

Speech: Foreign Secretary statement on his visit to Oman, Iran and the UAE

Mr Speaker, with your permission I will make a statement on my visit to the Middle East, from where I returned this morning.

This is a crucial time in the region: on the one hand we have a moment of hope, with scores of countries having come together to break the corrosive grip of Daesh on Iraq and Syria.

Britain's armed forces have played a proud role in a military campaign that has freed millions – and Iraq's government declared on Saturday that all of its territory had been liberated.

During her successful visit to Iraq last month, my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister thanked the British servicemen and women who have helped to bring about the territorial defeat of Daesh.

In Jordan, she reaffirmed Britain's absolute commitment to the peace and stability of one of our closest allies in the region.

But the setbacks inflicted upon Daesh have coincided with a dangerous escalation of the war in Yemen, where one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world is now unfolding.

This morning, I returned from my first bilateral visit as Foreign Secretary to Oman, the UAE and Iran. My aim was to take forward Britain's response – diplomatically and economically – to the crisis in Yemen.

The Government strongly believes that the only way of bringing this tragic conflict to an end is through a political solution.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos of Oman – whom I met in Muscat last Friday – entirely shared this analysis.

The Sultan and I discussed in detail the tragedy in Yemen, with which Oman shares a 180-mile border.

The Sultan and I also agreed on the importance of settling the dispute between Qatar and its neighbours and I was pleased to see that the summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council went ahead in Kuwait last week.

From Muscat I travelled to Tehran where I met Iran's senior leadership including President Rouhani, Vice-President Salehi and the foreign minister, Javad Zarif.

I was frank about the subjects where our countries have differences of interest and approach, but our talks were constructive nonetheless. The latest chapter of Britain's relations with Iran opened with the achievement of the nuclear deal, the JCPOA, in July 2015.

In every meeting, I stressed how the UK attaches the utmost importance to preserving this agreement.

For the JCPOA to survive, Iran must continue to restrict its nuclear programme in accordance with the deal – and the International Atomic Energy Agency has verified Iran's compliance so far – and other parties must keep their side of the bargain by helping the Iranian people to enjoy the economic benefits of re-engagement with the world.

The House knows of Iran's disruptive role in conflicts across the region, including in Syria and Yemen.

Our discussions on these subjects were frank and constructive though neither I nor my Iranian counterparts would claim that we reached agreement on all issues.

If we are to resolve the conflict in Yemen, then Houthi rebels must stop firing missiles at Saudi Arabia and the House will recall that King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh – Saudi Arabia's equivalent of Heathrow – was the target of a ballistic missile launched from Yemen on 4th November.

I pressed my Iranian counterparts to use their influence to ensure that these indiscriminate and dangerous attacks come to an end.

On bilateral issues, my first priority was the plight of the dual nationals behind bars.

I urged their release on humanitarian grounds where there is cause to do so.

These are complex cases involving individuals considered by Iran to be their own citizens – and I do not wish to raise false hopes.

But my meetings in Tehran were worthwhile and while I do not believe it would serve the interests of the individuals concerned or their loved ones to provide a running commentary, the House can be assured that the Government will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to secure their release.

I also raised with Mr Zarif the official harassment of journalists working for BBC Persian and their families inside Iran.

I brought up Iran's wider human rights record, including how the regime executes more of its own citizens per capita than almost any other country in the world.

But where it is possible to be positive in our relations with Iran – for instance by encouraging scientific, educational and cultural exchanges – we should be ready to do so.

I then travelled to Abu Dhabi for talks yesterday with the leaders of the UAE, focusing on the war in Yemen, we agreed on the importance of restoring full humanitarian and commercial access to the port of Hodeidah, which handles over 80 per cent of Yemen's food imports.

We also agreed on the need to revive the political process, bearing in mind that the killing of the former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, by the Houthis may cause the conflict to become even more fragmented.

And we discussed how best to address the missile threat from Yemen, welcoming the United Nations investigation into the origin of the weapons that have been launched.

Our concern for the unspeakable suffering in Yemen should not blind us to the reality that resolving a conflict of this scale and complexity will take time and persistence – and success is far from guaranteed – but it is only by engagement with all the regional powers, including Iran, and it is only by mobilising Britain's unique array of friendships in the Middle East that we stand any chance of making headway.

I am determined to press on with the task, mindful of the human tragedy in Yemen, and I shall be meeting my Gulf and American colleagues again early in the New Year.

I commend this statement to the House.

Press release: Home Secretary announces new national economic crime centre to tackle high level fraud and money laundering

The Home Secretary Amber Rudd has announced plans to tackle economic crime to help stop criminal gangs exploiting the vulnerable and profiting from fraud, money laundering and corruption.

She announced a package of measures – including new laws and an enhanced operational response – to crack down on money laundering that allows ruthless gangs to profit from their crimes and fraud, the most common offence in the UK that is estimated to cost every household £255 a year.

A new national economic crime centre within the National Crime Agency (NCA) will task and coordinate the national response to economic crime, backed by greater intelligence and analytical capabilities. It will draw on expertise from across government, law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, as well as new resources provided by the private sector.

To further improve the coordination of the law enforcement response, new legislation will allow the NCA to directly task the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) to investigate the worst offenders. The SFO will continue to act as an

independent organisation, supporting the multi-agency response led by the NCA.

The Home Secretary will personally chair a new economic crime strategic board to drive action. It will convene the relevant ministers from across government to agree strategic priorities and to ensure the right resources are allocated across our law enforcement agencies to tackle economic crime.

Home Secretary, Amber Rudd said:

There is a myth that there are no real victims of economic crime, but I have seen first-hand how it can ruin people's lives. It is not a victimless crime and so it's vital we tackle these offences that can leave innocent people destitute, cost the country billions every year, and allow gangs to profit from serious and violent crimes.

The measures we have announced today will significantly improve our ability to tackle the most serious cases of economic crime by ensuring our agencies have the tools and investment they need to investigate, prosecute and confiscate criminal assets.

Rest assured we will pursue all those seeking to move, use and hide the proceeds of crime.

In addition, the government has published its [anti-corruption strategy](#) which sets out the government's anti-corruption priorities, both domestic and international, and establishes an ambitious, long-term framework for tackling corruption up to 2022.

The government's 6 priorities under the strategy are:

- reducing the insider threat in high risk domestic sectors such as borders and ports
- reducing corruption in public procurement and grants
- promoting integrity across the public and private sectors
- strengthening the integrity of the UK as an international financial centre
- improving the business environment globally
- working with other countries to combat corruption

To complement this, the Prime Minister has announced the appointment of John Penrose MP as the new anti-corruption champion. In his role, John Penrose will be responsible for challenging and supporting the government in implementing the strategy, as well as promoting the UK's response to corruption both domestically and internationally.

Anti-corruption champion, John Penrose MP said:

Corruption destabilises governments and economies, taking money

away from developing nations to support the luxury lifestyles of ruthless criminals.

I am thrilled to have been appointed as the government's anti-corruption champion, and am looking forward to furthering the work that has already been done in rooting out corruption and securing the UK's prosperity.

World Anti-Corruption Day on 9 December highlighted the impact that corruption can have on countries and businesses across the globe and the need for governments to take action to stamp out corruption.

The cost of corruption worldwide is estimated to be more than 2 per cent of global GDP and the World Bank estimates that over \$1 trillion paid in bribes each year.

At the recent Global Forum on Asset Recovery, co-hosted by the UK and the US, more than 250 participants from 29 countries committed to a renewed effort to trace, recover and return stolen assets.

The government has also renewed its commitment to introduce an overseas companies beneficial ownership register, which is being developed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

It will mean that overseas companies that own or buy property in the UK, or participate in central government procurement, will be required to provide details of their ultimate owners. This will reduce the opportunities for criminals to use shell companies to launder their illicitly gained wealth in London property, and make it easier for law enforcement to track and act on criminal funds.

Further commitments were also made to seize criminal assets. A new working group will be established, which will include the NCA, the police (including devolved forces), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Crown Prosecution Service and the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) to use the powers within the Criminal Finances Act for forfeiture of criminal money.

To provide a more targeted, intelligence-led focus on high risk economic crime, the government will also reform the suspicious activity reports regime, making the necessary legislative, operational and technical changes required.

Finally, the Law Commission will undertake a review of the law on confiscation in the Proceeds of Crime Act with the aim of improving the process by which confiscation orders are made and optimise the enforcement of them.

Press release: Environment Agency's Christmas stocking for Berkshire anglers

The Environment Agency is delivering an early Christmas gift to anglers in Berkshire this week, when it carries out a Christmas stocking of young adult fish into the River Cut at Jocks Lane recreation ground in Bracknell.

Thousands of fish, including roach, dace and chub, will be added to the river's existing fish population this Thursday, 14 December. This will provide an immediate boost to numbers, which will be multiplied many times over when the new arrivals settle into their new homes and begin to produce offspring.

Stuart Keable, a fisheries officer for the Environment Agency, said:

We carry out a number of fish stockings every year. Sometimes it is to help fish populations recover when they've suffered from a pollution incident, or through flooding, which can push large numbers of fish downstream, and many never return.

The River Cut has suffered from recurrent pollution near Jocks Lane recreation ground in 2017, where uncontaminated water from a large proportion of Bracknell drains into the Cut. Environment Agency officers have been working closely with Thames Water, which manages the surface water network, to investigate the source of the pollution. The partnership has also resulted in pollution-prevention visits to nearby industrial estates, where officers advised businesses on oil and chemical storage compliance, hazardous waste disposal and the risk to streams and rivers.

Rachel Brown, an Environment Agency team leader in east Berkshire, said:

The Environment Agency has responded to a number of incidents on the River Cut this year, reported to us through our incident hotline. We have been working with Thames Water to find why the river was polluted, whilst also reducing the impact to the environment. We have carried out pollution-prevention visits at the nearby industrial estates, to raise awareness of the surface water drainage network and correct disposal of waste. Information provided by the public is vital in helping us with these ongoing investigations, and we urge anyone witnessing an environmental pollution to call our 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Christmas is a good time to introduce the fish into rivers, as it enables them to acclimatise to their new surroundings, ahead of their spawning season

in the spring. Fish also play a critical role in sustaining a river's finely-balanced eco-system, so the wider natural environment will also get a festive boost.

Stuart Keable added:

The River Cut has undergone some fantastic enhancements recently. We've done a lot of that ourselves, but we increasingly work with local angling clubs, Bracknell Town Council, community groups and volunteers to get bigger and better results. The council has already installed 10 fishing platforms on the upstream section of the river at Jocks Lane, which will eventually see a wheelchair ramp installed for disabled access to this area. These improvements were made through the Angling Trust's Angling Improvement Fund.

Through the Environment Agency's Fisheries Improvement Programme, we have started on some major habitat improvement work in the river itself. In November, we installed the first of 10 marginal berms to provide a more diverse habitat for fish, insects, birds and plants, as well as push silt out of the system. This work will be ongoing throughout the winter. The collective contribution from our various partners to the wellbeing of the river has been immense.

The fish are being brought to site in oxygenated tanks from their birthplace and home for the last 12-18 months, the Environment Agency's own Calverton Fish Farm in Nottingham. Funded through rod licence fees, Calverton produces some 450,000 coarse fish each year which are used to help the vitality and diversity of fish populations in rivers, lakes and ponds throughout England.

Speech: PM statement on EU negotiations: 11 December 2017

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the negotiations for our departure from the European Union.

On Friday morning the government and the European Commission published a [Joint Report on progress during the first phase](#).

On the basis of this report – and following the discussions I held throughout last week – President Juncker is recommending to the European Council that sufficient progress has now been made to move to the next stage and begin talks on the future relationship between the UK and the EU.

And President Tusk has responded positively by proposing guidelines for the

next phase of the negotiations.

I want to pay tribute to my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and our whole negotiating team for their calm and professional approach to these negotiations.

We have argued robustly and clearly for the outcomes we seek.

A fair and reciprocal deal that will guarantee the rights of more than three million EU citizens living in the UK and a million UK nationals living in the EU – so they can carry on living their lives as before.

A fair settlement of the accounts, meeting our rights and obligations as a departing member state – in the spirit of our future partnership.

And a commitment to maintain the Common Travel Area with Ireland; to uphold the Belfast Agreement in full; and to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland while upholding the constitutional and economic integrity of the whole United Kingdom.

Let me set out for the House the agreements we have now reached in each of these areas.

Citizen's rights

Mr Speaker, more than 3 million EU citizens make an extraordinary contribution to every part of our economy, our society, our culture and our national life.

And I know that EU Member States similarly value the contribution of the 1 million UK nationals living in their communities.

So from the outset I have made protecting citizens' rights my first priority.

But for these rights to be truly reciprocal, they need to be interpreted consistently in both the UK and the EU.

The European Union started by wanting all EU citizens' rights to be preserved in the UK by a prolongation of EU law.

They said these rights should not require any UK process to implement them.

And that they should be supervised by the Commission and enforced by the European Court of Justice.

Those proposals were not acceptable.

Mr Speaker, when we leave the European Union our laws will be made and enforced here in Britain not in Luxembourg.

So the EU has accepted that we will incorporate the Withdrawal Agreement into UK law.

And citizens' rights will then be enforced by our courts – where appropriate, paying due regard to relevant ECJ case law, just as they already decide other matters with reference to international law when it's relevant.

In the interests of consistent interpretation of citizens' rights, we have agreed that where existing law is not clear, our courts – and only our courts – will be able to choose to ask the ECJ for an interpretation prior to reaching their own decision.

But this will be a very narrow remit and a very small number of cases.

And unlike now, they will not be obliged to do so. This will be voluntary.

The case itself will always be determined by the UK courts, not the ECJ. And there will also be a sunset clause so, after eight years, even this voluntary mechanism will end.

Mr Speaker, the end point of this process is very clear.

EU Citizens living in the UK will have their rights enshrined in UK law and enforced by British courts.

And UK citizens living in the EU will also have their rights protected.

The jurisdiction of the ECJ in the UK is coming to an end.

We are taking control our own laws once again. And that is exactly how it should be.

Financial settlement

Let me turn to the financial settlement.

Following some tough conversations – we have agreed the scope of our commitments and the principles for their valuation.

We will continue to pay our net contributions under the current EU Budget plan. During this time our proposed implementation period will see us continuing to trade on current terms.

And we will pay our fair share of the outstanding commitments and liabilities to which we committed during our membership.

However, this is conditional upon a number of principles we have negotiated over how we will ultimately arrive at a fair valuation of these commitments, which will bring the actual financial settlement down by a substantial amount.

This part of the report we agreed on Friday, like the rest of it, is also subject to the general reservation that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This means we want to see the whole deal now coming together, including the terms of our future deep and special partnership, as I said in Florence.

Mr Speaker, these are the actions of a responsible nation honouring the commitments that it has made to its allies having gone through those commitments line by line as we said we would.

It is a fair settlement for the British taxpayer who will soon see significant savings compared with remaining in the European Union.

It means we will be able to use that money to invest in our priorities at home – such as housing, schools and the NHS.

And it means the days of paying vast sums to the European Union every year are coming to an end.

Northern Ireland

Mr Speaker, our departure from the European Union presents a significant and unique challenge for Northern Ireland and Ireland.

So it is absolutely right that the Joint Report makes clear we will uphold the Belfast Agreement in full. This Agreement, including its subsequent implementation agreements and arrangements, has been critical to the progress made in Northern Ireland over recent decades.

Our commitments to those agreements, the principles that underpin them, the institutions they establish and the rights and opportunities they guarantee, remain steadfast.

Mr Speaker, the Joint Report reaffirms our guarantee that there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. So much of daily life in Northern Ireland depends on being able to cross the border freely, so it is right that we ensure no new barriers are put in place.

We have also been absolutely clear that nothing in this process will alter our determination to uphold the constitutional and economic integrity of the whole United Kingdom. And it was right that we took time last week to strengthen and clarify the Joint Report in this regard, listening to unionists across the country, including the DUP.

On Friday I reinforced this further by making [six principled commitments to Northern Ireland](#).

First, we will always uphold and support Northern Ireland's status as an integral part of the United Kingdom, consistent with the principle of consent.

As our Northern Ireland manifesto at the last election made clear, the government I lead will never be neutral when it comes to expressing our support for the Union.

Second, we will fully protect and maintain Northern Ireland's position within the single market of the United Kingdom. This is by far the most important market for Northern Ireland's goods and services and Northern Ireland will

continue to have full and unfettered access to it.

Third, there will be no new borders within the United Kingdom. In addition to no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, we will maintain the Common Travel Area throughout these islands.

Fourth, the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, will leave the EU customs union and the EU single market. Nothing in the agreement I have reached alters that fundamental fact.

Fifth, we will uphold the commitments and safeguards set out in the Belfast Agreement regarding North-South Co-operation. This will continue to require cross-community support.

And sixth, the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, will no longer be subject to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice.

Mr Speaker, as the Joint Report makes clear, our intention is to deliver against these commitments through the new, deep and special partnership that we are going to build with the European Union.

Should this not prove possible, we have also been clear that we will seek specific solutions to address the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland.

And because we recognise the concerns felt by either side of the border and we want to guarantee that we will honour the commitments we have made, we have also agreed one further fall back option of last resort.

So if we cannot find specific solutions then the UK will maintain full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South co-operation, economic co-operation across the island of Ireland and the protection of the Belfast Agreement.

The Joint Report clearly sets out that cross community safeguards and consent are required from the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly for distinct arrangements in this scenario. And that in all circumstances Northern Irish businesses must continue to have full and unfettered access to the markets in the rest of the United Kingdom on which they rely.

So, Mr Speaker, there can be no question about our commitment to avoiding barriers both North-South and East-West.

We will continue to work with all Northern Irish parties and the Irish government in the second phase of the talks – and continue to encourage the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive so that Northern Ireland's voice is fully heard throughout this process.

Implementation period

Finally, Mr Speaker, in my Florence speech I proposed an implementation

period to give governments, businesses and families the time they need to implement the changes required for our future partnership.

The precise terms of this period will be for discussion in the next phase of negotiations. And I very much welcome President Tusk's recommendation that talks on the implementation period should start immediately and that it should be agreed as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Mr Speaker, this is not about a hard or a soft Brexit.

The arrangements we have agreed to reach the second phase of the talks are entirely consistent with the principles and objectives that I set out in my speeches in Florence and at Lancaster House.

I know that some doubted we would reach this stage.

The process ahead will not be easy. The progress so far has required give and take for the UK and the EU to move forwards together. And that is what we have done.

Of course, nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

But there is, I believe, a new sense of optimism now in the talks and I fully hope and expect that we will confirm the arrangements I have set out today in the European Council later this week.

This is good news for people who voted Leave, who were worried we were so bogged down in tortuous negotiations it was never going to happen.

And it is good news for people who voted Remain, who were worried we were going to crash out without a deal.

We are going to leave but we are going to do so in a smooth and orderly way, securing a new deep and special partnership with our friends while taking back control of our borders, money and laws once again.

That is my mission. That is this government's mission.

And on Friday we took a big step towards achieving it.

And I commend this Statement to the House

[News story: Children to be given extra](#)

protection online

The new power will be taken as an amendment to the Data Protection Bill, currently before the House of Lords, with cross party support.

The Government's proposals will require the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to produce a statutory code of practice on age-appropriate website design.

The new code will set standards required of websites and app makers on privacy for children under the age of 16. It will also ensure that websites and apps must be designed to make clear what personal data of children is being collected, how it is being used, and how both children and parents can stay in control of this data.

The amendment has the support of Baroness Kidron and Baroness Harding, who have campaigned for many years to protect the rights and safety of children on the internet. The Government has worked closely with campaigners on the new amendment, to secure these rights around the online processing of a child's personal data in the Bill.

Digital Minister Matt Hancock said:

Our Internet Safety Strategy sets out how we want the UK to be the safest place to be online. To do that we strongly support freedom online, while protecting people, and particularly children, from harm. There is growing evidence on the need for protections for children on social media.

This statutory code of practice will require tailored protections to be built into websites and apps for children under 16. This must be done in a way that protects the wonderful freedom and opportunity of the internet, without jeopardising the future free flow of data between the UK and EU.

The amendment will be debated in the House of Lords today (Monday 11 December).

The new code would have the same enforceability as the government's codes on direct marketing and data sharing. It also has a clear link to enforcement provisions already set out in the Bill. The government expects that non-compliance with the code would play a relevant factor in any ICO decision to bring forward enforcement action against websites that do not comply with the Data Protection Bill – including in determining level of fines up to £18 million or 4% of global turnover.

The government will work in close consultation with the Information Commissioner's Office and others to ensure that the code is robust, practical, and meets the development needs of children in relation to

gathering, sharing, storing and commoditising of their data.

The amendment builds on a number of protections for children's data already in the Bill. This includes the need to obtain parental consent before processing the data of children under the age of 13, the requirement that consent is informed, as well as other new rights including the right to be forgotten.

In addition, through the [Internet Safety Strategy](#), the Government has the ambition to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online and has announced a range of measures including a social media levy, code of practice and annual transparency reporting.