tradition of always standing against mass murder by dictators and tyrants. Does he not agree that there is a humanitarian case for intervention, especially given what happened in recent history in Halabja in 1988, when 5,000 Kurds were killed with mustard gas?

The Prime Minister: I applaud my hon. Friend for always standing up against genocide, wherever it takes place in the world. It may well be that the fact that no action was taken over Halabja was one of the things that convinced President Assad that it was okay to build up an arsenal of chemical weapons.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I am going to make some progress. As I said, the second part of my speech deals with the actions set out in our motion. I want to address those and then I will take some more interventions.

Whatever disagreements there are over the complex situation in Syria, I believe that there should be no disagreement that the use of chemical weapons is wrong. As I said, almost a century ago the world came together to agree the 1925 treaty and to outlaw the use of chemical weapons, and international law since that time has reflected a determination that the events of that war should never be repeated. It put a line in the sand; it said that, whatever happens, these weapons must not be used. President Assad has, in my view, crossed that line and there should now be consequences. This was the first significant use of chemical weapons this century and, taken together with the previous 14 small-scale attacks, it is the only instance of the regular and indiscriminate use of chemical weapons by a state against its own people for at least 100 years.

Interfering in another country's affairs should not be undertaken except in the most exceptional circumstances. There must be, as my hon. Friend has just said, a humanitarian catastrophe, and the action must be a last resort. By any standards, this is a humanitarian catastrophe and if there are no consequences for it, there will be nothing to stop Assad and other dictators using these weapons again and again. As I have said, doing nothing is a choice—it is a choice with consequences. These consequences would not just be about President Assad and his future use of chemical weapons; decades of painstaking work to construct an international system

[The Prime Minister]

of rules and checks to prevent the use of chemical weapons and to destroy stockpiles will be undone. The global consensus against the use of chemical weapons will be fatally unravelled. A 100-year taboo will be breached. People ask about the British national interest. Is it not in the British national interest that rules about chemical weapons are upheld? In my view, of course it is, and that is why I believe we should not stand idly by.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Notwithstanding the differences I have with the Prime Minister on the issue of timing and his approach to conflict, may I raise the issue of consequences? Does he agree that whoever is responsible for a chemical weapons attack should know that they will face a court, be it the International Criminal Court or a specially convened war crimes tribunal in the future, because whether there is military intervention or not, somebody is responsible for a heinous crime and they should face the law?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree that people should be subject to the ICC and, of course, possession and use of chemical weapons is a crime and can be prosecuted, but we have to recognise the slowness of those wheels and the fact that Syria is not even a signatory to that treaty.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: Let me make a little more progress and then I will give way.

As I have said, I have consulted the Attorney-General and he has confirmed that the use of chemical weapons in Syria constitutes both a war crime and a crime against humanity. I want to be very clear about the process that we follow—the motion is clear about that. The weapons investigators in Damascus must complete their work. They should brief the United Nations Security Council. A genuine attempt should be made at a condemnatory chapter VII resolution, backing all necessary measures. Then, and only then, could we have another vote of this House and British involvement in direct military action. I have explained, again, the legal position and I do not need to repeat it, but I urge colleagues to read this legal advice, which I have put in the Library of the House of Commons. But let me repeat, one more time, that we have not reached that point—we have not made the decision to act—but were there to be a decision to act, this advice proves that it would be legal.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that our constituents are concerned about Britain's becoming involved in another middle eastern conflict, whereas he is focusing specifically on the war-crimes use of chemical weapons, which is a very different matter from Britain's being involved in a protracted middle eastern war?

The Prime Minister: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I am fully aware of the deep public scepticism and war-weariness in our country, linked to the difficult economic times people have had to deal with, and that they are asking why Britain has to do so much in the world. I totally understand that, and we should reassure

our constituents that this is about chemical weapons, not intervention or getting involved in another middle eastern war.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I give way to the former Home Secretary.

Hon. Members: And former Foreign Secretary, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice.

Mr Straw: And Member of Parliament for Blackburn.

The Prime Minister said a moment ago, within the hearing of the House, that one of the purposes of any action would be the “degrading” of the Assad regime's chemical weapons capability. In a letter that General Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent to Carl Levin, of the United States Congress, a couple of months ago, he spelt out that fully to do that would involve hundreds of ships and aircraft and thousands of ground troops, at a cost of \$1 billion a month. Given that the Prime Minister is not proposing that, could he say what his objective would be in degrading the chemical weapons capability?

The Prime Minister: Of course, the right hon. Gentleman has had many jobs—Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary and so on—so perhaps I should just refer to him as “my constituent”. That is probably safer.

The right hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, however. I think that the Dempsey letter was addressing the point that if we wanted entirely to dismantle, or to attempt to dismantle, Syria's weapons arsenal, that would be an enormous undertaking which would involve ground troops and all sorts of things, but that is not what is being proposed; the proposal, were we to take part, would be to attempt to deter and degrade the future use of chemical weapons. That is very different. I do not want to set out at the Dispatch Box a list of targets, but it is perfectly simple and straightforward to think of actions that we could take relating to the command and control of the use of chemical weapons, and the people and buildings involved, that would indeed deter and degrade. Hon. Members will ask this point in several different ways: how can we be certain that any action will work and would not have to be repeated? Frankly, these are judgment issues, and the only firm judgment I think we can all come to is that if nothing is done, we are more likely to see more chemical weapons used.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Although the Joint Intelligence Committee says it is baffled about the motivation for Assad's use of chemical weapons, it says it has

“a limited but growing body of intelligence which supports the judgment that the regime was responsible”.

I appreciate that the Prime Minister cannot share such intelligence with the House as a whole, but members of the all-party Intelligence and Security Committee have top-secret clearance to look at precisely this sort of material. As some of its members support and others oppose military intervention, would he be willing for them to see that material?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to consider that request, because the ISC plays a very important role, but I do not want to raise, as perhaps happened in the Iraq debate, the status of individual or groups of pieces of intelligence into some sort of quasi-religious cult. That would not be appropriate. I have told the House that there is an enormous amount of open-source reporting, including videos that we can all see. Furthermore, we know that the regime has an enormous arsenal, that it has used it before and that it was attacking that area. Then, of course, there is the fact that the opposition does not have those weapons or delivery systems and that the attack took place in an area that it was holding. So, yes, intelligence is part of this picture, but let us not pretend that there is one smoking piece of intelligence that can solve the whole problem. This is a judgment issue; hon. Members will have to make a judgment.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for being generous in giving way.

The reason many of us in Parliament oppose arming the rebels is not only that atrocities have been committed by both sides in this vicious civil war, but that there is a real risk of escalating the violence and therefore the suffering. No matter how clinical the strikes, there is a real risk that they would result only in escalating the violence. What assurances can the Prime Minister give, therefore, that this will not escalate violence either within the country or beyond Syria's borders?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend and I have not agreed on every aspect of Syrian policy, as is well known. If we were to take action, it would be purely and simply about degrading and deterring chemical weapons use. We worry about escalation, but the greatest potential escalation is the danger of additional chemical weapons use because nothing has been done. This debate and this motion are not about arming the rebels or intervening in the conflict, or about invasion or changing our approach to Syria. They are about chemical weapons—something in which everyone in this House has an interest.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): The use of chemical weapons has made Syria our business. Does the Prime Minister agree that to miss the opportunity we have today to send a strong message to Assad and others that this House condemns this war crime, the use of chemical weapons, and will stand by our obligations to deter them would be to undermine our own national security?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. One of the questions our constituents ask most is where the British national interest is in all of this. I would argue that a stable middle east is in the national interest, but there is a specific national interest relating to the use of chemical weapons and preventing its escalation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I will give way a bit more in a minute, but I want to make some further progress and leave plenty of time for Back-Bench speeches.

In this section of my speech, I have tried to address the questions that people have. Let me take the next one: whether we would be in danger of undermining our ambitions for a political solution in Syria. There is not some choice between, on the one hand, acting to prevent chemical weapons being used against the Syrian people and, on the other, continuing to push for a long-term political solution. We need to do both. We remain absolutely committed to using diplomacy to end this war with a political solution.

Let me make this point. For as long as Assad is able to defy international will and get away with chemical attacks on his people, I believe that he will feel little if any pressure to come to the negotiating table. He is happy to go on killing and maiming his own people as part of his strategy for winning that brutal civil war. Far from undermining the political process, a strong response over the use of chemical weapons in my view could strengthen it.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): One of the consequences of intervening will be the effect that it will have on other countries in the region, and my particular concern—as the Prime Minister knows—is Yemen, the most unstable country in the area. Has he looked at the possible consequences of intervention and the effect that it will have on the stability of a country such as Yemen?

The Prime Minister: I have taken advice from all of the experts about all the potential impacts on the region, which in fact is the next question in my list of questions that need to be answered. The region has already been profoundly endangered by the conflict in Syria. Lebanon is facing sectarian tensions as refugees pile across the border. Jordan is coping with a massive influx of refugees. Our NATO ally Turkey has suffered terrorist attacks and shelling from across the border. Standing by as a new chemical weapons threat emerges in Syria will not alleviate those challenges; it will deepen them. That is why the Arab League has been so clear in condemning the action, in attributing it precisely to President Assad and in calling for international action. This is a major difference from past crises in the middle east, and a region long beset by conflict and aggression needs above all clear international laws and people and countries who are prepared to stand up for them.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): I believe that my constituents, like those of the rest of the House, want the Prime Minister to make clear on behalf of this country that we will not turn away from the illegal use of chemical weapons, but that we will give peace a chance. Will he assure us that he will continue to engage—however difficult it is—with Russia and the other key countries to try to make sure that the UN route is productive and that the diplomatic process is engaged again as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend that we must continue the process of diplomatic engagement. Even after I had spoken to President Obama before the weekend, I called President Putin on Monday and had a long discussion with him about this issue. We are a long way apart, but the one issue about which we do agree is the need to get the Geneva II process going.

[*The Prime Minister*]

The assurance I can give my right hon. Friend is that any action would be immediately taken over by running a political process once again and that Britain will do everything in its power to help make that happen.

Let me answer a final question that has been put in the debate over recent days: whether this will risk radicalising more young Muslims, including people here in Britain. This is a vital question, and it is one that was not asked enough in 2003. This question was asked at the National Security Council yesterday, and we have received considered analysis from our counter-terrorism experts. Their assessment is that, while as ever there is no room for complacency, the legal, proportionate and focused actions that would be proposed will not be a significant new cause of radicalisation and extremism. I would make this point: young Muslims in the region and here in Britain are looking at the pictures of Muslims suffering in Syria, seeing the most horrific deaths from chemical weapons and many of them may be asking whether the world is going to step up and respond, and I believe that the right message to give to them is that we should.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: I will take one more intervention.

Mr Tom Clarke (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister reflect on the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) on the humanitarian situation, not just as it might appear in the future, but as it happens now, with thousands of refugees going to neighbouring countries? Given that aid agencies such as CAFOD have said that this is the worst situation of the 21st century, how can we be absolutely sure that we will not add in the neighbouring countries, including those in north Africa, to the problems that we are facing?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point, and we should be proud in the House and this country of the massive role that aid agencies and British aid money are playing in relieving this disastrous humanitarian situation. We are one of the largest donors, and we will go on making that investment because we are saving lives and helping people every day. But we have to ask ourselves whether the unfettered use of chemical weapons by the regime will make the humanitarian situation worse, and I believe that it will. If we believed that there was a way to deter and degrade future chemical weapons action, it would be irresponsible not to do it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Prime Minister: Let me just make this point. When people study the legal advice published by the Government, they will see that it makes the point that the intervention on the basis of humanitarian protection has to be about saving lives.

Let me conclude where I began. The question before us is how to respond to one of the worst uses of chemical weapons in a hundred years. The answer is that we must do the right thing and in the right way. We must be sure to learn the lessons of previous conflicts.

We must pursue every avenue at the United Nations, every diplomatic channel and every option for securing the greatest possible legitimacy with the steps that we take, and we must recognise the scepticism and concerns that many people in the country will have after Iraq, by explaining carefully and consistently all the ways in which this situation and the actions that we take are so very different. We must ensure that any action, if it is to be taken, is proportionate, legal and specifically designed to deter the use of chemical weapons. We must ensure that any action supports and is accompanied by a renewed effort to forge a political solution and relieve humanitarian suffering in Syria. But at the same time, we must not let the spectre of previous mistakes paralyse our ability to stand up for what is right. We must not be so afraid of doing anything that we end up doing nothing.

Let me repeat that there will be no action without a further vote in the House of Commons, but on this issue Britain should not stand aside. We must play our part in a strong international response; we must be prepared to take decisive action to do so. That is what today's motion is about, and I commend it to the House.

3.17 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I beg to move manuscript amendment (b), leave out from 'House' to end and add—

'expresses its revulsion at the killing of hundreds of civilians in Ghutah, Syria on 21 August 2013; believes that this was a moral outrage; recalls the importance of upholding the worldwide prohibition on the use of chemical weapons; makes clear that the use of chemical weapons is a grave breach of international law; agrees with the UN Secretary General that the UN weapons inspectors must be able to report to the UN Security Council and that the Security Council must live up to its responsibilities to protect civilians; supports steps to provide humanitarian protection to the people of Syria but will only support military action involving UK forces if and when the following conditions have been met that:

(a) the UN weapons inspectors, upon the conclusion of their mission in the Eastern Ghutah, are given the necessary opportunity to make a report to the Security Council on the evidence and their findings, and confirmation by them that chemical weapons have been used in Syria;

(b) compelling evidence is produced that the Syrian regime was responsible for the use of these weapons;

(c) the UN Security Council has considered and voted on this matter in the light of the reports of the weapons inspectors and the evidence submitted;

(d) there is a clear legal basis in international law for taking collective military action to protect the Syrian people on humanitarian grounds;

(e) such action must have regard to the potential consequences in the region, and must therefore be legal, proportionate, time-limited and have precise and achievable objectives designed to deter the future use of prohibited chemical weapons in Syria; and

(f) the Prime Minister reports further to the House on the achievement of these conditions so that the House can vote on UK participation in such action, and that any such vote should relate solely to efforts to deter the use of chemical weapons and does not sanction any wider action in Syria.'

I start by joining the Prime Minister in expressing revulsion at the killing of hundreds of innocent civilians in Ghutah on 21 August. This was a moral outrage, and the international community is right to condemn it. As the Prime Minister said, everyone in the House and

most people in the country will have seen the pictures of men, women and children gasping for breath and dying as a result of this heinous attack. I can assure hon. Members that the divide that exists does not exist over the condemnation of the use of chemical weapons and the fact that it breaches international law; nor does it lie in the willingness to condemn the regime of President Assad. The question facing this House is what, if any, military action we should take and what criteria should determine that decision. That is what I want to focus on in my speech today.

It is right to say at the beginning of my remarks that the Prime Minister said a couple of times in his speech words to the effect that, “We are not going to get further involved in that conflict. This does not change our stance on Syria.” I have got to say to the Prime Minister, with the greatest respect, that that is simply not the case. For me that does not rule out military intervention—I want to be clear about this—but I do not think anybody in this House or in the country should be under any illusions about the effect on our relationship to the conflict in Syria if we were to intervene militarily. As I say, and as I shall develop in my remarks, that does not, for me, rule out intervention, but we need to be clear-eyed about the impact that this would have.

Let me also say that this is one of the most solemn duties that this House possesses, and in our minds should be this simple question: in upholding international law and legitimacy, how can we make the lives of the Syrian people better? We should also have in our minds—it is right to remember it on this occasion—the duty we owe to the exceptional men and women of our armed forces and their families, who will face the direct consequences of any decision we make.

The basis on which we make this decision is of fundamental importance, because the basis of making the decision determines the legitimacy and moral authority of any action that we undertake. That is why our amendment asks the House to support a clear and legitimate road map to decision on this issue—a set of steps that will enable us to judge any recommended international action. I want to develop the argument about why I believe this sequential road map is the right thing for the House to support today.

Most of all, if we follow this road map, it can assure the country and the international community that if we take action, we will follow the right, legitimate and legal course, not an artificial timetable or a political timetable set elsewhere. I think that is very important for any decision we make. This is fundamental to the principles of Britain: a belief in the rule of law and a belief that any military action we take must be justified in terms of the cause and also the potential consequences. We should strain every sinew to make the international institutions that we have in our world work to deal with the outrages in Syria.

Let me turn to the conditions in our amendment. First—this is where the Prime Minister and I now agree—we must let the UN weapons inspectors do their work and let them report to the Security Council. Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, yesterday said about the weapons inspectors:

“Let them conclude their work for four days and then we will have to analyse scientifically with experts and then...we will have to report to the Security Council for any actions.”

The weapons inspectors are in the midst of their work and will be reporting in the coming days. That is why today could not have been the day on which the House was asked to decide on military action. It is surely a basic point for this House that evidence should precede decision, not decision precede evidence. I am glad that, on reflection, the Prime Minister accepted this yesterday.

Now it is true—some have already raised this issue—that the weapons inspectors cannot reach a judgment on the attribution of blame. That is beyond their mandate. Some might think that that makes their work essentially irrelevant. I disagree. If the UN weapons inspectors conclude that chemical weapons have been used, in the eyes of this country and of the world that will confer legitimacy on the finding beyond the view of any individual country or any intelligence agency. What is more, it is possible that what the weapons inspectors discover could give the world greater confidence in identifying the perpetrators of this horrific attack.

The second step in our road map makes it clear that there must be compelling evidence that the Syrian regime was responsible for the attack. I welcome the letter from the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee today, and I note the Arab League’s view of President Assad’s culpability. Of course, as the Prime Minister said, in conflict there is always reason for doubt, but the greater the weight of evidence the better. On Tuesday we were promised the release of American intelligence to prove the regime’s culpability. We await publication of that evidence, which I gather will be later today. That evidence, too, will be important in building up the body of evidence to show that President Assad was responsible.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): The Leader of the Opposition has said that he might be able to support military action of the kind that the Government are contemplating. He has put in his amendment a list of the requirements, virtually all of which, as far as I can tell, appear in the Government’s own motion. Why can he not, therefore, support the Government’s motion, in order that this House could speak with a united voice to the world on this matter?

Edward Miliband: I will develop in my remarks why I do not think that is the case. In particular, I would point to the fact that the Government’s motion does not mention compelling evidence against President Assad, and I will develop later in my remarks the fifth point in our amendment, which is very, very important—the basis on which we judge whether action can be justified in terms of the consequences.

The third step is that, in the light of the weapons inspectors’ findings and this other evidence, and as the Secretary-General said, the UN Security Council should then debate what action should be taken, and indeed should vote on action. I have heard it suggested that we should have “a United Nations moment”. They are certainly not my words; they are words which do no justice to the seriousness with which we must take the United Nations. The UN is not some inconvenient sideshow, and we do not want to engineer a “moment”. Instead, we want to adhere to the principles of international law.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I very much welcome the right hon. Gentleman's doctrine that evidence should precede decision; that is a stark change from at least one of his predecessors. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Does he believe that the evidence that has been presented to us today by the Joint Intelligence Committee is compelling or not?

Edward Miliband: I think it is important evidence, but we need to gather further evidence over the coming days. That is part of persuading the international community and people in this country of President Assad's culpability, and I think that is important. Let me also come to the hon. Gentleman's earlier point, though, because the Prime Minister raised it too. I am very clear about the fact that we have got to learn the lessons of Iraq. Of course we have got to learn those lessons, and one of the most important lessons was indeed about respect for the United Nations, and that is part of our amendment today.

On the question of the Security Council, I am also clear that it is incumbent on us to try to build the widest support among the 15 members of the Security Council, whatever the intentions of particular countries. The level of international support is vital, should we decide to take military action. It is vital in the eyes of the world. That is why it cannot be seen as some sideshow or some "moment", but is an essential part of building the case, if intervention takes place.

Andrew Selous *rose*—

Mr MacNeil *rose*—

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD) *rose*—

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) *rose*—

Edward Miliband: I give way to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert).

Dr Huppert: The Leader of the Opposition is right that the UN Security Council should not be just a sideshow, but why does his amendment merely say that the Security Council should have voted on the matter, rather than that it should have voted in favour of some intervention?

Edward Miliband: I will come directly to that question. It is because there will be those who argue that in the event of Russia and China vetoing a Security Council resolution, any military action would necessarily not be legitimate. I understand that view but I do not agree with it. I believe that if a proper case is made, there is scope in international law—our fourth condition—for action to be taken even without a chapter VII Security Council resolution. Kosovo in 1999 is the precedent cited in the Prime Minister's speech and in the Attorney-General's legal advice; but the Prime Minister did not go into much detail on that advice.

It is worth noting that in the Attorney-General's legal advice there are three very important conditions. The first condition is that there must be

"convincing evidence, generally accepted by the international community as a whole, of extreme humanitarian distress".

The second is that

"it must be objectively clear that there is no practicable alternative to the use of force if lives are to be saved".

That is a testing condition, which we need to test out in the coming days and the coming period. Thirdly,

"the proposed use of force must be...proportionate...and...strictly limited in time".

So the Attorney-General concludes in his advice—it is very important for the House to understand this—that there could be circumstances, in the absence of a chapter VII Security Council resolution, for action to be taken, but subject to those three conditions. That is the case that must be built over the coming period. These principles reflect the responsibility to protect, a doctrine developed since Kosovo which commands widespread support.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right; I did not cover everything in my speech. I could have gone into more detail on the Attorney-General's advice. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the three conditions. I just thought for the clarity of the House, for those who might not have had time to read it, I would point out that the very next sentence of the Attorney-General's advice is:

"All three conditions would clearly be met in this case".

Edward Miliband: Well, that is the Attorney-General's view—[*Interruption.*] That is the view that needs to be tested out over the coming period. Of course that is the case and a judgment will have to be made. Additionally, the responsibility to protect also demands a reasonable prospect of success in improving the plight of the Syrian people, and that responsibility is an essential part of making this case. That takes me to the final point of the road map we propose.

Glenda Jackson: I am referring to the fourth paragraph of our road map. My right hon. Friend has already touched on the fact that any action must be legal, proportionate and time-limited, but the amendment goes on to say that it must have "precise and achievable objectives". Will he detail what those objectives are?

Edward Miliband: I am coming exactly to that point, which is that the Government need to set that out in the coming days. That takes me precisely to the final point of the road map. Any military action must be specifically designed to deter the future use of chemical weapons; it must be time-limited with specific purpose and scope so that future action would require further recourse to this House; and it must have regard for the consequences of any action. We must ensure that every effort is made to bring the civil war in Syria to an end, and principal responsibility for that rests, of course, with the parties in that conflict, and in particular President Assad.

Mr Brazier: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I want to make a bit more progress.

The international community also has a duty to do everything it can to support the Geneva II process, and any action we take—this is the key point—must assist that process and not hinder it. That is the responsibility that lies on the Government and their allies—to set out that case in the coming period.

There will be some in this House who say that Britain should not contemplate action even when it is limited, because we do not know precisely the consequences that will follow. As I said, I am not with those who rule out action, and the horrific events unfolding in Syria ask us to consider all available options, but we owe it to the Syrian people, to our own country and to the future security of our world to scrutinise any plans on the basis of the consequences they will have. By setting a framework today, we give ourselves time and space to scrutinise what is being proposed by the Government, to see what the implications are.

Mr Baron: For the sake of clarity for the House, can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether, if there was no UN Security Council resolution, the Labour Opposition would back military intervention?

Edward Miliband: It depends on the case that has been set out and the extent to which international support has been developed—[*Interruption.*] I say to hon. Members on the Government Benches who are making strange noises that it is right to go about this process in a calm and measured way. If people are asking me today to say, “Yes, now, let us take military action,” I am not going to say that, but neither am I going to rule out military action, because we have to proceed on the basis of evidence and the consensus and support that can be built.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Glenda Jackson) asked an important question that I feel the right hon. Gentleman did not answer fully. Paragraph (e) of the Opposition amendment refers to “precise and achievable objectives”, which I assume means that he has in mind precise and achievable objectives. Can he please detail what they would be?

Edward Miliband: Yes I can, because the amendment goes on to say,

“designed to deter the future use of prohibited chemical weapons in Syria”.

Paragraph (e) also states that

“such action must have regard to the potential consequences in the region”,

so any proposed action to deter the use of chemical weapons must be judged against the consequences that will follow. Further work by the Government is necessary to set out what those consequences would be.

Mr Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): On consequences, I am listening carefully to the Leader of the Opposition and he is effectively making a strong case against military action. The consequences of the military action envisaged are very unquantifiable, because the objectives are, frankly, pretty soft in terms of degrading and deterring and of the link between military effect and the actual effect on the ground. He has also linked this to the consequences for the Geneva II process, which can only be negative.

Edward Miliband: I am saying to the hon. Gentleman and the House that over the coming period, we have to assess in a calm and measured way—not in a knee-jerk way, and not on a political timetable—the advantages

of potential action, whether such action can be taken on the basis of legitimacy and international law, and what the consequences would be.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): Listening to the right hon. Gentleman’s speech, any reasonable human being would assume that he is looking to divide the House for political advantage. What has happened to the national interest?

Edward Miliband: That intervention is not worthy of the hon. Gentleman. I am merely trying to set out a framework for decision for the House. My interest all along has been to ensure that the House of the Commons can make the decision, and do so when the evidence is available. Some in the House believe that the decision is simple—clearly there are such Members on the Government Benches. Some think we can make the decision now to engage in military conflict. Equally, others believe we can rule out military conflict now. I happen to think that we must assess the evidence over the coming period. That is the right thing to do, and our road map sets out how we would do it.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It is one thing to not rule out military action, but is not the problem with the Government’s motion that it asks for an in-principle vote for military action now, before we hear what the inspectors say and before the UN processes take place?

Edward Miliband: I say to my hon. Friend and the House that this morning, it was noticeable that the Government motion would be presented, if it was voted for—this is an important point—as the House endorsing the principle of military action. That is why I do not feel ready to support the Government motion, and why I believe the Opposition amendment, which sets out a framework for decision, is the right thing to vote for.

Penny Mordaunt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I am going to make a bit more progress.

Angus Robertson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I will give way.

Angus Robertson: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that in advance of previous conflicts, such as the intervention in Afghanistan, political parties in the House were briefed in detail, and on Privy Council terms, on the nature of the evidence on why there should be intervention? Can he confirm that there have been no such briefings in advance of this vote?

Edward Miliband: I have had the benefit of briefings with the Prime Minister, but I am sure that he, having heard the hon. Gentleman’s intervention, will want to extend that facility to him and other minority parties.

Penny Mordaunt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: I will not give way.

As I was saying, by setting this framework today, we will give ourselves the time and space to assess the impact that any intervention will have on the Syrian people, and to assess the framework of international law and legitimacy. As I have said, I do not believe that we should be rushed to judgment on this question on a political timetable set elsewhere. In the coming days, the Government have a responsibility, building on what the Prime Minister did today—but it is also more than what he did today—to set out their case on why the benefits of intervention and action outweigh the benefits of not acting.

Penny Mordaunt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Edward Miliband: No, I want to make this point.

I do not rule out supporting the Prime Minister, but I believe he must make a better case than he has made today on this question. Frankly, he cannot say to the House and to the country that the Government motion would not change our stance on Syria or our involvement in the Syrian conflict. It would, and the House needs to assess that.

Our amendment sets out a roadmap from evidence to decision that I believe can command the confidence of the House and the British public. Crucially, the amendment would place responsibility for the judgment on the achievement of the criteria for action—reporting by the weapons inspectors; compelling evidence; the vote in the Security Council; the legal base; and the prospect of successful action—with this House in a subsequent vote.

I hope the House can unite around our amendment, because I believe it captures a view shared on both sides of the House, both about our anger at the attack on innocent civilians, and about a coherent framework for making the decision on how we respond.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): May I thank my right hon. Friend and the shadow Foreign Secretary for the measured approach that they are taking on this very serious issue? Does my right hon. Friend agree that any reckless or irresponsible action could lead to full war in that area? We must understand from previous conflicts that war is not some sort of hokey-cokey concept; once you're in, you're in.

Edward Miliband: That is why there must not be a rush to judgment—my hon. Friend is entirely right.

Penny Mordaunt: The right hon. Gentleman speaks of a road map. Does he not appreciate that the first stage in our response to the atrocities is what we do in the Chamber this afternoon? Given that his perfectly legitimate concerns about consequences, evidence and so on are met by the Government motion, may I urge him to support the motion so that we can send a united, strong message to Assad and others? Otherwise, we will undermine our national security.

Edward Miliband: We will not support a Government motion that was briefed this morning as setting out an in-principle decision to take military action. That would be the wrong thing to do, and on that basis we will

oppose the motion. We could only support military action, and should only make the decision to do so, when and if the conditions of our amendment were met.

We all know that stability cannot be achieved by military means alone. The continued turmoil in the country and the region in recent months and years further demonstrates the need to ensure that we uphold the fate of innocent civilians, the national interest and the security and future prosperity of the whole region and the world. I know that the whole House recognises that this will not and cannot be achieved through a military solution.

Whatever our disagreements today, Labour Members stand ready to play our part in supporting measures to improve the prospects for peace in Syria and the middle east: it is what the people of Britain and the world have the right to expect. But this is a very grave decision, and it should be treated as such by this House, and it will be treated as such by this country.

The fundamental test will be this: as we think about the men, women and children who have been subjected to this atrocity and about the prospects for other citizens in Syria, can the international community act in a lawful and legitimate way that will help them and prevent further suffering? The seriousness of our deliberations should match the significance of the decision we face, which is why I urge the House to support our amendment.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No fewer than 99 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye, meaning that necessarily large numbers of colleagues will be disappointed. As always, the Chair will do its best to accommodate the level of interest, but it will not be assisted by Members coming up to it to ask whether and, if so, when they will be called. I ask Members please not to do so: calmness and patience are required.

Dame Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister—or, at least, a spokesperson—told the media yesterday morning that a UN resolution was to be circulated in the afternoon. I believe that it was, but when I asked the Library for the text neither it nor the Foreign Office was available to provide it. Will you, Mr Speaker, look into that?

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Lady is an immensely experienced Member—she is now into her 26th year; she started extremely young—and she knows that that is not a matter for the Chair. She has candidly aired her concern, and the Prime Minister and other Members on the Treasury Bench will have heard what she had to say.

3.43 pm

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): I listened in the most charitable manner I could to the Leader of the Opposition explaining why he cannot support the motion. Given that the Government responded not simply to his request but to those made by Members on the Government Benches to wait until the inspectors had completed their task and to enable the Security Council to consider the consequences, we and the country can only conclude that the right hon. Gentleman is incapable of taking yes for an answer.

I want to use the short time available to me to concentrate on one set of words—a reasonable phrase—in his amendment: the need for “compelling evidence” of the Assad regime’s responsibility for the chemical attacks. We should be clear what “compelling evidence” means. Nothing could ever be proven 100%. Someone charged with murder before our courts can be convicted if the jury is satisfied beyond reasonable doubt. That does not require someone to say, “I saw him pull the trigger.” Sometimes—usually—that is not available.

When we look at the situation in regard to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, what we know for certain—it is not in dispute—is that chemical weapons were used. The Assad regime themselves admit that. We know that such weapons were used in the middle of a sustained artillery attack by the Syrian Government forces on the very suburb in Damascus where the chemical attacks then took place. We know that the Syrian Government are the only state in the middle east that has massive stocks of chemical weapons, and we know that there cannot have been any ethical objection on the part of the Assad regime to using chemical weapons, not just because they have probably used them before, but because any regime that slaughters 100,000 of its own citizens clearly would have no compunction in using chemical weapons as well.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): When the right hon. and learned Gentleman says that we know that Syria is the only country in the middle east that possesses stocks of chemical weapons, will he draw attention to the use by Israel of illegal chemical weapons in Gaza—white phosphorus? Surely Israel, too, has such weapons, and we should take that into account in looking at the spectrum.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind: Let us use another occasion, if we may, to debate these important allegations. The issue is that the Syrian Government themselves do not deny that they have massive stocks of chemical weapons, and therefore the issue is whether there is any credible argument that on this particular occasion, in a district controlled by the opposition, the opposition somehow had both the capability and the will, and indeed did carry out this attack.

The inspectors’ reports will be helpful in two respects, I hope. First, they will give confirmation of the scale of this chemical attack. If only three or four people die, it could be argued that somebody could have been carrying around a bag of chemical agent and dispersed it, as happened in the Tokyo underground a good number of years ago. But when there are not just 300 people dying, but more than 3,000 people treated by Médecins Sans Frontières, clearly this was a massive chemical weapons attack which required rockets and a capability which, as we have heard, no one else in Syria has now or is likely to have in the short to medium term. Against that background, the inspectors could provide us with some helpful additional information.

The question then becomes, what is the purpose if military action is taken? It is not only going to be limited, as the Prime Minister has rightly said, but it has one overwhelming purpose, which has to be to deter further acts of the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime. Let me be emphatic about this—I hope

no one would argue otherwise—that at this very moment, the Assad regime in Damascus are watching very carefully to see whether they will get away with what they have done. If they get away with it, if there is no international response of a significant kind, we can be absolutely certain that the forces within Damascus will be successful in saying, “We must continue to use these whenever there is a military rationale for doing so.” There is no guarantee that a military strike against military targets will work, but there is every certainty that if we do not make that effort to punish and deter, these actions will indeed continue.

The other point that must concentrate all our minds very comprehensively is that a failure to act is not in itself an absence of a decision. It has profound other consequences, not just the ones I have mentioned, and most profound for the United Nations itself. The League of Nations effectively collapsed in the 1930s when Germany and Italy effectively prevented any sanctions or other action being taken against Italy for the invasion of Abyssinia. That, together with other similar acts of aggression which the League could not handle because of the absence of unanimity, created a chaos which led to the second world war. So if we can take action that has the support of Arab states and of the bulk of the international community, far from suffering, the United Nations and the concept of international institutions and the international community acting to deal with such acts of aggression will be boosted in a way that would not happen through any other course of action.

I believe that what is being recommended and will come back to this House is not only overwhelmingly in the interests of innocent Syrian men, women and children, but is far more likely to boost the concept of international action to deal with gross atrocities and violations of human rights than simply wringing our hands, protesting at the action but failing to make any effective response to it.

3.49 pm

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): I was the final speaker in the debate in this House on 18 March 2003 on the resolution in which I had recommended to the House that we should take military action against the Saddam Hussein regime. That resolution was passed by 412 votes to 149. I have set out in detail elsewhere how I came to the conclusion that war against Saddam Hussein was justified, on the basis of information that was then available and of widely shared international judgments about the threats posed by the regime. But, whatever the justification on 18 March 2003, the fact was that there was an egregious intelligence failure, and it has had profound consequences, not only across the middle east but in British politics, through the fraying of those bonds of trust between the electors and the elected that are so essential to a healthy democracy.

Iraq has not, however, meant that the British public or, still less, this House have become pacifist. Two years ago, the House and the public approved action against the Gaddafi regime. The need for that action to prevent a massacre in and around Benghazi was palpable. It was approved by the Security Council and it was plainly lawful. But Iraq has made the public much more questioning and more worried about whether we should put troops in harm’s way, especially when intelligence is involved.

[Mr Jack Straw]

The question before us now is whether the use of chemical weapons changes the considerations that, up to now, have determined that we should not intervene militarily in Syria. We need to decide whether, as the Government motion proposes, a “strong humanitarian response” to the use of chemical weapons may, if necessary, “require military action” by the United Kingdom’s armed forces. My conclusion at the moment is that the Government have yet to prove their case. I think we are clear that chemical weapons were used, but we will get more information on that from the inspectors. We are also pretty clear that culpability for that is likely to have been with the Assad regime, but I say to the Prime Minister and to my right hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench that there was also very strong evidence about what we all thought Saddam held—[*Interruption.*] No, he had held an arsenal of chemical and biological weapons, and the issue was much more one of what we should do about that than of a widespread sharing of the assessment by the Security Council that Saddam posed a threat to international peace and security.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman described Iraq as an intelligence failure, but what actually happened was that Tony Blair said in this House that the information was “extensive, detailed and authoritative”, yet it later turned out to be limited, sporadic and patchy. That was the assessment of the intelligence services. It was not an intelligence failure; it was a political failure.

Mr Straw: We can debate the Iraq inquiries at another date, and I am sure that we shall do so. I accept my responsibilities fully for what happened in respect of Iraq. I have sought, both before the Iraq inquiry and elsewhere, to explain why I came to my conclusion. I simply make the point, which is widely shared across the House, that one of the consequences of the intelligence failure on Iraq has been to raise the bar that we have to get over when the question of military action arises.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The House was told that there were weapons of mass destruction that posed a threat to the United Kingdom, and we were also told, in 2006, that we were going into Helmand province in the hope that not a shot would be fired. Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the result of accepting those decisions has been the deaths of 623 of our brave soldiers? Does he not realise that those are the reasons that the public no longer trust Government assurances about going to war?

Mr Straw: With respect to my hon. Friend, the arguments about Afghanistan, then and now, are very different. There will be other occasions to debate that matter.

Even if there is compelling evidence on culpability, the bigger question arises of the strategic objective of any military action and its likely consequences. The Prime Minister has accepted that such strikes would not significantly degrade the chemical weapons capability of the Assad regime. We need to be clear about that. The right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) spoke about trying to take that capability down. However, if the first set of strikes failed to do that—the Prime Minister seemed to accept that they

would be more by way of punishment and deterrence, rather than a degrading of the capability—what would happen after that? We all know—I bear the scars of this—how easy it is to get into military action, but how difficult it is to get out of it.

There is also the issue of precisely what is the objective of the action. The case seems to veer between the alleviation of human suffering and some sort of warning for or punishment of the Assad regime. If the Prime Minister comes back to the House to recommend military action, he must be clear about precisely what the purposes are.

This morning, we woke up to hear the President of the United States, Barack Obama, saying that by acting in

“a clear and decisive but very limited way, we send a shot across” Assad’s bow. Let us pause and consider the metaphor that was chosen by the President, because it is revealing. A shot across the bow is a warning that causes no damage and no casualties—shells fired over the bridge of a naval vessel. In this case, it might be a Tomahawk missile that is targeted to fly over Damascus and land in the unoccupied deserts beyond. That cannot be what the President has in mind. We need to know what he really has in mind and what the consequences of that will be. There will be casualties from any military action—some military and almost certainly many civilian.

I have one last point to put to the Prime Minister. He sought to draw a distinction in his speech between our response to war crimes and taking sides in the conflict. However much he struggles to make that distinction, let us be clear that if we take an active part in military action, which I do not rule out, we shall be taking sides. There is no escape from that. We shall be joining with the rebels, with all the consequences that arise from that, and not maintaining a position of neutrality.

3.57 pm

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): There are a number of things on which the House will be generally agreed. The first is that, for whatever reason, there is widespread scepticism among the British public about any further military involvement overseas. A number of questions need to be answered before we become involved in any form of military action. The first is what a good outcome looks like, the second is whether such an outcome can be engineered, the third is whether we will be part of engineering such an outcome, and the fourth is how much of the eventual outcome we want to have ownership of.

I do not believe that we can answer any of those questions to our satisfaction with regard to the civil war in Syria. I believe that that is why the British public are deeply sceptical about our being involved in that civil war in any way, shape or form. I share that scepticism. I also believe that there is no national interest for the United Kingdom in taking a side in that civil war. To exchange an Iran-friendly and Hezbollah-friendly Assad regime for an anti-west, anti-Christian and anti-Israel al-Qaeda regime does not seem to offer us any advantage.

However, that is not the issue before us today. There is a separate issue on which we need to have great clarity, which is how we respond to a regime that has used chemical weapons against its civilian population—something that is against international law and is a war

crime. The pictures we have seen in recent days have shocked us, even in our desensitised age. The pictures of toddlers laid out in rows were, and should be, deeply disturbing to all of us. The question is whether we are willing to tolerate more such pictures and, if not, how we go about minimising the risk of such pictures coming to our screens in the future.

It is true that if we take action against the Assad regime we cannot guarantee that it will not do something, or similar things, again in the future, but I believe it will minimise the risk and show the people of Syria that we are on their side and that the rest of the world is serious about its obligations in enforcing the existing law about the use of chemical weapons.

Much of the debate has focused on the consequences of taking action, but we must also focus on the consequences of not taking action. Will it make the Syrian people more or less safe from the use of such weapons in the future? On the implications for the Syrian regime, will it make it feel that it is more or less secure in taking such actions again in the future? On regimes in other parts of the world that might decide to use chemical weapons against their domestic populations, what signal would we send them about the international community's willingness to stop such use in future if we do nothing? Let us also not forget the onlookers in this—Iran—who have their own nuclear intentions and are intent on testing the will of the international community.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I accept many of the points that the right hon. Gentleman is making, but many Opposition and, I think, Government Members would say that this is not a choice between action and inaction; it is simply a choice of what action should be taken. Some of us worry that military action might exacerbate the situation, rather than make it better, and draw us into mission creep, over which we would have very little control.

Dr Fox: I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's point, which is valid. As the Prime Minister said, it is a judgment call. It is incumbent on those who take these decisions ultimately to determine whether they think it is more likely that we will be drawn into such a conflict or whether we will achieve the objectives without that happening. That is a matter for legitimate debate in the House. I believe that if we do not take action—and that probably means military action—the credibility of the international community will be greatly damaged. What value would red lines have in the future if we are unwilling to implement those that already exist?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dr Fox: I will give way once more, to my hon. Friend here.

Mary Macleod (Brentford and Isleworth) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that if we do nothing and stand by and watch as the horrific atrocities described by the Prime Minister take place, it will be as if we agree with these chemical weapons that have been spread across Syria?

Dr Fox: If we do nothing I believe it would be an abdication of our international legal and moral obligations, which we should take extremely seriously.

Let me say briefly one other thing. The Government should be commended for taking the United Nations route. It is right and proper that we do so and that the appropriate amount of time is given to consideration, but that comes with a caveat. It is clear that Russia has military interests in the port of Tartus and that it still feels very sore about its belief that it was sold a pup over Libya. We are not likely to get Russian support in the Security Council, nor are we likely to get Chinese support there, either. We cannot allow a situation whereby the international community's ability to implement international law is thwarted by a constant veto by Russia and China. Therefore, I think we should be deeply grateful to the Attorney-General for the clarity of the advice that he has set out on how we can carry forward our international humanitarian obligations were such a situation to present itself.

Let us be very clear that to do nothing will be interpreted in Damascus as appeasement of a dreadful regime and the dreadful actions it has carried out. Appeasement has never worked to further the cause of peace in the past, and it will not now, and it will not in the future.

4.4 pm

Dame Tessa Jowell (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I rise to speak in favour of the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition.

I was a member of the Cabinet that decided in good faith that this country should join the invasion of Iraq, and I know how heavy the burden is on those who are charged with such a decision. I also agree that, in many cases, doing nothing is as much a decision as doing something and that the present catastrophe in Syria demands a decision of us. As has been said, the use of chemical weapons is prohibited by customary international law and binding conventions. Short of the use of nuclear weapons, it is the most heinous crime a country can commit, made even more dreadful when chemical weapons are used in civil war on its own people.

I am therefore unhesitatingly in favour of taking the step that will deal as effectively as we can with Assad. But what is that step? What is our locus? How can we be effective, and at what cost? I want to deal with the last question first. The cost in human suffering and human life is clear, but there is another long-term cost—the damage that we may do to the rule of international law in international affairs.

It is obviously deeply frustrating that Russia and China have formed a blocking minority in the Security Council, and I know that Members will want to reinforce the importance of diplomatic initiatives to seek to engage Russia, in particular, in negotiation with the Syrian Government. However, it is also clear that to go to war with Assad—that is what it would be—without the sanction of a UN Security Council resolution would set a terrible precedent. After the mission creep of the Libyan operation, it would amount to nothing less than a clear statement by the US and its allies that we were the arbiters of international right and wrong when we felt that right was on our side. What could we do or say if, at some point, the Russians or Chinese adopted a similar argument? What could we say if they attacked a country without a UN resolution because they claimed it was right and cited our action as a precedent?

[*Dame Tessa Jowell*]

Legal rectitude may not amount to much, but it is all we have. It remains our best hope, and we cast it aside at terrible peril, hence the importance of the route map set out in the Opposition amendment.

I welcome the decision that the Government have now made to take no action until the UN inspectors have delivered their report, but if or when it is proved conclusively that Assad has used chemical weapons on his people, what can we do to prevent him from doing so again? There will perhaps be time in the future to bring him before the International Criminal Court, but in practical terms, what can we do, even if we are able to get a UN Security Council resolution?

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) mentioned, the US chairman of the joint chiefs of staff wrote to the Senate armed services committee last month—we are all grateful for the excellent briefing by the Library—about having examined five options. He said that controlling chemical weapons would involve billions of dollars each month and involve risks that

“not all chemical weapons would be controlled, extremists could gain better access to remaining weapons, similar risks to no-fly zone but with the added risk to...troops on the ground.”

The situation is parlous, and—

Mr Speaker: Order.

4.9 pm

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): It is no secret that, notwithstanding the horrors of Damascus, I have reservations about the use of military action in the circumstances with which we are engaged. In particular, I have reservations relating to the absence of a proper role for the United Nations. However, as the Government motion now sets out, there is a role for the inspectors, there is a duty imposed on the Secretary-General, and there is an endorsement to use every effort to secure a United Nations Security Council resolution under chapter VII of its charter. In addition, and I will come back to this in a moment, the motion also provides that for all of us—supporters, sceptics or opponents—there will be an opportunity to pass judgment on any question of British involvement at a further stage when, not surprisingly perhaps, rather more information may be available.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that for some of us at least, tonight's vote will not predetermine that we are satisfied at the next stage that there is a coherent plan that does not inflict too much damage on neighbouring countries?

Sir Menzies Campbell: I think my right hon. Friend is referring, by way of inference, to the suggestion that there has been briefing that those who voted for the Government motion would be endorsing in principle military action. Most of us have been around here long enough to know how often briefing is a long way from the truth. Anyone who is in any doubt about that should read the precise terms of the Government's motion.

The effort to achieve a resolution under chapter VII is a vital component of the doctrine of the responsibility to protect, because if no such resolution is achieved—here, I agree with the Attorney-General—we turn to what was once called humanitarian intervention and now is called responsibility to protect. It is a fundamental of that doctrine that every possible political and diplomatic alternative will have been explored and found not to be capable.

I want to applaud, if I may, Mr Speaker, the House for taking the unusual step—in my view wholly justified—of publishing the Attorney-General's advice. Those of us with long memories will remember that 10 years ago we were not favoured with anything like as much detail. It is also worth pointing out that there was no second vote 10 years ago. Within 24 hours of the motion being passed by the House endorsing the Labour Government's proposals, the Tomahawk cruise missiles began to rain down on Baghdad.

It respectfully seems to me that we need to examine the matter not in response to the emotion that it undoubtedly engenders in all of us. Emotion is no substitution for judgment in matters of this kind. We must look beyond what might be achieved in the short term, to the medium term and the long term.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke a moment ago of the responsibility to protect. One of the criteria is the prospects of success. Is he satisfied with the objectives of this action and the prospects of success on those objectives?

Sir Menzies Campbell: We cannot arrive at a conclusion on the prospects of success until we have more information than is currently available. The hon. Gentleman is right. I should have mentioned that the prospect of success is a part of that evolving doctrine. We should also remember that the doctrine is not universally accepted, and that the mere use of it is, on occasion, regarded as highly controversial. I rather fancy that at the G20 summit in St Petersburg next week the doctrine of the responsibility to protect may not get considerable support.

My questions, which I do not expect to be answered but I hope will lie on the table, are these. Will military action bring the Geneva conference any closer? Is it more likely to produce the political settlement that everyone believes is necessary? Although a strategic objective is set out, I hope I might be forgiven for thinking that military action is more of a tactic than a strategic imperative. That is why we must give consideration to the endgame, to use a colloquialism, and in particular to the whole issue of regional stability—what the consequences might be in an already very unstable region.

What would happen were the next horror to be carried out by some conventional means? What would our response be in the light of the fact that, for two years or so, a number of horrors have been brought about by the use of conventional weapons? My concern is that if we open the gate once, it will be difficult to close it.

I have read the motion and Opposition amendment and I believe that both are motivated by the same determination to do what is right and to see that the House endorses everything that is right. However, I

have to confess that, even following the most narrow textual analysis, I can find no difference of substance or principle anywhere in the two offerings. That is why I shall support the Government in the Lobby this evening. I very much hope that the Opposition will, too.

4.16 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Across the House, in all political parties, there is total revulsion at what has been happening in Syria in the past months and years of the brutal conflict there—in particular following the recent apparent chemical weapons attacks on civilians. There is absolute unanimity, here and internationally, that the use of those indiscriminate weapons is unacceptable and the United Nations is right to be investigating the circumstances of the attacks.

If we are serious about our support for the United Nations, the inspectors must be able to complete their work and report back to the world community before any course of new action is undertaken. If, as we expect, it is confirmed that chemical weapons were used, one of the first things that should be made clear is that whoever ordered and carried out those attacks will, in time, face the full force of the law. Regardless of what may otherwise happen in the short term, the perpetrators of such a crime should understand that they face indictment by the International Criminal Court or by a specially convened war crimes tribunal.

Today, however, we have been recalled to Parliament because of potential imminent military action by UK and other forces. We have been called back four days before Parliament was to reconvene anyway, so it is not unreasonable to conclude that there was a high probability that intervention would take place before Monday. The UK Government expected that we should vote for a blank cheque that would have allowed UK military action before UN weapons inspectors concluded their investigations and before their detailed evidence was provided to the United Nations—or, indeed, Members of this House. Following our having been misled on the reasons for war in Iraq, the least the UK Government could have done was to provide detailed evidence. Frankly, they have not, as was underlined in my intervention on the Prime Minister earlier.

In contrast with the sensible approach taken in the run-up to the 2001 intervention in Afghanistan, today we were expected to give the UK Government a blank cheque. However, Members on both sides clearly reminded their leaders that this is a hung Parliament and that there would not be a majority for a blank cheque. Instead there should at least be safeguards.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the public are suspicious about the argument that the issue is not about regime change? Only a few weeks ago, the Government wanted to arm the rebels. That argument is causing utter confusion among everybody.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point that will be noticed outside the House.

I appeal to Government Members to look closely at the amendment and ask themselves what is wrong with the safeguard it proposes. Surely the UN weapons inspectors must be able to conclude their mission and have the

necessary opportunity to report to the Security Council on the evidence and their findings on whether chemical weapons were used in Syria. Surely we must have definitive evidence that the Syrian regime or opposition was responsible for the use of these weapons—with the greatest respect, that means not just two pages of A4 paper. Surely the UN Security Council must consider and vote on this matter in the light of the reports of the weapons inspectors and the evidence submitted. Surely there must be a clear legal basis in international law for taking collective military action to protect the Syrian people on humanitarian grounds. And surely the aims, objectives and consequences of any intervention must be made clear and must not run the risk of escalating the conflict, causing further deaths and worsening the humanitarian situation. The safeguards in the amendment are absolutely clear and will bring the issue back for a parliamentary vote before any UK military intervention is possible. Should these safeguards not be satisfied, the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru will vote against intervention, just as we voted consistently against the Iraq war.

I urge the UK Government to invest more time and effort in supporting an end to the conflict and stepping up humanitarian support for the hundreds of thousands of victims in Syria and refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries. Earlier today, I met Jehangir Malik of Islamic Relief, an organisation that deserves as much assistance as possible to help people in and around Syria. He warned about the potential negative impact of military intervention and why that could significantly worsen the humanitarian situation. May I urge the Government to do yet more to support Islamic Relief and the other organisations involved in the Disasters Emergency Committee? With so many people watching our deliberations, I also urge the public to continue their great generosity in supporting humanitarian efforts.

I also urge the Government to renew their efforts to find a diplomatic resolution to the conflict. Do we think that Tomahawk cruise missiles fired into Syria will make that easier or more difficult? It is clearly understood that this civil war is intractable and that there is little willingness to compromise. Earlier today, I heard an appeal by Sakhr al-Makhadhi, the London-based Syria expert and commentator. He said that the people of Syria, from all backgrounds, are crying out for help to resolve the civil war. Please can the UK Government focus their attention on working with the United States and the Russian Federation, and all others who have influence in the region, including Iran, to bring the different Syrian sides to the negotiating table?

In conclusion, the UK Government must not have a blank cheque for military intervention in Syria. We have already heard that it is being briefed that tonight's vote on their motion is an agreement, in principle, for military action. We should not give them a blank cheque for military intervention in Syria, either in principle or in practice.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD) *rose*—

Angus Robertson: I have only 30 seconds left.

We cannot ignore the lessons of the calamitous Iraq war. We need safeguards, in order to ensure that all is done to provide evidence about chemical weapons and to support the United Nations and international law.

[Angus Robertson]

We need a coherent and comprehensive strategy that fully takes into account the consequences of intervention. What is currently a calamity for the people of Syria could worsen and become a conflagration across the middle east. That is why this House should unite around the cross-party safeguards amendment, vote against the Government motion, and make diplomatic and humanitarian efforts the key focus of the international community.

4.22 pm

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con): There are four key questions we have to address. Is there a moral case? Does the intelligence stack up? Is this lawful? What is the objective? The moral case is something each individual MP will have to decide, based on his own character, morality and attitude to world affairs. Many colleagues and friends are, in principle, non-interventionists, whereas others have a strong interventionist streak. Others say, "If that criterion is met, or this, maybe." We all wrestle with the conflict between head and heart. Some say that the murder of hundreds of innocent citizens by chemical weapons is nothing to do with us and that it is easier not to get involved, but I ask them to examine their conscience.

Syria is a signatory to the Geneva protocol of 1925 prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. It was a protocol drawn up in the aftermath of the first world war, when the world said, "Never again." Do we now say, "Well, never mind, let's just sit on our hands and ignore the atrocities taking place"? This is not just any ordinary convention; it is a convention on genocide and the abuse of basic morality. Some say, "What's the difference between being killed by an artillery shell or by sarin gas?" With everything in life there is a red line—a straw that breaks the camel's back—and, to me, this is it. In my judgment, faced with the mass murder of innocent civilians, doing nothing is not an option.

In his excellent speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) made the point about credibility. Britain is a leading member of NATO, it is chair of the G8 and it has a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. This gives us huge diplomatic clout, but with the benefits come responsibilities, and this is just the moment when we must ask ourselves what those responsibilities are. We can behave like a minor nation with no real international responsibilities and put our head in the sand, or we can live up to the expectations that the world community has of us.

Our objectives must be strategic. A missile strike would make it clear that chemical weapons cannot be used without a response from the world community; it would help to degrade the Assad regime's future capacity; and it would deter the regime from its future use. In my judgment, those are worthy objectives that have my support.

Mr Michael McCann (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): One component common to both the motion and the Opposition's amendment is the possibility of our ending up on a path to military action, a missile strike being the first of potentially two steps towards such action. The Prime Minister did not answer the question from my right hon. Friend the

Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) about what that action would entail, although he ruled out the possibility of a large-scale deployment of troops on the ground. In order to degrade Assad's opportunity to use chemical weapons, would we not have to use either special forces on the ground or launch a missile strike, which could cause even more damage?

Richard Ottaway: We have to take the world as we find it. The situation has been made quite clear, including by the Prime Minister: the aim initially is to attempt to degrade Assad's capacity, so it is essential that our strategic objective be focused on the command and control of the chemical weapons programme. If that is not successful, I am sure that he and I will be back here asking, "Where do we go from here?"

I turn to the Attorney-General's view that there is a legal basis for intervention without a Security Council resolution, which poses more questions than it answers.

Mr Straw: Will the hon. Gentleman be a bit more precise? Today, the Prime Minister widened the objectives to include degrading the chemical weapons capability, but General Dempsey has made it clear that that is possible to a significant degree only with the deployment of thousands of troops and hundreds of ships. Surely we have to be clear about what we anticipate will result from the use of Tomahawk missiles and such things before, not after, we embark on their use.

Richard Ottaway: The right hon. Gentleman put that point to the Prime Minister, and I thought he dealt with it. General Dempsey was talking about the wider picture, whereas the motion and the proposal concern the chemical weapons regime, which we will attempt to degrade.

Dame Joan Ruddock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Richard Ottaway: I am sorry, but I have used up my two interventions.

The Attorney-General's view is that there is a legal basis for intervention without a Security Council resolution, which I believe poses more questions than answers. Since the present doctrine was introduced in 2005, there has been no precedent for such a thing, and in my view it has serious consequences. In effect, it means that the UN is now redundant and that the humanitarian doctrine has legs of its own and can be interpreted virtually any way the parties wish. When the dust has settled on this affair, I hope that the House and the United Nations will revisit the responsibility to protect, because at present it is not working as it was intended.

On the intelligence, those of us who were here in 2003, at the time of the Iraq war, felt they had their fingers burnt. The case for war was made and Parliament was briefed on the intelligence, but we were given only part of the story and, in some cases, an inaccurate story. A summary of the intelligence has been published, but it is the bare bones, and I urge the Government in the following days to consider how more intelligence can be provided. The picture is clear, as far as it goes, but it has no depth. I warmed to the suggestion from my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) that the Intelligence and Security Committee could

look at the JIC analysis, report to the House on the veracity of the intelligence and confirm that it agrees with the opinion in the JIC intelligence letter before us.

This is a difficult time. There are no easy options. We are between a rock and a hard place, but we have to decide, and I, for one, will be in the Government Lobby tonight.

4.29 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I want to thank the Conservative Back Benchers, a number of Liberal Democrat Members, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Foreign Secretary for their intervention over the last 48 hours, which halted what looked like a headlong rush to war. It is widely acknowledged that the American President has set a timetable, most probably for an attack this weekend. He came under pressure last year from the Republicans and McCain to set red lines as parameters. It was inevitable that that would escalate the demand for military action at a later date. That might explain the American position, but it does not explain why a sovereign independent state called Great Britain should automatically fall into line in support of military action. If there is a lesson of the past 48 hours, it is that no Prime Minister and no Government should take this House or the British people for granted on matters of this nature.

The reality is that, yes, time has moved on since Iraq. People have made references to lessons from Iraq, and I want to refer to three. First, there is no automatic approval of, or even trust in, a prime ministerial judgment on an issue such as this involving the country in military action without overwhelming justification, evidence and thorough debate. The evidence before us from the JIC today says that there is “some evidence” to suggest regime culpability in the gas attack and that it is “highly likely” that the Syrian regime is responsible. I have to say that “highly likely” and “some evidence” are not good enough to risk further lives, to risk counter attack, to inflame the whole region, to risk dragging other states into this war and, at the same time, to increase the risk of terrorism on British streets.

The second lesson of Iraq is based upon the principles of humanitarian intervention. It must be objectively clear that there is no practical alternative to the use of force if lives are to be saved. I do not believe that it has been demonstrated that all practical alternatives have been exhausted. In particular, discussions around the permanent stationing of UN weapons inspectors in Syria to prevent the use of these weapons have not been exhausted. That, linked to an insistence on the participation of all sides in a UN peace conference, has not been exhausted.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend not surprised that the British Government appear to have made no rational efforts to try to build a relationship with the new Government of Iran, which might be part of a road towards some kind of peace settlement?

John McDonnell: That leads to my third lesson from Iraq, and from Afghanistan. It is to ensure that any intervention does not cost lives and does not make matters worse; it is the “do no harm” principle. No matter how surgical the strike that is planned by the

Americans or by us, lives will be lost and lives will be put at risk. A negotiated peace is the only long-term solution for Syria; that is what has been expressed by members of all parties in the House. Military intervention is more likely to undermine the potential for peace talks. Hawks within the Assad regime will be even more intransigent and defiant. The opposition—the so-called rebels—will have no incentive, because they will believe that the US and, yes, the UK and others will be on their side and that they can achieve a military victory. Military intervention would also alienate Iran and the Russians—the very people we look to now to bring Assad to the negotiating table.

If we have learned anything from Iraq and Afghanistan, it is this: military intervention does not just cost lives; it undermines the credibility of the international institutions that we look to to secure peace in the world and, in the long run, it undermines peace settlements across the globe. Therefore, I believe that we should focus on conflict prevention and conflict resolution and not support military aggression. That is why I will not support any motion that, in principle, supports military intervention in Syria, which can only do more harm than good.

4.34 pm

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): In common, I suspect, with all Members, I find this an exceptionally difficult issue. My constituents hate the idea of our getting involved in Syria, and so do I. As I said earlier, I have not yet made up my mind which way to vote, but the Prime Minister’s flexibility over the past couple of days has been extremely helpful.

I should like to look first at the legality of our taking action. The conversations that have been had with the media over the past few days have talked about Syria not having impunity for the use of chemical weapons. The word “impunity” implies that there is a new doctrine of punishment as a reason for going to war—not deterrence, not self-defence, not protection, but punishment. I believe that, if that is a new doctrine, it needs considerably wider international consensus than currently exists.

Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman is making an important point. The very last sentence of the Attorney-General’s advice says:

“Such an intervention would be directed exclusively to averting a humanitarian catastrophe, and the minimum judged necessary for that purpose.”

So there can be no new doctrine.

Mr Arbuthnot: I want to come to the Attorney-General’s advice. My right hon. and learned Friend is an exceptional lawyer, and therefore I have the temerity to question one aspect of what he says. The third of his conditions to be met for humanitarian action is that

“the proposed use of force must be necessary and proportionate to the aim of relief of humanitarian need”.

I believe that he needed to spell out an additional point that there must be a reasonable chance of success. Therefore, the legality of this action, in my view, depends entirely on the precise action proposed, and that we do

[Mr Arbuthnot]

not yet know. That is why the Prime Minister is absolutely right to say that we need to have a further vote in the House once it is clearer what action is proposed.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Is the right hon. Gentleman's concern about a possible new doctrine of war as punishment informed by the fact that senior American political sources only last weekend talked in terms of retribution as the basis for taking action against Syria, and that was repeated by a Minister here as well? If the international community takes action on Syria on the basis of retribution as the defining motive, does that not send a very dangerous message and set a dubious standard for the wider middle east?

Mr Arbuthnot: Well, possibly, although there is a question, if there is a new doctrine, about how far it extends. Why was it not used with Mugabe? Why was it not used with Pol Pot earlier? That is why I question the Attorney-General's advice, with temerity and diffidence, as I say.

What are the objectives of any military strike? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the objective was to deter and degrade future chemical weapons use. As I understand it, a country that can make a non-stick frying pan can make chemical weapons. Personally, I have found it very difficult to find any country that can make a non-stick frying pan. Nevertheless, if Syria could simply recreate any weapons that we destroy, where would we have got by attacking the chemical weapons? What is the risk of collateral damage? What is the risk of hitting the chemical weapons that we are trying to prevent from being deployed? We need further information on that.

Next is the evidence. I am certainly in a minority in this country and probably in a minority in the House in saying that I personally believed Tony Blair when he said that he believed that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I am certainly in a minority in the country when I say that I still believe that he was telling the truth as he believed it to be, but I think that he exaggerated the influence of—[*Interruption.*] I know, I am naive and a silly young thing, but I still believe that he exaggerated the influence and importance of intelligence. I do not think that we have yet got to the bottom of the precise limitations of what intelligence can tell us.

Paul Flynn: During my time in this House, chemical weapons have been used against the Kurds; they were used in the Iran-Iraq war; and they were used against the people in Gaza, in the form of phosphorous bombs—certainly a chemical bomb. Is not the real reason we are here today not the horror at these weapons—if that horror exists—but as a result of the American President having foolishly drawn a red line, so that he is now in the position of either having to attack or face humiliation? Is that not why we are being drawn into war?

Mr Arbuthnot: No, I do not think so. I think the real reason is that unless we do something—it must not be something stupid—Assad will use more chemical weapons time and again. I believe that in order to stop the use of chemical weapons from becoming the norm, the world needs to act. The world, however, does not equal the

United Kingdom. If the world wants us to act as the international policeman, let the world say so, because when we have done so in the past, the world has not tended to thank us.

It could be argued that it is only us who have the capability to act, but there is a paradox here. We are a country with the fourth largest defence budget in the world, yet attacks could still be made on this country using weapons against which we have no defence. Actually, that is true of every country in the world. We should take that concern into account when we decide how to vote. I believe that it would probably be helpful to support the Government tonight, but next week—or whenever the decision comes up—we will need to take that issue very clearly into account.

4.42 pm

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Looking at the Government motion taken in the round, it appears to me, despite the statement that it has been watered down, to be something of a paving motion for military action. It includes the words

“may, if necessary, require military action”;

it refers to a

“legal basis for taking action”;

and in the penultimate paragraph, it refers to “backing military action”. It also states that

“in spite of the difficulties at the United Nations...a United Nations process must be followed as far as possible to ensure the maximum legitimacy”.

The serious question is: why was a draft motion not presented to the United Nations before now; why the delay?

It is all very well referring to “difficulties”, but diplomacy has not failed utterly. It was, after all, the Russians who pressed the Syrian Government to allow the UN inspectors in on Monday. My party colleagues and I believe that any military action would prolong the conflict and lead to further bloodshed. We would call on the Government to use their influence and their relations with others to bring all the relevant parties around the table to conduct talks. The chief aim should, of course, be to prevent further loss of life.

There has been an ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria for almost two years. The Government should put greater effort into ensuring a greater humanitarian response, gearing up the level of aid sent to the region. Previous military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and other recent examples show that the commitment of troops without an end plan costs a very high price—both in money and in lives lost, not to mention the physical and mental scars that individuals and communities at home and abroad must therefore bear. If the UK backs US Government military action or indeed participates in it, the conflict could well draw in Russia and Iran to back Assad's regime, possibly making diplomatic talks more difficult, and certainly not easier, in the future.

In yesterday's *Guardian*, Hans Blix wrote that even if Assad used chemical weapons, the west has no mandate to act as a global policeman, and that by ordering air strikes against Syria without a UN Security Council mandate, President Obama would

“be doing the same as Bush in 2003”.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): In the right hon. Gentleman's legal experience and opinion, at what point does destroying air defences and preventing a military capability start to become regime change, and would not that be illegal?

Mr Llwyd: Clearly, regime change is unlawful in international law. Any incursion of that kind would have to take sides, so inevitably that will follow. The hon. Gentleman is right.

The timing of the decision must also be questioned. If, as some of us believe, the decision on military action has already been made in Washington and agreed by the UK Government, that is the real reason why we are here: because Washington feels that there should be some bombs falling this weekend. Many atrocities have taken place in the two years since the conflict began. Surely those seeking to take military action could wait a few days longer, to ensure that their facts are straight.

It is obvious that there is no threat to the security of the UK—that we know. The Government seek military action in order to deter and undermine chemical weapons. They may well seek that—that is fine, although military action must be sanctioned by law—but surely they should wait until the full conclusive proof is available, verified by the UN, having had the inspectors' report. The basis of any decision on military action taken in that light, the Government's own litmus test, should be undeniable. That is why I believe it is imperative that even within the Government's own reasoning, they should heed the UN Secretary-General's call for more time to establish whether chemical weapons were used and, if possible, where they emanated from.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): There appear to be two conflicting objectives in what has been set out by the Prime Minister. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that on one hand it is about policing the use of chemical weapons, and on the other a humanitarian agenda is being set out, with legal reasons why a humanitarian intervention would be possible? The three conditions could have been met in Syria at any time for many months, however, and have been met in many other countries around the world where we have not intervened, so which is the real objective in taking us forward in this way?

Mr Llwyd: That is a very good question. The abstract of the legal opinion presumes that there will be no progress via the UN, so it then goes into detail on humanitarian intervention. There are at least four flaws in that debate, but that is for another time, and no doubt we shall have that opportunity.

Even if nothing else is learned from Iraq—there are many lessons to be learned—the one lesson should surely be that weapons inspectors should be given time to carry out their work and report fully to the UN. The situation in Egypt is a timely reminder of western Governments' fickle adherence to so-called universal principles: first supporting the movements rising against the Mubarak regime in favour of democracy, and then siding with the army when it carried out a coup and overthrew a democratically elected Government. Gaddafi was condemned for Lockerbie, then lauded for opposing al-Qaeda, then condemned again swiftly when the situation turned in Libya. In the recent past, Assad was lauded

by the British Government. His actions now clearly are deplorable, as have been the actions of many other groups fighting in this conflict, which has descended into a bloody civil war.

The recent build-up of rhetoric regarding military action has been confusing. Last Friday, the United States and UK Governments were pressing for weapons inspectors to be allowed into Syria. On Monday the inspectors went in, albeit under difficult circumstances, but on Monday evening all indications were that the US and UK had made up their mind, and that a strike was indeed imminent. That may be why we are here today. On Tuesday the UK softened its stance, however, perhaps worried about the consequences of proceeding into conflict where there is very little public support for it—the legacy of Iraq looming large, as has been said.

Plaid Cymru will be voting against the Government motion and instead supporting the amendment tabled by the official Opposition, and if it is called, the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas). The past decade has seen the UK embroiled in many bloody wars, paying a high price in treasury and blood, and failing to secure any peace. The middle east is in a very precarious state as we speak. We must learn well from those mistakes. I want to place it on the record that our support for the official Opposition's amendment today does not in any way imply that we shall in any way vote for a military strike in due course, unless the evidence supports it.

4.50 pm

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): As the Prime Minister pointed out, poison gas was extensively used in battle in the first world war. That led to a revulsion that was formulated by the 1925 Geneva gas protocol, which banned the use of poison gases but did not prevent a country from possessing a stockpile so that it could threaten retaliation if attacked by such gases. That protocol had nothing to do with the fact that poison gas was not used in the second world war—what prevented Hitler from using it was the threat of overwhelming retaliation. Indeed, sarin and tabun were nerve gases that Nazi scientists invented in the 1930s and 1940s. Hitler proposed to use tabun in 1943 but was deterred from doing so by the mistaken belief that the allies had discovered it too, although they had not. Similarly, Churchill thought of using poison gas against the V-weapons in 1944, and decided not to do so on military advice. The gas protocol had nothing to do with it.

Mr Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): If my hon. Friend is talking about Hitler's use of gas on soldiers he should not forget that Hitler used poison gas on innocent civilians—6 million Jews to be precise.

Dr Lewis: I am delighted to have the extra minute, especially as that was the next point I was going to make, given that a large proportion of members of my family were among those victims who were gassed. Hitler used poison gas against those innocent victims because he did not give a fig for the gas protocol; he cared about whether or not people could hit back. Those victims could not hit back whereas the allies could, and that is why he did not use gas against them.

[Dr Julian Lewis]

I do not want to divert too far into that, but it is important to understand the realities of what makes countries use poison gas and what deters them from using it. In my mind, the questions we must consider resolve themselves into two, rather than the four elegantly put forward by the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. My two questions are: first, is it proven beyond reasonable doubt that Assad did it; and secondly, even if Assad or his regime did it, is a military strike sensible?

On the first question, the UN inspectors will not tell us anything about whether or not Assad did it, as I understand it. All they will do is tell us whether or not a sarin gas attack took place, so we cannot look to them to point the finger as to who did it. The Joint Intelligence Committee has been cited and we can all read the summary. That summary is not conclusive and in fact states that the JIC is baffled to find a motive for Assad having done this, as well it might be. If Assad did it—and perhaps he did—it was the height of irrationality for him to do the one thing that might get the west intervening against him.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): There is a clear motive for Assad to have done this. He has used chemical weapons on five previous occasions, testing the west to see if it was going to respond. He has lost control of Aleppo airport, Homs is still under rebel control and rebels are fighting in the suburbs of Damascus. Assad is getting desperate and that is why he used chemical weapons. There is no question of any circumstantial evidence that points to anyone else.

Dr Lewis: I greatly respect my hon. Friend's opinions on this and all other related matters, but nevertheless his point would make more sense if Assad were willing to acknowledge that he had been testing the water, rather than vehemently denying that he did it.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr Lewis: I will not give way as I am still answering the previous question. I think it just as likely that if the regime were responsible in some way, it might have been done by some part of the regime unauthorised by another part.

That leads me to the question of contradictory evidence, because from the leaked reports on the one hand we are getting stories that the attack was ordered by Assad's brother in retaliation for a failed assassination attempt on the leadership, and on the other hand hearing that there is intercept evidence that somebody who was unauthorised was responsible and that there was a telephone conversation in which somebody said, "Why on earth did you do this?" and a panicked reaction to the unauthorised release of poison gas. The point is that it is very far from certain that the evidence stacks up. The Intelligence and Security Committee is cleared to see classified material well up to the level of the material that the JIC and the Prime Minister have seen. I see no reason why those of us who have been cleared for such access should not have it.

I shall now move on to the second question. Let us suppose that Assad did it. Is it then sensible to reply with military action? We have heard the arguments about red lines and the sacrosanct taboo that we must stand up for. If my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) is correct, however, and if the Assad Government did that irrational thing, it shows that they are behaving very irrationally indeed. One thing that bothers me greatly is that it is now being suggested—I say this as someone who is generally supportive of Israel—that Israeli intelligence might be the source of the evidence that the Assad Government did it. If Assad is behaving irrationally and if he is so desperate, what is to prevent him, if he is attacked militarily by us on the perceived basis of intelligence supplied by Israel, from retaliating with a chemical attack against Israel? What will Israel do? It will retaliate in turn. What will America, Iran and Russia do then?

I began my speech by referring to the first world war. Next year, we will commemorate the centenary of the events of August 1914. Those events have a worrying parallel. At that time, a series of actions and reactions drew in, in an escalating fashion, one country after another. Nobody thought that the assassination of an obscure archduke would lead to a world conflagration. As Admiral Lord West has said, this is a powder keg, and we should not be lobbing weapons into the heart of such combustible material.

4.57 pm

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Syria did not start having an evil regime last week or two years ago; it has had an evil regime for a generation. The murder of 10,000 people in Hama is evidence of that. The world did not criticise in any way whatever.

We are told that the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, if proved, transforms the situation. It would certainly make the situation ghastly, disgusting and abominable. However, Syria is not the only country in the middle east to have used chemical weapons in warfare. Israel used white phosphorous in its attack in Gaza in Operation Cast Lead—I saw the consequences for myself when I went there—but Israel gets away with it because it is on the right side of what is regarded as civilised opinion.

There is selectivity right the way through. We are told that we are being bundled into this situation because of President Obama—the same President Obama who sends a stream of drones over Pakistan, violating its sovereignty and murdering its citizens. I have no time whatever for the Syrian regime, and I condemn the use of chemical weapons, but we are being selective. Reference has been made to Egypt, where two regimes have been overthrown in two years, without a whimper. In Libya, we were told we had to protect the citizens of Benghazi, and I voted in the House to do so. Western air forces—British and French—misused a UN resolution to achieve regime change, which was illegal, and resulted in the murder of Gaddafi, vile dictator though he was, whose corpse was dragged through the streets. I do not trust what is regarded as western opinion on the middle east and north Africa.

The motion states that the Government want a UN resolution

“to alleviate humanitarian suffering by deterring use of chemical weapons and does not sanction any action in Syria with wider objectives.”

Pull the other one: they do what they want and make all kinds of excuses to justify random, murderous activity that does not even cure the situation. I ask the Foreign Secretary, if he is to reply to the debate—

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague) *indicated dissent.*

Sir Gerald Kaufman: Ah, the Deputy Prime Minister is to reply. In that case, we are on a higher moral level.

If action is taken, what would the action be? What would its impact be? How many casualties, including among civilians, would it cause? Would Assad say, “Oh, dearie me, I must be a nice boy now”? Anyone who has been in Syria, as I was when I was shadow Foreign Secretary and was trying to liberate our hostages in Lebanon, knows that this is not a nice regime that will behave as we want. The Foreign Secretary said he wanted to punish Assad, but an Assad punished would be worse than an Assad as he is now. I will vote against the motion and against military action.

5.2 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): When the Prime Minister wanted to take military action in Libya, most of us supported him because there was a clear moral imperative: if we had not acted tens of thousands of lives would quickly have been lost. That clear moral imperative does not stand in the action we are countenancing.

There is no doubt that the Assad regime is evil, but that is not our *casus belli*: our *casus belli* is the monstrous crime of killing hundreds, perhaps more, of civilians with nerve gas. The use of chemical weapons is not the first monstrous crime of this regime: at least 100,000 people have been killed in the civil war, most of whom were civilians. Death by dismemberment, burning, being crushed under falling buildings, gangrene or all the other outcomes of the use of conventional weapons is no better than death by nerve gas—these are monstrosities, however they are delivered. In moral, as against legal, terms many people will rightly, as they have in this debate, ask: why intervene now?

To press their case, the Government and American Government, now supported by the JIC, have asserted, in effect, that the gassing of a large number of Syrian civilians could have been carried out only by the Assad regime. Perhaps. There are three possibilities. The first, and probably the most likely, is that nerve gas was deployed by Assad, but even the JIC says that this is an irrational and incomprehensible act. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) pinned that perfectly. Another possibility is that it could have been done by a rogue or panicky military unit in the Syrian army without Assad’s knowledge—that may be the most likely explanation—or it could have been done by the Syrian rebels with the direct aim of dragging the west into the war. These are the only people who have a clear motive that fits the crime. The JIC discounted that last possibility, but there are many reasons for us to worry about this concern. We do not want to be conned into a war, in effect, by actions designed to do just that.

There are plenty of facts around, or at least reported facts. It is reported that the UN representative for human rights for Syria thought there was concrete evidence of rebels having sarin gas. There were reports that the Turkish authorities arrested 12 al-Nusra fighters with 2 kg of sarin gas, and other reports that Hezbollah fighters are in Beirut hospitals suffering from the effects of sarin gas.

A number of people, most notably my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway), the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, have said that we must have clear evidence to show the House that, if there is a *casus belli*, it is real, not concocted or constructed. That may mean more aggressive disclosure of intelligence than we would normally have. Given where we have been before in this House, we must consider that our intelligence as it stands might just be wrong. It was before, and we must test it rigorously.

Mr Jenkin: It is impossible to imagine how the rebels would have the capacity to shell a single location from seven different locations, which is what occurred on that occasion. Do we honestly think our own security services have not learned the lesson from Iraq or that they are not extremely cautious about the advice they make public on which decisions are going to be made? Should we not have faith in these devoted and courageous public servants, instead of joining the post-Iraq panic that is paralysing this country?

Mr Davis: If I had 10 minutes to take my hon. Friend through the forensics, I probably could. There is plenty of forensic evidence that will come out of the UN investigation and out of other data that we can obtain by other methods. It is not a question of panic; it is a question of getting the facts right before we act. It is very simple: when we are going to do things which will lead to the death of people, civilians in particular, we should get our facts right first.

That brings me to the Deputy Prime Minister on the “Today” programme this morning, talking about chemical weapons and saying—let me quote him exactly—that it is

“the first time in close to a century”

that we have seen—in Syria, he means—

“the ever more frequent use of chemical weapons.”

I recommend that he speaks to our American allies. The CIA has recently declassified and published its information on Iraq’s use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war, in which the west provided intelligence data in order for the Iraqis to be able to target their activities more effectively, killing 50,000 Iranians. How will our stance now be seen on the Iranian street? What will the pressures be on the Iranian Government when we make our holier-than-thou arguments about chemical warfare now?

I do not have time to conclude the arguments that I want to put. I will make one last point. Putin has said that the reason he provided anti-aircraft missiles to the Syrians was, in his words, to balance the war and prevent external intervention. What will his response be if we attack Syria? His response will be to feed this war more weapons, more deaths—

Mr Speaker: I call George Galloway.

5.9 pm

George Galloway (Bradford West) (Respect): Thank God for the erudition and historical memory of the last three speakers; those qualities were almost entirely absent from the Prime Minister's initial address. He was clearly making a speech that was not the one he intended to make here this afternoon. Otherwise, Mr Speaker, he would not have persuaded you to recall the House of Commons, at vast public expense, to decide that we were actually going to decide on this matter next week or the week after, when we shall be back here in any case. It is absolutely evident that, if it were not for the democratic revolt that has been under way in this House and outside among the wider public against this war, the engines in Cyprus would now be revving and the cruise missiles would be ready to fly this very weekend. Any attempt by the Prime Minister to pretend that he had intended to take this course of action all along is just bunkum.

The unease on both sides of the House, demonstrated in two exceptional speeches by the last speaker and the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), reflects the feelings of the people of this country. According to *The Daily Telegraph* this morning, only 11% of the public support Britain becoming involved in a war in Syria. Can any British Government have ever imagined sending their men and women to war with the support of only 11% of the public?

There is no compelling evidence—to use the Leader of the Opposition's words—that the Assad regime is responsible for this crime, yet. It is not that the regime is not bad enough to do it; everybody knows that it is bad enough to do it. The question is: is it mad enough to do it? Is it mad enough to launch a chemical weapons attack in Damascus on the very day on which a United Nations chemical weapons inspection team arrives there? That must be a new definition of madness. Of course, if Assad is that mad, how mad will he be once we have launched a blizzard of Tomahawk cruise missiles on his country?

As I heard those on the Front Benches describe how bad Assad was, I wondered just why the former Prime Minister forced Her Majesty to billet him in her guest room at Buckingham Palace just a few years ago, and why a former Prime Minister recommended him for an honour. I remembered how he was hailed from all corners as a moderniser. The narrative has now changed, of course, because this Government are intent on regime change in Damascus.

That brings me to the only other point I am going to be able to make in the time available. The reason for the unease is that people can see the character of the Syrian opposition. They have seen the horrific videos that we have heard about. Take a look at the video of one of the commanders of the Syrian revolution cutting open the chest of a human being and eating his heart and liver. He videotaped himself doing it and put it up on YouTube because he thought that it might be considered attractive. Take a look at the videos of Christian priests having their heads sawn off—not chopped off; sawn off—with breadknives. Even a bishop in the Christian Church was murdered by these people. Every religious minority in Syria—there are 23 of them—is petrified at the thought of a victory for the Syrian rebels, whom the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary have been doing their utmost to supply with weapons and money over

the last two years. They cannot deny that. They say that this is now about this new crime, whoever committed it, but it has been the Government's policy for two years to bring about the defeat of the regime in Damascus and a victory for the kind of people who are responsible for these crimes.

I have 20 seconds left—

John McDonnell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

George Galloway: Willingly.

John McDonnell: If only for another 60 seconds. The hon. Gentleman made reference to arms supplied to Syria, but let us remember where those arms have come from over decades, from this country.

George Galloway: Indeed.

I now have 60 seconds at my disposal, so let me make this point more clearly. When did the 2.5 billion people of Russia and China cease to be members of the international community? Who are you on the other side to decide what the international community should do, if you are unable to persuade the Security Council to go along with your point of view? Who are you to decide that you will launch a war in any case?

I keep hearing about the unreasonable use of the veto. I have heard that many times in this House over the past few years. The United States has vetoed every attempt to obtain justice for the Palestinian people and to punish and issue retribution for international lawbreaking on the part of Israel, and nobody in this House has said one word about it.

Dr Offord: Mr Speaker, I think you will be very interested to know that several constituents have e-mailed me about comments made by the hon. Gentleman on Iran's Press TV. One constituent claims that he said that Israel supplied the chemical for the attacks in Syria. I find it very hard to believe that the hon. Gentleman said that. Would he like to take this opportunity to refute that claim or to provide the evidence to satisfy my constituent?

George Galloway: That just shows the unreliability of green-ink letters, whether they come in the post or by e-mail. I said no such thing.

But the Syrian rebels definitely had sarin gas, because they were caught with it by the Turkish Government, as the last speaker, the former Government Minister said—I hope he will forgive me because I have forgotten his constituency. *[Interruption.]* No, I know my constituency. It is where I gave you such a bloody good hiding just over a year ago.

The Syrian rebels have plenty of access to sarin. It is not rocket science. A group of Shinto obscurantists in Japan living on Mount Fuji poisoned the Tokyo underground with sarin gas less than 20 years ago. One does not have to be Einstein to have one's hands on sarin gas or the means to distribute it.

Russia and China say no to war; so do I and most people in this country.

5.17 pm

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): One does not have to follow the oratory of the hon. Member for Bradford West (George Galloway) to realise that the spectre of the debate on Iraq in 2003 hangs over this debate. I sat undecided in the gangway listening with care to the then Prime Minister and marched resolutely into the Lobby behind him—a decision which I regret and which split my constituents and the Mitchell family. That debate did huge damage to the noble cause of liberal interventionism.

My first piece of strong advice to the Government is therefore to publish in full the evidence, of which there will be plenty more in the days to come, that has led them to conclude that the use of chemical weapons is unequivocally the work of Assad. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) made the point that there is doubt about the evidence. There will be the opportunity in the days to come to help to clear up that doubt. It is hugely in the interests of the agencies and the intelligence community to do so.

There are allegations in the press today about US intercepts of communications between members of the regime. As much of that evidence as possible should be exposed to give our constituents confidence in the Government's position. It seems clear to me that the awful events that took place in Ghutah on the night of 21 August could have been carried out only by the Syrian Government, for the reasons that have been clearly put. Let us have as much light on these matters as possible.

Secondly, I do not believe that there is any military solution to the wider situation in Syria. There needs to be a far greater effort to force the parties into a negotiating structure. Above all, that means that there must be much greater engagement by Russia and the United States. I understand the reticence of the United States in such matters, but it has been very late to give this crisis its full attention. Secretary Kerry's recent involvement in the middle east is much to be welcomed. The UK's less chilly relationship with Putin and Russia can help. The situation is made worse by the lack of international reaction to the earlier chemical attacks in June. At some point this logjam at the United Nations will be broken, and every sinew must be stretched to achieve that. Britain's immensely strong and effective diplomatic abilities give us a hugely important part to play in that around the world.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): Am I right in believing that, whether or not there is a Security Council resolution, it is still legally possible for the whole of the General Assembly to pass a resolution in considering the matter?

Mr Mitchell: I cannot give my hon. Friend a direct answer, but I refer him to the Attorney-General's legal advice, which I think makes it clear that that is the case.

My third point is that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will recall from our earliest discussions on Syria in the National Security Council that I have been at the hawkish end of the argument about what to do. That is because, as International Development Secretary, I saw the mounting humanitarian catastrophe developing in the early days. I visited the Zaatari camp on the

Jordanian-Syrian border when it was in its infancy, and women and children who entered it were shot at by the Syrian army as they went over the border. That camp has been strongly supported and funded by Britain and is now, in effect, the fourth biggest city in Jordan. There are now more than 2 million refugees. This is the largest movement of civilians across borders since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Appalling pressure is being exerted on the Governments and people of Jordan and the Lebanon, and more than 100,000 people have been killed, as has been mentioned.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): My right hon. Friend was an extremely good International Development Secretary. This is the largest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century and it is taking place not only in Syria, but in the countries surrounding it. One in five people in Lebanon is a refugee, and 45,000 people are trying to cross the border into Iraq. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the views of the non-governmental organisations on the ground, such as Christian Aid and its partners, which believe that an attack of any kind on Syria could exacerbate the situation further?

Mr Mitchell: The views of the NGOs on this matter are mixed, but what is clear is that part of the contribution that Britain can make—and other countries more so—to the humanitarian situation is to fund the NGOs and agencies that are working cross-border. Virtually all the aid currently goes through Damascus. Very little aid goes cross-border into the rebel-held territory, which means that, in effect, the international community is preventing the areas controlled by the regime from starving, but starving the areas held by the rebels.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Mitchell: I am afraid I have had my injury time.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), but this is a complex situation and the NGOs on the ground disagree on the matter. Even at this late stage, we must continue to demand unfettered access for those brilliant people in the humanitarian and relief community who are risking their lives daily and to whom my hon. Friend has referred.

Finally, we come to the present situation. Chemical weapons have been used. War crimes have been committed. A violation of international law has taken place. This is a regime which stoops to gas its own people. It is hard to think of a situation which more rightly triggers the Responsibility to Protect that has been referred to this afternoon. In my view, failure by the international community to act would be far more dangerous than taking evidence-based, proportionate and legal military action as a clear lesson to human rights abusers and dictators who murder and terrorise innocent civilian populations.

5.23 pm

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): I rise to agree with many of those present and to say that, in my opinion, we are all united in our disbelief and deep sense of grief and revulsion at the tragedy that is

[*Dr Alasdair McDonnell*]

unfolding in Syria. All of us in this House know that this conflict has gone on in its current phase for two years and has ripped the heart out of that country and its long-suffering people. However, my colleagues in the Social Democratic and Labour party and I are gravely concerned about any prospect of military action, the bombing—whether it be selective or non-selective—of Syria and the haste with which this course appears to have been embarked on.

Our objections are based primarily on simple, straightforward moral and ethical grounds. Beyond those ethical grounds, however, are the significant practical considerations and consequences. On a practical level, we believe that any military activity will be counter-productive and will not save lives but in fact cost them. As was said earlier, it is no more pleasant for a person to be killed by a cruise missile than by gas—they are still dead. Our objective should be to be humanitarian and protect lives.

Jim Shannon: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern, and that of many Members, about the Christian minority of some half a million, who have been displaced, murdered and ethnically cleansed? Any attack upon Syria, whatever it may be, could have repercussions for the Christian minority, who are concerned about what would happen given the example of Iraq, where there were 1.3 million Christians before the war and only 300,000 afterwards.

Dr McDonnell: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns, which dovetail with my point that whatever the British Government do, they should ensure that their actions do not make the situation worse or lead directly or indirectly to their excusing or justifying more deaths among those active in the conflict in Syria.

I urge the Prime Minister to pause and resist the temptation to launch a war just because there are pressures coming from some sources or because he feels it is the only option. The opinion poll showing that only 11% of the people feel favourably disposed to the concept has already been referred to, and that means that 89% are hostile to it.

I wish also to pose the question of how the sight of a British and US-led attack is likely to be perceived across the middle east, not just in Syria, especially if it is carried out without credible UN backing or on the basis of uncertain or confused intelligence. That would risk handing the Syrian regime a major propaganda victory at a pivotal point, which its supporters could rally around. The impact on the wider region is even more uncertain and potentially volatile. Even if such action could ever be morally justified, which I and my colleagues do not accept, there surely needs to be a serious prospect of an endgame that has an outcome of success and of benefit in some shape or form.

Mr MacNeil: Does the hon. Gentleman fear, as I do, that if the Prime Minister were to win the vote on his motion tonight, it would embolden him for future adventures? As the hon. Gentleman said, it is clear that the public, and I think majority opinion across the world, are against adding any more to the powder keg in Syria that was referred to earlier.

Dr McDonnell: My view, which I do not think is far removed from that of other Members, is that mission creep is inevitable in any such situation. Whatever justification is put forward today, the mission would creep and change in the light of changing circumstances next week and next month. As such, it would lead to all sorts of consequences that we have not perceived at this point.

To put it more precisely, I do not think anybody in this country, in Europe or around the world wants to see another Afghanistan or Iraq. I have heard little here today to convince me of the merit of any proposed military action. We have been given no clear indication of what success might look like or how it would be measured. We are told that this action might persuade Assad to consider not using chemical weapons in the future, but I have little faith that such a course of action will not make his position better rather than worse. There is a clear risk that even more lives will be lost and even more harm done than we are trying to prevent. I can only see that cruise missile attacks will take lives—hundreds, if not thousands, of lives—of combatants and civilians alike. There is little evidence that any lives would be saved in the long run.

Mr Jenkin: What message would come from this House were we to vote for the Opposition amendment and, in effect, say that we are not going to take any action as a result of this? That would be the message.

Dr McDonnell: I can only refer the hon. Gentleman to Iraq and its consequences. We have all been left scarred by Iraq.

Many in this House and in Government will have convinced themselves of the courses of action that should be taken, but they have not convinced the public. I think the public know better. The public have long and bitter memories of Iraq and Afghanistan. All the promises and assurances issued then were not worth the paper they were written on. The public remember the contrived situation, the misleading of this House and the needless deaths of so many soldiers and countless civilians. While I would find it difficult, if not impossible, ever to tolerate or support military intervention, I believe that this House should contemplate such action against Syria only if it were UN approved and if we were convinced that it would improve the situation.

5.31 pm

Mr John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): We make no more important decision in this House than to give permission to our armed forces to unleash some of their formidable arsenal. We should only do so if we feel there is democratic consent for the aim and the purpose of the conflict, and we should do so only if it is legal so to do. In my adult lifetime in politics I think that we, as a country, have intervened too often. We have too often asked our armed forces to do things that armed forces alone cannot do. I am not against all intervention. Of course, when we had to liberate Kuwait or the Falkland Islands, they were noble aims. Our armed forces performed with great skill and bravery, and the British public were behind them. We must be very careful, however, not to inject them into a civil war where we do not know the languages, where we have uncertain sympathy for the

cultures and the conflicting groups involved, and where the answer in the end has to be a political process in the country itself and not external force.

I therefore welcome strongly the three things the Government have set out. I welcome this debate and the fact that we will do things democratically. It is our job to speak for our constituents and, if there is to be military activity, to ensure that the British public will it—they certainly do not at the moment. I welcome very much the Government's statement that we will not arm the rebels. That is huge progress and I support that fully.

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what we would like to hear from the Deputy Prime Minister when he sums up later is a clear statement that the Government believe that in all future cases military action—immediate external assault—will not be entered into unless this House has given its say-so first?

Mr Redwood: Of course I agree with that. Any sensible Government would do that, because what Government can commit our armed forces without the implicit or actual support of the House of Commons? That can be tested at any time, so no Government would be so foolish as to try and proceed without it.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend just go a bit further and agree that anybody going through the Government Lobby tonight is not giving their approval for direct military intervention on behalf of the UK, and that the Deputy Prime Minister should make that very, very clear in his summing up tonight? There will be another vote.

Mr Redwood: I leave the Deputy Prime Minister to speak for himself and the Government.

The third thing I welcome is that the Government are not trying to influence the conflict. That is an important new development, although I am not sure how it marries with possible military intervention. If military intervention is planned, I presume that it will be against Assad and his forces and that, of course, would have some impact on the conflict. That impact might be in the direction that the Government and others wish to go, but they need to accept that there is a possible contradiction or ambiguity between their wish not to have an impact on the balance of forces in Syria and their wish to intervene over the issue of chemical weapons.

Everyone in the House shares the Government's horror at the use of chemical weapons and the brutality shown, perhaps by the regime. It is quite possible that the regime used them. I agree with right hon. and hon. Members from both sides who have pointed out that there have also been atrocities and horrors enough without chemical weapons—those should also shock our consciences and worry our emotions, and they do.

Given the understandable wish to respond to the use of horror weapons, we need to ask whether the Government could undertake, or assist others to undertake, a military intervention that would fulfil the purpose. That should be the only question. Of course I understand that the Government cannot come to the House and debate a

series of targets with us in advance—that would be folly. However, I hope that the House can help steer Ministers to ask the right questions of their advisers about whether there is any type of military intervention that could make the position better rather than worse.

The military experts to whom I have talked say that the last thing we want to do is shower down bombs or cruise missiles on stocks of chemical weapons; that would degrade them, but could let them out as well. It would be a dreadful tragedy if, in an attempt to stop, by destruction, the use of chemical weapons, we infected people in the surrounding areas. That does not sound like a good idea. Bombing the factories might have a similar consequence, although perhaps the risk would not be as great as bombing the stocks of chemical weapons.

Is the idea to bomb the soldiers and their commanders who might use the weapons? That could be a way. However, we would have to ask the Government how many soldiers and officers we would need to kill to guarantee more or less that Assad would not use the weapons again. I fear that the answer might be very many, given that we are dealing with someone as mad and bad as Assad. Would we want to go that far? Are we sure that it would work?

Is the idea to bomb a load of buildings, preferably when people were not in them, so that we destroyed the command headquarters or military installations? That would be possible; western forces have done such things in other situations, normally as preparation for invasion. Again, however, how many would we need to bomb to make sure that Assad never used chemical weapons again?

I hope that the Government will think very carefully about the issues. If they wish to persuade the British people, who are mightily sceptical about our ability to find the right military response to stop Assad and his horrors, they need to come up with some answers privately and find the language to explain to Members, and the public we represent, why they have every confidence that we can achieve the noble aim of stopping Assad from using chemical weapons.

I wish the Government well. If they really can come up with a way of stopping Assad murdering his own people, nobody will be happier than me. Everyone in the House would be extremely happy. But the Government have to understand the scepticism of the British people. Assad is mad and bad and it will not be easy to stop him. I fear that we will not be able to do it in a half-hearted manner with a few cruise missiles in the hope that he will not retaliate.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Reports are circulating that No. 10 has indicated that it cannot rule out a recall of Parliament again on Saturday or Sunday to debate this matter further. Have you received any information from the Government in relation to any such request? It would have implications for this evening's debate.

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is no; the first I have heard of that has been from his lips. We shall leave the matter there for now. He has put his point on the record.

5.39 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Later this evening, the House will divide over whether in principle this country should undertake military action in Syria. We will perhaps do justice to the suffering of the Syrian people if we first determine where, as a Parliament, we are at one.

I have no doubt that we are all united in complete condemnation of the deplorable chemical attacks on civilians in Damascus. The gut-wrenching images of those attacks are etched on all our minds as we sit here tonight. All of us seek an outcome that will bring peace and stability to the region. That much we can agree. It is also the case that this motion is less damaging than the one we were originally led to believe we would be debating. That is a tribute to the fact that Back-Bench and Opposition MPs can make a difference. To that extent, this is a good day for Parliament and for public pressure. It is clear to me that those things have helped to force the Government to think twice about their way forward on Syria.

I welcome the fact that this motion recognises that to have proceeded with a military attack as the UN weapons inspectors were still visiting the sites of the alleged chemical weapons assault would have been preposterous. It beggared belief that, once again, we could have been about to embark on military engagement, without apparently having learned any of the lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan. By seeking to pre-empt the outcome of the inspectors' work, we would also have increased the likelihood that further requests for access by weapons inspectors would be denied; they would be regarded simply as a ploy for subsequent military action, regardless of the findings. As Hans Blix pointed out earlier this week:

"If the aim is to stop the breach of international law and to keep the lid on others with chemical weapons, military action without first waiting for the UN inspector report is not the way to go about it."

Although I am pleased that the Government's motion now accepts that we must wait for the inspectors' reports, I am deeply concerned at their cavalier treatment of international law and I completely reject their drive towards military action. On the legal question, both the US and our Government are indicating that they are prepared to act against Syria without a UN mandate. For all that the Government's motion talks of making "every effort" to ensure a Security Council resolution, the bottom line appears to be that they are happy to proceed without one.

We are told that intervention could be legally justified without a Security Council resolution under the UN's responsibility to protect, but the 2005 UN world summit outcome document, in which the Heads of State unanimously approved the new international norm of the responsibility to protect, subsequently approved by UN Security Council resolution 1674, states clearly that it is still subject to UN Security Council agreement. Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who co-chaired a working group on the responsibility to protect, again stressed that it is to be implemented in accordance with the UN charter. That means that the central decision-making authority is the UN Security Council. The conclusion from all this is clearly, if inconveniently for the Government, that military action against a sovereign state, other than in self-defence,

without the authority of the Security Council cannot be justified under the responsibility to protect. On that issue the Labour amendment is also, unfortunately, very weak; it regards international law as an inconvenience. That makes it all the more important that our deliberations today are informed by all the relevant information and based on sound legal grounding.

Jeremy Corbyn: Does the hon. Lady agree that the Government's position would be far stronger if instead of coming here proposing military action, they had come here to tell us that they were having serious discussions with the new Government in Iran and a new round of talks with Russia, and that they were trying to build a consensus in the region to bring about what must happen at some point—a political solution to this crisis?

Caroline Lucas: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. As he rightly highlights, we have an opportunity now with the new regime in Iran and we should be responding to a more moderate leader there, yet by going ahead and giving a signal that military action is the direction in which we are heading, we absolutely undermine the authority of that new leader in Iran.

I was making the case that we should have seen the Attorney-General's full legal opinion and that this one-and-a-half-side summary is simply unacceptable. While I am on the subject of further pieces of information that could have usefully informed this debate, I wish to refer hon. Members again to the Chilcot report—that missing report which has gone absent without leave. It is unacceptable that, yet again, many people are talking about the importance of the legacy of Iraq and we do not have that document, which would have given us the lessons to be learnt.

Martin Horwood: The hon. Lady seems to be making a reasonably powerful case against any use of military force whatsoever. Faced with one motion that does not rule it in and a Labour motion that does not rule it out, is not the logic for all those who have spoken against military action today, including those on the Labour Benches, to vote against them both?

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman's point is, unfortunately, a very strong one—[*Interruption.*] He knows what I mean.

I remain to be convinced that a military attack would deter, rather than escalate, conflict in the region, which is why I agree with what the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) just said. I have yet to hear what the strategy would be for Syria and the wider region in the event of an attack. I listened carefully to the Deputy Prime Minister on the radio this morning. It was put to him that Assad could well retaliate against an attack, but when he was asked what we would do in the face of such an escalation, answer came there none. I remain concerned as well about the impact of flouting international law. To intervene without the due resolution would send a message to everyone else that international law can be ignored when it is inconvenient.

As the law of the jungle takes hold, it will be increasingly difficult to condemn similar actions by others. I am increasingly convinced, therefore, that only a political and diplomatic solution will solve the war raging in

Syria and by extension hold its spread beyond the region. That is why I will not support the Government's motion and why I tabled my own amendment setting out that the case for military action had not been made. I am sorry that we will not have an opportunity to put that amendment to the vote, because it would have addressed the issue raised by the hon. Member for Cheltenham. Had it been accepted, we would have had a genuine choice tonight.

We need to strain every sinew to get all relevant parties around the table for peace talks. On so many levels, as others have said, this is a proxy war, which is why we need China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and many others involved as well. We also absolutely need to redouble our efforts to support refugees. We are hearing from many of the development agencies, including Oxfam, that the situation facing those refugees, both in Syria and the wider region, is appalling. More than 8 million people are now in desperate need of supplies. That is why people who say, "If we don't have military action, it is equivalent to doing nothing", are so misguided. There is much we can do on refugees and a political solution.

5.46 pm

Sir Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): In this kind of debate, there comes a point when people say, "Everything's been said, but not everybody's said it", but I hope that all of us who speak in the second half of the debate will help to reinforce the key arguments and still manage to draw out some particular aspects that have not yet been addressed.

Had we been debating the motion we expected earlier in the week, I would not have been able to support it. I still have grave reservations, however, and if I support the Government tonight, that will not give them any right to expect me to support them in a subsequent vote. It is important that that is understood. As is agreed on both sides of the House, that does not mean that there is not a case to be made; at the moment, however, it has not yet been made.

I understand the passion expressed, people's abhorrence and the desire that something be done, but it is very dangerous if we do not decide that that something will work rather than make the situation worse. My concern is that we do not know what the response will be. The argument is that there would be a highly forensic, targeted attack to eliminate the regime's capability to continue with such acts. Apart from the fact that we cannot ensure that there will not be collateral damage, there is the added problem that if it does not take out the regime, the regime and its allies will still have some capacity to act and might act in ways that escalate the situation.

Speaking as Chairman of the International Development Committee, which is responsible for holding to account the Government's aid programme, I welcome the contribution from the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), who addressed with deep knowledge and passion the commitment we are making. Of course the United Kingdom should be using humanitarian assistance to help the people distressed in this conflict, but so far £345 million of our aid programme has been diverted to supporting refugees in this conflict zone, an area of the

world where we would otherwise not be spending any of our aid money, because it is not a poor region. By definition, that money has been taken away from poor people in Africa and south Asia because of a conflict. We must not do anything that makes that conflict worse and results in even more displaced persons and refugees, whom we will inevitably want to help.

Mr MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman raises some substantial doubts. The Prime Minister earlier spoke about this being a matter of judgment. Surely anyone with such doubts in the Prime Minister's judgment could not support him tonight.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I think it is a matter of judgment. I am giving my judgment and the Prime Minister has given his.

The point that the motion and the amendment have in common—that is the result of the progress made in the past few days—is that we should allow the UN process to continue to the point where, we hope, it can be a determinant, and that this House will have an opportunity to decide before any military action takes place. Those are two important facts, which I would not want to vote against. If neither the motion nor the amendment is carried, the Government presumably could say that they had a mandate to do something immediately. We have to be careful what we vote out, as well as what we vote in.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): My right hon. Friend expressed earlier his concerns about the case for military intervention not having been made, and those concerns will be shared by many people across the House, but has he recognised that the motion is in fact not about military intervention? It simply does not rule it out, which is why the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), which said that the case has not yet been established, was irrelevant. That is the case that would have to be made for any future motion. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: I accept that, and I think I have made clear that what I want to see is how this action will take place in a way that will not make the situation worse. If I do not hear that, I will find it impossible to support that proposition. That is why I am grateful that we are being given time.

The truth is that we are being asked to make a decision because the American Government have made a decision on the basis of a red line that President Obama set. I am not sure whether, when he set that red line, he was naive in the assumption that it would not be stepped across or whether it was a challenge. Certainly it has reached a point where he feels bound to respond and is looking to his allies to support him. I do not think that we should be discourteous or unreasonable as allies, but we are entitled to consider our own interests.

On the point of the UN process and the point at which it would be legitimate to take action even without the UN, we must understand that Russia has a very direct interest that it is promoting. It has the capacity, as a permanent member of the Security Council, to use its veto. I do not believe that Russia should be entitled to say "That is the end of the matter" and that no action

[*Sir Malcolm Bruce*]

can be taken regardless of how the situation escalates. Clearly there has to be a legal framework that does not paralyse the UN because one member takes the view that its interests will not allow it to support what the rest of the international community wants. That is why the proposal that perhaps a General Assembly resolution might be part and parcel of the process is important.

That leads me to the conclusion that we need to determine the British position—not just how much we would like to support our allies, of which generally I am in favour, but the extent to which our involvement matters and our position in the world is enhanced, and on the bases that we will have improved rather than deteriorated a situation and that the British people will understand what we are doing. At this moment, I do not think any of those points has been answered satisfactorily.

I suspect that action is likely to take place in the next few days. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will be able to explain to us what will be the position of the British Government if action takes place before the House meets again, whether there is any likelihood of the House having to meet sooner than Monday and, indeed, if we would be asked to sanction a specific programme. The Government need to be able to make it clear what action is being taken, why they believe it will be effective and why they do not think it will make the situation worse. It will be only on that basis that I can be persuaded to support a second motion.

5.53 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Gordon (Sir Malcolm Bruce) and I agree with a number of things he said. I also very much welcome the change of heart of the Government, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary in not calling us here today to vote for immediate action against Syria. I would ask the Deputy Prime Minister, who is in conversation at the moment, to answer this simple question: why are we here today? Why could this not have waited for a few days?

Mr MacNeil: With reference to the earlier point of order that Parliament could be recalled on Saturday, does the hon. Gentleman agree that to recall Parliament before Monday would be absolutely farcical?

Albert Owen: It would be farcical, and folly. I think it is folly that we are here today, to be honest.

The Foreign Secretary, whom I admire as an individual, has been out of sync with many of my constituents and the British public in the way he has dealt with events in the past few days. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) in praising Government Back Benchers, the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Foreign Secretary and others for putting pressure on the Prime Minister and No. 10 to change their minds and to allow us to have two votes and to listen to the UN. I believe that that is what the British public want. They want us to have a rational debate, to look at all the issues and to come to the right conclusion.

I feel that what has happened has slightly tainted the Government on this occasion and that our international reputation has been slightly damaged.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I agree that the Government have made a tactical change from calling the House to debate a motion that would have supported military action, but the fact that we are called here to debate a motion that includes the option of military action surely places us on the first step of a slippery slope that leads to a new mood and a climate in which that becomes acceptable.

Albert Owen: I believe that it is an escalator and that this could be the first, very dangerous, step.

I praise the Leader of the Opposition and others for getting, at least, a breathing space to allow us to take a step backwards. Using the UN is the right way forward. The UN is not a perfect organisation but it has greater legitimacy than the United States, the United Kingdom and other nations acting alone. That is important.

I have been consistent on this point since I have been in the House. I voted against my own party and against the Government on Iraq, because I did not think that it had the legitimacy of the UN and the international community. I voted with the Prime Minister and the coalition Government on Libya, as the operation had greater legitimacy because of the UN support. We saw clearly that Benghazi would have been invaded and that there would have been thousands and thousands of deaths. That was the right action to take.

I strongly agree with General Lord Dannatt, who is reported as saying that if the international community were of one voice on this matter, the case would be compelling. At the moment, it is not. There is a lot of work to be done. There is a real danger that a divided international community, as many others have said, would lead to a proxy war by some of today's superpowers, using Syria to unleash greater dangers than we are seeing internally in that country. Let us be clear: what has happened in Syria is abhorrent. There are no ifs and buts about that, but we have to be careful to ensure that we do not make the problem worse in that country, that region and the whole world.

On the UN inspectors and chemical weapons, let us not forget that these inspectors were called in before the most recent atrocity. They were investigating alleged gas attacks—we have heard different numbers today—and they were aided to get into Syria by Russia. We should be putting more pressure on Russia in future, at the G20 and other meetings, to get the Russians to help us to resolve the crisis in Syria. The UN inspectors had a few days to do their work, and yet action has been proposed by the United States, the United Kingdom and others that will hamper their work if it goes ahead.

Let us not forget that we have been here before with the Iraq debacle and whether the international inspectors could carry on their work. The reality here is that, if we were to unleash a strike on Syria, it would not just hamper Syria, but put at stake the UN's credibility. So I hope that issues become clearer over the next few days and months. In the words of Ban Ki-moon, we must give the UN inspectors and peace a chance. There are other routes that we could be going down now. The humanitarian route is an obvious one. Why are we not talking about creating humanitarian corridors in Syria,

protecting the people there and getting in the UN inspectors to make it clear what has happened and how we can help those people who are suffering by civil war?

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): I would like to see humanitarian protected areas. That would take troops. Is my hon. Friend suggesting that?

Albert Owen: A UN peacekeeping force could be used. There are many ways to do that, but I would rather see that alleviate people's suffering than bombing from Cyprus and ships. Yes, we must consider helping people on the ground, but military action should not be our first option—it should be the last—and humanitarian corridors could work if we had the will of the Security Council and the United Nations working together, rather than polarising them, which is what we are doing by threatening military strikes now.

We need a rationale; we need an international solution; and we need to listen to our constituents. Overwhelmingly, the people of Britain are telling us no to immediate action and no to strikes. We should listen to them. The country was divided over Iraq. On this issue, it is united in saying no to military action now. Let us get the humanitarian effort under way.

6.1 pm

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I am extremely reluctant to endorse military action in Syria. My reluctance does not spring from any doubts about the facts of the use of chemical weapons by Assad's forces. Those who suggest that the atrocity of 21 August was committed by his opponents on their own supporters to provoke intervention by the alliance are allowing their hostility to military action to fuel their imagination in the absence of any concrete evidence. But my right hon. Friends were right to delay any decision until the UN inspectors have reported.

Nor does my reluctance spring from doubts about the legality of action to deter or prevent the further use of chemical weapons, even without a UN resolution, but I am puzzled why the United States, the United Kingdom and France stepped forward with alacrity to take on this unpopular task. France, from which I have just returned, is the country whose willingness to do so can most easily be explained. The decline in President Hollande's support was checked only by his successful intervention in Mali, with boots on the ground. More importantly, France has always believed that it has a special involvement in Syria. However, President Hollande, and indeed anyone else who is thinking of serious involvement on the ground in Syria, should read a report of the last time that France was involved in Syria, written by President Hollande's predecessor, de Gaulle, when he was still a commandant in 1931, describing how it took six years and nearly 10,000 French dead to restore peace in Syria after the first world war. We all do well to remember just how difficult that country is to pacify.

The involvement of the United States and the United Kingdom is much more puzzling. Obama voted against Iraq. By no stretch of the imagination is he a interventionist cowboy; nor are my right hon. Friends the Foreign

Secretary and the Prime Minister rabid neo-cons. I can only suspect that one reason is the fear that inaction now that red lines have been crossed would send a message to Iran that it has little to fear if it continued to develop nuclear weapons. That is a legitimate and powerful reason, but it can have difficult consequences.

My main concern is that, although the Government's intentions as laid out in the motion are limited, military action will unleash pressures to become further involved. If Assad takes whatever blow we inflict upon him but then goes on and appears to be winning, would we tolerate a war criminal being allowed to win? Would there not be enormous pressures to switch the balance back against him, and would it not be hard to resist pressures to arm the rebels? If we are partly motivated by a concern to send a message to Iran, will it not be seen as difficult to allow Iran's ally to win?

Let us suppose that Assad desists from the further use of chemical weapons, to go on committing what might be called conventional atrocities, as he has. Will not our commitment and its legal basis that this is not about chemical weapons but about the duty to protect people lead us to be pressed to take action against that type of atrocity? Indeed, if those atrocities are committed by the other side, or sides, in the war, will we not be pressed to take action about them?

What keeps me out of the No Lobby tonight is my confidence in the judgment of the Foreign Secretary, with whom I have worked in many roles, subordinate and inferior, and my confidence that he would not use his good judgment unwisely in this matter—nor would the Prime Minister—but what I need to persuade me to join them in the Yes Lobby is the clearest possible assurance that they will resist the forces to go further if we do get involved and say, "So far, but no further."

6.6 pm

Mr Roger Godsiff (Birmingham, Hall Green) (Lab): I have been to Syria on two occasions as part of delegations and had audiences with President Assad, and they were certainly illuminating. Syria is ruled by him as a family fiefdom and has a history of brutality. Its political structure—the Ba'athist party—is modelled on the old Russian Communist party. I say that because I do not, however, believe that President Assad is a fool, but I will return to that later.

What has happened to the people of Syria is a crime against humanity, and it is imperative, as the Leader of the Opposition said, to bring the conflict to an end as soon as possible. War crimes have been committed by both sides, and Assad should be held accountable in due course for declaring war on his own people. When it was alleged that chemical weapons had been used in the latest atrocity, I welcomed the fact that UN weapons inspectors were to go to the site. However, I was very concerned when almost immediately the Foreign Secretary appeared on television, dismissively making pre-emptive comments about the fact that the evidence that they might find may already have disappeared or have been contaminated and that they might not find anything. I do not believe that the Foreign Secretary is not an honourable man, but his comments reminded me very much indeed of what was said in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq by the USA and Britain.

[Mr Roger Godsiff]

We were told at the time that Saddam Hussein's regime had weapons of mass destruction. We were told that the weapons inspectors would not find any WMDs because they had been very well hidden. We were told that there was incontrovertible evidence from the intelligence services that WMDs existed. Finally, in the last debate on the subject in the Chamber, we were told that the WMDs could hit this country within 45 minutes. What happened subsequently? We found out that what was said was not true, that the intelligence had been sexed up, that the weapons of mass destruction did not exist and that political decisions had been taken at President Bush's ranch in America way before the conflict began.

Indeed, I ask the Government to answer this tonight: if the Chilcot committee report could be published, instead of disappearing into the ether, a lot of people would like to know whether what I and other people have said is correct, so when will the Chilcot report be released? Furthermore, as I and others have said, the consequences of Iraq caused poison to enter British politics, leading to a total distrust of politicians and Governments. There are, of course, consequences in this case, and they have been well outlined by other Members.

Turning back to President Assad, I said at the outset that I did not think he was a fool. He was educated in the west; he was trained as an eye specialist; and he is married to someone who was brought up in this country and worked for a merchant bank. The Assad family has ruled Syria for generations and it is not, of course, averse to brutality or atrocities. Assad's father killed 50,000 people after an uprising in Homs during his reign. This is a brutal family, but let us consider this: the regime, as we all know, has chemical weapons, and it used to have a nuclear capability, which was taken out by the Israelis in 2007.

Tim Farron: On that point, I agree that Assad is not a fool. Will he therefore sit up and take notice of the fact that although Syria is not a member of the International Criminal Court, if we built up a dossier to convict him as a war criminal at some point in the future, he would have nowhere to go if he did not comply?

Mr Godsiff: As I have clearly said, I believe that Assad should be held accountable for his actions and should be brought before the international courts.

The regime has the full patronage of Russia, which can veto resolutions in the Security Council. Syria has some of the most sophisticated weaponry around, supplied by Russia and Iran, and it has total control over the skies in Syria. It has helicopter gun ships, and also a surrogate army fighting with Syrian Government forces in the shape of Hezbollah. As my good friend the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) rightly said, what is in this for Assad? Why should he deliberately participate in an atrocity guaranteed to bring an international response—the one thing that he does not want, and the one thing that all the disparate organisations fighting against him do want?

Mr Jenkin: The American intelligence services believe that Assad did this; the British intelligence services believe Assad did it; the French and even the German

intelligence services believe it; and the whole Arab League thinks Assad did it. Is this debate to be conducted on the basis that we in this House know better than all these experts? Can the hon. Gentleman name one expert on Syria who does not believe that President Assad is responsible for this attack? Name one.

Mr Godsiff: Let me answer the hon. Gentleman in this way. I said earlier that what happened over Iraq had poisoned British politics, but more to the point, many Members vowed privately at the time—the hon. Gentleman was here—that they would never again believe one single solitary assurance given by any Prime Minister who came to the Dispatch Box to say, "Trust me; I'm taking this country into a military adventure."

Let me return to this point: why would Assad do this? What is in it for him? Dictators have one unifying thing in common: they want to remain in power; they want the spoils of being a dictator and all that goes with it. Why on earth, then, would the Assad regime wish to bring on itself cruise or Tomahawk missiles? Why on earth would it want western countries to get involved in the Syrian civil war? Why on earth would it want to lose power?

6.14 pm

Mr Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): We should reflect first on the awful responsibility of our leaders who find themselves as chief executives in these circumstances. The witnessing of an appalling crime on television, played out endlessly on YouTube and other internet sites, showed that something utterly dreadful had happened. The President of the United States, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom or the President of France, who all command armed forces that could do something about it, then faced many pressures. The shadow Health Secretary spoke emotionally about wanting to address this appalling crime when he appeared on television last Sunday, but I think the shadow Foreign Secretary was probably not wildly enthusiastic about the implications of what his right hon. Friend said when he gave vent to his feelings. It then falls to this Parliament coldly to consider the effect of taking action when it is felt that something must be done, yet the evidence shows that the action might make things worse rather than better.

On the issue of attribution, there was an intriguing piece of information, perhaps a leak, placed in *The Times* about what was apparently a SIGINT—signals intelligence—report of a conversation between the Assad defence ministry and the field commander of the chemical weapons unit. It was described as a rather panicked conversation. I can see no conceivable reason why Assad would have directed this particular use of weapons on this occasion, although I can see that such weapons could be used where the responsibility has been delegated to field commanders to help them out when they are in desperate situations. The Joint Intelligence Committee information seems to suggest that that might have happened on this occasion. As the JIC suggests, there has been low-level use, and I would agree that the responsibility almost certainly sits with the Assad Administration, although whether it sits with President Assad personally is another issue.

Mr Graham Stuart: If our aim is to deter further use of chemical weapons and protect people, is my hon. Friend aware of any ultimatum previously given by the

west to Assad on the use of chemical weapons? If not, would not the more logical response be to lay down a credible threat, rather than one artificially limited by some time frame, stating, “If you fail to undertake not to use chemical weapons, we will degrade and deter you by military strike and bring you to the table”? Might that not have more effect than a short-term military strike now?

Mr Blunt: The difficulty is legality, which is why the Government have been dancing on the head of a pin, making the case that this is absolutely and only about the use of chemical weapons—because nothing else in international law would justify the sort of intervention that is being proposed if agreement at the UN Security Council cannot be reached. If we get to that grave position, I think we have to be pretty certain about the effectiveness of the military action before we take it. Are we going actively to degrade chemical weapons? There are hideous practical problems in attempting that, with the potential of awful collateral damage. If we go after the command and control structure in a way that is sufficiently active to degrade it, that plainly means going after Assad himself, thus actively intervening on one side in the conduct of the war.

The critical point about the consequences was put by the Leader of the Opposition in his speech, and it is implicit in the motion. I rather wish that the Opposition had been more direct about the implications of what the right hon. Gentleman was saying. He was saying that if the consequences of our military action were to threaten the Geneva II process, which should mean Assad and his Government on the one side and the rebels on the other sitting down, engaging in politics and reaching a deal to escape from the current position, the action would not be worth engaging in. I think that case is overwhelmingly strong. It is the Russians, supported by the Chinese, who have put themselves in this position by vetoing any attempt to bring about wider international action, so the responsibility is theirs to get their client to the negotiating table.

The responsibility to act is not ours, particularly on much more doubtful legal ground around the use of international humanitarian law, which could get us into a potentially hideous situation with unforeseen consequences. If we are lucky, what we are debating here and perhaps again next week is a very limited British involvement in quite a small international operation of firing off some scores of cruise missiles to make a point about deterring action. We might be firing one cruise missile so that our hand is, as it were, on the dagger of international action.

I suppose that if Prime Minister Blair did nothing else, he at least so sensitised the body politic that we are here having this debate in recess, and we are yet to be in a position where we are even authorising a very limited use of military action. However, we are intervening in a situation where, in the analysis of Eugene Rogan, this is not about winner takes all in Syria; it is about loser must die. So the idea that we will send an effective deterrence message with a limited use of military action does not stand up.

We need to consider other responsibilities. This month, the Egyptian Government have, with malice aforethought, murdered well over 1,000 of their own citizens to suppress people who were supporting what had been previously

an elected Government. What are they to think about the fact that we are getting ourselves into a position to intervene over Syria, and yet we have said precious little about a crime that is on the scale of five or 10 times what we are debating here? It has not been part of an insurgency yet, but the Egyptian Government have almost certainly kicked an insurgency off as a result of what they are doing.

We need to examine what we are doing and whether it will work. I do not think it will; I cannot support it.

6.20 pm

Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): Syria’s use of chemical weapons is either a huge mistake or, in my view, a calculated attempt to test the resolve of the west, post Iraq and post Afghanistan. If we look at the possibility that it was a mistake, it could have been an official or a general who gave orders to the relevant Government department for the use of chemical weapons without the direct instruction of Assad; that scenario has been put forward by reports appearing in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. Alternatively, it could be a test to see whether Syria could get away with the use of weapons of mass destruction, and whether the west would not have the stomach for a challenge. Chemical weapons have been used in Syria earlier, and until the recent red line from Obama the west did not react, other than to threaten a red line.

The weapons inspectors said that they needed another four days to finish their investigations, plus, I am sure, a short time after that for their report to be collated. Many of us believe that the regime is responsible for the attacks, and those attacks are probably authorised from a very senior level—probably Assad himself. But the inspectors need to report back to the UNSC purely and simply to establish due process—something that did not happen through the Iraq conflict and the Iraq war that followed. I was a relatively new MP, sat on the Bench just behind the Prime Minister, in 2003 when we took the decision. We thought we had good intelligence, and that intelligence was later found to be false. One of the lessons of the Iraq war is that we wait for due process to be followed through the UN before action is taken.

Obviously, the resolution tabled by the Prime Minister under chapter VII preceded the weapons inspectors’ report, so we knew full well that the Russians and Chinese would be likely to veto that resolution. Our debate today obviously takes place before the weapons inspectors have finished, because powers elsewhere have decided to go ahead before the Security Council has determined whether the evidence from the inspectors is sufficient to meet the burden of proof required. It is clear that without that Security Council resolution, any military action would, like that of a previous Labour Government, be illegal.

Mr Newmark: The hon. Gentleman is putting huge stock in the UN, but the UN will not apportion blame. The only thing that the UN is doing is validating that chemical weapons were indeed used, and we all know that.

Mark Hendrick: Yes, we do all know that, but it is a prerequisite of the due process, and the UN procedure, that that is established through the inspectors. That

[Mark Hendrick]

must be the basic building block on which the Security Council makes a decision. In addition to that, as the Prime Minister has said, there must be a lot of intelligence from different intelligence services around the world, and the inspectors' report will add to that information. So that is just a basic building block; it is not a decision in itself.

Therefore, as I said, action may be illegal, despite the doctrine of responsibility to protect. Despite what the Attorney-General says, I and many others around the world are not convinced that the six criteria required by the doctrine have been met. The unintended consequences of that could be catastrophic, for the following reasons.

By using those weapons, Syria has crossed the red lines set by Obama. Iran is watching, helping to arm the regime and sending its own forces to the regime. The Russians are arming the Syrians to the hilt and wondering whether the west will act against the use of WMD. Iran knows that if Syria can get away with using WMD, its own WMD, as well as its development of nuclear weapons, could well be ignored, and Iran could go on to produce more WMD and nuclear weapons without the intervention or involvement of the west. That may provoke a response, if that were to be allowed, from the Israelis. The Israelis will be looking, at some point short of Iran's having developed nuclear weapons, to possibly take matters into their own hands. Indeed, if the situation kicks off with the western intervention in Syria, and Iran responds, and if Syria responds with an attack on Israel, that could be the perfect excuse for the Israelis to try and deal, not only with the WMD question and Syria, but also the nuclear question and Iran. We need to take these things into consideration before we decide, as a result of any UNSC deliberations and a UNSC decision, what action we take.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has taken the right decision. Let us go the UNSC route. If Russia and China say no and veto, for political reasons rather than the reasons of the evidence that we all know about, we must make a decision. Only once we have seen the evidence from the inspectors will we be able to decide what that decision shall be.

6.27 pm

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (Con): The House has been recalled not to sanction military strikes in Syria, but to deplore the use of chemical weapons. I think we can all agree on that. I hope we can agree, too, that there must be a second vote in this House before any direct British military response: no vote, no strike.

Certain of our traditionalists will no doubt delight in pointing out that under the rules of Crown prerogative, no Commons approval is actually technically required for a Prime Minister to take us to war, and historically they are correct, but Parliament is waking up and asserting itself. As the Prime Minister himself pointed out as Leader of the Opposition, the Crown prerogative, that constitutional quirk that has handed 10 Downing street the powers of a mediaeval monarch, needs changing. No Prime Minister should embark on a non-defensive war without the consent of this House. In recognising that, the Prime Minister has been wise, not weak.

Having a sovereign Parliament means that sometimes, yes, a Prime Minister will be told to pause and think again. Good. Democracy works.

Not unreasonably, the Leader of the Opposition, like most on the Government side of the House, would like to see more evidence—evidence from UN inspectors—before voting on military action. If the *casus belli* is the use of chemical weapons, let us be certain who used them. If the UN is going to help provide us with the evidence, though, we must not make the mistake of believing that the UN can confer legitimacy on military action. Legitimacy to go to war comes not from the UN, nor from international law or international lawyers, nor even from our own National Security Council. That sort of legitimacy comes only from below, not from above. It comes from the demos and those they elect. When the time comes for that second, crunch, vote, there can be no buck-passing, no deferring to a higher authority, no delegating. It will be our responsibility alone, and all the more weighty for that. If I am certain that this House needs the final say on our policy towards Syria, I am far less certain as to what that policy should be. There are, I think, no good outcomes.

Mr Jenkin: Has my hon. Friend just demonstrated the shortcomings of this system of decision making and giving executive decisions to a legislative body? That is contributing to the paralysis of our nation. If we do not trust our Prime Minister to take decisions of this nature, we should not have trusted him with the office of Prime Minister.

Mr Carswell: If the alternative to rushing into a conflict that may have significant implications is that we pause, I would not describe that as paralysis but as good governance. It is vital to recognise that the Executive do not control the legislature; the legislature must control the Executive. Sending our young men and women to war is a decision of massive consequence, and it is right and proper that the House should exert its authority and give legitimacy to that decision. I understand and respect the case for intervention, and I think no one in this House or anywhere else is calling for a land invasion. What is envisaged is an aerial bombardment to punish and deter those behind the chemical weapons outrage.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Gentleman says that the only thing envisaged is an aerial bombardment, but does he have any idea about the envisaged length of time of that bombardment?

Mr Carswell: That comes to my next point—no, I do not. I am deeply unconvinced about what missile strikes and bombing will achieve or how long they will need to continue, and we have yet to hear how they might achieve their objective. Neither am I clear where British military involvement might end. Since the second world war, Britain has mostly fought what might be called wars of choice, but if we initiate hostilities in the eastern Mediterranean, will what follows continue to be fought on our terms and in the way we choose? Ninety-nine years ago, almost to the day, the Austrian chiefs-of-staff launched a punitive attack on Serbia. It did not end there.

There are serious players in this fight with serious military kit lined up behind the different factions in

Syria. Are we ready to deal with what they might do and how they might respond? I need to know before I vote for any strikes, and I think the good people of Essex would like us to know whether the Government know what they are doing before we vote to sanction such action.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have argued with great passion and determination that we in the west must take a stand for democratic values, and I agree. The Arab spring of 2011, like Europe's spring of 1848, saw the hopes of liberals and reformists raised. However, the autocrats fought back in Egypt and Syria as they once did in Italy, Paris, Poland and Austria. As we once did in the 19th century, so we must do again in the 21st century. We must promote the liberal and reformist cause, and the constitutionalist one where possible. As in the 19th century, where possible we must avoid war with the autocrats.

Democracy and liberalism will one day seem as firmly rooted in the south and east of the Mediterranean as they do to the north, but if spreading democratic values is to be the cornerstone on which we are to build British foreign policy, let us do so consistently. We cannot act in defence of democratic values in Syria two months after we failed to speak out in defence of the democratically elected Government in Egypt. We cannot act when hundreds of civilians are murdered in Damascus, but continue to arm the Egyptian junta that slaughtered a thousand in Cairo. We cannot champion the right of self-determination in one part of the Arab world, yet ignore those who seek basic human rights in another, including the Gulf.

I am unconvinced that the Government's intended course of action in Syria is part of a coherent strategy, and I will not support military action until I am convinced that it is part of such a strategy. I am still undecided whether we should support the motion, oppose it, or abstain. I am fearful of being seen to back military action, I am unwilling to abstain, yet I find there is little in either the Government or the Opposition motion with which I can disagree.

6.34 pm

Mr Dai Havard (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): A lot has been said already in this debate for those who come in at this late stage, but I agree with the powerful points made by the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr Blunt), who talked about the context in which individual decisions are being made. Let us be brutally honest. The Americans were not really interested in the middle east; they were going to look to the far east, and Syria was contained in a number of different ways.

We see on television one brutal reality on the ground, but there is another reality that has not come out, because we never really debated properly how we would arm the rebels. The rebels are already being armed. We know about the Saudi and Qatari money; we know about buying Croatian arms and how they pushed through Jordan. We know about a whole series of grading operations, not by official US forces—no, but there is a lot of “brigadier, retired”, “general, retired”, who are there helping to do what the Americans needed to do, which is to try and find out who could and could not be properly armed. There is a lot of mythology about where we are in terms of the reality of how the Syrian conflict has been contained.

Let us look at what has been proposed today. What are we going to do? Apparently we are going to send in a few Tomahawk land attack missiles to give Assad a bit of a spanking because he has used chemical weapons. That is nonsense and a ridiculous proposition that will lead us to the position that a lot of people have already begun to explain. We cannot write Assad a letter and say, “By the way, the TLAM missile was only to give you a spanking over chemical weapons. It didn't mean that we were interfering in your conflict in any way, shape or form.” Frankly, that is nonsense. We cannot compartmentalise such activities in the way suggested, and there will be an effect. What will that effect be? Well, there is lots of information about why we are trying to do this. “He has used chemical weapons.” Who has used chemical weapons? The hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) dealt with that point earlier in a powerful contribution. It could have been a rogue commander. Assad is not necessarily directing. It could be that the regime's assets are being used, but who is using them?

I remember being involved in all sorts of discussions about Iranians kidnapping British forces when we were in Iraq—hon. Members may remember that exercise. That was not sanctioned by the central regime in Iran—whatever that might look like—but it was a rogue operation by an Iranian guard commander who saw an opportunity when everybody was on holiday to nick the boat. They obviously took advantage of that as best they could—why would they not?—and we got into all sorts of mess. Do not imagine that under such circumstances, and particularly in a war situation, Assad and his people are so monolithic and well-organised that there are no differences among them. This is difficult information to try to grade out and decide who was responsible on any day for any particular activity.

Mr Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman is making a good point. Does he think that if a rogue commander under the Assad regime made use of chemical weapons, the fact that that regime has those detestable and illegal weapons puts responsibility for their use, if they have delegated responsibility, on the Assad regime itself?

Mr Havard: I do not disagree. Those responsible should be punished, although I am not sure that sending TLAM missiles is a punishment. People have mentioned the International Criminal Court, and I agree. These people must be held to account for their actions at some point. We do not now have an immediate almost knee-jerk reaction—it was going to be knee-jerk but it is a week late now—to the situation. The strike is apparently “targeted”, but I do not know what that means. It is targeted in the sense that we know where we will throw the missile, but it is hardly a surgical, contained or compartmentalised activity. Will we do that, or will we have a broader constituency of people who can start to prosecute the idea of bringing those people to account at some time or another?

The idea that if we do not do something now for those stated reasons we will not do anything is nonsense. There are lots of other things that can be done that we should probably have been doing for a long time and will have to do now. We must accept one thing: we will not get anywhere towards resolving the problem for the Syrian people unless and until we grapple differently

[*Mr Havard*]

with the question of those terribly difficult Chinese people and them nasty Russkies. We must incentivise the Russians to be involved in a process that caters for some of their needs. Libya has been mentioned several times, and it has often been said that they are smarting from what happened in Libya. Well, I do not know where we will be on Monday—according to certain reports, we might be here on Sunday—and things might have happened that are out of our control. The Americans might have done something. However, unless and until we can say to the Russians, “Okay. We understand some of your concerns,” and incentivise them to be in the plan, we will not resolve the situation. Any American activity now will not resolve the situation. Later, the UN could agree and we might have to take military action. The idea of sending half a dozen aeroplanes to Akrotiri is a good one, because if some of the whizz-bangs go bang at the weekend, we might well be dealing with a situation in the area—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order.

6.40 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I very much welcome the decision to delay the vote on whether we should take military action until the UN inspectors have had their chance to report. It makes no sense whatever for the west to make great play of getting the UN weapons inspectors in to inspect the site only to have a vote in the House without getting their report and without determining the evidence on the ground.

Perhaps the rationale for the debate has moved on. Welcome though that is, the debate gives hon. Members the opportunity to ask questions of the Government. I remain unconvinced by the arguments for military action that I have heard this evening. It is important that the House lays down markers, so that, when we have the next debate, the Government hopefully come to the House with better answers.

Let us begin with the evidence. There is no doubt that foreign policy should be based on firm evidence and grounded in legitimacy. We know there are no easy answers on Syria, but we must acknowledge that atrocities have been committed by both sides in this vicious civil war. There have been claims and counter-claims on both sides in relation to chemical weapons, and yet nothing has been verified. Even the JIC document, brief though it is, is in terms of probabilities and possibilities, but not of certainty. At the end, the JIC admits that it has no idea as to Assad’s motivation in committing to chemical weapons when he was gaining ground and winning the battle. We must therefore have careful consideration of the evidence.

Mr Jenkin: The JIC concludes that it is highly probably that the Assad regime is responsible for the attack. That is the consensus among all reputable intelligence services, including the Arab League intelligence service. I put it to my hon. Friend that the only people who contest the evidence probably do not want to believe the certainty that Assad did it. I include my hon. Friend among those

people. He does not want us to get involved, and is therefore reluctant to believe in the certainty that Assad did it.

Mr Baron: My hon. Friend is attributing motives to me, which does not do him justice. The bottom line is that we have asked the UN inspectors to go in and inspect the site. We should at least wait and see what they say when they return—[*Interruption.*] If my hon. Friend wants to intervene again, he is welcome to do so. We are talking only of a couple more days before we get the report. One hundred thousand people are already dead. We need only a couple of days to ensure we have a calm assessment of the evidence. That is not asking too much, yet the motion reads that the

“House...Deplores the use of chemical weapons in Syria...by the Assad regime”.

That is a statement of fact, but it is not correct until we at least have the UN inspectors’ report.

Martin Horwood: I will try to save the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) from saying for a sixth time what he has said. The JIC report comes to a strong conclusion. It says not that it is bewildered, but simply that it cannot put a “precise motivation” on the attack, and concludes that there are “no plausible alternative scenarios to regime responsibility”.

As the motion states, it is not the responsibility of the UN weapons inspectors to attribute blame.

Mr Baron: The JIC document states clearly that it cannot understand the “precise motivation”. The document is in terms of probability. I put this question to the House, and particularly to those who want to intervene militarily: what is the harm in waiting for the UN inspectors to come back and present their evidence? We should not forget that the west did its utmost to get those weapons inspectors to the site. At the very least we can wait a couple of days to see what they say after their due inspections. Otherwise, what was the logic of sending them there in the first place? Sending them there and not waiting for the report would not make sense.

The second question is of legitimacy. Is military intervention without a UN resolution legitimate?

Mr Jenkin: And legal?

Mr Baron: And legal.

Mr Jenkin: They are two different things.

Mr Baron: International law is terribly subjective—there are no hard and fast rules, but the best we have is the UN. Is such action legal? Many have suggested that we should look to the concept of the responsibility to protect, which was introduced in 2005, but that is not linked to chemical weapons. R2P could have been invoked 100,000 lives ago. Therefore, the idea that it becomes relevant because chemical weapons have been used is a non-starter.

We must also ask questions about the military objectives—there are many questions on, for example, the scope of the operation and the potential for mission creep. What happens if Assad uses chemical weapons again or if the rebels use them? There are very few answers, and we need more. The decision to commit to military intervention and potentially to commit soldiers

to war is one of the most serious the House can make, if the not the most serious. We need to base such a decision on firm evidence and not on speculation.

Many accuse those of us who question the idea of military intervention by saying, “You believe that nothing should be done. You’re in that camp that says, ‘We should wash our hands of it and let them get on with it.’” Utter tosh! So much more could be done on the humanitarian front. The refugee camps are desperately short of basic amenities. Britain has a good record—we have done a lot of the heavy lifting—but we could do a lot more, as could the international community. Tens of thousands of women and children are living in extremely poor conditions, and yet the west is saying, “There’s very little more we can do to help the humanitarian situation,” which is utter nonsense.

The west could also do a lot more on the diplomatic front. It makes no sense whatever to exclude Iran from the forthcoming peace talks, but that is what we currently intend to do. Iran is a key regional player and a participant in this conflict. Excluding Iran from the talks is utter nonsense. We need to go that extra diplomatic mile. This is a cliché, but it is true: you make peace with your enemies, not with your friends. We need to talk to the Iranians if we hope for a diplomatic solution. A political and diplomatic solution, and not a military one, is the only long-term solution to this vicious civil war. The Syrian people have suffered enough. We must have answers to those questions.

6.48 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): A few days ago, I found myself rushing to switch off the television because my five and seven-year-old boys were in front of the news when it was showing images of men, women and children who had been gassed and were lying on the floor dead—they were in front of our eyes. It is impossible to have watched events unfold in Syria in the past few years and to have thought anything other than, “If not now, when?”

It is impossible to have watched the footage in the past week and not to have felt the instincts of liberal interventionism pulsating in our consciences. That instinct tells us that we cannot be isolationist, and turn a blind eye to mass murder and wash our hands of the responsibility to act. It is impossible not to think back to the difference that British intervention made for the people of Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Libya and wonder how it can be replicated for the people of Damascus, Homs and Aleppo. However, the tempering of those instincts should be a resounding message seared on the memories of many Members: liberal intervention can fail—and it can fail badly. It can fail if we have no vision of the outcome, no definition of success and no route map to the exit; it can fail if we allow our thirst for justice to trump the patience to secure the greatest possible legitimacy for our action; and it can fail if we forget that our first responsibility is not to make matters worse.

Iraq is not a reason to absolve ourselves from our responsibilities in Syria, but it is a reason to exercise caution, invoke clarity and define a conclusion. This Government seek a blank cheque to use British armed forces in Syria without convincingly and coherently answering the most crucial questions. What constitutes success for a military intervention? If a negotiated

settlement is the goal, will military intervention make it more or less likely? Are we comfortable that our intervention is limited to punishing the use of chemical weapons, rather than explicitly to protecting the lives of the Syrian people?

Is it fair for the Prime Minister to imply, as he did today, that this is a humanitarian intervention, when his only ambition is for Britain to be the dispassionate referee of a brutal civil war? If a short and limited military intervention leads not to the cessation of the use of chemical weapons but to an escalation of hostilities or, even worse, retaliation, do we further escalate our involvement or back away entirely? If we escalate, are we comfortable with the slow creep that will place the lives of more war-wary members of our armed services at risk? We need to know the scale of our intervention, the limit of our commitment and the nature of our involvement before we can be asked to affirm it. Parliament cannot be expected to vote on pure sentiment; it needs to vote on specifics.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend, like me, is sickened by the number of times we have voted for war, sometimes to my great shame. What is the hurry? The civil war has been going on for two years. Is it not time that we got on with negotiation and diplomacy?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I know that hon. Members turn away because they think I might not stop them if their intervention is too long. I remind Members that they should address their comments through the Chair so that I can sit them down if they go on too long.

Mr Lammy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who is precisely right: there is nothing in the motion that could not have been debated next week. We should be very concerned about the speed and haste that is indicated beyond this place.

We should remember that conflicts do not take place without context. This conflict will not take place without history, without suspicion of our intentions or outright hostility to our presence. Syrian Government assertions that French, British and American agents launched the chemical attacks to pave the way for intervention might attract ridicule in this Chamber, but let us not be so naive as to think that there will not be many willing subscribers to this conspiracy theory across the middle east. We must never under-estimate the cynicism that surrounds our motives and those of our allies. We must never under-estimate the fact that even the most humanitarian of objectives can be misconstrued as a nefarious attempt by the west to project its power. We must never under-estimate the fact that we must first win the battle of perception above all else.

Any intervention needs to be demonstrably scrupulous, must involve more than just the usual suspects and must be the last resort of a process that has visibly exhausted all diplomatic means. The recent ratcheting up of rhetoric has come at the expense of reason and has eschewed responsibility. The cacophony of tough words and the insidious indication that attacks could take place as early as this weekend have not facilitated diplomacy or the forging of alliances.

[Mr Lammy]

We need cooler heads rather than broader shoulders. The Government must abandon the march for “war by the weekend” and assure the House that any military intervention will be countenanced only after the weapon inspectors have been given time to investigate, free from external pressure. The process might be long and arduous but it is necessary and right.

We are holding this debate on the anniversary of the speech that Martin Luther King made, but he made another speech in 1967 against the Vietnam war. We should reread his words.

6.55 pm

Lorely Burt (Solihull) (LD): Like many Members, I have deep reservations about the actions we are contemplating. I am therefore pleased by the changes made to the Government motion, regardless of whether they were prompted by last-minute demands by Labour Members—although quite why they proposed an amendment almost the same as the revised motion is a little beyond me.

I welcome the common-sense decision to allow the weapons inspectors to report before we take the final decision to act and the UN’s work to secure consensus for action. Colleagues on both sides of the House have expressed scepticism about whether Russia will vote for it, but I urge the Government to wait until a Security Council resolution can be proposed and voted on before taking any further action.

Russia and China abstained in the vote on the no-fly zone over Libya, and there is scepticism among colleagues who believe that this will happen again, but in the face of overwhelming support among the rest of the international community Russia would be further marginalised and the legitimacy of international action, with or without a supporting UN Security Council resolution, would be increased.

Regardless of whether we agree with Russia, it is entitled to its point of view, which is that action could lead to further destabilisation in the middle east. Ironically, if we do not get the Russians to vote on a resolution we give them an opportunity to make mischief and blame western imperialism and themselves to contribute to destabilising the region.

The third change that I welcome is that a further vote must be held before any military action is agreed. Without that, I would not have been able to support the motion.

I still worry that we might be embarking on a slippery slope: that what we agree today will pave the way to further action. I worry that we are being softened up. The motion still provides that the UN must be allowed as far as possible to ensure the maximum legitimacy for any action taken. It states that

“every effort should be made to secure a Security Council Resolution...before any such action is taken”.

The implication is that if we do not get the UN resolution we will take action anyway and that that will be the next step. If the UN cannot get the consensus it needs, will we not already have tacitly supported military action? It is only one small step to approve “limited” action, and once you have done that you are on the road. It is a bit like pregnancy: a woman cannot be a little bit pregnant—either she is or she is not.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): I appreciate the hon. Lady’s concerns, but I think she is debating something we are likely to discuss next week. Does she agree that we should not allow the conscience of Russia and China to be our conscience when we are considering potential action?

Lorely Burt: I entirely agree. I am not suggesting that we take no action; I simply think that we must have international approval before taking that step.

Having bombed supposed chemical weapons sites, what then? With all that human suffering, surely we should intervene further. As the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) commented, would we really want to allow President Assad to win? Several hon. Members have expressed concern about military action and they, like me, fear mission creep. Not every member of the public has researched these issues in detail, but they have a strong feeling. Only one person in four supports military action. Members of my own party are fearful of that and have urged me to vote against. Even the chambermaid at my hotel yesterday, before I left my family holiday in Wales, said to me, “Please don’t let them vote for war.” I will not.

In summary, I do support action, as I said to the hon. Lady, but under the present circumstances, not a military solution.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): No one wants war, but does the hon. Lady agree that there is a war, whether we want it or not, and if we choose to do nothing at all and further atrocities are committed and further chemical weapons attacks take place, what comfort will that be to any of us?

Lorely Burt: I am not suggesting that we do nothing, but in order to ensure that we act with maximum legitimacy, we must have transparent international law on our side and make sure that the actions that we take have wide international approval. If not, we run the risk of being condemned as a pariah by Russia and giving the Assad regime an excuse for more action. At present I support action, but not a military solution. I want to make it clear that unless we act with a wide international coalition within transparent internationally agreed law, I will not vote to take military action in Syria in the future.

7.1 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I remember, 10 years ago, like many Members, sitting on the Government Benches listening to the whole of the Iraq debate and agonising about how I should vote. I remember my heart telling me that I should support my leader—I particularly wanted to support my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), my good friend—and my head telling me throughout that debate, “No, there’s something wrong here,” and I voted no. I voted no, understanding that many members of my own party in Vauxhall probably supported the war, although most did not. Many people in my constituency supported the war, although most did not. There was an even split at that time.

On this occasion, 10 years on, I am very clear and I am not agonising. I oppose military action in this case.

Whatever the Attorney-General says and despite all the legal paraphernalia that we have been bombarded with, for the general public this is almost like agonising on the head of a pin. Legal arguments will not wash with the public or with me when it comes to what is right and what is wrong. It would be wrong and, importantly, counter-productive to take military action against Syria. I am not a pacifist. I was one of the first people, together with a number of my colleagues but long before my Front-Bench team did so, to argue strongly for intervention in Bosnia. I also supported the Falklands war, so I am not a pacifist.

The question is how bombing, no matter how strategic, how precise and how short, will make things if not better for the Syrian people, at least not worse. I believe that it will not do so and I have yet to be persuaded by anyone who has spoken in this debate that it would make things better for the Syrian people. I found the speech by the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) very commanding indeed. I do not support Assad or the regime. As many Members have said, it has been an appalling regime for many years. It is worth remembering that we provided many of the regime's arms. I wonder who provided the components that make up the chemical weapons. I would not be a bit surprised if some came from this country and other countries in the west—*[Interruption]*—and of course from Russia, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) says.

It has not been proven absolutely that the chemical weapons were used by Assad. It probably was Assad—

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Hoey: No.

We have had information before that poison gas had been used and Carla Del Ponte, who was the UN commissioner in Syria, pointed out that it was the rebels who had used it. Will the Deputy Prime Minister tell me when he winds up the debate, if, despite what everyone thinks, the weapons inspectors find that it was the rebels or some rogue general who used the chemical weapons last week, the Prime Minister will be saying the things that he did about the use of chemical weapons? The doctrine of prevention, which I had hoped—

Mr Newmark: I have huge respect for the hon. Lady. To help her in her thinking, let me point out that Damascus is defended by the president's brother, Maher. He is responsible for the fourth division and he is ultimately responsible for the heinous chemical attack that took place. Given the industrial scale with which those chemicals hit three, four or five different areas, it would be impossible for the rebels to do it to themselves, besides the fact that it would be incredibly counter-intuitive.

Kate Hoey: I do not think that has been proved or that we have any proof that bombing will make things any better or get rid of the chemical weapons, if they are there. We need to remember that once we cross that line of military action, as other Members have said, even if it is a short strike and very few civilians are killed, which is highly unlikely, the result will be that when anyone is killed in future years in Syria, whoever has killed them or whatever the background, the west will be blamed. The United Kingdom will be blamed, as

has happened throughout the middle east, and we will see the repercussions on our streets in the form of increased extremism.

Jim McGovern (Dundee West) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned that some of her constituents in the past were for and some against, but that in this case they were almost unanimous in opposing military intervention. She may be aware that I am one of her constituents. If I came to her surgery and said, "I am disgusted and horrified by pictures of children being poisoned by chemicals and I want something done about it," and if she says that military intervention is not the answer, what would she suggest? What is the alternative?

Kate Hoey: I have many suggestions and many Members have made suggestions. I do not think we have worked through the United Nations mechanism. It may not be a brilliant organisation and we may all have criticisms of it, but there is a lot more that could be done. We should be putting much more diplomatic pressure on Russia. We should call in the Russian ambassador and say, "We are going to expel you from this country if you do not change Russia's attitude." There are a number of things that we could do. Military action is the very last option. I do not believe that we should go down that line.

Any military action will, as I said, lead to a completely different attitude among many of our Muslim communities in this country. It will be the catalyst for the build-up of all sorts of extremism. I know that it is an extraordinarily difficult decision for Governments in these situations and for the Opposition, but in such cases we must always reflect on what is in our national interest. I do not believe that our national interest will be served by military intervention in Syria or that that is the way forward for this Parliament. We may return to the issue in a few days, just because America is calling the shots. What will the Prime Minister say if, over the weekend, America decides to go it alone? How much influence will we have had? It is quite wrong that we are being pushed by America. We should take our time, reflect and make it very clear that we are not going to rush into something that will ultimately not be in our national interest.

7.9 pm

Mr Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), for whom I have huge respect. I want to begin by agreeing with the Foreign Secretary that this is a moment for democratic nations to live up to their values. The use of chemical weapons by President Assad's regime is a moral outrage that cannot go unchallenged. I will therefore be supporting today's motion.

Less than 24 hours ago, I was on the Syrian border, where I have spent the past few days meeting Syrian opposition fighters from the Free Syrian Army—the FSA. The brigade commanders and fighters I met were from all backgrounds. Many were doctors, teachers, farmers and engineers; they represented a broad cross-section of Syrian society, including Sunnis, Christians, Kurds, Druze and, yes, Alawites as well. I also had the opportunity to meet General Idris, the head of the FSA, and President Jarba, the head of the Syrian Opposition Council. As colleagues will know, I also met

[Mr Brooks Newmark]

President Assad several times over the five-year period between 2006 and 2011. So I come to this debate fairly well informed on Syria and its people.

The use of chemical weapons in war is particularly abhorrent, as we saw in 1988 when Saddam Hussein gassed 5,000 Kurds in Halabja, and again last week when the Assad regime inflicted a chemical weapons attack on Ghutah, a suburb of Damascus. According to Médecins sans Frontières, that attack resulted in at least 3,600 casualties. In 1925, in the aftermath of the first world war, the Geneva gas protocol was passed to ban the use of such weapons.

A year ago, a red line on the use of chemical weapons was drawn by the Assad regime, but since then, it has been testing the elasticity of that red line with the repeated small-scale use of such weapons, according to witness statements, video evidence and physiological samples that have been tested here at Porton Down as well as in the US and elsewhere. In fact, last week's chemical weapons attack was possibly the 14th such attack by the Assad regime on its own people. It was only the fact that it was on such a large scale and took place in the capital itself that led us in the west to decide that enough was enough.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech based on his knowledge of the situation on the ground. What assessment has he made of the size of the chemical weapons arsenal, and of which country might have helped Syria to establish it in the first place?

Mr Newmark: That is a very good question, and I suspect that I know my hon. Friend's direction of travel in asking it. There is no evidence, at least that I am aware of, that the Russians or the Iranians helped Syria to develop that arsenal, although I would not be surprised if they had done so.

Peter Hitchens wrote recently, in support of the Assad regime, that the Syrian Government were not lying and that it made "more sense" for the opposition to poison and kill more than 1,000 of their own people. If that is the case, however absurd, why, if they had nothing to hide, did the Syrian Government and their chief sponsor on the Security Council, Russia, block the United Nations chemical weapons inspectors from going to the site when they were only 15 minutes away? Instead, they continued to bombard the area and to degrade the evidence as much as possible. I find it astounding how this kind of double-think has become common currency among many of those who oppose the war. That includes some Opposition Members who have been retweeting articles along those lines from the Voice of Russia. Frankly, I would rather believe our Government and our intelligence agencies than Russia and President Assad.

That chemical weapons have been used in Syria is in no doubt. The question is whether the regime itself delivered them. My understanding is that the intelligence drawn from eye-witness statements, video footage and electronic intercepts is extremely compelling. This raises another question: do we have any confidence in our intelligence agencies at all? My answer is yes. Just because Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell were economical

with the truth about the intelligence that they used to get us into Iraq—through what has become known as the "dodgy dossier"—that should not taint our view of the current evidence that the intelligence services have been collecting on this matter. That evidence puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of Bashar al-Assad and his brother, Maher.

Bob Stewart: I was an officer trained in nuclear, biological and chemical warfare, and one of the things that I learned on my course was that only a professional army could manage and use chemical weapons. There is no doubt in my mind that the rebels would not have the capacity or the ability to use such weapons. I am sure that when the report comes back from the United Nations inspectors, it will not be able to identify who threw them or used them but it will perhaps be able to say that they were used. In my mind, however, there is no doubt that only a professional army—and not the rebels—could use chemical weapons.

Mr Newmark: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for his thoughtful intervention.

Those opposing military action say that, notwithstanding the increasing evidence that Assad used chemical weapons, we should let the UN inspectors do their work first. To them I say this: of course, but we should remember that the inspectors' remit is not to apportion blame for this atrocity; it is merely to confirm that chemical weapons were in fact used. Does any Member in the House doubt that such weapons were used? Of course not. Those opposing military action say that we need a UN resolution to back any action, but we will never get such a resolution while Russia, the Assad regime's key supporter, remains a member of the Security Council. In fact, Russia has blocked every single move to condemn the Assad regime since this conflict began.

Dr Huppert: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Newmark: No, I am afraid I cannot.

The result is that the UN is failing to live up to its mandate to protect. We therefore need to find a coalition of the willing. Why? Because we cannot allow the use of chemical weapons to go unchallenged. As President Jarba said to me earlier this week, western silence and inaction are killing his people. If we do not support today's motion, and if we do nothing, it will give a green light to the Assad regime to go on slaughtering and gassing its people with impunity. For that reason, I support the motion.

7.16 pm

Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): The Democratic Unionist party has never been found wanting when it has come to supporting military action on behalf of our nation when it was deemed necessary. That has happened on at least three occasions during my time in Parliament. I have to say, however, that I have not yet heard a compelling argument today to convince me that military intervention in this case is either necessary or in our national interest.

One of the things that I have learned about sectarian conflict is that perception is a very powerful thing. I have heard the Government make many nuanced explanations today about why military action would be

appropriate, but let me tell them that those nuances would be lost on the middle east. The region is riven by conflicts between the Shi'a and Sunni factions, and any action that we take against Syria will have an impact. We can control the manner of our intervention, but we have learned from our experiences in Iraq and Libya that we cannot control the outcome of any intervention.

There are many powerful forces at work in Syria. In addition to the two sides in the civil war, there is Hezbollah, which brings Lebanon into the equation. When we bring in Lebanon, we bring in Israel, and when we bring in Israel, we bring in Iran. The situation could escalate quickly as the perception spread across the middle east that the west had intervened in a way that set one side against another.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): My right hon. Friend has set out clearly the potential impact of intervention across the region. Is he therefore surprised, as I am, to see that although the Opposition's amendment refers to such consequences, there is no reference to them in the Government's motion?

Mr Donaldson: Indeed; that is one of the weaknesses in the Government's motion that is causing us concern. The Government talk about voices in the Arab world being raised in support of intervention, but that does not mean that any such intervention would not have consequences for the stability of the wider region. If we intervene, where does it begin and end? I accept what the Government say about intervention being focused on removing or diminishing the capacity to use chemical weapons. That is a noble objective, but I am concerned about the outcome of such an intervention. That is why I am not convinced that military intervention is in our national interest, never mind conducive to building stability in a troubled region.

Jim Shannon: Further to that point, does my right hon. Friend recognise the implications for the ethnic minorities in Syria, and in particular for the Christians, who have been subject to ethnic cleansing? Those Christians just want the support of the Syrian state and unity in their country, and yet they are subject to intimidation and persecution.

Mr Donaldson: Indeed. Other right hon. and hon. Members have referred to the religious minorities in Syria and the impact that the conflict is having on them. We have heard colourful and dreadful descriptions of what is happening in Syria.

If the Government choose to take military action and are able to persuade Parliament to take that path, we need to have some understanding of what diplomatic and humanitarian efforts will be made alongside it. There have been some contributions on humanitarian issues. In Iraq, we had Operation Safe Haven, which was designed to safeguard civilians. I would like to hear more from the Government about what we are doing on that front.

How are we using our powerful diplomatic influence across the region? Ambassadors such as Tom Fletcher in Beirut do an excellent job in trying to bring stability to the region. I would like to hear what our diplomatic outposts are saying to the Government about the potential impacts of military action in the region, because that

would be important in informing this House about the global and regional consequences of what we decide to do.

My party is not the kind of party that takes the soft option on such matters. We recognise the atrocities that have been committed in Syria. It is terrible that 300 or more lives have been lost as a result of this atrocity. However, as other Members have rightly said today, almost 100,000 lives have been lost in Syria. If the Assad regime commits another atrocity with conventional weapons tomorrow, the next day or five days after military intervention, what will we say when we see the body bags and the scenes from Damascus, Aleppo or wherever it might be? What will we say about the human disaster that is taking place there? Is it only because of the use of chemical weapons that this House will decide that military intervention is necessary? What about the continuing use of conventional weapons, some of which were supplied by western states to the Assad regime? We need to give those matters careful consideration.

I also want to mention our capacity in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence. I say this as a member of the Defence Committee. We recently announced that the reserve capacity on CBRN is to be axed. We have axed the CBRN regiment in our armed forces. If chemical warfare is so important to us, why are we diminishing the capacity of the UK armed forces to deal with it? That is an issue that the Government need to address, and not just within the context of a review of the strategic defence and security review.

In conclusion, we will think long and hard before we vote for military action. To date, including in the debate in the House today, we have not heard anything that convinces us that it is the right thing to do in our national interest.

7.24 pm

Richard Harrington (Watford) (Con): Having listened to all the arguments today, read everything about this issue over the past couple of days and listened to our constituents, it is easy for Members to form an opinion against taking action in Syria. There are many compelling arguments for doing nothing. Military action is expensive. We have all heard the argument that we should be building hospitals, not spending money overseas. People say that it is wrong on principle for the US to interfere in foreign countries. We are unsure of the consequences of action in Syria and, as many right hon. and hon. Members have said, of how it might extend to other countries. There is no exit strategy. The history of Afghanistan and Iraq looms large in people's minds.

Those arguments all have strong merits and are compelling. It is certainly true that the British public have little appetite for further military engagement in the middle east. Because of the merits of the above arguments, I could not stand here and argue for full-scale intervention to force regime change or to bring about a western-style democracy. My instincts are that it would be great to do those things in theory, but that we should not do them.

Like all colleagues, I have received my fair share—or possibly more than my fair share—of correspondence on this matter over recent days. It has largely been against military intervention. However, a piece of

[Richard Harrington]

correspondence from one of my constituents, Ian Peck of Hempstead road in Watford, summed up the crucial question: should there be very precise, selective action to prevent the further use of chemical weapons? Like Mr Peck, I believe that there should be such action following confirmation in the weapons inspectors' report.

We have to accept that any action that is taken may have unintended consequences. As Danny Finkelstein—soon to be Lord Finkelstein—argued in *The Times* yesterday, at the start of most military actions that history has shown to be the right decision, there was no guarantee of any definite result. He cites Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis and Tony Blair in Serbia. On the grand scale, we could cite Winston Churchill in 1940, when he decided to fight on against the Germans without any clear idea of what would happen. We have to accept that there will be uncertainty. More importantly, although we cannot guarantee or fully predict the outcome of any action in Syria, we can assume with greater certainty that taking no action would allow Assad to continue carrying out chemical attacks on his own people.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a thoughtful speech. Does he agree that in this case, we are damned if we do and damned if we don't? If we do nothing, we accept that the Assad regime can use chemical weapons and destroy its own people, with terrible consequences. However, if we do something, we must ensure that we do not do so much that we get into another war from which we cannot extricate ourselves.

Richard Harrington: I agree very much with my hon. Friend's sentiments. Many decisions in politics, war, business and many other spheres of life have similar damned if you do, damned if you don't consequences. However, decisions have to be made.

As I have said, I could not stand here and argue for full military intervention. We should do everything that we can on a humanitarian level to support the people of Syria. I am sure that we would all agree that they are the overriding concern in any decision that is made today.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's contribution. He says that he would stop short of any further intervention. However, suppose that we attack Assad and our Tomahawks take out a number of facilities and do some damage, but he says, "Okay, we will dust ourselves down and carry on using chemical weapons." What then? At what point do we take further steps?

Richard Harrington: I remind the hon. Gentleman that when the western allies attacked Belgrade with Tomahawk missiles, it took them eight months to get President Milosevic to do what they wanted. I accept that this is not definite. I wish that there was a way of doing it in a day or two. I agree that there is uncertainty. I believe that we all have a responsibility not to blindly follow party lines, but to consider for ourselves, according to our own conscience, what is best. I hope that my constituents will agree that, whether one agrees with intervention or not, this is a grave and important matter.

The truth in my case—this is a fundamental point—is that in my lifetime I have spoken to people who survived the holocaust in Nazi Germany as children and I have visited the sites of genocide in Rwanda, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I feel that if there is any way in which through my vote in this House today I can do anything that may—I agree that it is a case of "may"—deter a ruthless dictator from gassing innocent children, it is my duty to do it.

It would be ideal to be able to predict the consequences exactly. In fact, it would be ideal if we could prevent dictators such as Assad from appearing anywhere in the world. Whenever my political career ends—I hope it is just Opposition Members who hope that that will happen sooner rather than later—I do not want to wake up one morning and see children similar to those we have seen in Syria lying on the ground as victims of gas and chemical weapon attacks and find myself thinking that there was something I could have done, however small, to make a difference. That is why I support the motion and why I will support a motion for limited action based entirely on the hope that it will deter Assad and other dictators from carrying out chemical attacks.

7.31 pm

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): Like the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), I begin by citing an e-mail I received from a constituent who was opposed to any intervention and who described himself as an ex-member of the armed services. Having listed some cogent reasons why military intervention was not in his view acceptable or sensible, he said at the end of his e-mail that, of course, we run the risk of washing our hands of the fate of the people of Syria, who are likely to be gassed in the future. He summed up neatly the dilemma we all face today. I would not use the phrase, "Damned if you do, damned if you don't," but there is a fine line involved in deciding between one course of action and another.

I want to address two points raised by the Prime Minister, but I will not do so in a spirit of party political contention, because I want the debate to progress in such a way that by the time we get to episode two we can all understand more fully the Government's intentions, the action that might be taken and under what circumstances. It would be helpful if the Deputy Prime Minister could address my points later.

First, the Prime Minister made it clear that any action taken would have the primary if not sole objective of either deterring or degrading Syria's chemical weapons capability. There is a strong argument in favour of taking such action, but unfortunately, when pressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw), the Prime Minister was not able to give enough information—or certainly was not able to put it clearly enough—to convince me that his proposed course of action would achieve that end. That case needs to be put more clearly. A stronger narrative about how it might work would be a big help, not just to Members of this House, but to the wider public, who have serious concerns about what is being proposed.

Secondly, the Prime Minister said that, in the end, this comes down to judgment. Each of us has to form a judgment about what is the right course of action. I accept that all such difficult decisions inevitably come

down to forming a judgment. In order to help me and others form that judgment we need to discuss two things over the next few days, and perhaps longer. First, what is the intelligence that exists: what do we know about it, what does it prove and show, and what can we be certain of? I accept that it is not always possible to share intelligence with the public or even with Members of this House. In his very good speech, the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) made the point that the intelligence could at least be made available to the Intelligence and Security Committee, which I sit on, so that at least a few more people—nine of us, to be exact—would know exactly what is at stake. I do not want to over-claim anything. If the intelligence cannot be shared nationally, I am not sure that simply sharing it with the ISC would necessarily resolve that problem.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is talking about sharing information. I listened carefully to the Prime Minister's speech, and he said that he had convincing evidence that young Muslims in Britain would not be alienated by this, and indeed that they were calling for military action to protect people in Syria. Would it not be a good thing if the whole House could see that evidence, because that is not what I am hearing from my constituents?

Mr Howarth: It would be a good thing if as much information as possible could be put before not only the House but the wider public. I have already made that point.

The second point that needs to be addressed is: where is the weight of world opinion? It seems to me that whenever there is a crisis of this kind—I have no qualms about saying this—the United Nations fails to live up to its promise. What tends to happen is that the United Nations Security Council will pass resolutions—I think it passed 14 on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction before any action was taken—but in the end, whatever the UN does, it tends to fall on the shoulders of coalitions of the willing to enforce its will. I am not condemning the United Nations—it is all we have—but we need to have a better way of doing these things in the future. We need to think very carefully as a country about where we fit into each of the coalitions, particularly the one under discussion.

Robert Ffello: I am enjoying my right hon. Friend's contribution; it is very good and sound. This is not a new issue. Why is it that we seem to have the same discussions time and again?

Mr Howarth: That is the point I am making. I do not think that the machinery of the United Nations is able to enforce decisions, and this is an obvious example. I accept that probably the overwhelming balance of evidence is that it is the regime that is carrying out these attacks, rather than the rebel forces, which probably do not have the capability. There is a further argument that a rogue commander might be carrying out these attacks without the knowledge or consent of the leadership and the President. If that is the case it is even more worrying if the regime works in such a way that random commanders can decide to do such things almost at will rather than be directed from the centre.

So far, so good: the debate has taken us a little further, but it has not taken us all the way. I hope that over the days and weeks to come the Prime Minister can get the narrative a bit clearer, so that those of us—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order.

7.39 pm

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Before I came into the Chamber today I looked at the archway through which we walk and the broken stones that were left there when the Chamber was rebuilt to remind us that we have the power of life and death over our citizens. I think that today's debate is a prime example of the decisions we all have to make which could result in life or death not just for our citizens, but for others. However, having listened to the debate carefully all day, I still do not feel that I have enough accurate or verifiable information to support direct UK military action in Syria. At the same time, I want to send a message that we will not stand idly by while others use chemical weapons to destroy their population.

The Prime Minister did absolutely the right thing by recalling Parliament and bringing us back here to debate the situation. I believe that he also recalled us because there was a real possibility that intervention could be almost immediate. I hope that that possibility may have diminished a little with the developments that have occurred over the past two days, and I certainly praise the Prime Minister for moving his position and meeting the concerns of many of my colleagues in the House. It is a wise Prime Minister who listens and reacts to what Members of Parliament have to say on such issues. Of course, as he acknowledged in his opening speech, many of us are reluctant about matters involving peace and war because we previously sat here and listened to a Prime Minister tell us from the Dispatch Box what I now believe to have been a fabric of lies. I cannot sit here and be duped again by any Prime Minister, whether of my party or the Labour party.

My constituents' instinct is also against any direct UK military action. Like, I am sure, all my colleagues throughout the House, I have received not just form e-mails sent by some lobbying organisation but individually composed e-mails showing the strength of feeling and fear that lie in the British population. Having said that, and despite feeling strongly that my constituents' instincts and my own should be followed, what I have seen on the television and experienced through reports of what has gone on in Syria has struck at the very fabric of my being. However, I am unclear about our response and our objectives. What are punitive strikes? Will they send a message to Assad to use it or lose it when it comes to chemical weapons? What will be the reactions of other countries? What are the capabilities of the people who may be deployed in support of Syria? There are still many questions that need to be answered.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most dangerous aspect is the unintended consequences that military action may bring? I fear that missile strikes may further inflame tensions in the middle east, bring conflict to the wider world and provoke more terrorist attacks on British streets or those of our territories and allies abroad. What can we do to prevent that?

Mrs Gillan: Those fears have been reflected in many communications that have been made to my office over the past few days. We need more time to consider our response, the whole situation and the implications of intervening directly through military action.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am listening to my right hon. Friend's logic, and I absolutely agree with it. I have been to Syria twice, and I met President Assad a few years ago. I came away not knowing who on earth ran that country and which powers were behind that dictator. Does she agree that "What next?" is the most important question about the impact that any reaction by us will have, and that it has not been properly answered?

Mrs Gillan: The situation is so complicated that I believe very few people in the House, if any, know the full state of affairs. In that case, we owe it to our constituents and our armed forces to be very cautious before we take the next step of a full UK military plan.

I have spoken to the Prime Minister because of my fears. Because I am not naturally disloyal, I want to support my Government, but I have said that at this stage, with the amount of information that has been made available to me, I cannot support direct UK military action.

To me, the way in which the motion has been drafted means that it is still ambiguous. It states that the situation may,

"if necessary, require military action that is legal, proportionate and focused on saving lives by preventing and deterring further use of Syria's chemical weapons".

I would need further and better particulars on that. However, I seek to rely tonight on the last line on page 4 of today's Order Paper, which states that

"before any direct British involvement in such action a further vote of the House of Commons will take place".

The Deputy Prime Minister is in his place, and I know that he will sum up this long, emotional and hard debate. I can walk through the Lobby to support the coalition Government only if he gives me a firm undertaking that the vote will not be used or interpreted as Parliament's agreement to UK military involvement, or as cover for any UK military involvement. I need that categorical assurance about today's motion, and further, I want to hear again from the Dispatch Box that there will be a further vote in the House before military action takes place or is contemplated. I hope for that undertaking, and if I get it I will support the Government tonight. However, I hope that the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister will understand the way I, my constituents, and, I believe, the whole country, feel about intervention in Syria at this stage.

7.46 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan). She is obviously thinking hard about how to vote later, and I know that a lot of right hon. and hon. Members feel the same way.

I wish briefly to address the words of the corrected motion and the intent behind it, then I will turn to the Opposition amendment. First, however, I congratulate the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Foreign

Secretary on effectively putting the brakes on a Government who were heading for military action this weekend. Of that I think the House can agree there is no doubt. My right hon. Friends have served the country and the Commons well through their actions, especially over the past 24 hours, and I hope that the Opposition will continue to lead in the same way and act as a restraint on the Government.

This is not the debate that the House expected to have, it is certainly not the debate that No. 10 was planning, and it is not the one that the media predicted would happen, but there have none the less been some excellent contributions. Despite the fact that there will be another debate and vote next week, this has been a useful exercise in testing the issues at stake.

I turn to the motion, which I have real problems supporting. That is not because I am a supporter of President Assad—I am not—but neither do I support the jihadist element of the Syrian Opposition that has been referred to in many contributions today. The wording of the corrected motion is important. The first and second paragraphs are straightforward in their commentary and condemnation. The third introduces the requirement of military action, and the fourth, fifth and sixth are very instructive. The fourth notes

"the failure of the United Nations".

That is the softening-up line. The fifth notes

"that the use of chemical weapons is a war crime...and that the principle of humanitarian intervention provides a sound legal basis for taking action".

The sixth mentions the "wide international support", including from the Arab League, for action from the international community.

The right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell) said that tonight's vote was not really important, because the important vote would be next week. I say to the Liberal Democrats in particular that if we get another debate and a vote next week, I predict that those words will come back to haunt them. The Conservatives are boxing them in by saying, "You've got to support military action, since the UN has failed, and we don't need it anyway. We've got legitimacy, because the Attorney-General says so, and we've got international coalition support. It's only the Russians and Chinese who don't support it."

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that the general secretary of the Arab League has tonight said on CNN that it shies away from backing western intervention, and that it would intensify anti-US feeling in the region? Those of us who have been sitting here all day have had a chance to google.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that information to the House. It clearly demonstrates the fragility of the international coalition lined up behind the attempt to intervene militarily in Syria.

The Opposition amendment, it is fair to say, is at least more open and honest. However, from my reading it essentially endorses the same principle: if we address certain issues and if certain conditions are met, military action can happen. I do not believe that it should happen under any circumstances. The Opposition amendment is stronger and clearer, but whereas the

Government motion is explicit in its direction of travel towards military action, the Opposition amendment states that we will go there if the conditions in six of the paragraphs it lays out are met. My concern is about the end game and the exit strategy. There have been many excellent contributions to the debate—

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): Paragraph (e) of the Opposition amendment refers to

“precise and achievable objectives designed to deter the future use of prohibited chemical weapons in Syria”.

What are those “precise and achievable objectives”?

Jim Fitzpatrick: I have exactly the same difficulty as the hon. Gentleman—I do not know what they are either. I do not think that they are identifiable. I do not think that they are achievable. My objection, as I was saying a moment ago, is that there is not an exit strategy or an end game. There have been many contributions to the debate in which colleagues have said, “If we do this, that will happen. If we do not do that, this will happen.” Only one thing is absolutely guaranteed: nobody knows what will happen if we go down the road of military action. We have seen that too often in recent decades. The difficulty I have is the fact that we do not have an exit strategy.

In conclusion, and for the hon. Gentleman’s information, I have problems with both the Government motion and the Opposition amendment. Ultimately, I do not believe that either is able to achieve the honourable ends that both sides of the House want. I am opposed to military intervention in Syria full stop. To be honest and consistent on both questions, I will vote in the No Lobby against the Government motion and against the Opposition amendment.

7.52 pm

Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con): I am a former human rights and criminal lawyer who has worked in this country and abroad, and I want to address the legality of the process we face today. The effectiveness of chemical weapons is beyond doubt—that is why people want to use them. Their usage is a war crime and a humanitarian catastrophe, and I agree that the perpetrator, in any circumstance, should face justice.

It is a sad fact that all of our constituents are scarred by the Iraq and Afghanistan experience, which has poisoned the well of public confidence in so many ways. The public clearly lack confidence in our attempts at foreign policy. I know that the majority of my constituents in Northumberland and the majority of those in this House of Commons do not want to get involved in a civil war in Syria. Neither do I. I am clear that I have no desire for land forces or long-term involvement in this civil war, however abhorrent both sides are. I am grateful that both the Government and the Opposition have made that point clear. The reality of the situation is that we are only discussing the limited use of potential air strikes to diminish chemical weapons capacity.

I welcome the Prime Minister’s approach in holding the debate today, the decision to hold a second debate in the future, the publication of the JIC report and the Attorney-General’s legal summary. I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for the meeting yesterday. The revised motion gives a stronger and greater role to the

United Nations. If anybody could urge the United Nations to resolve this, all of us would do so. Both the motion and the amendment seek the UN’s assistance. Whether we would be able to achieve that is a separate matter.

On usage and evidence, many have made the case that there is widespread and extensive evidence—from multiple intelligence agencies and the Arab League—of the repeated use by Assad of chemical weapons in the past couple of years, certainly in excess of a dozen times. All participants admit the usage on 21 August, when 300-plus were killed and 3,000-plus were maimed. If there is a delay, we hope that the UN can assist, but what do we do if 98% of the UN wish to pass a resolution but a country such as Russia blocks us? That has been the reality for some time and I suspect that that will be the reality in the future. One has to pose the question that if an incident like the holocaust were to happen tomorrow and one of the Security Council objected, what would the rest of the world do? We have to ask whether we are prepared to allow Russia to be the sole determinant of which part of international law is to be observed. Exact parallels can be found in the Kosovo situation in 1999, when Russia sought to prevent any NATO action.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend’s analysis of the UN. The General Assembly is about to meet. Does he agree that using the General Assembly as a mechanism by which we could obtain a recommendation for action in Syria would be a sensible option for us to consider before exhausting all mechanisms within the UN?

Guy Opperman: I completely endorse that. In Kosovo in 1999 there were three broadly supported UN resolutions. Although not enough to get over the UN hurdle that we seek to overcome, they did provide assistance and support that such a course would entail. We have to address what the legal basis is for any proposed action by the British or other international troops.

Bob Stewart: I will make one point. I very carefully studied United Nations Security Council resolutions in 1992 as an authority for action. It is only the Security Council of the UN, as it is currently constituted, that will give authority for international action under article 6 or article 7.

Guy Opperman: With no disrespect to my hon. Friend—my honourable and respected military friend—I disagree. Subsequent to 1991, the responsibility to protect protocols were introduced, particularly post-1999 in Kosovo. I accept that we are not in a UN article 51 charter case. We are not acting in self defence. We are not, as a nation, in any way threatened. However, the process of R2P does allow NATO to act when certain preconditions, as set out in the Attorney-General’s guidance, are maintained.

On this particular point, I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) and anyone who is concerned about this issue to go through the Attorney-General’s guidance, which has been published today. An objective has to be identified. In this case, it would be the objective of attempting to stop the specific spread and repeated use of chemical weapons. There could be little doubt that such an outrage constituted a

[Guy Opperman]

humanitarian disaster, and we would need to be satisfied that every means, short of force, had been taken to resolve this specific situation in Syria. To that end, the revision of the motion and the encouragement of the UN makes specific the assistance on this particular problem that a military officer, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham, would have previously had in those circumstances. We would then have to consider that the proposed action was the only means to averting further and immediate human catastrophe. As the Attorney-General made clear, the force proposed would need to be both proportionate and specifically directed to stop the possible future use of chemical weapons.

I have already mentioned the example of Kosovo in 1999, but historians and lawyers could set out similar actions. Action was taken in Liberia in 1990 and elsewhere in the past 20 years. Surely the point is this: R2P was brought in to address the question of whether, as a last resort, humanitarian intervention is authorised under international law. We are clearly not yet in that situation, but the power to act and a lawful course are clearly set out.

Today is not about military action or involvement in another country's civil war; all agree that the issue is not about boots on the ground. It is about a war crime—the massive use of chemical weapons—and several countries in the world attempting to prevent the extended and further use of such weapons. Before any further specific action is taken, the House will have a second debate and will be provided, I hope, with an understanding of our objectives and strategy, the upsides of action or inaction, and an exit policy. I welcome and support the revised motion on those grounds.

8 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I am glad to have this opportunity to take part in this important debate. It seems that tonight Parliament has stepped back from the brink of giving the Prime Minister *carte blanche* to involve British forces in the bombing of Syria this weekend. I believe that the British public, whatever political party they support, will be glad that we have done so. We know—the polls tell us—that the public are overwhelmingly against such a military strike. The British public do not want to be drawn into yet another war in the middle east. They have seen that movie and know how it ends.

For the avoidance of doubt, I should say that had I been pressed by my own party to vote on a motion that authorised the bombing of Syria, in the current state of knowledge, I was always going to vote no—whatever the pressures and consequences. It would not have been a party political gesture, which some Government Members have mentioned. I was one of the Labour MPs who voted against their own Government on Iraq. I say to Government Members who may be wondering what to do tonight that I have never had reason to regret that vote.

It seems that the Prime Minister may be coming back to the House of Commons to authorise his war, and it may be helpful for me to set out my reservations as matters stand. The first question is about the facts. Have chemical weapons been used and who has deployed them? I heard what the Prime Minister said about the

Joint Intelligence Committee and I know the opinion of Vice-President Biden. It is clear that the balance of probability is that Assad used chemical weapons. However, whatever the Americans say and the Joint Intelligence Committee conjectures, I do not believe that it is wise entirely to rule out the possibility that the chemical weapons were wielded by Assad's opponents.

In these circumstances, we always have to ask, “*Cui bono?*”—“Who benefits?” Assad's opponents know that only chemical weapons would trigger a reluctant President Obama to authorise a military intervention. Whatever the Prime Minister says, a military strike would inevitably tilt the scales of the civil war in favour of Assad's opponents. Earlier, we heard that the UN investigator Carla Del Ponte said in May:

“according to testimonies we have gathered, the rebels have used chemical weapons, making use of sarin gas”.

They did it in May, and they may have done it again.

My other point is about legality. I have heard a lot about Kosovo and how in some sense it sets a precedent for this Syrian war. At the time of the Kosovan war, I was a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. We carried out a major inquiry into Kosovo, taking a great deal of evidence about its legality. We took oral evidence from Professor Christopher Greenwood QC, Mark Littman QC and Professor Vaughan Lowe, among others, and there was a whole host of written evidence from others. What the all-party Select Committee concluded was that the Kosovo operation

“was contrary to the specific terms of what might be termed the basic law of the international community”.

We went on:

“at the very least, the doctrine of humanitarian intervention has a tenuous basis in current international customary law, and...this renders NATO action legally questionable.”

Those who want to rest the argument for a Syrian war on the Kosovan precedent need to read their law again.

Finally, let me say this. In the run-up to the Iraq war, Colin Powell cited the Pottery Barn rule—Pottery Barn is a string of American china shops. The rule is, “You break it? You own it.” The notion that we can make a military intervention on the narrow point of chemical weapons is disingenuous to say the least. Were we to intervene militarily in Syria, we would take ownership of the outcome of the civil war. I see no endgame, no idea of what victory would look like in those circumstances.

I am glad to be here to speak for my constituents. I will be glad to follow my leader into the Lobby tonight, but in my view we cannot support war in the House unless it has the stamp of the United Nations.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am afraid that in the past hour and a half there have been only 11 Back-Bench contributions, as everybody has taken his or her full time and interventions. The consequence is that a lot of people want to speak but there is little time for them to do so. The limit is reduced to three minutes with immediate effect.

8.5 pm

Ben Gummer (Ipswich) (Con): Bashar al-Assad is a very lucky man. Were we having this debate in 2002, following an attack on 21 August and the successful

interventions in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, it might have focused a little more on the maintenance of international humanitarian law and on our alarm at the use of chemical weapons next to a NATO ally, Israel, which we have a unique duty to protect. The debate might also have focused a little more on our need to protect innocent civilians in the first use of chemical weapons in a battlefield in the 21st century—weapons not used even by Hitler in the second world war.

Assad is lucky that we are having this debate not in 2002, but in 2013. The year 2003, which so many have referred to, intervened. We must not beat around the bush—Tony Blair and his Administration were dishonest. The result has been the injury of our democracy to a degree not achieved by any other single action, I believe, in the 85 years since women gained full voting equality. Our decision now is being influenced by that failure in 2003.

Mr MacNeil: If the rebels were found to have used chemical weapons, would we feel it was fine for the Russians to bomb them, using the same basis as that for our proposed intervention?

Ben Gummer: One of the problems of this debate has been the number of counter-factuals; the Prime Minister has answered a variation of the hon. Gentleman's.

In this instance, most people agree that the full likelihood is that President Assad has bombed his own people. We are asked to draw lessons from the experience of 2003 as we come to a conclusion on this matter. One of the principal lessons is that we should expect our leaders to act with transparency, conviction, consistency and principle and to accommodate colleagues who have doubts and be responsive to their concerns. I do not think that President Obama, President Hollande or our own Prime Minister can be faulted on many of those points.

However, a lesson is not an excuse to prevaricate with questions of increasing sophistry or to change one's mind at the first whiff of political opportunity. It is not an excuse to come to the House with a view different from the one that might have been professed in private and public some days before.

If we allow the ghost of Iraq to influence our decision in this important debate, we risk a double calamity. In not considering what we should, we risk not intervening when we should because we intervened when we should not have. The victims would include not only international humanitarian law, which without force is meaningless and a dead letter, and the Syrian people, who could be attacked with Assad knowing that he would get no response, but our own Parliament, which would have been shown to have lacked resolve and conviction when it knew what was right.

8.9 pm

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): The situation in Syria and the surrounding area is catastrophic—at least 100,000 people have been killed and 2 million have been forced to flee the country, with the refugee camp at Zaatari alone containing an estimated 130,000 people, half of whom are under 18. It is difficult to ensure that aid reaches those still inside Syria—in some areas, it is impossible—or even to know their situation. Over the

past two years, the international community has stood on the sidelines. Some countries, including the United Kingdom, have provided funds and resources for the refugees in the surrounding countries, but the numbers leaving Syria get larger by the day, as we have seen recently with the thousands crossing into the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Many countries say that the situation in Syria is difficult and that intervention from outside would make it worse, and we have heard that argument time and time again today. However, the situation has got progressively worse without intervention. Are there any signs that it will get better? It is beyond question that everyone here would prefer a negotiated diplomatic solution to the crisis, but despite the considerable efforts of many, including the Foreign Secretary, all attempts at obtaining a United Nations Security Council resolution to try to secure that have proved impossible. It is clear that any moves at the UN would be vetoed by Moscow and Beijing. Russian and Chinese support for Assad means that there is little incentive for him to make meaningful concessions or even to discuss a ceasefire. But now the use of chemical weapons has escalated the crisis. The Joint Intelligence Committee has confirmed today that the Syrian regime has used lethal chemical weapons on 14 occasions since 2012, and the world has done nothing. However, last week's large attack has led to international condemnation and, I believe, a determination to do something.

Some argue that last week there was not a chemical attack and a few say that such an attack was carried out by someone other than the Assad regime, but I believe Assad to be responsible. I accept the judgment of the Joint Intelligence Committee. It has concluded that

“there are no plausible alternative scenarios to regime responsibility.”

We have known for years—this is by Assad's own admission—that Syria has chemical weapons. Intelligence leads us to believe that they can be delivered on a variety of platforms. To those who are not persuaded by the need to relieve the humanitarian crisis and who say, “Intervention has nothing to do with us; it will play into the hands of al-Qaeda”, I say that the reverse is true. We can and must intervene.

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful point eloquently. Does she agree that although we have heard a lot this evening and earlier today about the risks of taking action, there are also risks in not taking action?

Meg Munn: There are clearly risks in not taking action; for more than two years we have not taken action. We should have been having this debate two years ago. We should have been doing something two years ago. Our delay has led to there being no good options. We have heard time and again today about why we should not do something, but I say that we have a responsibility here. The UN's doctrine of a responsibility to protect, which was born out of those humanitarian disasters of the 1990s, is widely accepted and must be invoked. If a diplomatic initiative at this stage could succeed, we would, of course, all prefer it to military action, but at the moment it seems to me that diplomatic and peace efforts have completely failed.

[Meg Munn]

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition stated that the amendment will enable action to be taken even without a Security Council resolution and, on that basis, I will support it. Kofi Annan said when he resigned last year that

“as an envoy, I can’t want peace more than the protagonists, more than the security council or the international community”.

The Assad regime, bolstered with units of the Iranian republican guard and Hezbollah, wants to win, whatever it takes in lives and misery. Are we really going to continue to sit on the sidelines wringing our hands?

8.13 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I know that the Prime Minister would have preferred us to be debating a motion that provided the necessary sanction for military intervention in Syria, and many have welcomed the Government’s altered position and motion, with some congratulating them on it. Perhaps that has arisen as a result of the circumstances in which they find themselves. The motion is certainly different from the one they intended to bring forward when they were seeking to recall Parliament two days ago. Although today’s motion waters things down, rows back or back-pedals to a certain extent, it still softens up Parliament, crosses a threshold and puts a firm foot on the slippery slope towards military intervention in Syria by creating a climate and the mood music which makes it easier for such action to be taken in future.

The motion may be a tactical decision—perhaps an artifice—taken to paper over cracks in what is, without question, a difficult situation, given the range of views within the Government, but we are now on that slippery slope. I will leave aside what I may think about the appalling Assad regime. I accept that, on the balance of probability, there is little plausible explanation for the chemical attack other than that it was carried out either by a rogue commander or under the instruction of the Assad regime—that is almost certain. However, I still do not believe that that justifies military attacks or that it would be wise for it to result in them.

There has been a lot of speculation about the consequences of taking such action. If we say that Assad has behaved irrationally in using chemical weapons in the first place, the risk is that the proposed military intervention will mean he is likely to become even more irrational. The situation may escalate into war and may involve other countries stepping in. We do not know which direction this is going. No one has persuaded me this afternoon either that such action will quell the situation or that it will not make it worse. We also need to consider the risk of mission creep. We may be saying that a war crime has been committed, but war crimes have been going on in Syria and in other civil wars in the past 10 years over which the international community has failed to take any action. In Syria alone, innocent children and non-combatants been killed. What is the difference between killing a child with a conventional weapon—

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): So many speakers seem to have offered the choice between military action or doing nothing, but I do not think that anybody is suggesting that we should do nothing. If there is a

war crime, there is a war criminal. We are talking about an international crime, the action that should be taken is against the war criminal responsible and that does not necessarily mean military action.

Andrew George: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about that. I say that instead of bombing them with bombs, let us bomb them with diplomacy, humanitarian aid, shelter, support, humanitarian corridors, and international negotiations with Iran and other neighbouring countries in order to address this issue. We should do that instead of carrying out the kind of surgical strikes proposed here today.

I return to what I was saying a moment ago. What is the difference between an innocent child—a non-combatant—being killed by a conventional weapon and that child being killed with a chemical weapon? It does not much matter to them or their family, because it is still a horrendous death of an innocent. We therefore need to ask whether we are being consistent in saying that this is the red line and it is appropriate for us to take this action. The key point, and the reason I am saying it is not just about the words on the page but what is between the lines, the context and having had Parliament recalled for this debate, is that it sends out a message to others that we are already on this slippery slope—the context is already there. What happens if in the next few days the intelligence suggests that the chemical weapons are being moved around the country? This Parliament cannot be called back, but other nations, such as the US and France, may see this debate and the vote we have this evening as sufficient sanction—perhaps an amber light or even a green one—to their taking military action in Syria.

8.18 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): When the Prime Minister performed his U-turn yesterday on taking action this weekend, I wondered what we would be debating today. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Foreign Secretary on forcing the Prime Minister to do a handbrake turn over the action we were clearly called back to vote on today. The Prime Minister may have changed the text of the motion, but he certainly made the same hawkish speech today. I do not accept that wanting to exhaust all the avenues with the United Nations is somehow an argument for doing nothing.

I heard the Deputy Prime Minister being interviewed this morning on the “Today” programme, and it was not his finest hour. He said that this was an atrocity that could not be ignored, which I accept, and that he did not want ours to be remembered as the generation that sat idly by, but our motion does not suggest doing that. He then said that the Government were seeking a mandate for a limited response. There we have it. That is why we are here today; the Government are seeking a mandate for a limited response, which is why our amendment is necessary and needs to be supported. Their intention was not to wait for the UN process to be exhausted, but to take precipitate action.

What is a limited response? We have no mandate to punish—that is not our role—so what is the objective? Who or what is the target? It has been suggested that we aim to “deter” and “degrade” chemical weapons. These are technical terms quite often used to make it easier for

us to vote in favour of military action. We have also heard about “precision strikes”, “selective strikes”, “technical strikes” and the intention to “degrade”. We even have civilian deaths described as “collateral damage”. These are all terms used to convince us that we should vote in favour of a strike, but how do we contain a missile attack on a chemical weapons dump or manufacturing centre? How do we ensure that no civilians die? Would those deaths be acceptable? Would they somehow be laudable for having been created by us, rather than by chemical weapons?

We do not have an end plan, a strategy for what we want to achieve with an incisive strike or an exit strategy. We have been here before. I voted against a similar motion when my Government attempted this in 2003, and exactly the same things are being said today.

8.21 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): This has been a great two days for Parliament; I think we have won. This time yesterday morning, the motion would have been used to justify war, perhaps this very weekend. War is not going to happen. The Prime Minister has listened to his Back Benchers. We made it perfectly clear to our Whips yesterday afternoon that we were not prepared to vote for any motion that justified war, and so the Prime Minister has offered us another motion. This is not a motion for war. I will not vote for war. I would never vote for war against Syria. If there is a second vote, I will definitely vote against, but I do not believe there ever will be a second vote, because I do not believe that the parliamentary arithmetic stacks up. It does not stack up because MPs are doing their job and listening to what the public want, and the voice of the public is completely clear: they do not want war. They are scarred by what went on in Iraq. We were lied to in Parliament and we are not going to go down that route again. I voted against the Iraq war and I will vote against this one.

What would it achieve? That is what we must ask ourselves. Why is it any of our business? Has Syria ever been a colony? Has it ever been in our sphere of interest? Has it ever posed the remotest threat to the British people? Our job in Parliament is to look after our own people. Our economy is not in very good shape. Neither are our social services, schools or hospitals. It is our job to think about problems here. If I am told that we are burying our heads in the sand, I would ask: are there anguished debates in other Parliaments all over Europe about whether to bomb Syria? No, they are getting on with running their own countries, and so should we.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): If we were to punish—that is the word that springs to mind—every appalling regime by dropping missiles on it, would missiles not be criss-crossing the skies on a daily basis?

Sir Edward Leigh: Absolutely. Although we have spoken with great moral certitude in this debate, the fact is that our contribution to an attack on Syria would be infinitesimal. Have we not degraded our own armed forces in the past three years, contrary to repeated warnings from myself and others? Do we have an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean? In reality, we would simply be hanging on to the coat tails of President Obama. He was foolish enough to issue a red line. His

credibility is on the line, not the credibility of the British people or ourselves. We do not have to follow him in this foolish gesture.

We know that we cannot destroy the chemical stocks of President Assad. We know that we can only degrade them. We know that no significant group in Syria would praise us, apart from these famous rebels, whom we have been supporting over the past two years. Who are these rebels? Does the west seriously want Assad to lose power? Do we want him replaced by a regime that includes Sunni jihadists? That is why we have over the years been buttressing what has been a stable regime. It is simply not in our national interest to bomb Syria. It would not degrade his chemical stocks and it might result in more pressure being placed on minorities in Syria.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I am listening carefully to what my hon. Friend is saying and he is making some very powerful points. Is he aware of comments from Sir Andrew Green, chairman of Migration Watch and formerly a respected ambassador to Damascus, who has said in the last couple of days that if the regime was to fall, chaos would follow, because the kind of jihadists to whom my hon. Friend has referred would take control, which would be hugely against the interests of the UK?

Sir Edward Leigh: Absolutely. We have heard very little about what is happening on the ground in Syria. How many of those who have spoken with such moral certainty have actually visited Syria? I must confess I have only been there once, but as far as I could see, the minorities were protected. The 2 million Christians are protected by Assad. What will be their fate when Assad falls? What will be the fate of the 2 million Alawites? What will be the fate of the 22 other minorities? How much does the House know about what is actually happening in Syria? Yet we believe that we, who know so little about the complexities of the situation, have the moral right to commit execution on people. That is what we are talking about. We cannot send cruise missiles into a country without killing people. That is what we would be doing. What right has the House to say with any certainty that we know what went on that day? What right have we to say that we can sort out the situation? No, there is a better way—the way of peace and diplomacy, not of war. I cannot, therefore, support the motion tonight. I give some credit to the Prime Minister, but I will not vote for the motion.

8.27 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): This debate inevitably takes place in the shadow of the decision taken in the House a decade ago to go to war with Iraq, and it is absolutely right that we learn from that experience, but the past should inform us rather than imprison us. After the experience of the 20th century, chemical weapons are rightly regarded with unique horror by the world.

It is completely understandable, in the light of the decision taken by this House a decade ago, that people want to know more about the facts of the use of chemical weapons this time. That is why it is right that we should look closely at the facts and at the reports, and analyse them very carefully. The bar to action is

[Mr Pat McFadden]

necessarily higher now because of the experience of the past decade. But in asking questions and calling for evidence, it is important that this is done as a means of taking a decision rather than a means of avoiding a decision. Let us see the evidence and the reports, but let us not escape the fact that we will still have a responsibility to decide; if not tonight, then very soon.

If the lesson that we drew from Iraq was that we must never again intervene, that military action could never again take place where repression was taking place and that it is impossible to act no matter how brutal a dictator is being to his own people, and if our policy was governed by a world-weary resignation that these issues are difficult and complex and therefore there is little that we can do, then I say that would be a dismal conclusion for victims of repression around the world. It would also be an open recognition of the diminished stance and capability of the international community, and it would beg the question as to what international law banning chemical weapons would mean if it could not be enforced.

Robert Flello: For many in this Chamber such as me, it is not about not taking action; it is about what that action is and what it is seeking to achieve. Action that is taken that makes things worse creates a worse situation.

Mr McFadden: I understand the fears expressed by my hon. Friend, but for the reasons I have set out, I believe that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was right in his speech and in the amendment not to rule out military action. People say that it is difficult and complex, and of course it is. We cannot predict with certainty the consequences of action. But difficulty and complexity cannot be reasons to give dictators the right to do as they wish to their own people. Difficulty and complexity cannot be justifications for abandoning people to their fate, including death through the use of chemical weapons. In terms of consistency, the fact that we cannot do everything and that we do not act in every circumstance is not a reason never to act, whatever the circumstances.

Naomi Long: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last statement, but the issue of consistency is important. The question in the minds of the public, and many of us in the House tonight, is, "Why in some cases and not in others?" Surely in order to reassure the public, we need to have a clear framework as to how these decisions are taken.

Mr McFadden: The use of the fact that we have not acted in the past where perhaps we should have done as an argument against action in every circumstance is, in the end, a counsel of despair and an abdication of our responsibilities.

I do not believe that tonight's votes are the key because I do not think that this is the debate or the motion that the Government intended. But that decision and that key debate is coming. We will soon be faced with the decision and the responsibility as to what we, as permanent members of the UN Security Council and as people who have stood up against repression in the

past, will do in the face of chemical weapons being used against innocent civilians. That decision is coming soon and we will have to take it.

8.32 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I have listened carefully to the debate all afternoon, and for me there are two occasions where military action can be justified. The first is where British interests are imminently threatened, and clearly that is not the case in this particular debate. The other is as part of a UN-sponsored humanitarian mission to prevent dictators from causing damage to their own people. I am not convinced that the Government have made that case this evening. The reality is this; there is an evil dictator, but the opposition to that evil dictator is even worse. These are people who will oppose the west at all costs and will cause damage to their own people. They are barbaric and inhuman and we should not support them in any shape or form. I would not support any regime change, or attempted regime change.

I am delighted that the Prime Minister and the Government have moved substantially over the past few days on the motion and on the rhetoric behind it. I will make clear my personal position: I will not support any military intervention at all. Should there be a second vote in this Chamber, I will oppose military intervention, because I think that it is wrong in principle. I say that for several reasons.

First, we are talking about a country involved in a civil war at the moment, and we intervene at our cost. Also, Syria is adjacent to Lebanon and Israel. The border between Syria and Israel has been peaceful for about 40 years. If we escalate the violence, do we not think that the Syrians and the Russians will react? We then escalate the problem of the middle east conflict. At the moment, this House has endorsed the principle of direct peace talks between the Palestinians and the Israeli Government. What do we think the reaction would be if we acted against Syria and then Syria reacted against Britain and potentially other countries in the region? That would destabilise those talks and probably end the chances of peace in the middle east for ever. That is the key issue.

The other thing that we must consider is that Syria is a satellite state of Russia. Do we think that the Russian Government will sit idly by and allow the US and Britain to bomb one of their satellite states? They will react in some way, shape or form. So we should be clear that, if we embark on military action, there will be direct military consequences for the whole region and for this country. We should send a message to President Assad, if we are convinced that he and his regime are responsible for the chemical attacks, to say, "Identify those who are responsible. Make them come before the criminal courts," so that they can be punished in the best way possible, through due process of law.

8.35 pm

Mr Michael Meacher (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): We are asked by the Government tonight to approve a so-called strong humanitarian response, with the implication of using force in principle and a second vote after the UN inspectors have reported, but there is no case in international law for this military attack—neither with a UN Security Council resolution authorising it,

nor under article 51 of the UN charter, which permits a right of self-defence, but that clearly does not apply to a chemical gas attack in eastern Damascus, as that is obviously not an attack on another state. That is why the Prime Minister switched today to quoting long-standing international conventions that prohibit the use of chemical weapons. However, nothing in those conventions inherently allows other nations to take military action against such a state just because it has used chemical weapons—certainly not without wider international sanctions.

There is a second argument: what exactly—I have listened all day—is the aim of the military strike? Will it realistically succeed in achieving those goals? The stated aim is to hit Assad's military targets, but not the chemical weapons, obviously, for fear of releasing poison gas into the atmosphere. Whatever else, this will certainly not be a short, surgical strike. I remind the House that it took 78 days of continuous bombing of Serbia before the Milosevic regime could be shifted from Kosovo, and only then when the US and UK threatened a land invasion. Even leaving that aside, no one has answered the question what will happen if the attack is made and Assad retaliates by using chemical weapon attacks on perhaps a greater scale, as his sites are all over Syria.

Let us not forget that Syria is no Libya. It is far stronger than Libya, with far more disciplined and larger armed forces, and it is still powerfully backed and reinforced by Russia. At worst, there is a very real danger of the west being sucked into a long-term war that it cannot win and that will only expose its impotence, as has happened already in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

None of that is to say that we should do nothing. We should press to have Assad arraigned before the International Criminal Court. We should freeze Syrian assets throughout the west. We should impose travel bans on all members of the Syrian leadership deemed responsible for the atrocities. Above all, we should press much harder for a regional peace conference, to achieve a settlement involving all the relevant parties, including the Russians. That is the only way to settle this conflict.

8.38 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr Meacher). He made a powerful point, to which I want to return a little later.

May I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the Prime Minister for recalling Parliament? Today's debate was absolutely necessary. It has been a very good debate. Party politics have not been involved. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have argued different points of view. That is what is good about today.

I have been under no pressure from my Whip to vote one way or the other. That is a really good sign. Hon. Members are wrestling today with a very difficult issue. I find these occasions, when we have to decide what is morally right and whether or not we will kill people and whether, by killing them, we save other people in the long run, immensely difficult. I have made it clear to the Prime Minister that I have not made up my mind tonight, and that my decision will rely entirely on the summing up by the Deputy Prime Minister—[*Interruption.*] I would like to thank the Deputy Prime Minister for spending much of the afternoon listening to the debate.

Thank goodness we have a British parliamentary democracy. We MPs can come here and influence the decision of the Executive. Everybody knows that MPs from both sides of the House have influenced the Prime Minister to change the position of the Executive. In the States, there are 100 Congressmen begging the President to let them debate the issue. We are so much better off in this House.

In response to what the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton said, the question is indeed what we should do to solve this exceptionally difficult problem, because just bombing will not solve it. There needs to be a disproportionate response. What I think President Obama has done is to have got out "The West Wing" series and looked at what President Bartlet would have done under the circumstances. There is exactly that episode: "If we bomb Damascus airport, we are going to kill thousands of people, but they will never do it again." Of course, the expert then says, "If you do that, the whole world will be against you." The President asks "Well, what do we do?" and the reply is, "You just bomb a few buildings, which have been emptied because everybody knows which buildings are going to be bombed." The President says, "That will have no effect," but the experts say, "Yes, but that is actually what you have to do. You have to have a response." That may be how it works in America, but it does not work like that here.

I am very interested in one point that I hope the Deputy Prime Minister will help us with tonight. If we vote against the motion and both motions happen to be lost, does it mean that there is no guarantee that there will be a second vote in this House?

8.41 pm

Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I shall be brief. My principal question to pose to the Treasury Bench is, what happens next if Assad does not stop his outrages? My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Hugh Bayley) posed that question to the Prime Minister and got no satisfactory answer, so let me pose it to the Deputy Prime Minister.

I refer tangentially to the sensible comments of the hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), who I see in his place. I also think it important for the Security and Intelligence Committee or an appropriate group of parliamentary colleagues to be apprised of some of the intelligence information. It is hugely important that we understand where the weapons are, whether they are mobile and what volumes we are talking about. We appreciate that a lot of people are working on that.

When we hear the advice coming from such an august body of colleagues, I believe that we will conclude that the guidance in the Attorney-General's report is almost unachievable; indeed, it will be unachievable. The problem we must face—the House must be mature about it—is that if we are to achieve either the goals set out in the Government's motion or the programme of events set out in the Opposition amendment, that will almost inevitably mean putting boots on the ground. Now everyone is saying that we are not in favour of that, and I am certain that that is the view across the country. Before we get to a debate next week, it is hugely important that the analysis is done and that the House is apprised of it in a mature way, recognising the need for security considerations.

Mr Jim Cunningham: I am sure my hon. Friend has noticed in this debate that no thought has been given by the Prime Minister—or, for that matter, the Deputy Prime Minister, who will be winding up—about the consequences for the aftermath. Are we going to be in another situation like Iraq, for example, where no thought was given to the aftermath?

Andrew Miller: My hon. Friend is quite right. I am sure that those discussions are happening in private, but the Attorney-General's briefing, a welcome document, refers entirely to the humanitarian issues. Let me repeat the sentence I cited earlier:

“Such an intervention would be directed exclusively to averting a humanitarian catastrophe, and the minimum judged necessary for that purpose”.

The motion, the amendments and the advice before us tonight are about that point, and that point alone. But can we achieve that goal by means of a clinical operation? It is my assertion that that is not possible.

Before we have a further debate, therefore, that analysis needs to take place. Members need to be properly briefed, recognising the sensitivities of some of those briefing issues, so that we can make a decision fully informed of all the facts, because these are hugely important issues. I do not believe for a moment that it is possible to take out the chemical weapons capacity remotely. Does that mean it is special forces on the ground—ours or other people's? We need to understand such issues fully before we take the decision next week. I hope that Members on the Treasury Bench take those points seriously.

8.45 pm

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Our long debate today has served two valuable purposes. First, it has served to underline the huge complexity of the issues before the House and the country. As one who came to the debate as a sceptic about military intervention, I have found it extremely useful and I hope that the country and the newspapers will have observed that Parliament is taking this issue very seriously.

Secondly, the debate has served a valuable purpose in enabling the Prime Minister and the Government to set out their precise position. In that respect, the categorical statement by the Prime Minister that it is not the Government's intention to get involved in the wider Syrian civil war is hugely welcome. As many hon. Members have said, the message that we are getting from our constituents throughout the country is that there is no appetite for further military intervention by this country when no British national interest can be identified. I personally endorse the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) about the nature of the opposition in Syria, many of whom, I think, are absolutely disgusting. I cannot see, personally, that there is much likelihood of a better flavour of regime than the present one; my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) made that point too.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that he is talking about a specific, narrowly focused response to the use of chemical weapons. That is the sole objective. My colleague the former Defence Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), said that doing nothing was equal to appeasement,

and that the two issues could be kept completely separate. I am not sure that is possible, but just simply focusing—

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Can the right hon. Gentleman reconcile the two statements—that one can be involved in military action and somehow keep out of the civil war in Syria? Surely that action involves us, necessarily, in that civil war.

Sir Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman makes an entirely valid point. That is a question that, as parliamentarians, we are entitled to ask: to what extent would the nature of the operation that the Government are proposing constitute taking sides? Hon. Members have made that point already, but let me address my concerns about the clinical strike.

I fully understand the argument that doing nothing would send a green light, that there would be further atrocities by Assad or others, and that it would send a message to others in possession of chemical weapons that they could get away, with impunity, with using those revolting weapons. There are extremely difficult issues here. However, we need to ask ourselves some questions. If it is the Government's position that there is a narrowly defined objective, which is to send the message, “This is unacceptable. We do not wish to get involved in the wider civil war, but we wish to send you a message, ‘Do this again to your people and you will be zapped,’” I believe that we have the military means to deliver a precision strike. However, I think we need to ask ourselves, “What would the consequences be?” The right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) asked the question: “What if this does not work and Assad continues? What then do we do?” What is the response of Russia likely to be? As parliamentarians, it is entirely right and proper that we ask such questions on behalf of ourselves and our constituents. That is what the country expects and I hope the Government will provide some answers to those points. If this does not work, what happens then? Will we get our hand in the mangle and be drawn into further military operations beyond clinical strikes? I expect to support the Government tonight because I think the Opposition have been playing politics with this issue.

8.49 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The options in Syria have never been easy or risk free, and today all options are bad ones. The reality is that in the past two and a half years, the international community has betrayed those secular, enthusiastic people who tried to get democratic change in their country. Because of our hang-ups about our past, because President Obama was not interested, and because of Russian and Chinese vetoes in the Security Council, we have not given support, and that has led to the brutality, radicalisation and extremism that we confront today.

This debate has not made me proud. I am sad and I believe it tells me something about our country today when I hear people saying, “It's none of our business” and “We shouldn't get involved” when 100,000 people are dead and 4 million displaced from their homes. Today, increasing numbers of Kurds are fleeing Syria to go to the Kurdish region of Iraq where Saddam Hussein

used chemical weapons to kill the Kurds in the Anfal campaign in 1988, yet nobody seems to realise the significance of that.

I have reservations about both the Government motion and the Opposition amendment because I believe they are inadequate. They both talk about deterring the future use of chemical weapons, but I do not think one can deter the use of chemical weapons simply by firing missiles symbolically—a “shot across the bow”, or whatever phrase President Obama used. I think the strategy the United States is about to launch is doomed to fail in its objectives.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The hon. Gentleman is extremely knowledgeable about Syria and I am extremely concerned about the implications for the wider region if we launch military action—heaven forbid that we agree to do so. Will he outline to the House his assessment of the implications of military action for the wider region?

Mike Gapes: If military action is simply based on the kind of inadequate gesture politics that we seem to have coming from across the Atlantic, it will be a disaster and will inflame the people in the region. I believe, however, that non-involvement and non-intervention also has consequences, the most serious of which is that simply saying we will deter the future use of chemical weapons assumes that only the Assad regime will possess such weapons. What happens when areas of the country where chemical weapons are stored are overrun by elements of the jihadist-linked opposition who get them and pass them to al-Qaeda? What happens when, to try to secure some of those weapons and not let them get into the hands of the opposition, Assad gives them to his ally, Hezbollah, which tries to take them for potential use against Israel or elsewhere?

We must talk not only about deterrence but about the removal and ultimately the destruction of those chemical weapon stockpiles that date back to when the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia provided them to Assad's father and his regime. I believe that these issues will be with us, however we vote today, next week and next year. In three or four years' time we will still be confronting the issue of chemical weapons and we must get real about that. I will be supporting the Opposition amendment today, but I think we must go further.

8.54 pm

Sir Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I want to explain why I cannot support the motion. The House is predicated on procedure and rules—we seek fairness in things—but the very first sentence of the motion states that the House:

“Deplores the use of chemical weapons in Syria on 21 August 2013 by the Assad regime, which caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries of Syrian civilians”.

We have gone from an assumption to a declaration that we know that Assad did that. I could not support that under any circumstances, because I believe in some form of due process that identifies the perpetrator. We have the opportunity to do so. The Labour party amendment would take out the possibility of doing the thing that most offends most other people around the world—power determining the outcome irrespective of the facts.

I am also a victim—if I can put it that way—of past judgments, dossiers and information. In the Prime Minister's speech, he used only the words “highly likely”—taken from the JIC's observations. I can see no other reason, but we normally seek to ask, “Cui bono?” No one has given a plausible explanation of why, with UN investigators in Damascus, the Assad regime would want to let off these weapons there and then. I cannot give an explanation for the actions of the most odious and horrible regime. Two generations of Assad have been prepared to slaughter. We are now faced with an empty land of hope, to which we contribute little if anything, because of our lack of knowledge of lands beyond our understanding. It was a French colony; we are British.

We ought to reject the concept that we have already tried the regime and therefore should push to war. I want my constituents to know why I cannot support a motion predicated on such a thought.

8.56 pm

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): The fundamental judgment that we all must make this evening and over the next week or two, as individuals and as a House, is whether military intervention in Syria by foreign countries, including our own, is more likely to end the civil war or to add fuel to the fire, perhaps in the ways my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) has suggested. I do not believe the Prime Minister made the case today that intervention will do more good than harm.

The Prime Minister argues in his motion that “a strong humanitarian response is required”

and I agree with that. A humanitarian response is needed to protect civilians, but how can it be a humanitarian response to propose to use UK military might to protect Syrian civilians from one class of weapons—chemical weapons—but not to use it to protect civilians from conventional weapons, which have of course killed far more of the 100,000 dead so far in this civil war? In effect, such a proposal gives the Assad regime impunity to continue to use guns, bombs and missiles as long as they are conventionally armed and not armed with chemical weapons.

Clausewitz said that war is the continuation of politics by other means. He was absolutely wrong, because war is qualitatively different from diplomatic action, from humanitarian relief, and from the kind of action we have taken hitherto on the crisis in Syria. It is qualitatively different because, by taking military action, we become involved in the conflict morally and in international law, and because we require young British servicemen and women to fight and risk their lives. I do not believe that we should shoulder the first burden, and nor should we ask our military personnel to shoulder the second one—to risk their lives—without having a credible plan to bring the Syrian conflict to an end. The Prime Minister did not set out such a plan today.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): Would it not have been so much better if the frenetic activity of the past few days to try to build international support for military action had been devoted to trying to build international support for a peace conference?

Hugh Bayley: Yes. I do not rule out the possibility that in future circumstances might be such that I support military action, but an overwhelming, international shared objective would have to be built around a military plan that appeared credible as a way of ending this conflict.

We know that it is much easier to start military action than it is to bring it successfully to a conclusion. After the first Gulf war the decision was taken not to topple Saddam but to impose a no-fly zone to prevent him from using his weapons of mass destruction. We and the Americans alone, under a UN mandate, operated that no-fly zone at a cost of millions of pounds for more than a decade, but it failed to bring Saddam to heel and eventually it escalated into the second, controversial Iraq war. Once a small military step is taken, conflicts are likely to escalate because of the uncertainty involved in military action. If the Government want the support of the House and of our people, they need to provide a clear strategy for managing a military campaign.

9.1 pm

Mr Julian Brazier (Canterbury) (Con): In 1990, the brutal regime of President Assad senior ruled three quarters of Lebanon. I was on a visit to east Beirut, part of the free enclave, when the Syrian army broke through and captured the rest of the city. A few weeks after the fighting, they butchered, in cold blood, a friend of mine, and when they found his five-year-old son hiding under the bed they killed him too. I have never since had any illusions about how evil this man is, but I have healthy respect for how rational and clever he and his horrible allies, Hezbollah, are.

I and my friends who live in Lebanon are convinced that when Hezbollah's star began to fade under the emerging Lebanese democracy—the Cedar revolution—Hezbollah manufactured a border incident with Israel to bring on a bombardment that hugely strengthened Hezbollah's position in Lebanon.

I firmly believe that President Assad was responsible for this atrocity, and although I do not know why he did it I would not rule out the possibility, which bears a little thinking about, that the election of President Rouhani in Iran was a disaster for Assad and Hezbollah. One of the best ways of undermining the tentative moves President Rouhani might make to build links with the opposition and a more peaceful attitude to the west would be western bombing.

I support two things that the Prime Minister brought out very strongly, the first of which is that we will go through the UN process and take it as far as we can. I agree that we cannot make the UN process, successfully overcoming the veto in every case, an absolute requirement. There might, for example, be an occasion when a vital British interest is threatened but we cannot get UN support, as well as the humanitarian examples that my right hon. Friend gave.

In saying that I shall support the Government tonight I would like to make three brief points. First, we must listen and not simply talk to countries in the neighbouring area. Secondly, we must continue to build on the excellent work we are doing in neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon and Jordan, because that is what is preventing a national horror from turning into a regional catastrophe. Thirdly, we must remember that if we take military action, and if it is to have any effect at all, we must do so

with the full intention of being willing to turn up the wick if the other side responds in the wrong way, which is a sobering thought.

9.4 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): “Full stop, end of story.” Those five glib words were the best assurance that the Prime Minister was able to offer the House today against all the concerns being expressed about the risks of wider consequences of rash military intervention. It might be okay for the Prime Minister to negotiate the sophistry of the different sensitivities and anxieties in this House about whether or not there is a precise legal justification for military intervention in the current situation, but it certainly will not answer the exigencies of the situation that will open up once the machinations of intervention commence and once the exigencies of conflict are engaged, not just within Syria but potentially in the wider middle east.

Nor will that answer the serious issues that will arise—the Prime Minister seemed to comfort himself with that—potentially radicalising a whole new generation of Muslims, not just here but in other parts of the world, as they see again a western-driven intervention in this situation, but the west failing to act on continuing excesses and violations against the Palestinians, including the use of chemical weapons, which everybody knows were used. The opposition then came in the form of US vetoes, in which many people in this House seemed complicit and comfortable with. Today we are hearing the rightful indignant condemnation of Russian and Chinese vetoes that have already been exercised in relation to Syria and more of which we are expecting soon.

The Prime Minister told us that he and the National Security Council are assured that research shows that the Muslim population here will not be antagonised, because they will understand the precise legal justification—that intervention was purely a response to this use of chemical weapons and nothing else. Even if people believe that that is the mood of many people now, will it remain the mood once the wider difficulties are created, and once the military intervention finds itself embedded in an ever more difficult and ever-changing situation?

It is all very well for the Prime Minister to say that the intervention is purely on the basis of the use of chemical weapons, not to impact upon the wider civil war in Syria and not to get involved in any other complications in the wider middle east. The fact is that our rightful outrage which might motivate military intervention does not excuse us from having moral responsibility for any outcomes that might flow from that intervention.

Naomi Long: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that part of the problem is that the legal justification is the humanitarian crisis? Even without chemical weapons, there is still a humanitarian crisis. How would we justify stopping action?

Mark Durkan: I thank my hon. colleague for that point. Those of us who have concerns about the Government's position are not saying that there should be no action. Clearly, action is needed on a humanitarian basis, but the idea that that can best be expressed in military intervention in support of the headlong rush that is coming from the States in the name of retribution,

and the idea that retribution should become the going rate for military action in the middle east in circumstances where we are usually trying to counsel the various players and interests in the middle east against their natural impulses for retribution, seems to me to be a very rash proposition.

We have to ask ourselves the questions that the Prime Minister failed to answer today: what then and what when? If we are to see the limited intervention that the Prime Minister seems to expect, will it be some keyhole surgery-type strike which will have no wider implications and leave no wider scars or difficulties? If it does not work, what then? If there is reaction by Assad or by others in the area and there are wider difficulties, what will happen? Does the Prime Minister's limited intervention—"No, I'm smoking, not inhaling. Our interventions are one thing and we are not involved in anything else"—stand? It will not be able to stand.

9.8 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): The choice between head in the sand and boots on the ground has always, to my mind, been a false one. In recent days we have heard much about the limits to our influence on events in Syria, but we must not allow ourselves to believe that we can do nothing for the Syrian people. I recently visited a refugee camp near the Syrian border in the Kurdish region of Iraq. It was a harrowing reminder of the brutality of this war and its complexity.

In demographic terms Syria is like a photographic negative of Iraq. Both have large minority populations of Christians and Kurds, but in Syria it is the Sunnis who form the historically oppressed majority. In Iraq, we have seen what happens when a ruling minority is violently deposed. Today, large swathes of Sunni Iraq have all the characteristics of a failed state. My fear is that the envisioned post-Assad Syria would be equally unsustainable. A Sunni-dominated Syria would show no mercy to the defeated Alawites, and would therefore be completely unacceptable to the minorities, whether Alawite, Christian or Kurd, who would undoubtedly rebel with the support of regional powers.

The ever-shifting maze of internal politics and external agendas, and the sheer complexity of the situation, demand that we should be modest about what we hope to achieve. My constituents are deeply concerned about the prospect of another open-ended war in the middle east, and I will not vote for any action that would entangle us in regime change. There can be no more nation-building. We simply do not have the capability to do that; indeed, the most powerful country in the world does not have that capability.

Bob Stewart: Whatever we do, we must be quite precise about it. People talk about an exit strategy, but I have never seen an exit strategy in any other military conflict. I went into Bosnia with no mission whatever, but with just one idea: to save people's lives. That is what we should be doing: saving the lives of people in Syria if we can.

Nadhim Zahawi: That is right. Any intervention by Britain must have a clear objective and defined limits, and our objective must be to protect civilians, as my hon. Friend has just said.

Michael Ellis: Is my hon. Friend also concerned about those who focus on the United Nations Security Council having absolutely the final say on interventions in humanitarian crises? If a country such as Russia were to oppose intervention in some new holocaust or similar disaster because it was taking place in a satellite country in which it had an interest, would we not be hamstrung and unable to take action?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is right; my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) has also made that point very powerfully.

Our objective is to protect civilians and to preserve the international taboo on the use of terror weapons. In the age of total war, there are virtually no moral limits on what a state might do in pursuit of its military objectives. Where such limits do exist, they must be upheld by responsible members of the international community. The Kurds of Iraq know that only too well. When Saddam bombed Halabja with mustard gas in 1988, the world looked on in horror but did nothing. Our inertia did not prevent further conflict; it made it more likely. With Saddam emboldened, the gassing of Halabja was followed by the invasion of Kuwait. From Munich to Srebrenica, the lesson of history is that one violation of international law leads to another.

On the question of limits, our model for intervention should be not Iraq in 2003 but the no-fly zone established over northern Iraq by the Major Government after the first Gulf war. In 1991, our objective was clear. It was to prevent Saddam's final attempt to massacre the Kurds and the Shi'a. Crucially, however, the terms of the mission strictly limited our involvement. We were not trying to fix Iraq's fractured politics; nor did we manage to do so. Let us remember that, with Saddam at bay, the Kurdish factions turned on each other and fought a bloody civil war. The Syrian people have to find their own vision of self-government, as the Kurds eventually did in Iraq.

Political consensus on this vital issue is incredibly important. It will serve only to weaken the United Kingdom if we are divided on foreign policy, which is why I am so disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition has flip-flopped on this issue. We might not be able to stop the killing in Syria, but we might be able to render the situation a little less terrible. If we want to live in a civilised world, some things must be beyond the pale. I will be supporting the motion tonight.

9.13 pm

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): I have spent a lot of time this summer working with a veterans group in Tyneside called Forward Assist, which works with people who have left the forces and fallen through the cracks in society. Talking to those men and women made me realise what we ask them to do. We do not just ask them to go around the world and to be prepared to die for us; we also ask them to be prepared to kill for us. We ask them to do abnormal things. Most people would run away when someone was firing at them, but we ask those people to run into the gunfire. Those people are our constituents and the husbands, wives, sons and daughters of our constituents. They say to us clearly that if we are going to commit them to such action

[Mr David Anderson]

again, we must do it on the very best evidence. We have heard today that we do not have that evidence or the certainty that we need.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree with the many Members who have expressed concerns about the apparent timetable for action before the recall of the House? Does he agree that being seen to act through cruise missiles or airstrikes should not be confused with taking more cautious but effective action against the regime?

Mr Anderson: It is clear that we are being driven by a timetable that has no basis in anything other than appeasing America, which says that the red line that it drew last year has been crossed. We saw the same thing 10 years ago when we were driven by the deadline of an American President—the deadline for him to get re-elected in 2004. We were wrong to follow America then and we would be wrong to follow it now.

The Labour amendment helps to bring clarity, but I make it clear to my Front Benchers that if the amendment is passed, it will be no more than a checklist. It will be a job sheet for the Government and the Opposition to work through so that they can say to the people of this country that they have the support of the United Nations and that there is more clarity and better evidence before they bring us back here to vote again. I want to make it very clear to my Front Benchers and to Government Front Benchers that even if the motion goes through amended, it will not be an automatic green light for anybody in this House to say that we are supporting military action. It will be a statement that we will come back in a given period with good information and good evidence, that we will have another debate and that we will then decide whether to support military action.

The ghost of Tony Blair haunts this debate, but the ghost of Hans Blix haunts it even more. We should have listened to him in 2003. We should have given him time and waited. We ignored the one independent voice in the arena. We should not do that again. We should be very clear about what we are doing tonight. We are giving the Government nothing more than the remit to improve what is happening. We are not giving the green light for any military action whatsoever.

9.17 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Parliament has done its job today: it has applied the brakes to a headlong rush into unilateral western military action.

The problem with the motion, which is undeniably full of a series of truths, is that it draws one into agreement. However, there is a sting in the tail, which is that it asks us to agree that unilateral western military action is legally justified. I do not agree with that statement. For that reason, I am sorry that I will not support the Government motion tonight.

The country is almost unanimously opposed to unilateral western military intervention. That is not because we are a nation of appeasers and apologists; it is because the nation rightly has weighed up the risks of such action exploding into a wider military conflict with hundreds of thousands more deaths.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons why many of our constituents are so opposed to this debate taking place is that they believe we are about to vote on military action? Of course, that is not the case, as the Prime Minister made clear today.

Dr Wollaston: The point is that agreeing to the legality of military action inevitably sucks us closer to the cliff's edge. That is why I will oppose the motion.

Mr Bacon: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr Wollaston: I will not at this stage.

The Arab League has supported the principle of UN-backed intervention, but it has stated today that it does not back unilateral western military intervention. That is right. It undermines the Arab League when the west constantly steps in and makes decisions instead of allowing it to develop a regional solution that could lead to lasting peace.

We cannot destroy Assad's arsenal of weapons. That has been made clear. The best that we can do is to deliver a warning. Are we seriously suggesting that no nation in the Arab League is capable of delivering that warning? Is Saudi Arabia not capable of that? If not, what on earth are we doing arming all these nations to the teeth? It is time for the Arab League to step up to the plate and for western countries to recognise that we cannot continue to impose solutions, because those solutions fuel resentment and harden attitudes; they raise the question about the double standards of the west across the middle east.

Where was the world's policeman in 1985 when Iran was under sustained attack from chemical weapons? It suited the west to support Iraq in that situation. Why did we allow the world's policeman to weaponise white phosphorus? When white phosphorus contacts the skin and burns as it oxidises, it burns right down to the bone. If that is not a chemical weapon, what is? Why is the world's policeman allowing the USA to sell cluster bombs to Saudi Arabia? The point about cluster bombs is that they continue to kill and maim children long after the combatants have left the field. We need to be very clear. Why is the world's policeman not calling a coup a coup in Egypt? These are the kinds of issues that cause burning resentment across the middle east, with good reason. It is time that we let the Arab League come to a regional solution, if we are going to achieve lasting peace.

To be wary of war is not to stand idly by, but a realistic appraisal of the risks and learning from past experience. The British people are not standing idly by; they are delivering humanitarian aid, but they do not feel that humanitarian aid from the west is best delivered in the form of a cruise missile.

9.21 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): These debates are carried on in a spirit that is not real. What we should be asking ourselves is not why now, but why us? This is not about weapons of mass destruction or chemical weapons. During my time in the House we have witnessed terrible atrocities involving chemical weapons, from Saddam

Hussein internally in his war with Iran to the Israeli use of phosphorus bombs. We stood by then—we did not do anything.

We know why we are here tonight: it is due to the fact that the President of the United States made a foolish threat that there was a red line that should not be crossed. He now finds that it has been crossed and if he does not do something it will be an act of humiliation.

Why us? The same question was not answered during the Iraq war. We debated then the feeling that, if we did not go to Iraq, Saddam Hussein would continue to rule. Our contribution to Iraq was great in terms of the heroism, professionalism and sacrifice of our soldiers—there were 179 victims—but Tony Blair was told by Bush that he was not needed. Tony Blair was invited to pull out. When we get the long-awaited report of the Chilcot inquiry we will know that it was as a result of Tony Blair's refusal to pull us out of that war and to stop deceiving the House that 179 British lives were lost. That is a terrible price to pay for the vanity of one man. He has appeared again in this controversy and I think it would be very helpful for him and the nation if he had a prolonged period of invisibility and silence.

We are not involved in this, but we are here tonight. We are the fourth highest spenders in the world on weapons and on defence. Why should we be there? We are a small, northern European nation. Yes, we should do the things we are very good at, which are human rights and peacekeeping. We did a splendid job in Kosovo and Sierra Leone, but the investment we made in blood and treasure in Afghanistan and Iraq was dreadful. We went into Helmand with the hope that not a single bullet would be fired and that we would be there for three years and then leave having solved the drug problem. Two British soldiers had died up to that point; now, 444 have lost their lives.

9.24 pm

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): May I begin by commenting on the analysis of my hon. Friends the Members for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and for Reigate (Mr Blunt)? Their remarks were well worth rereading, but I differ from them on the conclusion that they drew tonight. I share the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan)—although I, like she, will vote with the Government tonight, they cannot expect that it is a blank cheque. I, too, want the Deputy Prime Minister to accede to the request that she made.

We have seen this evening the report of the Joint Intelligence Committee stating that it is reasonably sure that the Assad regime was responsible for the chemical warfare strike on 21 August. That is likely to be true on the balance of probabilities. I do not think it is fair to say that we could prove it beyond all reasonable doubt, but for tonight's purposes, bearing in mind the last two paragraphs of the Government's motion, I believe it is the best we can do.

I also accept that an attack upon the Assad regime's chemical weapons factories and stockpiles, even if it caused the loss of human life beyond the Syrian military, could be lawful irrespective of whether we, the United States and France had prior United Nations Security Council approval. However, what concerns me is that we find ourselves here today in something of a short-term

hurry, albeit that we have taken some time to get here. It is difficult for a Back Bencher to reach any firm conclusion about what our strategy is and how, tactically, we are to achieve the end goal of that strategy.

It is, of course, entirely proper for the Prime Minister to concentrate on the chemical warfare aspect of the crisis, but much as he wants to do that, many inside and outside the House cannot see 21 August and our response to it in isolation from the context of the Syrian civil war and how we went into Iraq.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): My hon. and learned Friend says that we are in a hurry, but we have taken more than two and a half years to come to this position and are where we are only because there has been an escalation through the use of chemical weapons.

Sir Edward Garnier: I said that we were in a short-term hurry, albeit that it has taken us a long time to get here.

Some 100,000 people have been killed and more than 1 million displaced because of the other terrible actions by the Syrian regime and opposition forces, and 350 were killed by the chemical attacks and many more injured. Whatever the method of earlier killings, it is not possible to avoid the conclusion that military action to deal with chemical weapons could well lead to action to consolidate that military gain and then escalate to other action. In the light of the Iraq and Afghanistan adventures, the public suspect mission creep, to use that hideous expression. It is only because of the final words of the Government's motion—

“before any direct British involvement in such action a further vote of the House of Commons will take place”—

that I am prepared to vote with the Government this evening.

However, I am concerned that much of the anodyne and uncontroversial nature of the motion, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) said, is an attempt to suck us into a particular position irrespective of the merits of it and the evidence on the ground. I am also concerned that there is a distinction between the third paragraph of the motion, which requires

“military action that is legal, proportionate and focused on saving lives by preventing and deterring further use of Syria's chemical weapons”,

and the 10th, which refers simply to “detering” it. I urge the Government to listen hard to what has been said tonight, and not to—

Mr Speaker: Order.

9.28 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): There are 196 recognised world nations, 165 of which have formally signed the convention on the use of chemical weapons. Two have failed to ratify it fully—Israel and Myanmar. Five have not signed it, including North Korea, South Sudan and Angola. Egypt has also not signed. The right hon. and learned Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind) said earlier that no other country in the middle east had failed to sign, but Egypt has. I do not know the level of its chemical weapons, but it has certainly failed to sign the convention. Earlier today, the Prime Minister said that Syria had signed. Syria has not signed the convention on chemical weapons.

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

We must be careful that it is not just up to the US, the UK and France to decide when conventions are broken. There are 165 nations in the UN who have signed. We have said that there must be a UN vote. We have not said that it must be won. Those 165 nations must have the opportunity to add their voices and to make it clear that they too are appalled and horrified, and opposed to the use of chemical weapons. Russia is a signatory and must clearly bear responsibility for supporting Syria. Syria must be Russia's responsibility if it refuses to sign up to the UN Security Council's opposition to the use of chemical weapons.

We must be fearful, and careful that we do not create a further rejection of western Governments within the middle east. We do not want to appear to take sides in what is increasingly becoming a Sunni-Shi'a conflict. In refugee camps, we are already seeing greater radicalisation and groups dividing on religious grounds.

Any action we take must clearly be in the national interest of the UK, accord with a viable plan and produce a workable strategy that will not increase problems for the UK and the wider middle east region.

9.31 pm

Mr Douglas Alexander (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I thank right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions to the debate. The speeches have genuinely been a testament both to the wealth of experience and the expertise contained within this House, and to the concerns, questions and fears of many of its Members. In particular, all Members will have been grateful for the speeches given by former Foreign and Defence Secretaries on both sides of the House. Given the time available, and the number of Members who have spoken, I cannot hope to acknowledge all the contributions, but I wish to place on record both my respect and my gratitude for the tone of the debate, the nature of the interventions and the sincerity of the speakers.

Let me start on the common ground. This House stands united in its revulsion at the reports of the use of chemical weapons being deployed against innocent men, women and children in Syria. The use of chemical weapons is not just deplorable; it is both immoral and illegal. Since the Geneva protocol of 1925, the use of such weapons has been prohibited. Hon. Members are therefore right to be horrified and revulsed by reports of their use, and to be deeply concerned as to how to protect the international prohibition of their use that has been in place for decades.

There is also common ground across the House in recognising the suffering and the scale of the slaughter in Syria. In the past two years, more than 100,000 people have been killed and more than 6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Already 2 million refugees have fled Syria, 1 million of whom are children. All of us should be proud of the humanitarian aid that the British Government and British non-governmental organisations have provided to help alleviate the suffering of the people of Syria and the wider region. Now, however, as the crisis deepens and the pressures on Syria's neighbours grow, the international community is right to intensify the diplomatic and humanitarian efforts to help relieve the suffering and prevent further bloodshed.

Ultimately, a way will have to be found back to talks. We all recognise that, and that the process to get to talks will need to involve not just the Russians but discussions with neighbouring countries Jordan, Lebanon and, yes, Iran, as well as those within Syria.

In the light of these recent attacks and the wider circumstances, we all recognise that on Syria the House faces the prospect of grave and difficult choices. All of them involve real risks and challenges. There are no good choices available, and that includes the choice not to act. Every judgment will have consequences, and all the consequences of any judgment cannot be known at the time when that judgment is exercised.

As the Opposition, we believe that our national interests are best protected not by rushed action, which would seek to bypass vital steps that the Security Council could and should take, but by multilateral efforts and a world order governed by rules. There have been reports in the media that we are seeking a UN moment in Syria, but as the Leader of the Opposition told the House earlier, these are not our words. The right response from the British Government is not to engineer a UN moment, but to adhere to UN processes and international law.

I freely acknowledge the limitations and past failures of the United Nations, but it remains the indispensable institution of international law and that is why my party continues to believe that it should be the focus of both diplomacy and action.

Let me turn to the substance of the amendment for which we will be voting this evening. We believe that the House deserves and the country expects more clarity than is set out in the wording of the Government motion. Specifically, our amendment sets out a road map for decision, with clear steps that would need to be taken and conditions that would need to be met before the use of force could be authorised.

Let me address directly a point made by the right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell), a man for whom I have great respect. I want to talk about the differences between the Opposition amendment and the Government motion, and why they matter. The test set by our amendment for the Syrian regime's responsibility for the use of chemical weapons is "compelling evidence". That test is absent from the wording of the Government motion. I do not believe, not least because of past mistakes, that satisfying ourselves that evidence of Assad's responsibility is compelling is too high a hurdle to expect—indeed, I suggest that the public would expect nothing less ahead of any UK military action in Syria. That threshold should be explicitly stated in the motion.

Secondly, our amendment explicitly states that the United Nations Security Council would need to have considered and voted on the evidence presented by the UN weapons inspectors. No such commitment to a Security Council vote is contained in the Government's motion. Indeed, the Prime Minister's remarks earlier today did not once make explicit a reference to a vote of the UN Security Council on a resolution in relation to Syria. That matters because surely to exhaust, and be seen to exhaust, the processes of the United Nations would be crucial to seeking the broadest possible support for any subsequent military action on an alternative

legal base. Such a vote—and, let us freely acknowledge, quite probably a veto—in the Security Council of the United Nations would also make clear where each member of the Security Council stood.

Thirdly, our amendment states that in making a decision to commit force, regard must be had to the potential consequences in the region. The region is experiencing unprecedented turmoil. Syria as a nation state is dissolving before us. That disintegration has already exacerbated sectarian tensions across the region, destabilised neighbours and caused horrific refugee and humanitarian crises. It is surely reasonable for the impact of any military action to be explicitly considered in that context, and that consideration should appear on the face of the motion.

Fourthly, our amendment specifies that any decision to authorise force would be time limited. Given the deep anxiety in the House and across the nation about the risk of deepening and ever longer engagement in Syria, that would mean that the House would not give the Government authority for an open-ended military commitment. These are material issues. I urge Members on both sides of the House to reflect on those differences and support our amendment.

Surely Members can also understand that the need for such a clear and considered road map to decision is made all the more crucial given that in recent days there have been real and growing concerns in the country that we are being pushed too quickly towards military action on a timetable set elsewhere, without due process being followed and the necessary steps being taken. Indeed, the case for action is not helped by the suggestion from some of our allies that the objective has more to do with punishment than with protection. Let me be very clear with this House: punitive action—action motivated by a desire to punish—would have no basis in international law. To be legal, the objective of any such mission would need to be to protect the people of Syria, not to punish the rulers of Syria.

Guy Opperman: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Alexander: I am keen to make a little progress.

Let us be candid as to why we are gathered here this evening—*[Interruption.]* I will take interventions, but let me develop the point. Once the Government accepted our case, late yesterday, that there needed to be a further vote of the House of Commons when the evidence is available to us, today's debate truly became a parliamentary recall in search of a public rationale. This morning, it was then reported on the BBC that the House was being asked by the Government motion to agree tonight to the principle of British military action in Syria, without a vote having taken place at the UN Security Council or that body, or indeed this House, having yet had sight of the UN weapons inspectors' report. Although it would be wrong to rule out the use of force before the evidence is before us, it would also be wrong to rule force in before the evidence is before us. That is why Labour has tabled an amendment, why we will be voting for our amendment, and why we will be urging Members from all parts of this House to support it.

9.41 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr Nick Clegg): What we have seen today is this House at its very best. I have sat here throughout almost all the speeches and interventions, all of which, without exception, have been sincere, thoughtful and sombre. They have reflected the sombre and anxious mood in the country. I congratulate all Members on the tone in which very respectful differences have been expressed on a very difficult decision and dilemma we are grappling with today. I also wish to thank the Leader of the Opposition, and I actually agree with the vast bulk of what he says. Yes, there are differences between the motion and the amendment—I still think that the Government's motion is more exacting in some important respects than the Opposition's amendment—but we all agree on the fundamental issue, which is that something very grave happened last Wednesday, and that it was an affront to humanitarian law and to our values. We must take it seriously, and we must consider and weigh very carefully the responses necessary to try to inhibit those kinds of abuses of human rights and of the values we all share in the future.

Many questions have been raised in the debate and many comments were made, and I cannot possibly cover them all in the time available to me. However, I would like to group my comments to address three issues. The first is the various doubts that have been expressed, entirely understandably, about the risks of escalation. The second is the evidence necessary in order for individual Members in this House to take a view on this issue. The final one is the legality and legitimacy of the decisions we face.

Comments about escalation came from different directions. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox), who said that much as one can legitimately worry about escalation of any action being taken, one should equally, if not more so, worry about escalation flowing from inaction. Inaction is not a choice without consequences; it is a conscious choice that says to those who wish to deploy chemical weapons against their own people that they are more likely, and will operate in a more permissive environment, to do so on a larger scale in future. Others—

Mr MacNeil *rose*—

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me just make some progress. Others, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot), worried about escalation if action was taken. Let me be clear: our motion is very tightly defined. The sole aim—the sole aim—is to relieve humanitarian suffering by deterring and disrupting the further use of chemical weapons—nothing more, nothing less. It is not about invasion, regime change, entering into the Syrian conflict, arming the rebels or boots on the ground.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Deputy Prime Minister: If I may, I will make a little progress.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

President Obama's intentions are highly limited and so are ours.

The second area about which a lot of concern was expressed—very reasonably and understandably—was the evidence necessary to take a view about exactly what happened and who was responsible. It is right that there should be scepticism, particularly after 2003 and the events surrounding Iraq, and there is widespread scepticism in the country, but let us not let scepticism topple into outright suspicion of what are key persuasive facts. It is not for nothing that the Joint Intelligence Committee concluded

“that there are no plausible alternative scenarios to regime responsibility”

and that it was

“not possible for the opposition to have carried out a chemical weapons attack on this scale”.

There are eye-witness accounts, videos and social media.

We know that the regime has used chemical weapons on a smaller scale on at least 14 occasions prior to what happened last Wednesday, and there is no evidence that the opposition has these chemical weapons or controls stocks of chemical weapons. Neither does it have the artillery or air power to deliver them. That might not be sufficient for everybody, but I would simply suggest that legitimate scepticism should not sweep those very compelling facts under the carpet.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is being reported that No. 10 Downing street is briefing the media that the position of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is giving succour to the Assad regime. Will the Deputy Prime Minister take this opportunity to distance himself from and condemn that briefing?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I wholeheartedly agree with—I know the Prime Minister does, too, as we all do—recognise, understand and in many ways share people's anxieties in wrestling with this terrifically difficult dilemma. That is the spirit in which this debate has been conducted for close to eight hours and that is the spirit in which I believe we should treat the matter.

Another cluster of questions concerned the legality and legitimacy of any measures that might be taken. The hon. Members for Croydon South (Richard Ottaway), for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and for Hexham (Guy Opperman) and many others spoke on this issue. The Attorney-General has confirmed that the use of chemical weapons in Syria constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity. The Government's legal position, there for everyone to see, is also clear that the principle of humanitarian intervention provides a sound legal basis for the deployment of UK forces and military assets in an operation to deter and disrupt the use of chemical weapons, if the House, in a separate vote and a separate debate, were ever to decide to deploy. Let me be very clear on that point, because many right hon. and hon. Members expressed some anxiety about it: the motion in no way sends out an amber light message or is permissive of military action. Military action would only ever be undertaken by our country or be permitted or mandated by the House on the back of a separate

debate and separate vote. In other words, right hon. and hon. Members can support the motion today and be entirely free to refuse or withhold their consent to military action, if that was put to the House.

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): I seek clarification regarding the reference in the penultimate paragraph of the motion to “direct British involvement”. Will the Deputy Prime Minister describe what that means? If the Americans chose to attack this weekend and used, say, Akrotiri, the base in Cyprus, would that be an indirect involvement by this country? I ask because, if the Syrians then targeted it with a Scud missile in the proceeding days, we might be drawn into the conflict.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Direct action would mean the UK taking part in any strikes designed in an American-led military operation. I cannot be clear enough on this point; that would only ever take place if there were a separate debate and vote in this House.

Mrs Gillan: The Deputy Prime Minister knows of the concerns that there is an incongruity in the way in which the motion has been drafted. Will he once again repeat for the sake of the House and for Members who would like to support the Government tonight that the vote will not be used as a fig leaf to cover any sort of UK military intervention? We need that assurance—that there will be another vote—and we need it from the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister in order to support the Government tonight.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I can be unequivocal and unambiguous; yes. The motion is very clear on this point. There will be no decision taken on any military participation on the part of the UK without a separate debate and a separate vote. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a rather disorderly atmosphere now in the House. I want to hear the Deputy Prime Minister and I feel reasonably confident that he wants to hear himself.

The Deputy Prime Minister: On the issue of legitimacy, as the motion stipulates, we are of course committed to a proper UN process in which we hear at the earliest possible opportunity from the weapons inspectors and, of course, where the matter is brought to the Security Council.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that any indirect action will not be undertaken by the Government also unless there is a further mandate from this House?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The only decision that we envisage needing to be taken is about direct military action in an American-led operation. [Interruption.] Let me be clear. In other words, there is no scenario in which we envisage indirect action. That is something we will consider and we will always listen to the House.

Those queries, legitimate though they are, suggest that there is some suspicion about the intentions of the motion. Our intentions are as they are written in the motion. We believe that what happened last week was a war crime. We believe that it was an aberration and

something that flouted the principles, values and laws that we have upheld as a nation for close to 100 years. What we have done is to publish the legal advice and the independent assessment from the Joint Intelligence Committee. Unlike 10 years ago, we have recalled Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity, provided a vote and been clear that we will listen to the will of Parliament.

Hugh Bayley: Will the Deputy Prime Minister give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would like to make some progress.

Before I conclude, I think that it is important that we remind ourselves of the events that brought us here tonight; the murder of Syrian civilians, including innocent children, with chemical weapons outlawed by the world nearly a century ago. Those haunting images of human suffering will stay with all of us who saw them for a very long time. There is a danger in this debate that we lose sight of the historical gravity of those events. Chemical weapons are uniquely indiscriminate and heinous and we must not forget that. It is right that we proceed with care; openly, consensually and multilaterally. It is right that we restrict our commitment in principle to action that is limited, proportionate and in keeping with international law. It is right that we ask ourselves all the detailed questions that have been voiced here today.

But there is another question facing us tonight, which is what kind of nation are we? Are we open or closed? Are we engaged in shaping the world around us, or shunning the difficult dilemmas we all face?

Mr Blunt: The difficulty with this part of the Deputy Prime Minister's argument is that we have seen in the last month an atrocity carried out by the Egyptian Government against their own people with something like five to 10 times the number of people killed than in the incident in Syria. My right hon. Friend has a problem if he is to advance the argument in this way, as was done by the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As we have been explicit throughout and as the Prime Minister said at the outset earlier this afternoon, this is solely about the deterrence and discouragement of the further use of chemical weapons. Chemical weapons have been banned worldwide, and we as a nation have played an instrumental role in installing that ban since the 1920s, because of the atrocities of the first world war. That is what we are trying to uphold on humanitarian grounds.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I am grateful to the Deputy Prime Minister, but he still has not answered the questions that have been put to him. Will he rule out the use of British bases for any action unless there has been a vote authorising it in the House?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We have not been presented with any scenario—[*Interruption.*] With respect, the coalition Government have acted this week with complete

openness about what we think is facing us, what evidence we have available to us and what the gravity of the offence was. We are not in any way trying to hide anything from the House. That is precisely one of the lessons that we have learned from 10 years ago. That is precisely one of the lessons that we have learned from Iraq.

Several hon. Members rose—

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would now like to make progress and conclude.

This is not Iraq. Yes, we must learn the lessons of Iraq, but we must not assume that the choices that we face to today are identical choices to those that we faced in 2003. This is not an attempt to barge our way into someone else's war. We are not seeking to topple a dictator or to flex our muscles. We are not talking about putting British boots on the ground. As I said earlier, the motion is not an amber light for military action. That could only even happen by way of a separate debate and vote in the House.

Voting for the Government motion tonight will send a clear message that if and when a brutal regime kills its people with chemical weapons prohibited under international law, this Parliament believes that it cannot expect to do so with impunity. Iraq casts a long shadow, but it would be a double tragedy if the memory of that war now caused us to retreat from the laws and conventions that govern our world, many of which the United Kingdom helped to author. Because of our commitment to peace and stability around the world, we must now reaffirm our commitment to upholding those laws.

Mr Adam Holloway (Gravesend) (Con): Am I alone in feeling a sense of unreality that we in here seem to be talking about intervening in a civil war in Syria, when the people out there are not?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I said earlier, what we are talking about is simply seeking to find the best way to deter the further use, proliferation and more widespread use of these heinous and illegal chemical weapons. What has happened is without precedent. Assad has now used chemical weapons more frequently against his own people than any other state in living memory.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow Central) (Lab) rose—

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would like now to conclude.

The Government agree that the UN weapons inspectors should complete their work and brief the Security Council and that Parliament should vote again before any direct British military action. We have set a high bar for the evidence, and we are pursuing a UN process. The choice between our motion and the Opposition's amendment is not one of real substance. The choice is whether or not the House now speaks with a united voice, to show the world that the UK remains absolutely committed to the principles of international law. That is what the coalition Government are seeking, and it is in that consensual spirit that I hope that we can now proceed.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

Question put, That the manuscript amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 332.

Division No. 69]

[9.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Doughty, Stephen
Abrahams, Debbie	Dowd, Jim
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob	Doyle, Gemma
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas	Dromey, Jack
Alexander, Heidi	Dugher, Michael
Ali, Rushanara	Eagle, Ms Angela
Allen, Mr Graham	Eagle, Maria
Anderson, Mr David	Edwards, Jonathan
Ashworth, Jonathan	Efford, Clive
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Elliott, Julie
Bain, Mr William	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Balls, rh Ed	Engel, Natascha
Banks, Gordon	Esterson, Bill
Barron, rh Mr Kevin	Evans, Chris
Bayley, Hugh	Farrelly, Paul
Beckett, rh Margaret	Field, rh Mr Frank
Begg, Dame Anne	Fello, Robert
Benn, rh Hilary	Flint, rh Caroline
Benton, Mr Joe	Flynn, Paul
Berger, Luciana	Francis, Dr Hywel
Betts, Mr Clive	Gapes, Mike
Blenkinsop, Tom	Gardiner, Barry
Blunkett, rh Mr David	Gilmore, Sheila
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Glass, Pat
Brennan, Kevin	Glindon, Mrs Mary
Brown, Lyn	Goggins, rh Paul
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Goodman, Helen
Brown, Mr Russell	Greatrex, Tom
Bryant, Chris	Green, Kate
Buck, Ms Karen	Griffith, Nia
Burnham, rh Andy	Gwynne, Andrew
Byrne, rh Mr Liam	Hamilton, Mr David
Campbell, Mr Alan	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Harris, Mr Tom
Caton, Martin	Havard, Mr Dai
Chapman, Jenny	Healey, rh John
Clark, Katy	Hendrick, Mark
Clarke, rh Mr Tom	Hodge, rh Margaret
Clwyd, rh Ann	Hoey, Kate
Coaker, Vernon	Hood, Mr Jim
Coffey, Ann	Hosie, Stewart
Cooper, rh Yvette	Howarth, rh Mr George
Creagh, Mary	Hunt, Tristram
Creasy, Stella	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Cruddas, Jon	Jackson, Glenda
Cunningham, Alex	Jamieson, Cathy
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Jarvis, Dan
Cunningham, Sir Tony	Johnson, rh Alan
Curran, Margaret	Jones, Graham
Danczuk, Simon	Jones, Helen
Darling, rh Mr Alistair	Jones, Mr Kevan
David, Wayne	Jones, Susan Elan
Davies, Geraint	Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
De Piero, Gloria	Joyce, Eric
Denham, rh Mr John	Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Dobbin, Jim	Kendall, Liz
Dobson, rh Frank	Khan, rh Sadiq
Docherty, Thomas	Lammy, rh Mr David
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Lazarowicz, Mark
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.	Leslie, Chris
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Doran, Mr Frank	Lewis, Mr Ivan

Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
Lucas, Ian
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McClymont, Gregg
McDonald, Andy
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Sir Alan
Miliband, rh Edward
Miller, Andrew
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Robertson, Angus

Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Dame Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Sawford, Andy
Seabeck, Alison
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mr Tom
Watts, Mr Dave
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodcock, John
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Nic Dakin and
Julie Hilling**

NOES

Adams, Nigel	Beresford, Sir Paul
Afriyie, Adam	Berry, Jake
Aldous, Peter	Bingham, Andrew
Alexander, rh Danny	Binley, Mr Brian
Amess, Mr David	Birtwistle, Gordon
Andrew, Stuart	Blackman, Bob
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James	Blackwood, Nicola
Bacon, Mr Richard	Blunt, Mr Crispin
Baker, Norman	Boles, Nick
Baker, Steve	Bone, Mr Peter
Baldry, Sir Tony	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Baldwin, Harriett	Bradley, Karen
Barclay, Stephen	Brake, rh Tom
Barker, rh Gregory	Bray, Angie
Baron, Mr John	Brazier, Mr Julian
Barwell, Gavin	Bridgen, Andrew
Bebb, Guto	Brine, Steve
Beith, rh Sir Alan	Brokenshire, James
Benyon, Richard	Brooke, Annette

Browne, Mr Jeremy	Gilbert, Stephen	Lefroy, Jeremy	Reevell, Simon
Bruce, Fiona	Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl	Leigh, Sir Edward	Reid, Mr Alan
Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm	Glen, John	Letwin, rh Mr Oliver	Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert	Goldsmith, Zac	Lewis, Brandon	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Burley, Mr Aidan	Goodwill, Mr Robert	Lidington, rh Mr David	Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
Burns, Conor	Gove, rh Michael	Lilley, rh Mr Peter	Robertson, rh Hugh
Burns, rh Mr Simon	Graham, Richard	Lloyd, Stephen	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Burrowes, Mr David	Grant, Mrs Helen	Long, Naomi	Rogerson, Dan
Burstow, rh Paul	Gray, Mr James	Lord, Jonathan	Rosindell, Andrew
Burt, Alistair	Grayling, rh Chris	Loughton, Tim	Rudd, Amber
Burt, Lorely	Green, rh Damian	Luff, Peter	Russell, Sir Bob
Byles, Dan	Greening, rh Justine	Lumley, Karen	Rutley, David
Cable, rh Vince	Grieve, rh Mr Dominic	Macleod, Mary	Sandys, Laura
Cairns, Alun	Griffiths, Andrew	Maude, rh Mr Francis	Scott, Mr Lee
Cameron, rh Mr David	Gummer, Ben	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Selous, Andrew
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies	Gyimah, Mr Sam	Maynard, Paul	Shapps, rh Grant
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Hague, rh Mr William	McCartney, Jason	Sharma, Alok
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Halfon, Robert	McCartney, Karl	Shelbrooke, Alec
Carmichael, Neil	Hames, Duncan	McDonnell, Dr Alasdair	Simmonds, Mark
Carswell, Mr Douglas	Hammond, rh Mr Philip	McIntosh, Miss Anne	Simpson, Mr Keith
Chishti, Rehman	Hammond, Stephen	McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick	Skidmore, Chris
Chope, Mr Christopher	Hancock, Matthew	McPartland, Stephen	Smith, Miss Chloe
Clappison, Mr James	Hancock, Mr Mike	McVey, Esther	Smith, Henry
Clark, rh Greg	Hands, Greg	Menzies, Mark	Smith, Julian
Clegg, rh Mr Nick	Harper, Mr Mark	Metcalfe, Stephen	Smith, Sir Robert
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey	Harrington, Richard	Miller, rh Maria	Soames, rh Nicholas
Coffey, Dr Thérèse	Harris, Rebecca	Mills, Nigel	Soubry, Anna
Collins, Damian	Hart, Simon	Milton, Anne	Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Colvile, Oliver	Hayes, rh Mr John	Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew	Spencer, Mr Mark
Crockart, Mike	Heald, Oliver	Moore, rh Michael	Stanley, rh Sir John
Crouch, Tracey	Heath, Mr David	Mordaunt, Penny	Stephenson, Andrew
Davey, rh Mr Edward	Heaton-Harris, Chris	Morgan, Nicky	Stevenson, John
Davies, David T. C.	Hemming, John	Morris, Anne Marie	Stewart, Bob
(Monmouth)	Henderson, Gordon	Morris, David	Stewart, Iain
Davies, Glyn	Hendry, Charles	Morris, Grahame M.	Streeter, Mr Gary
Davies, Philip	Hepburn, Mr Stephen	(Easington)	Stride, Mel
de Bois, Nick	Herbert, rh Nick	Morris, James	Stringer, Graham
Dinenage, Caroline	Hermon, Lady	Mosley, Stephen	Stuart, Mr Graham
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hinds, Damian	Mowat, David	Stunell, rh Sir Andrew
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen	Hoban, Mr Mark	Mulholland, Greg	Sturdy, Julian
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hollingbery, George	Mundell, rh David	Swales, Ian
Drax, Richard	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Murray, Sheryll	Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Duddridge, James	Holloway, Mr Adam	Murrison, Dr Andrew	Swinson, Jo
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain	Hopkins, Kris	Neill, Robert	Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Dunne, Mr Philip	Horwood, Martin	Newmark, Mr Brooks	Syms, Mr Robert
Durkan, Mark	Howarth, Sir Gerald	Newton, Sarah	Teather, Sarah
Ellis, Michael	Howell, John	Nokes, Caroline	Thornton, Mike
Ellison, Jane	Hughes, rh Simon	Nuttall, Mr David	Thurso, John
Ellwood, Mr Tobias	Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy	O'Brien, rh Mr Stephen	Timpson, Mr Edward
Elphicke, Charlie	Hurd, Mr Nick	Offord, Dr Matthew	Tomlinson, Justin
Eustice, George	Jackson, Mr Stewart	Ollerenshaw, Eric	Truss, Elizabeth
Evans, Graham	James, Margot	Opperman, Guy	Turner, Mr Andrew
Evans, Jonathan	James, Mrs Siân C.	Osborne, rh Mr George	Uppal, Paul
Evennett, Mr David	Javid, Sajid	Ottaway, Richard	Vaizey, Mr Edward
Fabricant, Michael	Jenkin, Mr Bernard	Parish, Neil	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Fallon, rh Michael	Johnson, Gareth	Paterson, rh Mr Owen	Vickers, Martin
Farron, Tim	Johnson, Joseph	Pawsey, Mark	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Featherstone, Lynne	Jones, Andrew	Penning, Mike	Walker, Mr Charles
Field, Mark	Jones, rh Mr David	Penrose, John	Walker, Mr Robin
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Jones, Mr Marcus	Percy, Andrew	Wallace, Mr Ben
Foster, rh Mr Don	Kawczynski, Daniel	Perry, Claire	Walter, Mr Robert
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Kirby, Simon	Phillips, Stephen	Ward, Mr David
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Knight, rh Mr Greg	Pickles, rh Mr Eric	Watkinson, Dame Angela
Freeman, George	Kwarteng, Kwasi	Pincher, Christopher	Weatherley, Mike
Freer, Mike	Laing, Mrs Eleanor	Poulter, Dr Daniel	Wharton, James
Fullbrook, Lorraine	Lamb, Norman	Prisk, Mr Mark	Wheeler, Heather
Fuller, Richard	Lansley, rh Mr Andrew	Pritchard, Mark	White, Chris
Gale, Sir Roger	Laws, rh Mr David	Raab, Mr Dominic	Whittaker, Craig
Garnier, Sir Edward	Leadsom, Andrea	Randall, rh Mr John	Whittingdale, Mr John
Garnier, Mark	Lee, Jessica	Reckless, Mark	Willets, rh Mr David
George, Andrew	Lee, Dr Phillip	Redwood, rh Mr John	Williams, Mr Mark
Gibb, Mr Nick	Leech, Mr John	Rees-Mogg, Jacob	Williams, Roger

Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Yeo, Mr Tim

Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mark Lancaster and
Stephen Crabb

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 285.

Division No. 70]

[10.17 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Aldous, Peter
Alexander, rh Danny
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Sir Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, rh Gregory
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Binley, Mr Brian
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brake, rh Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, James
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Mr Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burstow, rh Paul
Burt, Alistair
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Chishti, Rehman
Clappison, Mr James
Clark, rh Greg
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colvile, Oliver
Davey, rh Mr Edward
Davies, Glyn
Dinenage, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evennett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mark
Foster, rh Mr Don
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gilbert, Stephen
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halfon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Oliver

Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Hendry, Charles
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, rh Mr Andrew
Laws, rh Mr David
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Jessica
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McVey, Esther
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Maria
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline

Nuttall, Mr David
O'Brien, rh Mr Stephen
Offord, Dr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Opperman, Guy
Osborne, rh Mr George
Ottaway, Richard
Parish, Neil
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Raab, Mr Dominic
Randall, rh Mr John
Reckless, Mark
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
Robertson, rh Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rudd, Amber
Russell, Sir Bob
Rutley, David
Sandys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soames, rh Nicholas
Soubray, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stanley, rh Sir John
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thornton, Mike
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Truss, Elizabeth
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Walter, Mr Robert

Watkinson, Dame Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Willets, rh Mr David
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin

Wilson, Mr Rob
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mark Lancaster and
Stephen Crabb

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Amess, Mr David
Anderson, Mr David
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Baker, Steve
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Baron, Mr John
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Dame Anne
Benn, rh Hilary
Benton, Mr Joe
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Bingham, Andrew
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bruce, Fiona
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnham, rh Andy
Burstow, rh Paul
Byrne, rh Mr Liam
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Sir Tony
Curran, Margaret

Danczuk, Simon
Darling, rh Mr Alistair
David, Wayne
Davies, David T. C.
(*Monmouth*)
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
de Bois, Nick
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Docherty, Thomas
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Drax, Richard
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fleelo, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Fabian
Hancock, Mr Mike
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Mr Tom
Havard, Mr Dai
Healey, rh John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huppert, Dr Julian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Alan
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Jowell, rh Dame Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leslie, Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lewis, Dr Julian
Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
Long, Naomi
Loughton, Tim
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McCartney, Jason
McClymont, Gregg
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
McPartland, Stephen
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward

Miller, Andrew
Mills, Nigel
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (*Livingston*)
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, Grahame M.
(*Easington*)
Mudie, Mr George
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O'Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osborne, Sandra
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reed, Mr Steve
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Robertson, John
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rogerson, Dan
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Mr Frank
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Dame Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Sawford, Andy
Seabeck, Alison
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Shepherd, Sir Richard
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, rh Sir Andrew
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Swales, Ian
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, rh Sir Peter
Teather, Sarah
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Thornberry, Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Mr Andrew
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, rh Keith

Vaz, Valerie
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Charles
Walley, Joan
Ward, Mr David
Watson, Mr Tom
Watts, Mr Dave
Weir, Mr Mike
White, Chris
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Roger

Williamson, Chris
Wilson, Phil
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Noes:

**Nic Dakin and
Julie Hilling**

Question accordingly negated.

[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr MacNeil, you are like an erupting volcano. Calm yourself, man!

10.31 pm

Edward Miliband: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. There having been no motion passed by this House tonight, will the Prime Minister confirm to the House that, given the will of the House that has been expressed tonight, he will not use the royal prerogative to order the UK to be part of military action before there has been another vote in the House of Commons?

Mr Speaker: That is of course not a matter for the Chair, but the Prime Minister has heard the right hon. Gentleman's point of order, and he is welcome to respond.

The Prime Minister: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I can give that assurance. Let me say that the House has not voted for either motion tonight. I strongly believe in the need for a tough response to the use of chemical weapons, but I also believe in respecting the will of this House of Commons. It is very clear tonight that, while the House has not passed a motion,

the British Parliament, reflecting the views of the British people, does not want to see British military action. I get that, and the Government will act accordingly.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for that response.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I do not wish to detain the House for long, but I wish to raise a point of order on a separate matter from the one we have discussed this afternoon. While the eyes of the world have understandably been focused on the atrocities in Syria, I am saddened to say that the Government of Colombia have taken the opportunity to escalate the oppression, and even murder, of their own citizens. Huber Ballesteros, a prominent leader, has been imprisoned on trumped-up charges, and Juan Camilo Acosta has been shot dead for taking part in peaceful strike action. Have you, Mr Speaker, had any indication that Foreign Office Ministers intend to make a statement about the continued appalling murderous and oppressive situation in Colombia?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I have received no indication of any intention by a Minister to make a statement on the subject. However, the House is scheduled to return on Monday and, knowing what an assiduous and indefatigable Member the hon. Gentleman is, I feel sure that he will use all the opportunities open to him to highlight his concerns and those of a great many others on this extremely concerning and problematic issue.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Resolved,

That this House, at its rising this day, do adjourn until Monday 2 September.—(*Greg Hands.*)

10.34 pm

House adjourned.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 29 August 2013

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Animal Experiments

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the rise in the use of cats and dogs for experimental purposes; and if he will make a statement. [165624]

James Brokenshire: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

The number of animals likely to be used in any given year is dependent on many factors, including investment in research and development, strategic decisions by funding bodies, global economic trends and scientific innovation.

Cats, dogs, non-human primates and horses are given special protection under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and may only be used if no other species is suitable or it is not practicable to obtain animals of any other species that are suitable for the purposes of the relevant programme of work. The licensing system under the 1986 Act is demand-led and we have no control over the number of project licence applications we receive and the species required.

The 2012 statistics, published on 16 July 2013, show that dogs, cats and non-human primates combined accounted for 0.2% of all procedures. The total scientific procedures using dogs for 2011 were 4,552 and 4,843 for 2012, representing an increase of 6%. The totals for cats in 2011 were 235 and in 2012 they were 247, representing an increase of 5%. These percentage increases represent relatively small changes in the number of procedures for a range of differing purposes.

Environment Protection: British Overseas Territories

Dr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times Ministers of his Department have met their counterparts in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development to discuss environmental stewardship in the Overseas Territories in 2013. [166432]

Richard Benyon: The last formal meeting in which Ministers discussed environmental stewardship in the Overseas Territories was at the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) in December 2012. The JMC is an annual event which brings together Territory leaders and UK Government Ministers to discuss key issues and identify priority actions for the Overseas Territories. The last JMC meeting included an important session on 'Cherishing the Environment and Creating Green Growth'. Ministers also regularly meet at informal events, including with representatives of Overseas Territories.

In addition to ministerial-level contact, DEFRA officials are in regular contact with colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development about biodiversity issues in the Overseas Territories. This ensures that the three Departments work together in a coherent way to deliver their respective responsibilities for the Overseas Territories.

Flood Control

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer of 10 July 2013, *Official Report*, columns 271-2W, on flood control, if he will list each recorded breach of flood defences in each of the last 30 years. [166077]

Richard Benyon: The Environment Agency does not hold any central records of flood defence breaches prior to 2007. It is improving the recording mechanism for breaches and other failures that will make information more readily available in the future. Incidents are listed here for 2007 and 2012; there were no such incidents between 2008 and 2011.

In the 2007 floods there were four sites where flood defence failure led to the earlier onset of flooding. The same level of flooding would have occurred even if the assets had not failed. These breaches were at:

Worksop, Nottinghamshire
Chesterfield, Derbyshire
Sheffield, South Yorkshire
Auckley, South Yorkshire.

In the 2012 floods the breaches were at the following sites. No properties were flooded as a result of these breaches.

Winterton, North Lincolnshire
N Kelsey, Lincolnshire
Cheshire Lines, Cheshire
Langleys Broad Ditch, Lancashire
New Reed Brook, Lancashire
Upper Swale, Yorkshire
Cheddar, Somerset
Poole, Dorset
Frodingham, Lincolnshire.

Forests

Mrs McGuire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many hectares of woodland have been brought into active management since 2002; and what proportion of such woodland was commercial coniferous forestry. [165851]

Mr Heath [*holding answer 18 July 2013*]: The current methodology used by the Forestry Commission to assess the area of woodland in England in active management can only provide figures back to March 2008. This means it is unable to compare directly today's actively managed area with that in 2002. Between March 2008 and March 2013 there was a net increase in actively managed woodland of 58,178 hectares.

Commercial coniferous forestry is not a recognised designation used by the Forestry Commission in its performance indicators for England or the National Forest Inventory. However, just over 22% of this net

total increase in actively managed woodland was conifer woodland. It is reasonable to assume that conifer woodland in active management is used for commercial purposes.

Mrs McGuire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of new forest cover up to 2060 will be commercial coniferous stands. [165852]

Mr Heath [*holding answer 18 July 2013*]: In January 2013 DEFRA's Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement included a commitment to "Work with the sector to find new ways of encouraging landowners to plant more trees where it best suits them and their local conditions". It is therefore primarily up to the landowner to define the nature of woodland planted and the management objective. However, we would expect a significant proportion of conifer woodland to be included in new planting in England over the next few decades.

Livestock: Transport

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many checks the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency have undertaken in (a) 2012 and (b) 2013 to date to ensure that drivers of vehicles transporting live animals to continental Europe comply with Article 17(2) of Regulation 1/2005 in holding a certificate of competence; and how many cases of non-compliance have been found in each such year. [165929]

Mr Heath: With regards to the number of checks undertaken specifically by Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) in relation to the holding of certificates of competence under Article 17(2) of Council Regulation EC 1/2005, the records held on the enforcement database do not differentiate between different forms of documentary check. This database is shared between AHVLA and local authorities and so the data could not be easily interrogated to obtain a satisfactory breakdown. However, AHVLA records do show that in 2012 AHVLA served six statutory notices as a result of a driver not being in possession of a certificate of competence at the time of inspection, and in 2013 to date one notice has been served as a result of a driver not being in possession of a certificate of competence.

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost of the inspections undertaken by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency on each lorry that transports live animals to continental Europe from Dover is; and for what reasons this cost is not passed on to the transporters under the cost sharing initiative. [165930]

Mr Heath: The Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) does not hold records of the cost of inspections relating to animal welfare legislation on an individual vehicle basis. Inspections on these same consignments, for the purpose of animal health certification, undertaken by private veterinarians appointed by AHVLA, are paid for directly by the owners of the animals.

As regards to the introduction of any further charges, DEFRA officials are still considering the case for the introduction of a limited range of charges in relation to welfare in transport controls. The outcome is likely to

be determined by possible changes to the scope of Council Regulation (EC) 882/2004 on official controls performed to ensure the verification of compliance with feed and food law, animal health and animal welfare rules. This legislation is currently subject to renegotiation as part of a package of measures to rationalise EU Animal Health and Welfare legislation. This includes those provisions directly relating to charging for official controls, such as inspections. It is too early to predict what changes are likely to be adopted at the EU level upon conclusion of negotiations, but the Government will wish to ensure that where charging is justified, it is proportionate, non-discriminatory in nature and applied as transparently as possible.

Overseas Aid

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which projects administered by his Department were UK Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) attributable; what the total value of his Department's contribution to UK ODA was in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012; and what the value of that contribution will be in 2013. [162210]

Richard Benyon [*holding answer 1 July 2013*]: Core DEFRA administers two programmes—(part of) the UK's International Climate Fund, and the Darwin Initiative—that contribute to the total of UK Official Development Assistance (ODA) expenditure:

	2010	2011	2012	£ million 2013 (forecast)
ICF	0	10	20	30
Darwin	3.2	2.4	2.4	4.3

Staff

Mike Freer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much his Department spent on (a) recruitment agency fees, (b) outplacement agency fees for displaced or redundant staff and (c) staff training in each of the last 12 months. [162614]

Richard Benyon: In the period 1 June 2012 to 31 May 2013 (the last 12 months for which data are available), core DEFRA spent:

(a) £71,315 on recruitment agency fees for recruitment to civil service and Public Appointments posts. The breakdown by month is as follows:

Month ¹	Spend (£)
2012	
June	31,278
July	3,768
August	710
September	3,430
October	0
November	2,664
December	4,200
2013	
January	24,459

Month ¹	Spend (£)
February	807
March	0
April	0
May	0

¹ Date shown relates to the date the invoice was paid.

(b) £12,600 on career transition services for staff at risk of redundancy. The breakdown by month is as follows:

Month ¹	Spend (£)
2012	
June	0
July	0
August	600
September	0
October	0
November	0
December	0
2013	
January	0
February	12,000
March	0
April	0
May	0

¹ Date shown relates to the date the invoice was paid.

(c) £1,246,266 on staff training²

² The figures given for staff training are for the total spend recorded against training account codes in the Department's financial management system for the whole year. This expenditure could be for a variety of reasons from actual training courses to booking course venues. We have given a total for the year as the monthly breakdown indicates a negative figure for April 2013 due to accounting policies.

Wales

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether his Department provides services to people resident in Wales or usually resident in Wales. [166105]

Richard Benyon: A number of DEFRA's network bodies provide services to people resident in Wales or usually resident in Wales.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Airwave Service

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 1 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 389W, on airwave service, whether the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme has made a decision as to the technology basis of the new solution. [166148]

James Brokenshire: The Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme will evaluate the technology options during tender evaluation, and the Full Business Case will recommend a preferred solution. The Full Business Case will not be approved before March 2015.

Arrest Warrants

Tom Blenkinsop: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment her Department has made of the potential scope of the extradition of nationals of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden from those countries if the UK opted-out of the European Arrest Warrant Framework. [160176]

Mr Harper [*holding answer 17 June 2013*]: The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), set out in her ministerial statement on 9 July 2013, *Official Report*, columns 177-93 that the Government will opt out of all of the pre-Lisbon police and criminal justice measures, and then negotiate with the Commission and other member states to opt back into those individual measures which it is in our national interest to rejoin, including the European Arrest Warrant (EAW). Parliament has voted on this position, and agreed to opt out of pre-Lisbon police and criminal justice measures.

In reaching its decision the Government considered how the EAW contributed to public safety and security, whether practical co-operation is underpinned by it, and whether there would be a detrimental impact on such co-operation if it were pursued by other means. We also considered the impact of each measure on our civil rights and traditional liberties. As part of this decision, the impact on the extradition of nationals of EU countries was considered. The European Convention on Extradition (1957) governed extradition relations between the UK and other EU member states prior to the adoption of the EAW. Under the ECE some member states did not extradite their own nationals to the UK and may not do so again in the future.

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the Statement of 9 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 177, on the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, if she will take steps to ensure that the police are required to inform a person of the existence of a European Arrest Warrant against them. [166011]

Mr Harper: There is no obligation to notify the person of the existence of a warrant ahead of their arrest. It is a matter of longstanding policy and practice that the United Kingdom will neither confirm nor deny that it has received, is to make or has made an extradition request, until the subject of the request has been arrested. This is because if a person wanted for extradition learnt of the request in advance of their arrest, they would be able to take action to evade justice.

Asylum

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers are still in the UK. [166208]

Mr Harper: The asylum work in progress (WIP) number is published on an annual basis, providing a breakdown of the status of these cases. This includes figures on the number of main applicants whose cases are subject to removal action (i.e. failed asylum seekers).

At the end of June 2012, a total of 23,497^{1,2} cases in the WIP were subject to removal action. A copy of the full publication can be found at:

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/aboutus/further-key-data/>

¹ The figure quoted has been derived from management information and is therefore provisional and subject to change. This information has not been quality assured under National Statistics protocols.

² While some cases in the "subject to removal action" category await imminent removal, for many there will be significant barriers to removals which we are still working to overcome. Such barriers include difficulties in obtaining documents from national governments; dealing with last minute legal challenges; and logistical and practical challenges in removing families in a humane and dignified fashion.

The asylum work in progress publication will be updated at the beginning of September 2013, providing figures on the WIP as at the end of June 2013.

Billing

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many creditors to her Department owed more than £10,000 remained unpaid for more than (a) 30 days, (b) 45 days, (c) 60 days, (d) 75 days and (e) more than 90 days in each of the last three years. [166376]

James Brokenshire: The details of how many of the Home Department's creditors remained unpaid for the quoted time periods can be found in the following table:

Financial year	Payments owing 30-44 days	Payments owing 45-59 days	Payments owing 60-74 days	Payments owing 75-90 days	Payments owing 90+ days
2010-11	230	90	47	42	213
2011-12	129	58	26	24	31
2012-13	201	74	33	19	37

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of her Department's total spending has been spent on the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre in each year since its inception; and what proportion of her Department's budget is forecast to be spent on CEOP in each of the next three years. [163315]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 4 July 2013]: Since 2006 the Government has provided funding for the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) of:

	£ million
2006-07	5.360
2007-08	5.657
2008-09	6.27
2009-10	6.353
2010-11	6.44
2011-12	6.38
2012-13	6.381

From April 2013 to October 2013 CEOP has a budget of £3.2 million. From October 2013 CEOP will form a

command within the National Crime Agency (NCA). The budget for the NCA will be announced in due course.

CEOP obtains additional funding from industry and charities.

Children: Detention Centres

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will investigate the child protection issues raised by the detention of children in adult immigration removal centres. [166073]

Mr Harper: It is Home Office policy not to detain under 18s in adult immigration removal centres other than in the specific event of their having been stopped at the border as part of a family group because enquiries are necessary as to whether the family can be safely admitted or, if not, pending a flight home. In these circumstances, families stay together in accommodation specially designed for families and separate from the other detainees. There are occasions when evidence emerges to indicate that a person who has been detained in other circumstances and as an adult is under 18. In those circumstances, the individual will be released from detention as soon as the local authority can make appropriate arrangements for them in the community. If the case meets the criteria for an age dispute case as set out in the following published criteria, the individual will be the subject of a formal local authority age assessment and will be treated as under 18 pending the outcome of the assessment.

<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/detention-services-orders/age-dispute.pdf?view=Binary>

Crime: EU Countries

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which other EU countries those accused of criminal activities (a) need to and (b) do not need to be physically present before being charged by that country's legal authorities. [164897]

Mr Harper [holding answer 12 July 2013]: The position varies across EU member states and, in some situations, depends upon the seriousness and complexity of the crime. According to the information received from member states, the following table sets out which of them requires the physical presence of the requested person in order for decisions to charge that person to be taken.

Overall, the reforms we are proposing will introduce much needed safeguards for persons subject to a European Arrest Warrant (EAW) in the UK. In addition to the provisions relating to decisions to charge and try, the Extradition Act 2003 will be amended to allow for the temporary transfer of the person to the issuing state. We also propose to make provision for the person to speak with the authorities in that state while

he or she remains in the UK (e.g. by video link). We will work to ensure the European Investigation Order is agreed as quickly as possible in order that this may be used as an alternative to the EAW in appropriate circumstances.

<i>Member state</i>	<i>Presence required for the decision to charge to be made</i>	<i>Presence required for the decision to try to be made</i>
Austria	No	Dependent on circumstances
Belgium	No	No
Bulgaria	No	No
Croatia	No	No
Cyprus	Yes	Yes
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes
Denmark	No	No
Estonia	Yes	Yes
Finland	No	Dependent on circumstances
France	No	No
Germany	No	Yes
Greece	Information not available	Information not available
Hungary	No	No
Ireland	No	No
Italy	No	No
Latvia	No	No
Lithuania	Information not available	Information not available
Luxembourg	Dependant on circumstances	Dependent on circumstances
Malta	No	No
Netherlands	No	No
Poland	No	Yes (with exceptions)
Portugal	Yes	Yes
Romania	Dependent on circumstances	Dependent on circumstances
Slovakia	No	Dependent on circumstances
Slovenia	No	No
Spain	Yes	Yes
Sweden	Information not available	Information not available

Criminal Investigation

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many employees of the Border Force are currently under criminal investigation; [164525]

(2) how many employees of her Department are currently under criminal investigation. [164526]

Mr Harper: From the information sources available, there are currently nine employees of the Home Department under criminal investigation. None of these employees are from Border Force.

Domestic Visits

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times she has visited (a) Scotland, (b) Northern Ireland and (c) Wales since her appointment; and if she will make a statement. [165304]

James Brokenshire: Home Office Ministers have regular visits and meetings as part of the process of policy development and delivery. As was the case with previous

Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of such visits.

Driving Offences

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of the National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme in preventing reoffending; and how many drivers have opted for these courses rather than accept penalty points on their driving licence in each of the last three years; [166332]

(2) how many National Driver Offender Retraining Schemes are operating in the UK; and which police forces do not run any such scheme. [166333]

Damian Green: The National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme (NDORS) is a police controlled and operated scheme that currently comprises six courses that cover speeding, careless driving/riding and other driving behaviours or attitudes. It is a matter for individual chief officers of police whether to make one or more of these courses available. All police forces within the UK run at least one of these courses. The number of drivers that opted for these courses rather than accept penalty points is not known, but NDORS management advise that course attendance in 2010 was 467,601, in 2011, 793,689 and in 2012, 963,657.

The Department for Transport has been assisting the police in evaluating how educational and training courses adapt driver behaviour to prevent reoffending and is currently working with the police to develop a recidivism evaluation of each NDORS course.

Entry Clearances

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what revenue was raised from applications for visas to the UK from each individual country where the UK has visa application centres in each of the last three years; and what the total amount so raised was in each of those years; [164279]

(2) what revenue was raised from applications for visas to the UK from each of the 10 principal countries ranked by revenue generated in each of the last three years. [164308]

Mr Harper: This information is not published by country, but is published by geographical region, from 2011-12 onwards. Therefore, a table is provided detailing income by region for the financial years 2011-12 and 2012-13, and is ranked according to 2012-13 income:

	<i>Income by region—overseas visas</i>	
	<i>2012-13</i>	<i>2011-12</i>
	<i>Million</i>	
Pacific	87.1	78.5
Gulf	86.6	83.1
Euro-med	85.3	79.5
South Asia	78.6	85.2
Africa	73.0	69.9
Americas	34.2	32.3
	444.8	428.6

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have overstayed their visa in each of the last three years. [166209]

Mr Harper: The requested figures on the number of people who have overstayed their visa in each of the last three years are not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Entry Clearances: China

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent progress she has made on making it easier for tourists from China to visit the UK. [165757]

Mr Harper [holding answer 16 July 2013]: We continue to look for ways to enhance the visa service to further encourage Chinese tourism and investment to the UK. Since December 2012 we have:

- simplified the document requirements for business and tourists
- shortened application forms for certain tourists
- expanded access to our premium services
- produced new guidance in simplified Mandarin
- launched a “business network” of staff to support key businesses through the visa application process
- launched an improved website
- introduced Passport Pass Back, allowing visitors wanting to apply for another visa at the same time to retain their passports
- launched a VIP Mobile Biometric service for senior executives whereby we go to the applicant’s office to take their biometrics
- introduced Prime Time, extended opening hours in six of our applications centres, for those who need the convenience of an appointment outside of usual business hours.

Entry Clearances: Married People

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will amend regulations to take into account contracts guaranteeing future income of returning UK citizens in spousal visa applications where overseas income has been insufficient to meet the new income threshold. [165845]

Mr Harper [holding answer 17 July 2013]: The family Immigration Rules allow a British Citizen returning to the UK to rely on a confirmed job offer or signed contract of employment here in sponsoring their spouse’s visa application, where the sponsor can evidence that they have been earning overseas the level of income concerned. We have no current plans to change this requirement.

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment she has made of the likely effect of the new income threshold for spousal visas on UK citizens studying abroad who marry overseas’ citizens. [165846]

Mr Harper [holding answer 17 July 2013]: A British Citizen studying overseas who does not have the income or savings required to sponsor their spouse to come to the UK under the family Immigration Rules may return to work in the UK. Once they have been earning the required level of income for six months with the same employer, they may be able to sponsor their spouse to join them here.

Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

Eric Ollerenshaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate she has made of how many people remain in the UK on expired student visas. [162079]

Mr Harper: The requested figures on the number of people who remain in the UK on expired student visas is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Equality

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been spent by her Department (a) in total and (b) on staff costs on promoting equality and diversity in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many people are employed by her Department for this purpose. [165457]

James Brokenshire: The Home Office spent the sums set out in the following table in discharging its statutory responsibilities as an employer and provider of goods and services under equality legislation.

The number of people employed specifically on equality and diversity is 15.

	Total annual spend (£)	Total annual staff costs (£)
2012-13	901,000	674,000
2011-12	1,110,000	865,000
2010-11	1,141,000	909,000

Europol

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she has visited Europol since May 2010. [158385]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 6 June 2013]: Home Office Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of international partners, as well as organisations and individuals in the public and private sectors, as part of the process of policy development and delivery. Details of these meetings, and of overseas travel, are passed to the Cabinet Office on a quarterly basis and are subsequently published on the Government.uk website:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/212353/Home_Office_Ministers_Jan_March_13.pdf

Europol and Eurojust

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the value of the UK’s membership of (a) Europol and (b) Eurojust. [156393]

James Brokenshire: The Government has sought input from law enforcement, the devolved Administrations and other partners of the value to the UK of our membership of Europol and Eurojust as part of its consideration of which EU police and criminal justice

measures adopted before 1 December 2009 (a category that includes both organisations) we should seek to rejoin when we opt out of those measures as a whole in December 2014.

The Government will seek to rejoin measures that combat cross-border crime and keep our country safe. Command Paper 8671 contains a set of 35 measures, including both Europol and Eurojust as they are currently constituted, that the Government believes it would be in the national interest to seek to rejoin.

The Government has not opted in to the new Europol proposal because of concerns over powers to direct national police and mandatory data sharing, including of sensitive law enforcement intelligence related to national security. However, we will opt in to the proposal once it has been adopted if these concerns are met in the negotiations.

The coalition agreement makes clear that the UK will not participate in the Commission's recently published proposal for a European Public Prosecutor's Office.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations she has received on the UK's membership of the antecedents to (a) Europol and (b) Eurojust. [156394]

James Brokenshire: The body that preceded Europol in supporting law enforcement cooperation in the EU was the Europol Drugs Unit. This was established in June 1993 and was replaced by Europol in July 1999. The body that preceded Eurojust in supporting judicial cooperation in the EU was known as Pro-Eurojust. This was formed in December 2000 and was replaced by Eurojust in February 2002. We have not received any recent representations about the UK's membership of these now superseded bodies.

Illegal Immigrants

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration enforcement raids were carried out in each year since 2008. [164528]

Mr Harper: The information requested is shown in the following table:

	<i>Enforcement visits</i>
2008	14,711
2009	11,642
2010	14,309
2011	14,203
2012	14,200
2013 (Q1)	3,840

Immigration

Rosie Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK Border Agency cases are outstanding; and what proportion of cases since May 2012 have taken longer than six months to process. [164650]

Mr Harper [holding answer 11 July 2013]: The Home Office's quarterly written evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee includes a description of work in hand and is published by the Committee.

Mr Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps her Department put in place to control immigration from other EU member states in (a) 2005, (b) 2010 and (c) 2012. [166151]

Mr Harper: The rights of European Union nationals to live and work in other member states, and to be accompanied by their family members who do not hold a European Union nationality, are set out in the 2004 Free Movement Directive (2004/38/EC) by which the UK is bound. The directive was implemented in the UK through the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006.

Free movement rights are not unconditional: after three months, those exercising rights must prove that they are a worker, student, self-employed or self-sufficient, such that they do not burden social welfare systems. The Home Office has strict checks in place to ensure that EU nationals who apply for registration documentation meet the requirements set out in the Immigration (European Economic Area) Regulations 2006. EU nationals who do not meet one of these requirements will not have a right to reside in the UK.

The Inter-Ministerial Group on Migrants' Access to Benefits and Public Services aims to ensure the UK's offer to legal migrants on benefits and services is fair but does not act as an inappropriate incentive to migrate and that rules preventing illegal migrant access are effectively enforced.

The Government does not tolerate abuse of free movement. The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), has consistently raised her concerns about fraud and abuse of free movement at the Justice and Home Affairs Council, and we are working to curb such abuse both domestically, and together with our European partners. The Government is also examining the scope and consequences of the free movement of people across the EU as part of the Review of Balance of Competences.

Immigration: Married People

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many spousal visas were granted in each year since 2008. [165663]

Mr Harper: The latest published figures for partner visas issued under the family route are given in the following table:

<i>Entry clearance visas issued to those entering as partners¹ through the Family route, 2008 to 2012</i>	
	<i>Visas issued</i>
2008	45,099
2009	39,556
2010	40,466
2011	34,832
2012	31,541

Notes:

- Includes visas issued for a probationary period and for immediate settlement. From July 2012, it also includes 'post flight' partners joining those who have been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection but who have yet to apply for or be granted settlement.
- It is not possible from the published statistics to distinguish between those granted visas under the old family rules and those granted visas under new family rules implemented since 9 July 2012.

Source:

Table be_04. Immigration Statistics, January to March 2013

The latest Home Office immigration statistics, including those for entry clearance visas, are published in the release Immigration Statistics January to March 2013, which is available from the Library of the House and on the Department's website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/series/immigration-statistics-quarterly-release>

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations about the ending of a relationship with someone who has permission to enter or remain in the UK as a partner of a British citizen her Department received in each year from 2008 to date. [165722]

Mr Harper: A complete set of data of all types of representations regarding the ending of relationships between British citizens and their partners with limited leave to enter or remain is not held centrally. The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Legal Costs

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department spent on external legal advice (a) between 7 May 2010 and 4 September 2012 and (b) since 4 September 2012. [158661]

James Brokenshire: The Home Department's spend on external legal advice for financial years (FY) 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13 and the first quarter of 2013-14 is set out in the following table:

<i>External legal advice</i>	
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Spend (£)</i>
2010-11	6,331,000
2011-12	8,622,000
2012-13	16,584,000
2013-14	2,176,000

¹ This data is for the first quarter of financial year 2013-14

Members: Correspondence

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the longest period of time the Minister for Immigration has taken to respond to a letter from an hon. Member since May 2010; [164172]

(2) what the average length of time the Minister for Immigration has taken to respond to letters from hon. Members is. [164173]

Mr Harper: Since May 2010, 217 working days has been the longest time taken for an Immigration Minister to reply to a hon. Member.

For letters already sent, on average it has taken 36 working days for the current Minister for Immigration to respond to hon. Members.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when she intends to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Slough of 18 March 2013 regarding the answer of 4 February 2013, *Official Report*, column 23-4W, on entry clearances. [166166]

Mr Harper: I wrote to the hon. Member on 24 July 2013.

Northcote House

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (a) Ministers and (b) officials in her Department used the facilities at Northcote House, Sunningdale Park, Berkshire in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13; and if she will make a statement. [164824]

James Brokenshire: Following a review of learning and development across Government the National School of Government, which delivered training on the Sunningdale Park site, closed in March 2012. Data on which individuals may have used the site were not retained.

Offences against Children: Lancashire

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support her Department has offered to the victims of organised grooming and sexual exploitation of children in Lancashire. [166337]

Damian Green: In Lancashire, the Home Office has provided £20,000 per year from 2011-12 until 2014-15 to part fund an Independent Sexual Violence Advocate (ISVA) post that is attached to the SAFE Centre (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) based at Royal Preston Hospital. This centre has a children's wing where support as well as medical examination is provided from the outset. The ISVA post provides support and advocacy to victims or rape and sexual violence and the signposting to counselling services as required on a case by case basis by the victim.

Police

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment she has made of the division of responsibilities between the Metropolitan and City police forces on cyber crime and fraud; and what assessment she has made of work on building capacity in other police force areas. [166222]

James Brokenshire [*holding answer 18 July 2013*]: The National Cyber Crime Unit within the new National Crime Agency will be the national lead on cyber crime. Responsibilities previously undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Service Police Central e-Crime Unit are being transferred into the National Cyber Crime Unit which is already operating in shadow form ahead of the National Crime Agency becoming fully operational October 2013.

The City of London police will continue to act as the national police lead on fraud, and will work closely with the new Economic Crime Command in the National Crime Agency which will coordinate and direct activity to tackle fraud, bribery and corruption across all the agencies involved in tackling economic crime.

The creation of the National Crime Agency will strengthen the national capability to tackle serious and organised crime, including on cyber crime and fraud. To support this stronger national capability and provide specialist support to local forces the Home Office is providing £26 million to improve regional policing capabilities in England and Wales, including on fraud and cyber.

Funding from the National Cyber Security Programme is also being used to deliver cyber training for police forces.

Private Sector

Mr Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much and what proportion of her Department's budget has been spent in payment to companies in the private sector in each of the last five years. [160740]

James Brokenshire: The details of the Home Department's total spend with, and what proportion of the Department's budget has been spent in payment to, companies in the private sector, in 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13, can be found in the following table. To provide the data for 2008-09 and 2009-10 would incur disproportionate cost.

	<i>Spend with private companies (£000)</i>	<i>Proportion of Home Department's budget has been spent in payment to companies (%)</i>
2010-11	2,620,217	25.6
2011-12	2,605,927	27.1
2012-13	2,313,293	25.5

Procurement

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much her Department has paid to (a) G4S, (b) Serco, (c) Sodexo, (d) GEOAmey and (e) Capita for services undertaken on behalf of her Department by each such contractor in (i) 2010-11, (ii) 2011-12 and (iii) 2012-13. [166280]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 18 July 2013]: In respect of the Home Department's expenditure with Capita and Serco in the given period I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answers given on 19 June 2013, *Official Report*, columns 686-87W and 4 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 788W, respectively. The Home Department's expenditure with G4S, GEO Amey and Sodexo can be found in the following table:

	<i>Expenditure (£ million)</i>		
	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2012-13</i>
Sodexo	71.0	57.8	60.6
G4S	101.7	45.0	47.9
GEO Amey	24.0	21.7	24.4

Recovery Orders

Robert Flello: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will publish the guidance her Department provides to police officers on the use of statutory recovery orders. [166059]

Damian Green [holding answer 18 July 2013]: There is a provision in the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 which empowers the police in certain defined circumstances to remove and recover vehicles. This work is carried out by contracted recovery operators. The Home Office has not issued any guidance on the use of these powers, which is an operational matter for the police.

Sex Establishments

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which local authorities have resolved to use powers to regulate lapdancing clubs under the Police and Crime Act 2009. [163402]

Mr Jeremy Browne [holding answer 5 July 2013]: This information is not held centrally.

South Yorkshire Police

Graeme Morrice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions she has held with the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Independent Police Complaints Commission regarding an investigation into the role of South Yorkshire Police at Orgreave coke works during the 1984-85 Miners' Strike. [165625]

Damian Green: There are complex jurisdictional issues associated with referrals from South Yorkshire Police in relation to events at Orgreave Coking Plant in 1984 and the subsequent court cases. These referrals are currently under assessment by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

UK Border Agency

Mr Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK Border Agency staff in each pay grade (a) joined and (b) left that organisation in each of the last 12 months. [166135]

Mr Harper: The UK Border Agency was abolished on 1 April 2013. At that point all employees were reintegrated into the wider Home Office. For the 12 months previously (the 2012-13 financial year), the joiners and leavers by grade are set out in the following table. A breakdown by each month could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The number of UK Border Agency employees in each pay grade who (a) joined and (b) left that organisation in 2012-13

	<i>Grade equivalency</i>	<i>Headcount</i>	
		<i>(a) Number of employees who joined</i>	<i>(b) Number of employees who left</i>
1.	AA	**	**
2.	AO	32	54
3.	EO	121	336
4.	HEO	61	164
5.	SEO	35	139
6.	Grade 7	21	87
7.	Grade 6	**	23
8.	SCS	0	**
	Total	283	811

Extract dates:

1 July 2012, 1 October 2012, 1 January 2013 and 1 April 2013—quarterly data was combined to create one set of data to cover the financial year.

Source:

Bespoke database on internal churn, with data taken from Data View—the Home Office's single source of Office for National Statistics compliant monthly snapshot corporate Human Resources data.

Period covered:

1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

Organisational coverage:

Figures include those who joined the UK Border Agency from within the Home Office (from core Home Office (including Border Force) and the Executive Agencies; HM Passport Office and the National Fraud Authority) and who left the UK Border Agency to move to another area of the Home Office. They also include those who moved into and out of the UK Border Agency due to restructuring, as well as those who moved on an individual basis when changing roles.

Employee coverage:

Figures given are headcount for civil servants who were current employees at the extract dates.

Redaction:

In accordance with the Data Protection Act figures less than 10 have been redacted and replaced with ** to avoid the identification of individuals.

Wales

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether her Department provides services to people resident in Wales or usually resident in Wales. [166108]

James Brokenshire: It is important that in the non-devolved areas sufficient support should be given to the Welsh language, and the Government is committed to ensuring this is done.

The Home Office leads on immigration and passports, drugs policy, crime policy and counter-terrorism and works to ensure visible, responsive and accountable policing in Wales and the rest of the UK.

Further details of the services the Home Office provides, can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/about>

Welsh Language

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether her Department has a current Welsh Language scheme; when that scheme was adopted; and whether it has been reviewed since May 2011. [166090]

James Brokenshire: This Government is fully committed to the Welsh language and fully committed to providing Government services in the Welsh language where there is demand for them.

It is important that in the non-devolved areas sufficient support should be given to the Welsh language, and the Government is committed to ensuring this is done.

Since September 2009, the Home Office has adopted a Welsh Language scheme. The measures set out in the policy document form the basis of an annual report sent to the Welsh Language Commissioner where the Home Office provides evidence to ensure compliance with the agreed measures for the scheme. This was last reviewed in July 2013 as part of the Home Office's Welsh Language Scheme report for 2012-13 and was sent to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

HEALTH

Arthritis

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department has taken to support families of people suffering from osteoarthritis; [166330]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to ensure that people with osteoarthritis have access to physiotherapy, exercise facilities and weight management services. [166335]

Norman Lamb: Through our Mandate to the NHS, we have asked NHS England to make measurable progress towards making our health service among the best in Europe at supporting people with ongoing health problems, such as osteoarthritis, to live healthily and independently/with much better control over the care they receive. The

NHS Outcomes Framework contains the indicators that will be used to hold NHS England to account for making progress.

One of NHS England's objectives is to ensure the NHS becomes dramatically better at involving patients and their carers, and empowering them to manage and make decisions about their own care and treatment. Achieving this objective would mean that by 2015; the 5 million carers who look after friends and family members will routinely have access to information and advice about the support available, including respite care.

It is for clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in partnership with local stakeholders, including local government and the public to assess the needs of their local population and to commission services accordingly. CCGs will work closely with public health colleagues in this assessment to address local needs within the health community including physiotherapy.

Local authorities are now responsible for commissioning weight management services. Public Health England will work with and support local authorities to tackle obesity and is currently developing its work programme to do this. The programme will include support to local authorities to commission weight management services in England.

Arthritis: Lancashire

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in East Lancashire with osteoarthritis were able to access joint replacement surgery within 18 weeks in each of the last three years. [166338]

Norman Lamb: Information is not available in the format requested.

Information on the number of weeks waited for finished admission episodes with a joint replacement as the main operative procedure for patients with a diagnosis of osteoarthritis resident in the former East Lancashire Teaching Primary Care Trust (PCX) area from 2009-10 to 2011-12 is shown in the following table:

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
0 to 1 week	18	14	32
1 to 2 weeks	16	18	16
2 to 3 weeks	14	16	23
3 to 4 weeks	30	18	22
4 to 5 weeks	31	26	20
5 to 6 weeks	49	31	20
6 to 7 weeks	38	41	36
7 to 8 weeks	31	39	26
8 to 9 weeks	44	42	30
9 to 10 weeks	32	36	36
10 to 11 weeks	38	41	37
11 to 12 weeks	44	48	47
12 to 13 weeks	42	23	42
13 to 14 weeks	40	46	46
14 to 15 weeks	47	42	42
15 to 16 weeks	38	46	49
16 to 17 weeks	43	28	30
17 to 18 weeks	39	43	41
18 to 19 weeks	21	16	19
19 to 20 weeks	20	12	14
20 to 21 weeks	13	17	19

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
21 to 22 weeks	12	13	15
22 to 23 weeks	9	9	14
23 to 24 weeks	6	7	9
24 to 25 weeks	*	9	9
Over 25 weeks	26	32	65
Unknown	38	98	107

Notes:

1. To protect patient confidentiality, figures between 1 and 5 have been replaced with "**"

(an asterisk). Where it was still possible to identify figures from the total, additional figures have been replaced with "**".

2. A finished admission episode (FAE) is the first period of in-patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FAEs are counted against the year or month in which the admission episode finishes. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the period.

3. The first recorded procedure or intervention in each episode, usually the most resource intensive procedure or intervention performed during the episode. It is appropriate to use main procedure when looking at admission details, (e.g. time waited), but a more complete count of episodes with a particular procedure is obtained by looking at the main and the secondary procedures.

4. The number of episodes where this diagnosis was recorded in any of the 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and seven prior to 2002-03) primary and secondary diagnosis fields in a Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) record. Each episode is only counted once, even if the diagnosis is recorded in more than one diagnosis field of the record.

5. ICD-10 codes used to identify osteoarthritis are:

M15.- Polyarthrosis

M16.- Coxarthrosis (arthrosis of hip)

M17.- Gonarthrosis (arthrosis of knee)

M18.- Arthrosis of first carpometacarpal joint

M19.- Other arthrosis

6. HES figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, changes in activity may be due to changes in the provision of care.

Source:

The Information Centre for Health and Social Care—Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)

Billing

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many creditors to his Department owed more than £10,000 remained unpaid for more than (a) 30 days, (b) 45 days, (c) 60 days, (d) 75 days and (e) more than 90 days in each of the last three years. [166375]

Dr Poulter: The requested information is not routinely collected by the Department. The payment target set for all Government Departments is to pay at least 80% of all invoices received within five days, regardless of the size of the creditor organisation or the value of the invoice. Payment performance is also monitored against targets of 10 days (the previous target set by Cabinet Office) and 30 days, which are the payment terms stated in all the Department's commercial contracts.

The Department's performance against each of the above targets for the last three full financial years is given in the following table:

Days	Percentage		
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
5	91.18	95.46	92.95
10	97.68	97.86	97.10
30	99.48	99.31	98.46

Cancer: Drugs

Sarah Newton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people in each strategic health authority area who have received treatment as a consequence of the introduction of the Cancer Drugs Fund. [166472]

Norman Lamb: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 18 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 656W.

Strategic health authorities no longer exist. NHS England took responsibility for the Cancer Drugs Fund from April 2013 and information on the number of patients funded through the Cancer Drugs Fund for 2013-14 is not yet available. NHS England is currently considering what information will be made available routinely and how it will be made available.

NHS England has advised that it has collected data on the use of the Cancer Drugs Fund for the first quarter of 2013-14 and it expects this to be made available shortly. Thereafter, data will be published quarterly.

Health Services: Lancashire

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in East Lancashire with a long-term condition were offered a personalised care plan in each of the last three years. [166331]

Norman Lamb: The information requested is not centrally held.

Responsibility for the treatment of long-term conditions passed to NHS England in April 2013. One of the objectives in the Government's Mandate to NHS England is for the national health service to better empower patients to manage and make decisions about their own care and treatment. Achieving this objective would mean that by 2015 everyone with a long-term condition will be offered a personalised care plan that reflects their preferences and agreed decisions.

Health: Restaurants

Mr George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will put in place plans for a Franchisee Responsibility Deal to allow franchisee-owned quick service restaurants to commit to improving UK health. [166389]

Sir Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a franchise responsibility deal to allow franchisee-owner quick service restaurants to commit to introduce healthier food; and if he will make a statement. [166609]

Anna Soubry: The Responsibility Deal currently has a number of partners that operate on a franchise basis, including Subway, Burger King and Pizza Hut, and their commitments cover all franchisees.

Additionally local franchise-owners can choose to sign up as local partners to the national Responsibility Deal. In April, the Department launched a local toolkit that includes a number of simple actions that local food/catering businesses can take to provide healthier

offerings for their customers. Further information on the toolkit and becoming a local partner is available at:

<https://responsibilitydeal.dh.gov.uk/local-partners/>

Hospitals: Greater London

Mr Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether (a) Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, (b) Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup and (c) Princess Royal Hospital, Bromley had annual financial deficits in the last financial year for which data is available; and if he will make a statement. [166578]

Dr Poulter: The Department routinely collects financial information from national health service trusts, but this information does not distinguish between individual hospitals within that trust.

South London Healthcare NHS Trust includes (a) Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, (b) Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, (c) Princess Royal Hospital, Bromley, (d) Beckenham Beacon Hospital, and (e) Orpington Hospital.

The financial position of South London Healthcare NHS Trust is shown in the following table.

	<i>Operating deficit (£000)</i>
2009-10	42,067
2010-11	40,865
2011-12	65,063
2012-13	44,718

Maternity Services

John Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent discussions he has had with groups representing (a) new mothers, (b) midwives, (c) doctors and (d) other maternity ward staff on the admission of sales representatives to NHS maternity wards; [166344]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing in Scotland on the admission of sales representatives on NHS maternity wards. [166345]

Dr Poulter: None. I wrote to all national health service trusts, NHS foundation trusts and heads of midwifery in England asking them to review their practices for allowing representatives from private companies on maternity wards and to assure themselves that they are maintaining women's dignity and respect shortly after the birth of a baby when they can be tired and vulnerable. A copy of the letter has been placed in the Library.

It is for individual trusts to make decisions about the admission of sales representatives to NHS maternity wards.

Mental Health Services

Geraint Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 12 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 437W, on mental health services, what information his Department collects on NHS (a) spending on and (b) referrals to counsellors and psychotherapists. [166622]

Norman Lamb: The Department collects information on overall spend on psychological therapy services in England.

From 2004-05 until 2011-12 the spend on psychological therapy services was as follows:

	<i>£ million</i>
2004-05	144,378
2005-06	142,047
2006-07	146,116
2007-08	161,378
2008-09	184,755
2009-10	292,308
2010-11	355,821
2011-12	388,980

Source:

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) three year report, November 2012

The number of referrals to IAPT services each year since October 2008 were as follows:

	<i>Number of referrals</i>
October 2008 to March 2009	75,278
April 2009 to March 2010	357,266
April 2010 to March 2011	682,438
April 2011 to March 2012	870,747
April 2012 to March 2013	983,619

Source:

IAPT Minimum Dataset

Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 27 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 343W on Jackie Holt, what involvement Ms Tina Long had in negotiating the proposed secondment of Ms Jackie Holt from Morecambe Bay NHS Trust into Warrington and Halton NHS Trust; and whether his Department was consulted about the proposed secondment. [166474]

Dr Poulter: NHS England advises that Tina Long, the Director of Nursing and Quality at the Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral Area Team was not involved in negotiations about seconding Jackie Holt, the Executive Chief Nurse at the University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust. The Department has no involvement in employment decisions of this nature.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what powers he has to intervene to ensure that NHS commissioners comply with the requirement to fund treatments covered by the multiple sclerosis risk-sharing scheme; [166075]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effects on the effectiveness of treatment for multiple sclerosis (MS) of (a) MS nurses, (b) specialist treatment centres and (c) other specialist services delivered by the MS risk-sharing scheme since its inception in 2002. [166076]

Norman Lamb: Under the National Health Service Commissioning Board and Clinical Commissioning Group (Responsibilities and Standing Rules) Regulations 2012, NHS commissioners are required to fund the four multiple

sclerosis treatments covered by the Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Risk Sharing Scheme for patients meeting published clinical criteria.

The development of the United Kingdom-wide network of over 70 MS specialist treatment centres together with an increase in the number of MS specialist nurses has helped to improve the care and support available to MS patients.

NHS

Mr Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms he has available for dissolving an NHS Trust; which NHS Trusts have been so dissolved; and if he will make a statement. [166574]

Anna Soubry: Paragraph 28 of schedule 4 to the National Health Service Act 2006 gives the Secretary of State power to dissolve an NHS trust on the application of the NHS trust concerned, or if the Secretary of State considers it appropriate in the interests of the health service. This power came into force in November 2006.

The following table gives details of the NHS trusts dissolved using this power.

	<i>NHS Trust</i>
2012-13	Barts and the London NHS Trust Newham University Hospitals NHS Trust Whipps Cross University NHS Trust Great Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust Oxford Learning Disability NHS Trust Scarborough and North East Yorkshire NHS Trust Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
2011-12	Worcestershire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
2010-11	The Bedfordshire and Luton Mental Health and Social Care Partnership NHS Trust The Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust The Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust The Suffolk Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
2009-10	Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust Royal West Sussex NHS Trust Worthing and Southlands NHS Trust
2008-09	No NHS trusts were dissolved in this year
2007-08	Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust St Mary's NHS Trust Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust

NHS Foundation Trusts

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the Competition Commission's preliminary conclusions on the proposed merger between the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Foundation Trust and the Poole Hospital Foundation Trust; and if he will make a statement; [166545]

(2) what his policy is on possible mergers of NHS foundation hospital trusts. [166546]

Anna Soubry: The Government's policy is that all mergers involving national health service organisations must be in the interests of patients.

The Competition Commission's review of the merger between the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch NHS Foundation Trust and the Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is an independent statutory process. We have noted the preliminary conclusions that were published on 11 July 2013. We now expect the Commission to carefully consider the benefits of the merger, taking views from stakeholders, before reaching a final decision.

NHS: Drugs

Mr Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues on interpretation of the performance of different NHS foundation trusts in the take-up of medicines at a local level as revealed in the innovation scorecard. [166544]

Dr Poulter: The Innovation Scorecard presents data showing which local health services are providing which National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommended medicines and technologies. The Department does not issue any guidance on the use or interpretation of the Innovation Scorecard data.

The Innovation Scorecard is part of the Innovation Health and Wealth programme being led by NHS England. It is designed to provide patients and the public with information on the treatments available within their local hospitals and NHS services, and guidance on its interpretation is a matter for NHS England. The Health and Social Care Information Centre publishes guidance alongside the Innovation Scorecard Data.

NHS: Procurement

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of NHS contracts have been won by commercial contractors; and if he will make a statement; [166404]

(2) what proportion of NHS contracts concluded in the last three months have been won by commercial contractors. [166405]

Dr Poulter: NHS England does not hold a central record of contracts that have been awarded to private sector ("commercial") organisations.

NHS: Public Appointments

Mr Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to which NHS trusts he has appointed a trust special administrator to exercise the functions of the chairman and directors of an NHS trust under the National Health Service Act 2006 since he took office; what the reasons were for each such appointment; and if he will make a statement. [166573]

Anna Soubry: The Trust Special Administrator's regime for a national health service trust, as set out under Chapter 5A of the NHS Act 2006, is triggered by the Secretary of State.

The former Secretary of State appointed a Trust Special Administrator to South London Healthcare NHS Trust in July 2012. Details about the appointment were set in a written ministerial statement of 12 July 2012, *Official Report*, columns 47-49WS.

Rickets

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the reasons for the increase in incidences of rickets between 2010-11 and 2011-12. [166124]

Anna Soubry: Although hospital episode statistics data show an apparent increase in the incidence of rickets between 2010-11 and 2011-12, these data are based on the recorded admission figures and may overestimate the incidence for a number of reasons. These include counting individuals who have been admitted to hospital more than once in a year with a diagnosis of rickets. However, we have not made a detailed assessment of the reasons for the apparent recorded increase in admission episodes of rickets.

There are a number of causes of rickets including a lack of vitamin D and/or calcium. The Government continues to promote and recommend that young children and pregnant and breastfeeding women take a daily supplement of vitamin D, to prevent vitamin D deficiency.

Royal Bolton Hospital

Mr Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many babies were born per bed, per day in the labour unit at Royal Bolton Hospital in the latest period for which figures are available; and how many midwives were on duty on each such day. [166465]

Dr Poulter: This information is not collected centrally.

We have written to David Wakefield, Chair of the Bolton NHS Foundation Trust, informing him of the hon. Member's inquiry. He will reply shortly and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Wales

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department provides services to people resident in Wales or usually resident in Wales. [166107]

Anna Soubry: Responsibility for Health and Social Care has been devolved since the Government of Wales Act 1998. So the vast majority of health and social care services utilised by people resident in Wales are overseen by the Welsh Assembly Government.

On some occasions Welsh residents need to access health care in England, perhaps because it is a specialist service only available in England. From April 2011 to March 2012 there were 57,477¹ inpatient finished admission episodes² of Welsh residents in English hospitals.

Some services are provided regardless of residence, such as the issuing of European Health Insurance Cards, which is done by the NHS Business Authority for both England and Wales.

¹ Hospital episode statistics (HES), Health and Social Care Information Centre.

² A finished admission episode (FAE) is the first period of inpatient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FAEs are counted against the year in which the admission episode finishes. Admissions do not represent the number of inpatients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.

Welsh Language

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has a current Welsh Language scheme; when that scheme was adopted; and whether it has been reviewed since May 2011. [166089]

Dr Poulter: This Government is fully committed to the Welsh language and fully committed to providing Government services in the Welsh language where there is demand for them.

As health is a devolved responsibility and Department of Health publications do not normally impact on Wales, there is not a policy of routinely translating documents into Welsh. If there was demand for publications to be available in Welsh this would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

TREASURY

Air Passenger Duty

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment his Department has made of the effect of a reduction in air passenger duty on connectivity to and from UK airports; [166306]

(2) what consideration his Department has given to the removal of air passenger duty for domestic air travel; and if he will make a statement. [166307]

Sajid Javid: The Chancellor keeps all taxes under review and considers their effects in the round. Air Passenger Duty (APD) is a relatively efficient and non-regressive tax, which makes an important contribution to the public finances.

It would not be possible under EU law to have different rates of APD on intra-UK flights than on flights from UK to other EU destinations.

The UK currently has excellent connectivity. London's five airports serve more destinations worldwide than any other city in Europe, and the UK has the third largest aviation network in the world. The Government has set up the Airports Commission to provide an assessment of how to meet the UK's international connectivity needs and maintain the UK's position as Europe's most important aviation hub.

Consultants

Mr Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much (a) he and (b) officials in his Department spent on external assistance to prepare for (i) appearances before select committees and (ii) contact with the media in (A) 2011-12 and (B) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [164678]

Sajid Javid: I can confirm that neither the Chancellor nor any Civil Servants within his Department have incurred any expenditure in relation to external assistance to prepare for appearances before select committees and contact with the media during 2011-12 and 2012-13.

Economic Situation: Jersey

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the recent report by Capital Economics entitled Jersey's value to Britain. [166613]

Sajid Javid: The Government acknowledges the report by Capital Economics, and recognises the contribution of Jersey to the UK economy.

European Investment Bank

Mr Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the British Director of the European Investment Bank will support the draft proposals on Future Energy Lending Policy at the Board meeting on 23 July 2013. [166115]

Greg Clark [*holding answer 18 July 2013*]: In line with the draft proposals, the Board of Directors of the EIB discussed and adopted new principles for the revised screening and assessment criteria for energy projects. The UK Director of the European Investment Bank supported their adoption.

Financial Services

Guto Bebb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 2 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 551W, on financial services, (1) what representations his Department has made to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) concerning the number of businesses that have been offered redress as a result of the FCA redress scheme announced in January 2013; [165541]

(2) how many businesses mis-sold interest rate hedging products, as defined by the Financial Conduct Authority redress scheme announced in January 2013, have been offered financial redress; and if he will make a statement. [165542]

Greg Clark: The Financial Conduct Authority has agreed to publish regular updates on progress of the review, the first of which will be issued shortly. This will provide information on the pace of progress of the review.

Regulation

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the title is of each regulation his Department (a) introduced and (b) revoked in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013 to date; and if he will make a statement. [165921]

Sajid Javid: The titles of each regulation the Treasury has introduced or revoked over the period asked are in the following lists. On 10 July the Government published the Sixth Statement of New Regulation, which documents the Government's progress in reducing the burdens of regulation. This gave details of the Treasury's contribution towards this effort. The Statement of New Regulation was accompanied by a written ministerial statement from the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Michael Fallon).

The document shows that the Government reduced the burden of regulation, within the scope of the One-in, Two-out rule, by £907 million per annum.

Title of regulation introduced

The Cross-Border Payments in Euro Regulations 2010
 The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2010
 The Banking Act 2009 (inter-Bank Payments Systems) (Disclosure and Publications of Specified Information) Regulations 2010
 The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) (Amendment) Order 2010
 The Building Societies (Financial Assistance) Order 2010
 The Building Societies (Insolvency and Special Administration)(Amendment) Order 2010
 The Al-Qaida and Taliban (Asset Freezing) Regulations 2010
 The Premium Savings Bonds (Amendment etc) Regulations 2010
 The Bank Administration (Scotland) (Amendment) Rules 2010
 The Bank Insolvency (England and Wales) (Amendment) Rules 2010
 The Building Society Special Administration (England and Wales) Rules 2010
 The Building Society Insolvency (England and Wales) Rules 2010
 The Bank Administration (England and Wales) Amendment Rules 2010
 The Building Society Insolvency (Scotland) Rules 2010
 The Iran (European Community Financial Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations 2010
 The Capital Requirements (Amendment) Regulations 2010
 The Mutual Societies (Electronic Communications) Order 2011
 The friendly societies (proxy voting) regulations 2011
 The Libya (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 The National Savings Bank (Amendment) Regulations 2011
 The Egypt (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 The Tunisia (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 The Ivory Coast (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 The Iran (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 The Syria (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 The Companies Act 2006 (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Order 2011
 The Investment Bank Special Administration (England and Wales) Rules 2011
 The First Option Bonds (Exchange of Securities) Rules 2011
 The Somalia (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2010 (SI no. 2010/2956)
 The Financial Markets and Insolvency (Settlement Finality and Financial Collateral Arrangements) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 (SI no. 2010/2993)
 The Somalia (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2010
 The Financial Markets and Insolvency (Settlement Finality and Financial Collateral Arrangements) (Amendment) Regulations 2010
 The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Administration Orders Relating to Insurers) Order 2010
 The Electronic Money Regulations 2011
 The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2011
 The Investment Bank Special Administration Regulations 2011
 The Libya (Financial Sanctions) Order
 The Electronic Money Regulations 2011 (SI no. 2011/99)

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Administration Orders Relating to Insurers) Order 2010 (SI no. 2010/3023)

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2011 (SI no. 2011/133)

The Investment Bank Special Administration Regulations 2011 (SI no. 2011/245)

The Investment Bank Special Administration Regulations 2011 (SI no. 2011/245)

The Libya (Financial Sanctions) Order (SI 2011/548)

The Money Laundering (Amendment) Regulations 2011

The Prospectus Regulations 2011

The Afghanistan (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Carrying on Regulated Activities by way of Business) (Amendment) Order 2011

The Investment Bank Special Administration (Scotland) Rules 2011

The Libya (Asset-Freezing) (Amendment) Regulations 2011

The Syria (Asset-Freezing) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 SI 2011/2479

The Legislative Reform (Industrial and Provident Societies and Credit Unions) Order 2011

The Recognised Auction Platforms Regulations 2011

The Terrorism Act 2000 and Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Business in the Regulated Sector) Order

The Al-Qaida (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Exemption) (Amendment No.2) Order 2011

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Permissions, Transitional Provisions and Consequential Amendments) (Northern Ireland Credit Unions) Order 2011

The Money Laundering (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2011

The Financial Restrictions (Iran) Order 2011

The Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010 (Commencement) Order 2011

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Market Abuse) Regulations 2011

The Protection of the Euro Against Counterfeiting (Amendment) Regulations 2011

The Open-Ended Investment Companies (Amendment) Regulations 2011

Libya Asset-Freezing (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Syria (European Union Financial Sanctions) Regulations 2012

The Iran (European Union Financial Sanctions) Regulations 2012-01-27

The Syria (European Union Financial Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Sudan (Asset Freezing) Regulations 2012

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Exemption) (Amendment) Order 2012

The National Savings Bank (Investment Deposits) (Limits) (Amendment) Order 2012

The Iraq (Asset Freezing) Regulations 2012

The Financial Services (Omnibus 1 Directive) Regulations 2012

The Capital Requirements (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Iran (European Union Financial Sanctions) Regulations

Guinea-Bissau (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2012

Burma/Myanmar (financial restrictions) (suspension) regulations

The Republic of Guinea (Asset Freezing) Regulations 2012

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable instruments, etc.) (France and Monaco) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Belgium and Luxembourg) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Denmark) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Finland) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Greece) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Italy) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Netherlands) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Czechoslovakia) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Yugoslavia) Order, 1945

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Siam) Order, 1946

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) Order, 1946

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (No. 2) Order, 1946

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Poland) Order, 1946

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Hungary) Order, 1946

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Romania) Order, 1947

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (General) Order, 1947

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Austria) Order, 1947

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Germany) Order, 1949

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Japan) Order, 1950

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Germany) Order, 1952

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc) (Revocation) Order 2012

The Prospectus Regulations 2012

The Terrorism Act 2000 and Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Business in the Regulated Sector) Order 2012

The Payment Services Regulations 2012

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2012

The Savings Certificates (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The National Savings Stock Register (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Savings Certificates {Children's Bonus Bonds} (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Gibraltar) (Amendment) Order 2012

The Undertakings for Collective Investment In Transferable Securities (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Money Laundering (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Terrorism Act 2000 and Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Business in the Regulated Sector) (No.2) Order 2012

The Syria (European Union Financial Sanctions) (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2012

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Short Selling) Regulations 2012

The Belarus (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2012

Community Emissions Trading Scheme (Allocation of Allowances for Payment) Regulations 2012

The Financial Restrictions (Iran) Order 2012
 The Iran (European Union Financial Sanctions) (Amendment No.2) Regulations 2012
 The Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2012
 The Regulated Covered Bonds (Amendment) Regulations 2012
 The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Disclosure of Confidential Information) (Amendment) Regulations 2012
 The Eritrea (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2012
 The Democratic Republic of the Congo (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2012
 The Payments in Euro (Credit Transfers and Direct Debits) Regulations 2012
 The National Savings Bank (Amendment) Regulations 2013
 The Belarus (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2013
 Financial Restrictions (Iran) (Revocation) Order 2013
 The Financial Services Act 2012 (Transitional Provisions) (Rules and Miscellaneous Provisions) Order 2013
 The Iran (European Union Financial Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations 2013
 The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Prescribed Financial Institutions) Order 2013
 The Financial Services Act 2012 (Commencement No.1) Order 2013
 The Consumer Insurance (Disclosure and Representations) Act 2012 (Commencement) Order 2013
 Financial Services Act Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Order Financial Services Act (Mutual Societies) Order
 Financial Services and Markets Act (Threshold Conditions) Order 2013
 Financial Services and Markets Act (PRA-Regulated activities) 2013
 Financial Services and Markets Act (Financial Services Compensation Scheme) Order 2013
 Uncertificated Securities (amendment) Regulations 2013
 Financial Services Act (Consequential Amendments) Order 2013
 Financial Services Act (Misleading Statements and Impressions) Order 2013
 Financial Services Act (Consequential Amendments and Transitional No. 2) Order 2013
 Bank of England (Macro-prudential Measures) Order 2013
 Financial Services Act (Commencement No. 3) Order 2013
 Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2013
 Financial Services and Markets Act (Over the Counter Derivatives Central Counterparties and Trade Repositories) Regulations 2013
 The Zimbabwe (Financial Sanctions) (Suspension) Regulations 2013
 The Syria (European Union Financial Sanctions) (Amendment) Order
 The Burma/Myanmar (Financial Restrictions) (Revocation) Regulations 2013
 The Prospectus Regulations 2013
Title of regulation revoked
 Al-Qaida and Taliban (United Nations Measures) (Amendment) Order 2002(a)
 Al-Qaida and Taliban (United Nations Measures) Order 2006(b)
 Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Administration Orders Relating to Insurers)
 Articles 2 to 8 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000
 Regulation 52 of the Insurers (Reorganisation and Winding Up) Regulations 2004(d)

Article 77(2)(e) to the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) Order 2001
 The International Monetary Fund (Limit on Lending) Order 2009
 The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Contribution to Costs of Special Resolution Regime) Regulations 2009
 The Iran (European Community Financial Sanctions) Regulations 2007
 The Iran (European Community Financial Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations 2010
 Terrorism (United Nations Measures) Order 2001
 Terrorism (United Nations Measures) Order 2001 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
 Terrorism (United Nations Measures) Order 2001 (Amendment) Regulations 2005
 Terrorism (United Nations Measures) Order 2006
 Terrorism (United Nations Measures) Order 2009
 Financial Restrictions Proceedings (UN Terrorism Orders) Order 2009
 The Friendly Societies (Proxy Voting) Regulations 1993
 Companies (Single Member Private Limited Companies) Regulations 1992 and Companies (Single Member Private Limited Companies) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1992
 Syria (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011
 Syria (Asset-Freezing) (Amendment) Regulations 2011
 Credit Unions (Limit on Loans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1986
 Credit Unions (Insurance against Fraud etc.) Order (Northern Ireland)
 Credit Unions (Authorized Investments) Regulations (Northern Ireland)
 Credit Unions (Limit on Membership) Order (Northern Ireland)
 Credit Unions (Limit on Shares) Order (Northern Ireland) 2006
 Credit Unions (Deposits and Loans) Order (Northern Ireland) 2006
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (France and Monaco) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Belgium and Luxembourg) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Denmark) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Finland) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Greece) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Italy) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Netherlands) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Czechoslovakia) Order 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Yugoslavia) Order, 1945
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable instruments, etc.) (Siam) Order, 1946
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable instruments, etc.) Order, 1946
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (No. 2) Order, 1946
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Poland) Order, 1946
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Hungary) Order, 1946
 Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Romania) Order, 1947

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (General) Order, 1947

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Austria) Order, 1947

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Germany) Order, 1949

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Japan) Order, 1950

Trading with the Enemy (Transfer of Negotiable Instruments, etc.) (Germany) Order, 1952

Iran (European Union Financial Sanctions) Regulations 2010
Iran (European Union Financial Sanctions (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Community Emissions Trading Scheme (Allocation of Allowances for Payment) Regulations 2008

Syria (European Union Financial Sanctions) (Amendment) Regulations 2012

The Belarus (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2012

Financial Restrictions (Iran) Order 2012

Sections 131 B to 131 D of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (short selling rules)

Taxation: Exports

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent steps he has taken to provide export tax credits for small and medium-sized enterprises. [166401]

Sajid Javid: There is no direct tax credit for export-related activities. The Government has delivered a number of corporate tax reforms to make UK firms more competitive and give them a greater rate of return for export-related investment. This includes cutting the main rate of corporation tax, which will fall to 20% by 2015, reform to controlled foreign companies rules, the introduction of a Patent Box and more competitive R&D tax credits.

The Government has also targeted export support through UKTI: at autumn statement 2012, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced £70 million extra funding for UKTI in 2013-14 and 2014-15; and the 2013 spending review continued this increase into 2015-16. The extra funding covers a number of programmes to support exports including services to more small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and more grants for SMEs to attend trade fairs overseas.

Welsh Language

Guto Bebb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether his Department has a current Welsh Language scheme; when that scheme was adopted; and whether it has been reviewed since May 2011; [166094]

(2) whether his Department provides services to people resident in Wales or usually resident in Wales. [166112]

Sajid Javid: This Government is fully committed to the Welsh language and fully committed to providing Government services in the Welsh language where there is demand for them.

It is important that in the non-devolved areas sufficient support should be given to the Welsh language, and the Government is committed to ensuring this is done.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Apprentices

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what strategies he has to create apprenticeships in the Law Officers' Departments; and what plans he has to promote such strategies; [165884]

(2) how many apprenticeships the Law Officers' Departments offered to people aged (a) 16 to 18, (b) 19 to 21 and (c) 22 to 26 years old in each year since 2010. [165866]

The Solicitor-General: The Treasury Solicitor's Department has offered eight apprenticeships since 2010. None of these opportunities were undertaken by people aged between 16 to 26-years-old.

The Treasury Solicitor's Department (TSol) has been working with Skills for Justice, a Sector Skills Council, alongside a number of private and public legal organisations, to develop National Occupational Standards in Legal Services. Their objective is to create apprenticeship opportunities for TSol administrative staff in legal services at skills levels 3 and 4 by April 2014. The scheme is an internal one and plans to promote it revolve primarily around internal communications.

TSol offers legal training contracts each year as part of the Government Legal Service (GLS) Legal Trainee Scheme. They will continue to promote this offer on their website as well as working with the GLS Secretariat in promoting the scheme through university visits and attending Law Fairs.

The TSol Vacation Placement Scheme offers a 5-day placement to law undergraduates and people who are completing a Graduate Diploma in Law, a Legal Practice Course or a Bar Professional Training Course, on an annual basis. The scheme is also promoted on the TSol website.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has enrolled 174 apprentices in a range of roles since January 2012, with an additional 43 appointments expected as a result of live recruitment campaigns. The following table refers to the age ranges of current apprenticeships as recorded in CPS data management systems:

	Age range	CPS apprenticeships
2012	16-18	14
	19-24	39
	25+	66
2013	16-18	9
	19-24	33
	25+	13

CPS has also worked with the Sector Skills Council, Skills for Justice, to develop new frameworks in Paralegal administration at level 3 and level 4, and a new apprenticeship in Victim and Witness Care at level 3. These developments enable more apprenticeship opportunities across the Criminal Justice Sector.

The CPS is committed to supporting the Social Mobility and Youth Employment Framework (published by Civil Service Employment Policy in 2012). From January 2012, all roles at grade AO that need to be filled either

on a temporary or permanent basis are considered as to the suitability for an apprenticeship vacancy. Since March 2012 there have been 35 separate recruitment campaigns for apprentices as a result of this approach. The CPS has appointed 108 new employees to apprenticeship positions, with some campaigns still ongoing. This is in addition to the 66 existing employees who have been enrolled on apprenticeship programmes.

The CPS is also taking part in the pilot Civil Service Fast Track apprenticeship programme which has resulted in eight young people being appointed to permanent posts as part of their apprenticeship programme in paralegal, finance, communications and administration roles.

All apprenticeship vacancies are advertised on the Civil Service Jobs web pages, and CPS is currently exploring working with the apprenticeship training providers to promote CPS apprenticeship vacancies to a wider audience. A single national recruitment campaign for apprentices is planned for autumn 2013 from which CPS would hope to draw from a pool of candidates for vacancies that are both part of this campaign and those that arise in the months following the campaign.

The SFO has run three apprenticeship schemes for individuals aged between 16 and 24 since 2010 and appoint up to four apprentices aged between 16 and 26 in each financial year. Apprentices are appointed on 12 month fixed term contracts working towards either an NVQ level 2 or 3 qualification. The SFO works together with a training provider who is funded by the Learning and Skills Council and apprentices are allocated a mentor to provide additional support throughout the apprenticeship.

During the period in question SFO has employed the following numbers of people as apprentices.

2010-11: Three apprentices who were aged 16 to 18 on appointment and one aged 19 to 21.

2011-12: One apprentice aged 16 to 18, two aged 19 to 21 and one aged 22 to 26.

2013-14: Four apprentices aged 19 to 21.

On successful completion of SFO apprenticeship, and provided there is a permanent role available, apprentices are offered a permanent contract.

Consultants

Mr Thomas: To ask the Attorney General how much (a) he and (b) officials in the Law Officers' Departments spent on external assistance to prepare for (i) appearances before select committees and (ii) contact with the media in (A) 2011-12 and (B) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [164658]

The Solicitor-General: None.

Crown Prosecution Service

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General what the value of the severance package to be paid to the Director of Public Prosecutions is expected to be when he steps down in October 2013. [166215]

The Solicitor-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions was appointed on a fixed term contract for a five year period from 1 November 2008 to 31 October 2013. His salary was linked to that of a judge of the

Court of Appeal and rendered him eligible to join a Civil Service pension scheme analogous to the judicial scheme pension arrangements. Any pension benefits accrued would be payable when the Director reaches the age of 65. No other payments arise.

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General how many formal complaints from the judiciary the Crown Prosecution Service has received in each of the last seven years. [166216]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) does not collect data on the number of formal complaints received from the judiciary.

Equality

Philip Davies: To ask the Attorney-General how much has been spent by the Law Officers' Departments (a) in total and (b) on staff costs on promoting equality and diversity in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and how many people are employed by his Department for this purpose. [165447]

The Solicitor-General: The total amount spent by the Crown Prosecution Service on equality and diversity issues during the last three years was £3,540,671. The following table provides the breakdown of each year's recorded spending. These figures include staffing costs and running costs:

Equality & Diversity: Running and staff costs 2010-13

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
EDU - salary costs	890,565	661,483	743,899
Equality & Diversity, Community Engagement Managers (EDCEM) - salary costs	200,000	200,000	200,000
General administrative costs	215,376	289,318	140,031
Total spend	1,305,941	1,150,801	1,083,929

Equality & Diversity: Full-time equivalent staff in post: 2010-13

	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Equality & Diversity (HQ staff)	11.50	9.40	7.2
Area EDCEMs	13.00	13.00	13.00
Total staff	24.5	22.4	20.2

The remaining Law Officers' Departments do not employ any individuals solely involved in promoting equality and diversity issues, they do however have specific Equality and Diversity policies which all employees are expected to comply with. In addition the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office have working groups set up to monitor diversity and equality issues within these departments. It is not possible to reliably estimate the costs involved in these activities without incurring a disproportionate cost.

The Serious Fraud Office (SFO) is also part of Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme and pays an annual membership fee. In 2012-13 the SFO paid £6,125 to Stonewall, in 2011-12 £1,800, and in 2010-11 £225. The sum for 2012-13 includes annual membership for 2013-14 and 2014-15. Membership for 2010-11 was paid for in 2009-10.

Prosecutions

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General pursuant to the answer of 11 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 352W, on prosecution, what triggered the review by the Crown Prosecution Service of its use of a single prosecutor on homicide cases and cases involving multiple defendants; and when he expects the review to be completed. [166243]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) keeps its guidance under regular review. CPS criteria for the instruction of more than one counsel, or QC alone, was first introduced in 2005 and revised in 2009. The latest consultation was triggered by a lapse of about three years since the previous revision. It was also apparent from discussions with the senior judiciary and others that there was external interest in this subject and a formal consultation allowed external parties the opportunity to contribute their views on the merits of the criteria. The review will be completed later in 2013.

Regulation

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Attorney General what the title is of each regulation the Law Officers' Departments (a) introduced and (b) revoked in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013 to date; and if he will make a statement. [165904]

The Solicitor-General: The Law Officers have introduced three statutory instruments since May 2010, details of which are outlined below. Each Order amended the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 (Specified Proceedings) Order 1999. No statutory instruments have been revoked.

Department	Date laid before Parliament	Title of Regulation/Order
AGO	26th June 2012	The Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 (Specified Proceedings) (Amendment) Order 2012
AGO	10th August 2012	The Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 (Specified Proceedings) (Amendment No. 2) Order 2012
AGO	26th October 2012	The Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 (Specified Proceedings) (Amendment No. 3) Order 2012

Sentencing: Appeals

Philip Davies: To ask the Attorney General pursuant to the Answer of 8 July 2013, *Official Report*, columns 12-13W, on sentencing: appeals, how many of the cases in each category of offence were referred to him by (a) victims or families of victims, (b) the police, (c) the Crown Prosecution Service and (d) other members of the public. [166265]

The Solicitor-General: The information requested is contained in the following tables.

2010		
Offence category	CPS	General public/MP/Victim or victim's family
Arson	2	0
Burglary	10	0
Driving deaths	4	6
Drugs	32	1
Firearms	7	0

2010		
Offence category	CPS	General public/MP/Victim or victim's family
Hate crime	0	0
Manslaughter	10	16
Murder	9	5
Robbery	28	1
S.18 OAPA	13	7
Sexual offences	50	25
Other	36	10

2011		
Offence category	CPS	General public/MP/Victim or victim's family
Arson	2	0
Burglary	14	12
Driving deaths	0	8
Drugs	78	1
Firearms	5	1
Hate crime	1	0
Manslaughter	12	6
Murder	12	13
Robbery	32	3
s.18 OAPA	30	6
Sexual offences	35	18
Other	12	19

2012			
Offence category	CPS	Victim or victim's family	General public/MP
Arson	1	0	0
Burglary	18	11	1
Driving deaths	4	3	6
Drugs	37	0	1
Firearms	3	1	1
Hate crime	0	0	1
Manslaughter	8	7	14
Murder	5	5	11
Robbery	46	3	2
s.18 OAPA	17	3	4
Sexual offences	43	15	66
Other	12	3	28

In 2010 and 2011 the categories of victim/general public/MP were not recorded separately. The statistics for 2012, however, do separate the victim complaints from the general public complaints. The category of 'General public' may also include, for example, campaigning organisations.

In some cases, requests to review the sentence were received from both the CPS and victims, MPs and/or the general public and the total figures may not therefore appear to be consistent with the answer given in the answer of 8th July 2013.

Philip Davies: To ask the Attorney General pursuant to the Answer of 8 July 2013, *Official Report*, columns 12-13W, on sentencing: appeals, for what offence each out of time case was for; and what the sentence was in each case. [166266]

The Solicitor-General: The following table contains details on the out of time cases for referable offences between 2010 and 2012. In addition to this there were four cases in 2010 and two cases in 2011 for non-referable offences.

<i>Offence</i>	<i>Sentence</i>
<i>2010</i>	
Rape and false imprisonment	Life with a minimum of 9 years' imprisonment
Rape	4 years' imprisonment
Rape	2 years' imprisonment
Rape	2 years' imprisonment
Rape	12 months conditional discharge
Manslaughter	3 years' 6 months imprisonment
Manslaughter	Indeterminate sentence for public protection, minimum term of 4 years
Manslaughter	4.5 years' imprisonment
Manslaughter	5.5 years' imprisonment
Murder	Life with a minimum of 14 years'
Murder	Life with a minimum of 15 years'
Murder	10 years' imprisonment.
Death by dangerous driving	3.5 years' imprisonment.
<i>2011</i>	
S.18 Offences Against Persons Act	Imprisonment for a minimum of 3 years and 230 days for public protection.
Murder	11 years' imprisonment
<i>2012</i>	
Possession of a firearm	12 months imprisonment suspended for 2 years
Murder	Life with a minimum of 13 years and 124 days
Murder	Life with a minimum of 17 years and 152 days
Murder	Life with a minimum of 16 years and 364 days

<i>Offence</i>	<i>Sentence</i>
Murder	Life with a minimum of 53 years and 364 days
Murder	Life with a minimum of 16 years and 307 days
Sexual Offences	2 year supervision order
S.18 Offences Against Persons Act	5 years' imprisonment
Manslaughter	28 months imprisonment
Other	8 months imprisonment
Other	20 months imprisonment
Other	Community sentence and unpaid work

Serious Fraud Office

Emily Thornberry: To ask the Attorney-General how much the Serious Fraud Office spent on away days in 2012-13. [166214]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office spent £5,090 on one away day in 2012-13.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Accountancy

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much his Department spent on contracts with (a) Deloitte, (b) PricewaterhouseCoopers, (c) KPMG and (d) Ernst and Young in each year since 2008. [164944]

Brandon Lewis: The following table sets out the amounts spent on contracts with the mentioned organisations since 2008:

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>nearest £000 (inc VAT)</i>				
	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>2011-12</i>	<i>2012-13</i>
Deloitte	49	351	473	20	0
KPMG	157	44	216	93	12
PricewaterhouseCoopers	2,945	2,977	2,527	61	229
Total	3,151	3,372	3,216	174	241

Our procurement records show that there were no spend data for Ernst and Young.

DCLG Internal Audit is part of Cross Departmental Internal Audit Service, the recently created cross departmental internal audit service which provides internal audit services to a number of different central Government bodies. As such the increase in PricewaterhouseCoopers spend recorded in the DCLG accounts is not directly related to an increase in PricewaterhouseCoopers use solely by DCLG, but a reflection of an increase in demand from across the Cross Departmental Internal Audit Service client base. We have recovered the additional spend through charges to our clients and there were no spend for DCLG audit programme in 2012-13.

Since January 2011, central Government Departments have been required to publish on Contracts Finder information on the contracts they award at:

www.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/

In addition, my Department publishes details of spend over £250 at the following website:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?keywords=transparency+data&publication_filter_option=all&topics%5B%5D=all&departments%5B%5D=department-for-communities-and-local-government&world_locations%5B%5D=all&direction=before&date=2013-08-01

Across Whitehall in 2012-13, in taking stronger control of the consulting and temporary labour bills this government has saved over £1.6 billion.

Affordable Housing

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many affordable homes (a) were built in each financial year from 2010-11 to 2012-13 and (b) he expects will be built in each financial year from 2013-14 to 2017-18. [163037]

Mr Prisk [holding answer 2 July 2013]: As outlined in my Department's press notice of 13 August, we estimate 150,000 more affordable homes have been delivered

in England under this Government; as the notes to editors explains, the precise figures for 2012-13 will be available in November.

As I stated in my answer to the right hon. Member of 9 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 185W, we do not publish specific yearly forecasts of affordable housing building.

Notwithstanding, I would note:

We are investing £19.5 billion of public and private money in new affordable homes in the spending review period from 2011 to 2015. This will help deliver 170,000 affordable homes by 2015.

Government guarantees worth up to £10 billion, and capital grant of £450 million, will support delivery of up to a further 30,000 affordable homes for rent and home ownership by March 2017.

After the current spending round period, we are investing £3.3 billion into the new Affordable Homes Programme from 2015-16. There will also be Right-to-Buy sales receipts reinvested in affordable housing. We expect this public investment to help lever in up to £20 billion of private finance on top, and deliver a further 165,000 homes between 2015-16 and 2017-18.

Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which of the 165,000 new affordable homes for 2015-16 to 2017-18 announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 27 June 2013 in his oral statement will be (a) homes built using the £3.3 billion of investment, (b) homes provided under section 106 agreements and (c) homes built as right-to-buy replacements. [163039]

Mr Prisk [*holding answer 2 July 2013*]: The £3.3 billion of public investment underpins our plan to build 165,000 new affordable homes and will be accompanied by up to £20 billion of private investment. This very large sum of money will allow us to respond to changing circumstances, including the inevitable uncertainty about supply from non-grant funded sources. As our aim is to use a competition for grant to get the most homes at the lowest possible cost per unit, we do not in any case think it would be sensible to set out sub-targets for different parts of the programme.

Apprentices

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) how many apprenticeships his Department offered to people aged (a) 16 to 18, (b) 19 to 21 and (c) 22 to 26 years old in each year since 2010; [165868]

(2) what strategies he has to create apprenticeships in his Department; and what plans he has to promote such strategies. [165886]

Brandon Lewis: We are actively supporting the Government's Civil Service Apprenticeship Scheme. We filled 10 apprentice positions in January 2013 (two were 16 to 18, six were 19 to 21, two were 22 to 26). These apprentices are taking part in a tailored learning programme, leading to a technical certificate in Business Administration at NVQ level 2.

We did not recruit any apprenticeships in 2010-11 or 2011-12 due to the Department's broader recruitment freeze and restructuring which entailed reductions in the number of staff, helping deliver savings for the taxpayer.

We intend to continue to offer apprenticeships as part of our wider resourcing strategy in order to build a strong pipeline of potential candidates for future positions throughout the organisation. This sits within the context of our wider approach to developing and managing talent within the Department and across Government.

Consultants

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much (a) he and (b) officials in his Department spent on external assistance to prepare for (i) appearances before select committees and (ii) contact with the media in (A) 2011-12 and (B) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [164660]

Brandon Lewis: The Department for Communities and Local Government did not spend any money on external assistance preparing for appearances before select committees and preparing for contact with the media in 2011-12 and 2012-13.

In comparison, Ministers in the last Administration spent at least £2,115 on public speaking training as outlined in the answer of 15 October 2012, *Official Report*, column 228W.

Food

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what proportion of all food procured for his Department was sourced from (a) British producers, (b) small and medium-sized enterprises and (c) producers which met British buying standards in the latest period for which figures are available. [164760]

Brandon Lewis: The Department for Communities and Local Government's food is procured as follows: 73% is from British producers, over 40% is from small and medium-sized enterprises, and all producers in the supply chain meet the Government Buying Standard for Food and Catering.

Our catering supplier is also required to provide healthy eating options in our canteen, including fresh and seasonal produce.

The procurement from British producers has increased from 35% in 2010 and from 56% in 2011.

Forests: Planning Permission

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance his Department gives to local authorities on the protection of ancient woodlands in the planning system. [166158]

Nick Boles [*holding answer 18 July 2013*]: The National Planning Policy Framework gives strong protection to ancient woodland. It makes clear that planning permission should be refused for development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland, unless the need for, and benefits of, the development in that location clearly outweigh the loss.

Grant Thornton

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much his Department has spent on contracts with Grant Thornton in each year since 2008. [165686]

Brandon Lewis: The information requested is set out in the following table:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Amount (£) including VAT</i>
2008-09	109,461
2009-10	136,608
2010-11	102,308
2011-12	123,006
2012-13	109,075

Since January 2011, central Government Departments have been required to publish on Contracts Finder information on the contracts they award at:

www.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/

In addition, my Department publishes details of spend over £250 at the following website:

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?keywords=transparency+data&publication_filter_option=all&topics%5B%5D=all&departments%5B%5D=department-for-communities-and-local-government&world_locations%5B%5D=all&direction=before&date=2013-08-01

Across Whitehall in 2012-13, in taking stronger control of the consulting and temporary labour bills, this Government has saved over £1.6 billion of taxpayers' money.

Green Belt

Julian Sturdy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps he is taking to protect green belt land from inappropriate and unsustainable development. [163728]

Nick Boles: The coalition agreement explicitly states that we will maintain green belt protection. The green belt has a valuable role protecting against urban sprawl and providing a green lung round our towns and cities.

The National Planning Policy Framework, which safeguards national green belt protection, explains how the green belt serves to:

- check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

This Government has abolished the last Administration's top-down regional strategies which sought to delete or undermine green belt protection in 30 towns and cities across England.

As outlined in the written statement of 1 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 24WS, our planning policy on traveller sites states that both temporary and permanent traveller sites are inappropriate development in green belt. In some cases, the green belt is not given sufficient protection in this context. Accordingly the Secretary of

State for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr Pickles), will give particular scrutiny to traveller site appeals in green belt, so that he can consider the extent to which this Government's clear policy intentions are being fulfilled.

In addition, as explained in the written statement of 29 July 2013, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 162WS, we are proposing a further strengthening of green belt protection by deleting the current policy requirement to give special consideration to the need for waste management facilities in the green belt.

Housing

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the name is of each housing initiative announced by the Government since May 2010. [161538]

Mr Prisk: There is no compiled list of "housing initiatives". Rather I refer the hon. Member to the Government's comprehensive and detailed Housing Strategy, published in November 2011, a copy of which is in the Library of the House and online at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/laying-the-foundations-a-housing-strategy-for-england--2

This clearly lays out the different steps we are taking on housing.

More broadly, the Government's ongoing key policies are clearly laid out on my Department's website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/housing>

under the following four themes:

- Increasing the number of available homes,
- Improving the rented housing sector,
- Helping people to buy a home, and
- Providing housing support for older and vulnerable people.

Housing: Construction

Alison Seabeck: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment he has made of the potential financial implications for his Department of not discounting demolitions on regeneration sites from the New Homes Bonus calculations over the lifetime of the scheme. [R] [165734]

Mr Prisk: Such a policy change (not discounting demolitions) would introduce a new financial incentive for councils to demolish homes.

It would entail a relative redistribution in local authority funding towards councils

which demolished more homes, away from those which did not. This is not a change that I am considering. As I outlined in my written statement of 10 May 2013, *Official Report*, columns 13-14WS, this Government has placed a greater emphasis on refurbishment and getting empty homes back into productive use, in contrast to the last Administration's obsession with demolition.

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number of (a) planning permissions given for new homes, (b) enactment on planning

permissions for new homes started, (c) new homes completed and (d) social homes completed in each of the last six month periods over the last three years.

[165864]

Nick Boles: Quarterly statistics on planning applications can be found online at:

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/planning-applications-statistics

Quarterly statistics on house building are online at:

www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building

Live tables on affordable housing supply, published by year, are online at:

www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-affordable-housing-supply

Figures for the number of enactment of planning permissions for new homes over the last three years are not centrally held.

My Department does hold some information from Glenigan on sites with 10 or more units. They estimate that as of June 2013 there were an estimated 495,700 units with planning permission. Of these, 234,800 had already started on site, 189,900 were progressing towards a start, 60,500 were classed as on hold or shelved and 10,500 were being sold or information was not available.

As I noted in my answer of 9 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 189W, this illustrates there is little evidence of land banking or land hoarding in practice. I also refer the hon. Member to that answer on what steps we are taking to help kick start stalled sites.

Local Government Finance

Mike Freer: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what level of reserves is held by local authorities in England and Wales.

[162832]

Brandon Lewis: Latest published data show that at 31 March 2012 non-schools revenue reserves were £16.4 billion in England. The Department does not collect data on the level of non-schools revenue reserves for Wales.

In December, we published the best practice document, '50 ways to save', which recommended to councils:

"Utilise £16 billion of reserves creatively:Many 'earmarked' reserves do not actually have a proper purpose. Make creative use of reserves to address short-term costs, such as restructuring or investing now to realise savings in the longer-term (e.g. 'invest to save' projects)."

Local Government: Constituencies

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans his Department has to ensure that appropriate signage will be placed correctly at historic county boundaries.

[158368]

Brandon Lewis: Ministers are currently reviewing what further steps can be taken to support recognition and awareness of England's traditional counties, including encouraging appropriate local signage.

Out of Town Shopping Centres

Mr Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps his Department is taking to assist local authorities in identifying and offsetting any negative effects of out of town shopping centres on town centres.

[165150]

Nick Boles: The Government is fully committed to supporting town centres. Our National Planning Policy Framework sets out clearly that local councils should recognise town centres as the hearts of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality. Specifically, it requires that local planning authorities apply a sequential and impact test to planning applications for certain uses, such as retail, leisure and office, that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date local plan. Where an application fails to satisfy the sequential test or is likely to have significant adverse impact it should be refused.

Our policy also supports the retention and re-introduction of markets in town centres, makes clear that local approaches to parking should support town centres, and that the needs of retail, leisure and other main town centre uses should be met in full. We have taken action to help rejuvenate high streets by backing communities across the country with a multi-million pound package of support, providing over £80 million in loans for start-up companies and doubling small business rate relief to help small entrepreneurs. Since the publication of the Portas Review into the future of our high streets last summer, we have established 27 Portas Pilots and 333 Town Teams to test different approaches to revitalising the high street, while the 500 neighbourhood plans being developed give local communities the opportunity to support their town's high streets.

Staff

Mike Freer: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much his Department spent on (a) recruitment agency fees, (b) outplacement agency fees for displaced or redundant staff and (c) staff training in each of the last 12 months.

[162610]

Brandon Lewis: We have interpreted recruitment agency fees to mean companies (third party suppliers) that we engage in recruiting permanent staff for the Department. We have spent £8,312 (excluding VAT) on recruitment agency fees in the last 12 months to July 2013.

To place this in context, our departmental audited annual accounts for the core Department show that total staff costs fell from £216 million in 2009-10 to £99 million in 2012-13, a reduction of 54% in cash terms, or a saving of £117,000,000 a year. The number of staff has been reduced from 3,781 full-time equivalent in 2009-10 to 1,681 in 2012-13, a reduction of 56%.

We have not made any such outplacement agencies fees in the last 12 months.

It would involve disproportionate cost to identify spend specifically on staff training in each of the last 12 months as this information is not readily available, as this is recorded within a wider development budget category.

Travellers: Planning Permission

Sheryll Murray: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to the statement of 1 July 2013, *Official Report*, columns 24-5W, on planning and Travellers, if he will extend the provisions put in place for greenbelt land to areas designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and if he will make a statement. [163600]

Brandon Lewis: Our planning policy for traveller sites states that local planning authorities should strictly limit the development of new traveller sites in the open countryside. This must be read in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework which accords great weight to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Notwithstanding, I am open to representations on whether further steps are needed to reform planning policy on travellers sites.

Wales

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department provides services to people resident in Wales or usually resident in Wales. [166099]

Brandon Lewis: In relation to Wales, the matters for which my Department is responsible are largely devolved to the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. We are, however, responsible for giving development consent for some of the categories of nationally significant infrastructure projects under the Planning Act 2008 across both England and Wales.

Welsh Language

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department has a current Welsh Language scheme; when that scheme was adopted; and whether it has been reviewed since May 2011. [166081]

Brandon Lewis: This Government is fully committed to the Welsh language and fully committed to providing Government services in the Welsh language where there is demand for them.

The Welsh Measure was adopted in 2011. There has not been a review by the Department of Communities and Local Government into the Welsh Language scheme since its introduction.

Youth Work

Mr Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much funding his Department allocated for youth work in (a) 2010-11, (b) 2011-12 and (c) 2012-13; and if he will make a statement. [164075]

Brandon Lewis: The information is as follows:

Local authority spending on youth services

Most spending decisions on youth services are made at a local level as local authorities are in the best position to assess local needs and priorities.

Local authority funding is not ring fenced and so local authorities can allocate resources according to the local context. Central government's role is to give them the freedom and flexibilities to make the most effective decisions.

Locals authorities' planned and actual expenditure on youth services, where it is segregated from other services, is published at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/chidrenandyoungpeople/strategy/financeandfunding/section251>

Youth and Community funding is one of the services supported by the local Government Finance Settlement, which is arranged through my Department. It is not possible to say how much funding has been provided for any particular service.

DCLG's spending on youth services

During the period 2010-11 to 2012-13 my Department has funded some specific projects targeted at youth work, that align with the strategic objectives of the Department.

As part of our Integration strategy:

1. Youth United—funding of £10 million over 2 and half years (of which £3,833,860 was paid in 2012-13, with the remainder falling in future years). Youth United Foundation is a coalition of the major uniformed youth volunteering organisations, such as the Scouts and Girl Guides, which engage with young people, offering a range of development opportunities such as leadership and employment skills. The programme aims to increase the provision of places in areas that have traditionally had limited opportunities for young people.

<http://www.youthunited.org.uk/>

2. National Citizens Service legacy project—£105,000 (£30,000 in 11-12 and £75,000 in 12-13) to the Young Advisors Company Ltd (a registered charity), to fund leadership and communications training for NCS graduates, enabling them to participate in volunteering after they leave the NCS programme.

3. Industrial Cadets—£200,000 (of which £115,000 in 2012-13, with the remainder in future years) to the Engineering Development Trust, to support a cadet programme to enthuse young people about the opportunities available to them through a career in the Industrial sector. Linking large and prestigious industrial firms to schools in deprived areas.

<http://industrialcadets.org.uk/>

4. Young Advisors Scheme support—a contribution of £133,500 in 10-11 to the Young Advisors Company Ltd for the support and expansion of the Young Advisors scheme.

As part of our Homelessness strategy:

1. St Basil's—funding of £80,000 in 2010-2011, £180,000 in 2011-2012 and £180,000 in 2012-2013, to support their work on tackling youth homelessness.

2. Shelter—£20,000 in 2012-2013 to develop a website as a resource for providers working with young people. The website includes practical, evidence-based information and advice to help solve young people's housing problems.

Troubled Families Programme

Since 2012-13 my Department has taken on the delivery of the Troubled Families programme. Announced in December 2011 by the Prime Minister, the Troubled Families Programme is a £448 million three year programme which aims to turn around the lives of 120,000 families by the end of this Parliament. The funding is drawn from six Government Departments, including DCLG. Of the £448 million budget, £136 million was paid to local authorities in 2012-13. The remainder will fall in future financial years.

Our payments by results scheme includes specific measures for the children and young people in these families, stating that a council may claim a result when:

each child in the family has had fewer than 3 exclusions from school and at least 85% attendance over the last three school terms; and

the number of proven offences by all young people in the family has reduced by at least a third in the last 6 months; and

the antisocial behaviour of the whole family has reduced by at least 60% over the last 6 months.

Or

one member of the family has moved off benefits, into work and kept this job for at least 3 months. Further details can be found in our Financial Framework:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-troubled-families-programme-financial-framework>

See the Financial Framework for details of payments attributable to each result:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-troubled-families-programme-financial-framework>

DEFENCE Apprentices

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many apprenticeships his Department offered to people aged (a) 16 to 18, (b) 19 to 21 and (c) 22 to 26 years old in each year since 2010; [165870]

(2) what strategies he has to create apprenticeships in his Department; and what plans he has to promote such strategies. [165888]

Mr Francois: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is pleased to be recognised as the single largest deliverer of apprenticeships in the UK. Apprenticeships are firmly embedded across armed forces initial training. 95% of Army recruits enrol in an apprenticeship each year, most of whom complete it within two years. Apprenticeships are now the means by which the majority of service personnel develop the skills that they need to succeed on operations.

Defence training for armed forces personnel is governed by a systematic approach that ensures all training is regularly re-assessed to ensure it delivers what we need. This process provides the mechanism by which we can examine options for further development, including apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships where appropriate.

The MOD has also been heavily involved in civilian apprenticeship delivery for many years and is the largest deliverer of such apprenticeships across Government Departments. The MOD works closely with other Government Departments regarding civilian apprenticeship delivery generally.

Figures for the three services and also for civilian apprenticeships are presented in the following tables.

Royal Navy

The Royal Navy organise their management information on the basis of apprenticeships which are started in a calendar year.

Age	2010	2011	2012	2013 ¹
16 to 18	691	321	350	178
19 to 21	1,139	686	1,091	511
22 to 26	1,029	729	1,063	555

¹ Provisional

Army

The Army hold management information based on the numbers of soldiers who achieved an apprenticeship in an academic year (1 August to 31 July) rather than the date started.

Age	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13 ¹
16 to 18	2,860	2,706	1,633	1,182
19 to 21	2,154	2,310	1,693	1,116
22 to 26	2,267	2,336	2,007	1,444

¹ Provisional

Royal Air Force

Information held by the RAF is based on the number of new apprenticeship registrations in each academic year.

Age	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13 ¹
16 to 18	440	173	184	138
19 to 21	957	715	764	484
22 to 26	674	624	683	564

¹ Provisional

Civilian

The MOD runs two engineering apprentice recruitment schemes for civilians, known as Craft and Technician. In addition, the MOD offers apprenticeships to its existing civilian staff through an arrangement delivered by Learn Direct. Localised apprenticeships are in use across defence, although information about these is not held centrally. The information presented here does not include MOD trading funds or agencies.

Engineering Craft Scheme Intake				
Age	2010	2011	2012	2013 ¹
16 to 18	4	4	4	4
19 to 21	1	3	1	0
22 to 26	1	0	0	2

¹ Anticipated

Engineering Technician Scheme Intake			
Age	2010	2011	2012
16 to 18	18	10	6
19 to 24	27	27	12
25 plus	8	9	4

In September 2013 we expect to recruit a total of 63 Engineering Technician apprentices; their age profile cannot yet be determined. The age breakdown presented for Engineering Technician apprentices is based on available internal management statistics. A restructured age breakdown along the lines requested has not been possible in the available time.

The Craft and Technician schemes invite applications annually from schools, colleges and through the media.

Workplace Apprenticeships delivered by Learn Direct for specified age groups				
Age	2010	2011	2012	2013
16 to 18	6	1	1	1
19 to 21	85	23	7	1
22 to 26	140	65	39	17

A service level agreement between the MOD and Learn Direct offers existing staff a route to a workplace apprenticeship on a voluntary basis. Since its introduction in 2009 over 3,000 MOD staff across all age groups have undertaken one of the apprenticeships on offer.

Armed Forces: Young People

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many recruits aged below 18 years have gone absent without leave (*a*) in the last five years and (*b*) since the Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 were introduced; [166519]

(2) how many recruits have (*a*) requested and (*b*) been granted discharge as of right under the rules introduced in The Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 since that legislation was implemented; and what the length of time was between each recruit's initial request for and their date of discharge. [166523]

Mr Francois: The information requested on absence without leave for recruits below the age of 18 is only available for those who were classed as long-term absent for 21 days or more. These data are set out in the following table:

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total</i>
2008-09	201
2009-10	30
2010-11	10
2011-12	10
2012-13 ¹	10
Since 12 July 2011	10
Total	80

¹ The Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 were brought into force on 12 July 2011.

Note:

The totals and sub-totals have been rounded separately and may not equal the sums of their rounded parts. When rounding to the nearest 10, numbers ending in '5' have been rounded to the nearest multiple of 20 to prevent systematic bias.

The number of recruits requesting and granted discharge as of right under the amended regulations, and instances of absence under 21 days, are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, there are no known examples in which a formal application for discretionary discharge under the 'Under 18 Discharge as of Right' scheme has been rejected.

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when the Attestation Papers for armed forces recruits were updated to include the extended rights of discharge for those enlisted below the age of 18 as introduced in The Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011, paragraph 9; and if he will place a copy of these papers in the Library; [166524]

(2) what official documentation is given to armed forces recruits aged under 18 and their parents which specify the extended rights of discharge introduced in The Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011; and if he will place a copy of such papers in the Library. [166525]

Mr Francois: Since the Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 came into force the extended right of discharge for recruits below the age of 18 has been implemented by each of the three services.

Recruits under 18, and their parents, initially received oral briefings while documentation was updated. All three services' attestation papers reflect the regulations in their latest iterations.

The naval service and the RAF changed their attestation documentation over the last year and the Army, because of the transfer of operations to the Recruiting Partnering Project with Capita, and the size and scale of their operation, have just completed updating their forms.

Armed forces recruits under the age of 18, and their parents, still receive an oral brief and copies of the offer of service. Copies of these papers for all three services have been placed in the Library of the House.

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken and guidance he has issued to ensure that recruiting officers, commanding officers, prospective recruits and their parents are made aware of the extended rights of discharge for those enlisted below the age of 18 introduced in The Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011. [166526]

Mr Francois: A Defence Instruction and Notice was issued in December 2011 providing service-wide instruction, including to all commanding officers and recruitment establishments, on the changes to the rights of discharge for those enlisted below the age of 18. This information is verbally emphasised to prospective recruits and their parents or guardians during the recruiting process and should now be reflected on the attestation papers if the individual subsequently enlists.

Regulation

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the title is of each regulation his Department (*a*) introduced and (*b*) revoked in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013 to date; and if he will make a statement. [165908]

Mr Francois: The following regulations were introduced: 2010

The Armed Forces (Redundancy, Resettlement and Gratuity Earnings Schemes) Order 2010—(SI 2010/345)

The Armed Forces (Redundancy, Resettlement and Gratuity Earnings Schemes) (No.2) Order 2010—(SI 2010/832)

The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme (Amendment) Order 2010—(SI 2010/283)

The Atomic Weapons Establishment (Awe) Burghfield Byelaws 2010—(SI 2010/249)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2010—(SI 2010/1723)

The Reserve Forces Act 1996 (Isle of Man) Regulations 2010—(SI 2010/2643)

The Reserve Forces Appeal Tribunals (Isle of Man) Rules 2010—(SI 2010/2644)

The Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2010—(SI 2010/2475)

The Visiting Forces (Designation) Order 2010—(SI 2010/2970)

2011

The Armed Forces Redundancy Schemes 2006 and the Armed Forces Redundancy Etc. Schemes 2010 (Amendment) Order 2011—(SI 2011/208)

The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme (Amendment) Order 2011—(SI 2011/811)

The Naval, Military and Air Forces Etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions (Amendment) Order 2011—(SI 2011/235)

The Northwood Headquarters Byelaws 2011—(SI 2011/3102)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) Order 2011—(SI 2011/517)

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act 1943 (Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme) (Rights of Appeal) Regulations 2011—(SI 2011/1239)

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals Act 1943 (Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme) (Time Limit for Appeals) (Amendment) Regulations 2011—(SI 2011/1240)

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Trading Fund Order 2011—(SI 2011/1330)

The Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2005 (Amendment) Order 2011—(SI 2011/1364)

The Armed Forces (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2011—(SI 2011/1523)

Harbours, Docks, Piers and Ferries - The Clyde Dockyard Port of Gareloch and Loch Long Order 2011—(SI 2011/1680)

The Thetford Range Byelaws 2011—(SI 2011/1142)

The Defence and Security Public Contracts Regulations 2011—(SI 2011/1848)

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Armed Forces) (Amendment) Order 2011—(SI 2011/2282)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2011—(SI 2011/2552)

2012

The Armed Forces Redundancy Scheme 2006, The Armed Forces Redundancy Etc. Schemes 2010 and the Armed Forces Pension Scheme 2005 (Amendment) Order 2011—(SI 2011/3013)

The Armed Forces Act 2011 (Commencement No.1, Transitional and Transitory Provisions) Order 2012—(SI 2012/669 (C.15))

The Ministry of Defence Police (Performance) Regulations 2012—(SI 2012/808)

The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme (Amendment) Order 2012—(SI 2012/670)

The Northwood Headquarters Byelaws 2011—(SI 2011/3102)

The Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 (Designation of Vessels And Controlled Sites) Order 2012—(SI 2012/1110)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2012—(SI 2012/1573)

The Armed Forces (Enhanced Learning Credit Scheme and Further and Higher Education Commitment Scheme) Order 2012—(SI 2012/1796)

The Ot Moor Range Byelaws 2012—(SI 2012/1478)

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Armed Forces) (Amendment) Order 2012—(SI 2012/2505)

The Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2012—(SI 2012/1750)

The Armed Forces Act 2011 (Commencement No.2) Order—(SI 2012/2921 (CI 16))

The Armed Forces (Powers of Stop and Search, Search, Seizure and Retention) Order 2012—(SI 2012/2919)

2013

The Armed Forces Act 2011 (Commencement No.3) Order 2013—(SI 2013/784 (C.37))

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Amendment) Order 2013—(SI 2013/436)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (Consequential Provisions: Subordinate Legislation) Order 2013—(SI 2013/591)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Consequential Provisions: Primary Legislation) Order 2013—(SI 2013/796)

The Naval, Military and Air Forces Etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions (Amendment) Order 2013—(SI 2013/241)

The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Scheme (Amendment) Order 2013—(SI 2013/707)

The Caversfield SFA Byelaws 2012—(SI 2012/3088)

The Visiting Forces (Designation) Order 2013—(SI 2013/540)

The Armed Forces (Court Martial) Rules 2013—(SI 2013/1851)

The Armed Forces (Retrial for Serious Offences) Order 2013—(SI 2013/1852)

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) (Consequential Provisions: Primary Legislation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2013—Awaiting Parliamentary Approval

The Armed Forces (Alcohol Limits for Prescribed Safety - Critical Duties) Regulations 2013—Awaiting Parliamentary Approval

Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order 2013—Awaiting Parliamentary Approval

The Armed Forces (Financial Penalty Enforcement Orders) (Amendment) Regulations 2013—(SI 2013/1761)

The Armed Forces (Remission of Fines) Order 2013—Awaiting Parliamentary Approval

The following regulations were revoked:

2010

None, although two areas of secondary legislation were reviewed: Regulations governing the Service Pensions Order (war pensions) and the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS)

2011

The Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation Scheme) Order 2011

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals (Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation) (Rights of Appeal) Regulations 2005

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals (Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme) (Rights of Appeal) Amendment Regulations 2006

The Defence Research Agency Trading Fund Order 1993

The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency Trading Fund Order 1995

The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency Trading Fund (Amendment) Order 1996

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Trading Fund Order 2001

The Thetford Rifle Range in the County of Norfolk Byelaws 1916

The Clyde Dockyard Port of Gareloch and Loch Long Order 1967

The Clyde Dockyard Port of Gareloch and Loch Long (Amendment) Order 1983

Additionally, in November 2011, the Armed Forces Act 2011 received Royal Assent. This Act repealed the Naval Medical Compassionate Fund Act 1915 and also revoked the Naval Medical Compassionate Fund Order 2008

2012

The Ot Moor Range Byelaws 1980

2013

Part 8 of Schedule 2 to the Armed Forces (Court Martial) Rules 2009

It should also be noted that each Armed Forces Act (Continuation) Order remains in force for one year only.

Temporary Employment

Mr Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many individual contracts have been issued for manpower substitution by his Department in each financial year since 2007; [166447]

(2) how many days have been worked by staff employed as manpower substitutes in his Department in each financial year since 2007. [166448]

Mr Francois: In 2007, the Ministry of Defence (MOD), excluding its Trading Funds, began to operate centrally administered manpower substitution contracts which provide MOD business units with access to short-term staff known as agency workers. These arrangements provide placements at agreed fixed rates on a national basis, thereby offering benefits to the entire Department. The first centralised contracts provided clerical/administrative and secretarial agency workers. This has expanded over time to a centralised Manpower Substitution Service (MSS) owned by Defence Business Services (DBS) which also encompasses the provision of interim professionals (including HR, finance and audit, project and programme management and procurement), specialist IT workers, health care and dental grades and Skill Zone workers, drivers and security guards.

The information held centrally on the MOD's MSS database reflects this broadening of scope. It records the number of centrally-held individual manpower substitution contracts rather than the number of different agency staff who may have worked within MOD.

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Number of individual manpower substitution contracts</i>
2008-09	1,348
2009-10	1,815
2010-11	1,175
2011-12	3,171
2012-13	4,021

The database used to capture this information was set up in late 2007 and therefore full data from financial year 2007-08 is unavailable. These data do not capture pre-existing locally arranged contracts, which business units may have had with recruitment agencies prior to the introduction of the new mandatory centralised arrangements, nor locally organised manpower substitution arrangements for temporary staff outside of the groups mentioned.

A calculation of the number of days worked could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Veterans: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of former (a) servicemen and (b) medical auxiliaries who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder after discharge from military service. [166342]

Mr Francois: The information is not held in the format requested. However, we do hold information on the number of veterans who are in receipt of a war pension under the War Pension Scheme (WPS) or have since April 2005 been awarded compensation under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that has been attributed to service.

As at 31 March 2013 (the latest date for which WPS and AFCS data are available) 6,200 ex-service personnel were in receipt of a war pension for PTSD and 185 ex-service personnel had been awarded compensation

as a result of a post-service claim under the AFCS for PTSD. The term "medical auxiliary" does not correspond to any category for which data are available.

In accordance with the Defence Statistics rounding policy the WPS and AFCS figures have been rounded to the nearest five.

Veterans: Suicide

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former (a) military personnel and (b) medical auxiliaries have been identified as having committed suicide on discharge from the military after having served in Afghanistan in each year since 2002. [166343]

Mr Francois: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) does not currently have specific information on the number of suicide and open verdict deaths among veterans who served in Afghanistan.

The MOD has commissioned a study on veterans of Operations Telic (Iraq) and Herrick (Afghanistan). This will monitor the causes of death (including suicide) of all members of the armed forces who served in the period from 2003 (the start of operations in Iraq) until the end of operations in Afghanistan. The intention is to run the study for the lifetime of the cohort; therefore the population will include both serving personnel and veterans. It is hoped that the initial results of this study will be published next year.

In 2006 the MOD commissioned research from Manchester university to investigate the level of suicide amongst those leaving the UK armed forces over the period 1996 to 2005, and to make comparisons with matched personnel remaining in-service and the general population. This work was published in March 2009. The study found that, taking all age groups together, the risk of suicide was no higher than in the general community.

EDUCATION

Apprentices

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many apprenticeships his Department offered to people aged (a) 16 to 18, (b) 19 to 21 and (c) 22 to 26 years old in each year since 2010. [165871]

Matthew Hancock: The Department does not hold this information.

Billing

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many creditors to his Department owed more than £10,000 remained unpaid for more than (a) 30 days, (b) 45 days, (c) 60 days, (d) 75 days and (e) more than 90 days in each of the last three years. [166371]

Elizabeth Truss: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. In common with other Government Departments, the annual report and accounts for the Department for Education, which are available in the Libraries of both Houses, contain information on supplier payment performance.

Education: Woking

school leavers and (b) secondary school leavers in Woking constituency in each of the last five years. [166304]

Jonathan Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment his Department has made of the level of literacy and numeracy in (a) primary

Mr Laws: The information requested has been provided in the following tables:

Achievements at the expected level¹ by pupils at the end of key stage 2 in Woking constituency^{2,3,4}(a)

Percentage of KS2 pupils achieving expected level in	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 ⁵
English	86	85	84	85	88
Maths	82	81	80	80	86

¹ Includes pupils who achieved Level 4 or above. Level 4 is the expected level of achievement for pupils at the end of key stage 2.

² Parliamentary constituency figures are based on the postcode of the school.

³ Data are final data for all years.

⁴ Includes state-funded schools including academies. Figures do not include pupils recently arrived from overseas.

⁵ In 2012, English was calculated from reading test results and writing teacher assessment rather than from reading and writing tests as in previous years. English in 2012 is, therefore, not comparable to previous years.

Source:

National pupil database

Percentages of pupils at the end of key stage 4 achieving A-C grades in English and mathematics GCSEs¹ in Woking constituency^{2,3,4}(b)*

Percentage of KS4 pupils achieving an A*-C grade in	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
English	72.9	71.9	76.0	75.7	66.1
Maths	64.5	66.7	69.1	72.1	71.2

¹ Full GCSEs only have been included (Full GCSEs, double awards, accredited international certificates and their predecessor iGCSEs and AS levels). Figures from 2007/08 to 2008/09 exclude iGCSEs, 2009/10 figures onwards include accredited iGCSEs.

² Parliamentary constituency figures are based on the postcode of the school.

³ Data are final data for all years.

⁴ Includes state-funded schools including academies. Figures do not include pupils recently arrived from overseas.

Source:

National pupil database

English Language: Lancashire

Andrew Stephenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many people in Lancashire have been affected by (a) English Language and (b) English Literature grade boundary changes in the current academic year. [166339]

Elizabeth Truss: This is a matter for Ofqual. I have asked the Chief Regulator, Glenys Stacey, to write to my hon. Friend. A copy of her reply will be placed in the House Library.

Free School Meals: Surrey

Jonathan Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of children in (a) Woking constituency and (b) Surrey were eligible for free school meals in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in each of the last three years. [166305]

Mr Laws: Information on the number and percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals in state-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools in Woking constituency, Surrey local authority and England is shown in the following table.

State-funded primary and state-funded secondary schools^{1, 2, 3}. Number and percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals^{4, 5}, January each year: 2011 to 2013, England, Surrey local authority and Woking parliamentary constituency

	2011			2012		
	Number on roll ^{4, 5}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{4, 5}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals	Number on roll ^{4, 5}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{4, 5}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals
<i>State-funded primary^{1, 2}</i>						
England	3,866,885	741,315	19.2	3,941,625	759,040	19.3
Surrey local authority	76,957	7,312	9.5	78,618	7,236	9.2
Woking parliamentary constituency	7,395	753	10.2	7,634	708	9.3
<i>State-funded secondary^{1, 3}</i>						
England	2,837,825	450,275	15.9	2,809,815	449,485	16.0
Surrey local authority	52,989	3,669	6.9	52,551	3,674	7.0
Woking parliamentary constituency	4,235	325	7.7	4,187	312	7.5

	2013		
	Number on roll ^{1, 2}	Number of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals ^{4, 5}	Percentage of pupils known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals
<i>State-funded primary^{1, 2}</i>			
England	4,039,970	774,610	19.2
Surrey local authority	80,921	7,374	9.1
Woking parliamentary constituency	7,881	760	9.6
<i>State-funded secondary^{1, 3}</i>			
England	2,779,190	452,600	16.3
Surrey local authority	52,161	3,902	7.5
Woking parliamentary constituency	4,204	301	7.2

¹ Includes middle schools as deemed.

² Includes all primary academies, including free schools.

³ Includes city technology colleges and all secondary academies, including free schools.

⁴ Includes pupils who are sole or dual main registrations. Includes boarders. In pupil referral units includes pupils registered with other providers and further education colleges.

⁵ Pupils who have full-time attendance and are aged 15 or under, or pupils who have part time attendance and are aged between 5 and 15.

Source:

School Census

Regulation

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what the title is of each regulation his Department (a) introduced and (b) revoked in (i) 2010, (ii) 2011, (iii) 2012 and (iv) 2013 to date; and if he will make a statement. [165909]

Elizabeth Truss: In 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 up to 16 July, the Department for Education introduced 289 and revoked 146 statutory instruments (SIs).

The Department has regulated within the 'One in, One out' (from 1 January 2011) and 'One In, Two Out' (from 1 January 2013) frameworks for those regulations affecting the business sector, such as private firms and civil society organisations. These rules only apply to those regulations affecting the business sector.

Details of these regulations are set out in a supplementary table that has been placed in the House Library.

Teachers: Standards

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of teachers were graded as (a) outstanding, (b) good, (c) satisfactory/notice to improve and (d) unsatisfactory in Ofsted inspections of (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in each of the last five years; what proportion of those teachers graded as (A) satisfactory/notice to improve and (B) unsatisfactory (1) were given professional support to improve the quality of their teaching and (2) ceased teaching; and what proportion of those who ceased teaching (x) resigned, (y) retired and (z) were dismissed. [166611]

Mr Laws: Ofsted inspectors reach judgements on the quality of teaching throughout a school, rather than on the quality of teaching by individual teachers.

Information is not collected centrally about the professional development of individual teachers. We have introduced streamlined arrangements to give schools more freedom to manage teacher performance to suit their own circumstances. Teachers' line managers are now free to decide how much observation over the course of the year is necessary for them to form an accurate assessment of teachers' performance, including underperformance, so that they can take appropriate action.

Teachers: Training

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps he has taken to improve continuous professional education for (a) teachers and (b) older teachers. [166612]

Mr Laws: High-quality professional development is important to support and enable all teachers, irrespective of their age, to improve their practice.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 May 2013 to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol North West (Charlotte Leslie), *Official Report*, column 127W.

Teachers: West Midlands

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many (a) teachers and (b) classroom assistants were employed in maintained schools in (i) West Midlands and (ii) Birmingham in each of the last five years. [166491]

Mr Laws: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 16 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 616W. The latest data, for 2012, were published on 17 July. These are included in the following table:

Full-time equivalent teachers and teaching assistants in service in publicly funded schools, January 2008 to 2009¹, November 2010 to 2012²: West Midlands region and Birmingham local authority

	Teachers					Teaching assistants				
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
West midlands	49,950	49,200	49,250	48,110	50,500	20,370	20,370	22,780	23,680	26,000

Full-time equivalent teachers and teaching assistants in service in publicly funded schools, January 2008 to 2009¹, November 2010 to 2012²: West Midlands region and Birmingham local authority

	Teachers					Teaching assistants				
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Birmingham	11,270	10,850	10,580	10,400	11,460	5,040	5,310	5,730	5,470	5,970

¹ Source:
Form 618g

² Source:
School Workforce Census

Wales

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether his Department provides services to people resident in Wales or usually resident in Wales.

[166103]

Elizabeth Truss: Education policy has been mostly devolved to the Welsh Government.

There are three non-devolved policy areas: teachers' pay and conditions of service, teachers' pensions and teacher discipline. We provide Government services in the Welsh language where there is demand. For example, we have translated two documents: Proposed Teachers' Pension Scheme Reforms; and School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2012 which are available on the Department's website^{1,2}.

¹<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/careers/payandpensions/b00204965/proposed-teacher-pension-scheme-reforms>

²<http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213238/teachers-pay-conditions-2012>

Welsh Language

Guto Bebb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether his Department has a current Welsh Language scheme; when that scheme was adopted; and whether it has been reviewed since May 2011. [166085]

Elizabeth Truss: The Department has a current Welsh Language scheme that was adopted in 2006. We are currently working with the Welsh Language Commissioner to update it.

JUSTICE

Accountancy

Mr Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much his Department spent on contracts with (a) Deloitte, (b) PricewaterhouseCoopers, (c) KPMG and (d) Ernst and Young in each year since 2008. [164957]

Mrs Grant: The Ministry of Justice has spent the following on the provision of services with (a) Deloitte, (b) PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), (c) KPMG and (d) Ernst and Young in each full calendar year since 2008. Spend is exclusive of VAT.

Consultants can provide a fast, flexible and efficient way to obtain necessary skills that are not available in house. Consultancy spend is governed by strict Cabinet Office controls and any spend over £20,000 requires approval by the departmental board on behalf of the Secretary of State.

Consultancy contracts in excess of nine months require further approval by the Cabinet Office.

Supplier	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Deloitte	521,646	5,010,352	3,092,206	296,956	519,365
PWC	2,881,694	3,678,005	3,549,901	1,743,840	1,877,886
KPMG	720,750	837,052	201,351	361,596	89,295
Ernst and Young	114,987	257,668	122,060	135,000	4,845,553

Conditions of Employment

Pamela Nash: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2013, *Official Report*, column 93W, on conditions of employment, how many people in his Department were employed on zero hours contracts in each of the last three years. [163953]

Mrs Grant: The number of staff employed on zero-hour contracts in the Ministry of Justice (Ministry of Justice HQ, HM Courts and Tribunals Service, National Offender Management Service and the Office of the Public Guardian) in each of the last three financial years is set out in the following table:

	Total cumulative staff number
1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011	238
1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012	218
1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013	172

The use of zero-hour contracts enables greater flexibility where work is irregular, thereby making more efficient use of resources to meet demand. The staff are only paid for the hours that they work.

Coroners

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what complaints were received against local coroners in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. [161685]

Mrs Grant: The Office for Judicial Complaints (OJC) considers complaints about the personal conduct or behaviour of coroners but not deputy or assistant coroners. The OJC does not hold the information requested for the years 2010 and 2011. Complaints against coroners were received in the following categories during 2012:

	Complaints
Discrimination	1
Inappropriate behaviour or comments	15
Judicial decision or case management	25
Misuse of judicial status	1
Not fulfilling judicial duty	4
Professional conduct	2

Corruption

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people were convicted of corruption in the last year for which figures are available; what distinction his Department makes between corruption and fraud for the purpose of crime statistics; and how each is measured and monitored. [165819]

Jeremy Wright: The number of offenders found guilty at all courts of corruption-related offences, in England and Wales, in 2012 (the latest available), can be viewed in the table.

Criminal court activity relating to fraud offences are reported within a wider offence group 'Fraud and forgery' in the Criminal Justice Statistics publication, which is released on a quarterly basis. On an annual basis, more detailed supplementary volumes are published which provide a further disaggregated breakdown of convictions and sentences issued within the 'Fraud and forgery' category. Similarly, the corruption offences provided in the table are reported within the wider offence group 'Other indictable (not motoring)', and more specifically within the '99 Other (Excluding Motoring offences)' offence type within annual supplementary volume tables.

Misconduct in public office is unacceptable and this Government is committed to ensuring that all those guilty of this offence are brought to justice.

Defendants found guilty at all courts of corruption-related offences, England and Wales, 2012^{1, 2}

<i>Offence</i>	<i>Found guilty</i>
Offences relating to offering, promising or giving bribes ³	1
Offences relating to requesting, agreeing to receive and accepting bribes ⁴	1
Misconduct in a public office by act or omission ⁵	52
Bribery, treating and undue influence at elections ⁶	0
Personation ⁷	0
Commercial organisation—failure to prevent associate bribing another with intent to obtain or retain business or advantage ⁸	0
Bribery of foreign public officials ⁹	48
Soliciting or receiving bribe or giving or offering bribe ¹⁰	0

¹ The figures given in the table relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ An offence under SS.1(2)(a), (b)(i), (ii) or (3) Bribery Act 2010.

⁴ An offence under SS.2(2), (3), (4) or (5) of the Bribery Act 2010.

⁵ An offence under Common Law of England and Wales.

⁶ An offence under S113-115 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁷ An offence under S60 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.

⁸ An offence under Section 7 of the Bribery Act 2010.

⁹ An offence under Section 6 of the Bribery Act 2010.

¹⁰ An offence under the Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act 1889 (S 1(1) and S2)

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services--Ministry of Justice.

Court of Protection

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the operation of the Court of Protection in respect of individuals suffering from Alzheimer's; and if he will make a statement. [155028]

Mrs Grant: The Court of Protection is a unique court dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in society. Its specialist judges are called on to make decisions in cases where there is a concern a person may not have the mental capacity to act in their own interests—for example about their property, financial affairs, health care or personal welfare.

The Court collects information on the type of applications being made, but not about the cause of the lack of capacity—for example about whether it relates to Alzheimer's—and so no assessments have been made about performance in that area

Courts: Crimes of Violence

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many incidents of violence there were in magistrates courts that involved defendants in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012; [164937]

(2) how many incidents of violence there were in Crown courts that involved defendants in (a) 2010, (b) 2011 and (c) 2012. [164938]

Mrs Grant: Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) do not maintain records detailing whether an incident of violence has involved the defendant for the period detailed above. HMCTS maintains records of violent incidents involving parties to a case. These are as follows:

	<i>Magistrates court</i>	<i>Crown court</i>
2010-11	37	13
2011-12	39	9
2012-13	33	7

My Department takes the security of all court users seriously and it is the policy of Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) that all security incidents are reported and investigated. All incidents involving violence are reported to the police for further investigation. The figures provided comprise reported incidents from the reporting years April to March and resulting in actual violence and include incidents between and against parties, court users and court staff and contractors. These figures do not include incidents of verbal abuse or verbal threats as they do not fall within the remit of the request.

Crime: Victims

Sadiq Khan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many complaints were received about the obligations under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime by each agency covered by the code in each of the last five years; [158122]

(2) how many complaints were received about obligations under the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in each of the last five years. [158150]

Mrs Grant: The Ministry of Justice does not hold this information centrally. Agencies with duties under the Code handle complaints under their own internal complaints processes. Collection and retention of complaints data is carried out at a local level. The Parliamentary and Health Ombudsman also retains data from those complaints from victims referred to them by a Member of Parliament.

The Government recently held a public consultation on a revised Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. This included proposals to improve the transparency and effectiveness of the complaints process to ensure that all criminal justice agencies provide quick and thorough responses to victims and that the onus is on agencies, not on the victim, to redirect complaints to the right place. The consultation ran from 29 March 2013 until 10 May 2013 and we intend to publish the Government's response this summer.

In addition, as part of the wider criminal justice reform agenda, the Government is committed to improving the accountability of the criminal justice system so that victims can hold the system to account if things go wrong.

Criminal Records

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when all police forces will be able to access full records of charges and out-of-court disposals for every police area. [165838]

Damian Green: I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Home Department.

The Police National Computer (PNC) already provides a central record of all charges, cautions, reprimands, warnings and penalty notices.

Authorised PNC users, within all police forces, are able to view full records for every police area.

Electronic Tagging

Nick de Bois: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the cost per day of electronically monitoring an individual using (a) global positioning system technology and (b) radio frequency technology; and if he will make a statement. [165812]

Jeremy Wright: The Ministry of Justice has not made an estimate of the relative cost per day of monitoring an individual using these two different technologies.

Most of the electronic monitoring which takes place under the current contracts uses radio frequency technology.

The next generation of electronic-monitoring contracts, currently out to tender, will provide for the use of both radio frequency and global positioning system technology—and we anticipate that the overall cost will be significantly lower than at present.

Knives: Crime

Steve McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people have received the maximum custodial sentence for possession of a knife in (a) 2010, (b) 2011, (c) 2012 and (d) 2013 to date. [158335]

Jeremy Wright: Unlawful possession of a knife or offensive weapon is a serious criminal offence which carries a maximum four-year custodial sentence. Where someone is actually harmed there are a range of existing offences against the person, in particular offences of wounding or causing grievous bodily harm, that reflect the seriousness of the offending behaviour and the harm caused.

In the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2013, the Government introduced the new offences of threatening someone with a knife in a public place or a school which came into force on 3 December 2012. These offences carry a minimum sanction of six months custody for adults and a four-month Detention and Training Order for juveniles.

The Government is also considering whether there is a case for further changes to be made to the sentencing framework for knife possession as part of the knife sentencing review.

Within the sentencing framework, it is for judges and magistrates to decide the appropriate sentence in individual cases taking account of the harm the offence caused and the culpability of the offender. Under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 there is an obligation on courts when sentencing for offences to follow the guidelines issued by the Sentencing Council, unless it would be contrary to the interests of justice to do so.

Available information on the number of offenders sentenced at all courts to immediate custody, and those who received the maximum sentence of four years, for knife possession offences, in England and Wales, in each year from 2005 to 2012, can be viewed in the table.

Following further validation and receipt of additional magistrates court records, a number of revisions have been made to previously published 2011 information. As such, 2011 figures may not match what was previously provided.

Court proceedings data for 2013 are planned for publication in May 2014.

Offenders sentenced at all courts to immediate custody, and those who received the maximum sentence, for knife possession offences, England and Wales, 2005 to 2012^{1,2}

Offence description		2005	2006	2007	2008 ⁵	2009	2010	2011 ⁶	2012
Having an article with blade or point in a public place ³	Immediate custody	965	1,070	1,060	1,373	1,671	1,403	1,578	1,323
	Maximum sentence of four years	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
	Average custodial sentence length (months) ⁷	3.2	3.4	3.6	4.6	4.7	4.8	5	5.1

Offenders sentenced at all courts to immediate custody, and those who received the maximum sentence, for knife possession offences, England and Wales, 2005 to 2012^{1,2}

Offence description		2005	2006	2007	2008 ³	2009	2010	2011 ⁶	2012
Having an article with blade or point on school premises ⁴	Immediate custody	5	5	5	4	4	10	7	4
	Maximum sentence of four years	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	Average custodial sentence length (months) ⁷	5.2	7.6	4.8	9.2	6.2	7.5	9.7	6

¹— Nil

² The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

³ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

⁴ An offence under Criminal Justice Act 1988 S.139 as amended by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 s.3.

⁵ An offence under Criminal Justice Act 1988 S.139A (1X5Xa) as added by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 S.4(1).

⁶ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates' court for April, July and August 2008.

⁷ Following further validation and receipt of additional magistrates' court records, a number of revisions have been made to previously published 2011 information. As such, 2011 figures may not match what was previously provided.

⁸ Excludes life and indeterminate sentences.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services in the Ministry of Justice

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) pursuant to the answer of 1 July 2013, *Official Report*, column 480W, on knife crime, and with reference to table 8 of the Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief for the first quarter of 2013, what the length of each of the eight immediate custodial sentences contained in that table which were handed down for the offence of threatening with a knife was; [164205]

(2) which of the defendants in each sentencing category referred to in table 8 of the Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief for the first quarter of 2013 (a) had a previous knife-related conviction, (b) had a previous violence-related conviction, (c) had any other previous conviction and (d) were sentenced for other offences at the same time as the offence of threatening with a knife. [164206]

Jeremy Wright: These offences are contained in the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, and came into force on 3 December 2012, and carry a minimum custodial sentence of six months for adults, and a four month detention and training order for 16 to 17-years-olds which must be imposed unless in all circumstances it would be unjust to do so.

The following table shows the sentence lengths for each of the eight offenders who received an immediate custodial sentence for aggravated possession of a knife or offensive weapon.

Length of sentences for offenders sentenced to immediate custody for an aggravated knife or offensive weapon possession offence, Q1 2013, England and Wales

Length of sentence	Number of offenders
Four months up to and including six months	3
Over six months	5

Source:

Ministry of Justice

It is not possible to further break down the number of offenders presented in each sentencing category from table 8 of the latest Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief due to the risk of disclosing personal data about these small numbers of individuals. We can however provide overall figures for each of the different parts of the question as follows:

	The number of offenders who were convicted for an aggravated possession offence
(a) With a previous knife-related offence	4
(b) With a previous violence-related offence	5
(c) Any other previous conviction and	15
(d) Were sentenced for other offences at the same time	14

These are the latest available figures and are a copy of table 8 of the Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief which was published on 6 June 2012. The quarterly bulletin is available from the Ministry of Justice website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/knife-possession-sentencing-quarterly-brief-january-to-march-2013>

Legal Aid Scheme

Richard Fuller: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether the definition of housing costs for the purpose of qualification for legal aid will be on an (a) imputed or (b) actual basis. [160034]

Jeremy Wright: Between 9 April and 4 June 2013 the Government consulted on a number of proposals to reform legal aid via the 'Transforming Legal Aid: delivering a more credible and efficient system' consultation. This included a proposed model of competitive tendering for criminal legal aid services. We have been clear we must continue to bear down on the cost of legal aid, including nearly £1 billion of taxpayers' money spent on criminal legal aid a year, to ensure we are getting the best deal for the taxpayer.

We will also be consulting in the autumn on changes to the legal aid financial eligibility tests to accommodate the further roll-out of universal credit. That will include proposals for the treatment of housing costs.

Mr Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps his Department has taken to ensure that client choice in relation to legal aid is still available. [163730]

Jeremy Wright: Between 9 April and 4 June 2013 the Government consulted on a number of proposals to reform legal aid via the 'Transforming Legal Aid: delivering a more credible and efficient system' consultation. This included a proposed model of competitive tendering for criminal legal aid services. We have been clear we must continue to bear down on the cost of legal aid, including nearly £1 billion of taxpayers' money spent on criminal legal aid a year, to ensure we are getting the best deal for the taxpayer.

One specific point in the consultation which has attracted significant response is the proposal to remove client choice in the model for competition for criminal litigation. The rationale for proposing this change was to give greater certainty of case volume for providers, making it easier and more predictable for them to organise their businesses to provide the most cost-effective service to the taxpayer. This was not a policy objective in its own right. We have heard clearly from the Law Society and other respondents that they regard client choice as fundamental to the effective delivery of criminal legal aid. We are therefore looking again at this issue, and expect to make changes to allow a choice of solicitor for clients receiving criminal legal aid. We will be launching a new consultation in the autumn.

Legal Aid Scheme: Wales

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much was paid in criminal legal aid costs to solicitors' firms in (a) Alyn and Deeside constituency and (b) North Wales in each of the last three years. [155159]

Jeremy Wright: The Legal Aid Agency records costs relating to firms by legal aid procurement area, which is broadly based on local authority boundaries. The information requested falls under the remit of the Legal Services Commission; however, the same applies as the information has historically been recorded by local authority. Therefore, the following information is provided in relation to the Flintshire local authority and the North Wales region, as the Flintshire local authority covers the area of Alyn and Deeside.

	<i>Criminal legal aid costs</i>		
	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>2010-11</i>	<i>£ million</i> <i>2011-12</i>
North Wales: Alyn and Deeside (Sir Y Fflint/Flintshire local authority)	1.06	1.04	0.92
North Wales: Others	5.68	6.15	5.52
North Wales: Total	6.74	7.18	6.44

Notes:

1. The costs include VAT and disbursements such as expenses, third party costs, and costs paid by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Services (HMCTS) on Crown Court cases.

² The information does not include costs paid by the Court of Appeal, Supreme Court, House of Lords, and Senior Court Costs Office. Solicitor advocates are treated as Barristers and costs paid to them are not included as part of the firm.

Offenders: East of England

Mr Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether he plans to review the provision of the multi-agency public protection regime in the East of England; and if he will make a statement. [163542]

Jeremy Wright: There are no plans to review the provision of the statutory multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPAs) in the East of England or elsewhere in England and Wales. Under the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms, MAPPAs will continue to operate for the assessment and management of known serious offenders, and all those offenders under statutory probation supervision and subject to MAPPAs will be managed by the public sector probation service.

HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) undertake thematic and core inspection programmes that focus on frontline practice as well as organisational arrangements. Much of their work is undertaken jointly, with other Inspectorates.

HMI Probation has occasionally undertaken inspections specifically into MAPPAs (2011) and related areas such as sexual offenders (2011). The effective operation of MAPPAs is also considered, where relevant, as part of wider "thematic" inspections such as those due to be published during 2013-14, which include life sentenced prisoners, victims and integrated offender management.

Prisons: Television

Mr Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what profit has been made by prisons from charging prisoners for access to televisions in their cells in the latest period for which figures are available. [155650]

Jeremy Wright: All in-cell TVs are Prison Service owned and their costs are recovered from prisoners.

All the income derived from prisoners this way is used for the provision of in-cell television.

Private Finance Initiative

Alex Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many contracts for private finance initiative schemes his Department signed prior to May 1997; and what the total capital value of those contracts was. [164358]

Mrs Grant: The information requested is not held centrally and to collate it would incur disproportionate cost. The Department has only existed in its current form since May 2007. Gathering the information you have requested would involve contacting the previous bodies which were subsumed into the Department, including but not limited to: The Home Office, the Department for Constitutional Affairs and Her Majesty's Courts Service.

Reoffenders

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many prisoners released on temporary licence subsequently re-offended in the last four years; [165182]

(2) how many (a) murders and (b) crimes of violence against the person have been committed by those released from prison on early release since 2008; [165190]

(3) how many offences were committed by offenders serving a prison sentence in an open prison in the latest period for which figures are available; what the offence was in each case; and in which open prison each such offender was serving; [165409]

(4) how many people who have served an indeterminate sentence for public protection have reoffended after release since 13 September 2010; and what estimate he has made of the number of offences committed by such reoffenders in that time period. [165442]

Jeremy Wright: Public protection is our top priority and we are determined to have the best possible systems in place to supervise offenders in the community. Any serious further offence is one too many and we work hard to manage risk—sadly it can never be completely eliminated.

We are currently reforming the system and will be introducing a new public sector National Probation Service focused on keeping the public safe from offenders who pose the greatest risk of serious harm.

Data on proven reoffending for offenders who were released from custody are produced and published by the Ministry of Justice on a quarterly basis. A proven re-offence is defined as any offence that was committed

within one year of release and receiving a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning within that year or within a further six months to allow the offence to be proven in court.

Proven reoffending data for adult offenders who were released from prison between July 2009 and June 2011 (latest period for which data are available) after serving an indeterminate sentence for public protection are published in Table 19a of the Proven Reoffending Statistics Quarterly bulletin at the following link. The table includes information on the number of adult offenders who committed a proven re-offence within 12 months of release and the number of proven re-offences that were committed by these offenders.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/proven-re-offending--2

The following table presents the number of murders and crimes of violence against the person committed by adult offenders who were released on licence from prison between 2008 and June 2011 (latest period for which data are available).

Number of proven re-offences committed by adult offenders who were released from prison on licence between 2008 and June 2011, England and Wales¹

Cohort	No. of offenders released from prison on licence ²	Number of re-offences				Total
		Murder	Violence against the person ³	Other		
2008	30,710	8	1,893	40,277	42,170	
2009	30,540	8	1,756	35,694	37,450	
2010	26,726	12	1,696	31,480	33,176	
July 2010 to June 2011	28,089	10	1,743	31,115	32,858	

¹ The data presented in the table are a further breakdown of the data published in Table 25 of the Proven Reoffending Statistics Quarterly bulletin: www.gov.uk/government/publications/proven-re-offending--2

² The group of offenders for whom reoffending is measured does not represent all proven offenders. Offenders released from prison are matched to the police national computer database and a certain proportion of these offenders cannot be matched. These unmatched offenders are, therefore, excluded from the proven reoffending measure

³ Includes murder.

Proven reoffending data cannot be provided for offenders who were released from prison on temporary licence nor can they be provided for offenders while they served their sentence in an open prison. This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Salvation Army

Michael Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what funding he is providing for identified victims of human trafficking after they have exited the Salvation Army Trafficking Support Scheme. [163648]

Mrs Grant: The majority of victims who have been supported by the Salvation Army decide to return to their home country. However, where a victim is entitled to remain in the UK, for example nationals of EU and EEA member states exercising EU treaty rights or those who have been given leave, they may receive outreach support, benefits or housing support through the local authority.

When it is safe and appropriate for a victim to return to their home country, reintegration funding may be provided to support them to do this.

Sentencing

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the degree to which

the creation of business impact statements under the revised Victims Code will result in more informed sentencing decisions and will reduce reoffending. [164790]

Mrs Grant: The Business Impact Statement, like the Victim Personal Statement, will give the victim a louder voice in the criminal justice system. It will provide the court with a fuller picture of the impact of the offence on the victim and will be disclosed to the defendant's legal team to provide an avenue through which the offender can be made fully aware of the impact of their actions on the victim. We will work with the judiciary to assist them in reviewing and updating the relevant guidance and Practice Directions governing the use of the statement in court.

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice in how many and in what proportion of occasions the maximum sentence for an offence was given in (a) Crown courts and (b) magistrates courts in each year since 2008. [165187]

Jeremy Wright: Parliament sets the maximum penalty for an offence at a level to provide for the worst possible example of the offence and to give the courts sufficient range of sentencing powers to deal with all the cases which come before them. The courts, therefore, rarely impose the maximum sentence. However, sentencing

has become more severe over the last decade: in 2012, the average custodial sentence length was 14.5 months, an increase of 1.9 months compared to 2002.

The number of defendants who received the maximum sentence available, following sentence at the Crown court and magistrates court, and the percentage of sentences where the maximum sentence was given at all court, in England and Wales, in each year from 2008 to 2012 (latest available) can be viewed in the table.

Defendants receiving the maximum sentence available, following sentence at the Crown court and magistrates court, and percentage of sentences where the maximum sentence was given at all courts, England and Wales, 2008 to 2012¹.²

<i>All courts</i>		
	<i>Number of maximum sentences handed down</i>	<i>Proportion who received maximum sentence (%)</i>
2008	2,805	0.2
2009	2,166	0.2
2010	2,371	0.2
2011	2,516	0.2
2012	3,601	0.3

¹ The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

Vacancies

Mike Freer: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his Department's vacancy rate was in 2012-13; and what vacancy rate has been assumed for 2013-14. [162673]

Mrs Grant: The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) does not collate vacancy rates centrally.

The Department's central budgetary calculations for 2013-14 do not involve assumptions about vacancy rates. Recruitment depends upon the need to balance redeployment of displaced staff, turnover rates and operational need.

Vending Machines

Debbie Abrahams: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many vending machines in his Department's premises contain snack foods that are high in calories and low in nutritional value. [164272]

Mrs Grant: We do not hold this information centrally and this information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However I can confirm there is one vending machine across the Ministry's London headquarters' buildings, in 102 Petty France. This stocks a variety of confectionary and soft drinks, which includes fruit juices, water and cereal bars.

WRITTEN ANSWERS

Thursday 29 August 2013

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
ATTORNEY-GENERAL	996W	HEALTH—continued	
Apprentices	996W	Billing	981W
Consultants	997W	Cancer: Drugs	982W
Crown Prosecution Service.....	997W	Health: Restaurants	982W
Equality	998W	Health Services: Lancashire	982W
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Serious Fraud Office	1002W	Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust.....	984W
		Multiple Sclerosis.....	984W
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..	1002W	NHS.....	985W
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Apprentices	1003W	NHS: Procurement	986W
Consultants	1004W	NHS: Public Appointments	986W
Food	1004W	Rickets	987W
Forests: Planning Permission	1004W	Royal Bolton Hospital	987W
Grant Thornton.....	1005W	Wales	987W
Green Belt.....	1005W	Welsh Language.....	988W
Housing	1006W		
Housing: Construction.....	1006W	HOME DEPARTMENT	965W
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