



House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

The United Kingdom's relations with Russia

Seventh Report of Session 2016–17

*Report, together with formal minutes
relating to the report*

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The Foreign Affairs Committee

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Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	4
1 UK-Russia relations since 1991: Divergent perspectives	7
2 Russia in 2017	13
Politics	13
Economy	14
Human rights	16
Rule of law	18
Russia's current foreign policy	19
The link between Russian domestic and foreign policy	21
Russia's foreign policy goals	22
3 Tensions in the UK-Russia relationship	24
Ukraine	24
Annexation of Crimea	24
The conflict in eastern Ukraine and the Minsk agreements	25
Supporting reform and resilience in Ukraine	28
EU-Ukraine Association Agreement	29
Sanctions on Russia in response to events in Ukraine	30
Alternative pathways for drawing down sanctions	34
Syria	35
Alleged violations of International Humanitarian Law	37
Potential co-operation with Russia on fighting terrorism	40
4 UK policy towards Russia	44
Current engagement	44
Making sanctions more effective	47
Response to propaganda	48
Russian language broadcasting	49
European Convention on Human Rights	50
5 Future engagement	52
Culture	52
Drug abuse and cheating in sport	53
World Cup 2018	53

FCO resources	54
Ministerial responsibility	56
A long-term people-to-people strategy	56
Conclusions and recommendations	59
Formal Minutes	65
Witnesses	67
Published written evidence	68
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	70

Summary

The bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Russia is at its most strained point since the end of the Cold war. This is because Russia and the UK have fundamentally different perceptions of recent history and the current international order. UK foreign policy is predicated on the maintenance of the rules-based international order and of international law, self-determination for sovereign nation states and the promotion of human rights and freedom of expression. Russia's post-Soviet experience and the apparent self-interest of the governing elite has led to a Russian foreign policy which more or less explicitly rejects and undermines that order and the principles on which it relies.

Refusal to engage with the Russian Government is, however, not a viable long-term foreign policy option for the UK, because Russia is a European nuclear-armed United Nations Security Council member state. The UK can communicate with the Russian Government without ceding moral and legal legitimacy or sacrificing its values and standards. Such conversations might well prove uncomfortable, but they would at least allow the clarification of specific points of agreement and points of difference on issues such as counter-terrorism and provide a basis for progress towards improving relations, if and when the time is right. To that end, we recommend the commitment of increased FCO resources to enhance analytical and policymaking capacity and the appointment of an FCO Minister with more specific responsibility for Russia.

Russia's actions in Ukraine and Syria constitute the two most urgent foreign policy challenges to the UK-Russia relationship. Ukraine must choose its own future. The UK and its allies should support Ukraine in developing resilience to further Russian encroachment and in building its social, political and physical infrastructure, which will facilitate further engagement with the West and allow Ukraine to engage with Russia on a more level playing field. While it may be increasingly difficult to sustain a unified western position on Ukraine-related sanctions, unilateral sanctions targeted on individuals, as set out in the Criminal Finances Bill, would enable the Government more effectively to hold to account people associated with the Putin regime who are responsible for gross human rights violations or abuses.

In Syria, UK Government officials have accused Russia of committing war crimes but have not published evidence to support their claims. The Government is right to call out the Russian military for actions that potentially violate International Humanitarian Law. However, if the Government continues to allege that Russia has committed war crimes in Syria without providing a basis for its charge, it risks bolstering the Kremlin's narrative that Russia is held to unfair double standards by hostile and hypocritical western powers.

The British and Russian people have healthy cultural relations despite the ongoing political difficulties. Bearing that point in mind, the Government must look beyond President Putin and reach out to the Russian people through mechanisms such as educational exchanges and support for small businesses in Russia in non-sanctioned sectors. A people-to-people strategy building bridges with the next generation of Russian political and economic leaders could underpin improved UK-Russia relations in the future.

Introduction

1. Russia matters.¹ It is the largest country in the world by surface area spanning Europe and Asia, and it is the ninth largest country in the world by population.² Its territory contains globally significant reserves of oil and gas. It has a rich culture that produced Tolstoy, Tchaikovsky and Pushkin. It is a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council. It deploys capable conventional armed forces, has full-spectrum nuclear weapons capability and is a cyber and space power. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) description of Russia as “a strategically important country for the UK” is a blinding glimpse of the obvious.³

2. The bilateral diplomatic relationship between the UK and Russia is at its most strained point since the end of the Cold War.⁴ This is the result of a succession of crises and disagreements since the mid-2000s, including the murder of British citizen Alexander Litvinenko by polonium poisoning and subsequent inquest into his death, the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare threats to NATO countries, the 2014 annexation of Crimea and conflict in eastern Ukraine, Russia’s intervention in the Syrian civil war and Russia’s attempts to subvert democracy and to interfere in referendums and elections in some European countries and in the United States.⁵ FCO Minister Sir Alan Duncan told us that “There is no doubt that, using modern technology, they [Russia] are interfering in many parts of the world. We also saw it in Montenegro, where there was a very serious interference—I think undeniably Russian inspired, if I can put it that way—in the democratic process”.⁶ Sir Tim Barrow added that Russia was responsible for “threats that we must be robust in defending ourselves against. We need to make sure that there is unity within NATO and within the west generally.”⁷

3. Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas at the FCO, told us Russia is

doing things of which we disapprove and of which we should disapprove. I think they are a growing cyber threat; some of their public comments stray rather far from the truth; their challenge to the territorial integrity of Ukraine is not acceptable; they have annexed Crimea, and the prosecution of the conflict in Aleppo is unacceptable.⁸

4. Russia’s Ambassador to the UK, Alexander Yakovenko, lamented “the present political alienation between our two countries” and “the sorry state” of UK-Russia relations

1 Russia is known officially as the Russian Federation. The Constitution of the Russian Federation states that “The names Russian Federation and Russia shall be equal”. For the sake of convenience, the term “Russia” is used throughout this Report.

2 The World Bank, [Russia](#), accessed 10 February 2017

3 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) para 4

4 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) paras 8–13

5 Russia has reportedly interfered in the internal affairs of several sovereign nations. *“Russia plotted to overthrow Montenegro’s government by assassinating Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic last year, according to senior Whitehall sources”*, The Telegraph, 19 February 2017; *“Barroso criticises Russian interference on Ukraine deal”*, BBC News, 29 November 2013; *“Marine Le Pen’s links to Russia under US scrutiny”*, The Telegraph, 21 December 2016; *“Russia is preying on Bulgaria’s next President”*, Politico, 11 May 2016; *“CIA concludes Russia interfered to help Trump win election”*, The Guardian, 10 December 2016

6 Q340 [Sir Alan Duncan]

7 Q341 [Sir Tim Barrow]

8 Q331

in written evidence to this inquiry.⁹ However, Ambassador Yakovenko blamed the deterioration in the relationship primarily on “the British position due to the Ukrainian crisis” and the UK’s subsequent decision to suspend most mechanisms for diplomatic co-operation.¹⁰

5. Some of the issues underpinning the erosion of UK-Russia relations have recently been explored by the House of Commons Defence Committee and the House of Lords EU Affairs Sub-Committee on External Relations.¹¹ The Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) last examined the UK-Russia relationship a decade ago, in 2007, focusing on the security dimension and noting the “serious deterioration” already under way in bilateral relations.¹² That deterioration has continued, even as the geopolitical and economic context of UK-Russia relations has changed.

6. This deterioration in relations provided the background to the Foreign Affairs Committee’s December 2015 decision to launch an inquiry on the *UK’s relations with Russia*. The terms of reference included:

- the current state of UK-Russia bilateral relations and the record of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in managing this relationship;
- Russia’s increasingly assertive foreign policy in both Russia’s self-defined ‘near abroad’ and the rest of the world with especial reference to the Middle East;
- whether the UK Government is responding appropriately and effectively to Russian actions and aspirations;
- the future prospects for UK-Russia relations, the potential consequences for international relations and security and the scope for co-operation in areas of shared interests;
- whether the FCO has the necessary expertise and understanding of Russia’s internal politics, external relations and policy responses to inform effective UK policy-making and strategic planning;
- the current state of UK-Russia economic relations and the extent to which they help shape the bilateral relationship;
- the role of UK cultural institutions, including the BBC World Service and the British Council, in the UK-Russia relationship; and
- the human rights situation in Russia and the extent to which this impacts, or should impact, on Russia’s bilateral relationship with the UK.

7. The FAC conducted six oral evidence sessions between May and December 2016 to inform our inquiry. At those sessions, we discussed the UK-Russia relationship with academics, journalists, commentators and critics who advanced a broad range of views. In addition, we took evidence from representatives of the Russian media who are active in

9 Russian Embassy ([RUS0037](#)) introduction

10 Russian Embassy ([RUS0037](#)) section 1

11 Defence Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, [Russia: Implications for UK defence and security](#), HC 107; European Union Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2014–15, [The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine](#), HL Paper 115

12 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, [Global Security: Russia](#), HC 51, para 4

the UK. In our final oral evidence session, we heard from the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, Sir Alan Duncan MP—the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister with responsibility for UK-Russia relations—and FCO civil servants. We thank everyone who took the time to contribute oral and/or written evidence.

8. We visited Russia in May 2016, when we travelled to Moscow and St Petersburg. We met Russian Ministers, politicians, civil servants, business leaders, civil society representatives, directors of culture and people who work in the Russian media. We also met diplomats from a range of other nations and British businesspeople who work in Russia. We thank HM Ambassador to Russia, Dr Laurie Bristow, HM Consul General in St Petersburg, Mr Keith Allan, and their respective teams for taking the time to facilitate our visit.

9. Bearing in mind Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, we visited Ukraine in October 2016, where we met Ukrainian Ministers, politicians, civil servants and civil society representatives. We thank HM Ambassador to Ukraine, Ms Judith Gough, and her team for their support in Kiev. In addition to participating in meetings in Kiev, we also travelled to the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. We visited Slovyansk and Kramatorsk, where we met local government leaders, Ukrainian security forces, displaced people and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors. We thank the Ukraine-UK Friendship Group in the Ukraine Parliament and the Ukrainian Ambassador to the UK, Natalia Galibarenko, for their help in organising this visit.

10. We appointed Sarah Lain, Research Fellow, Royal United Services Institute, as Specialist Adviser to our inquiry.¹³ We thank the Specialist Adviser for her input. Her insight into Russian affairs meant that she made a valuable contribution throughout this inquiry.

13 On Tuesday 5 January 2016, Sarah Lain was appointed Specialist Adviser to the Foreign Affairs Committee for the UK's relations with Russia inquiry. She had no declarable interests in relation to this role.

1 UK-Russia relations since 1991: Divergent perspectives

11. The current tensions between Russia and the UK stem in large part from differing interpretations of events following the collapse of the Soviet Union. According to the mainstream western narrative, which was summarised by the former UK Ambassador to Russia Sir Roderic Lyne, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s “the West sought to integrate Russia progressively into the Euro-Atlantic community and pursued a vision of a strategic partnership”.¹⁴ These efforts included supporting Russia, along with other members of the former Soviet Union, to become fully democratic and to develop a market economy, welcoming it into the G8 and establishing mechanisms such as the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC) to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

12. The FCO's written evidence to this inquiry encapsulated this western understanding of the post-Cold War period. The FCO told us that

From the end of the Cold War, the West's broad objective had been to try to promote Russia's integration into the international system and global economy, and build a strategic partnership with Russia.

The UK was at the forefront of this approach. Following the dissolution of the USSR, the UK moved swiftly to establish diplomatic relations with the newly-independent Russian Federation and to develop a strong and productive bilateral relationship. We sought to address Russia's fear of perceived NATO encirclement by supporting the establishment of a formal relationship through the NATO-Russia 1997 'Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security' (NRFA). We strongly supported Russia's inclusion into a wide range of multilateral organisations and groups, including the Council of Europe in 1996, the G8 in 1997, and its accession to the World Trade Organisation. The UK was also active in providing technical support to Russia in its transition from a planned economy to a market one.¹⁵

13. Most Russian commentators advance a different narrative describing the events of the 1990s and early 2000s. When we visited Russia in May 2016, politicians and academic experts repeatedly told us that among both the political elite and the wider Russian public the 1990s are seen as a period of domestic turbulence and international humiliation. From the official Russian perspective, the West took advantage of Russia's relative weakness by ignoring its legitimate interests in the post-Soviet space and the western Balkans and by refusing to reorganise the Euro-Atlantic security architecture to include them.¹⁶ For example, the Russian Federation regarded the NATO-Russia Council not as a meeting of equals, but as a forum where it was told what NATO intended to do. Moreover, in Russia's

14 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 7

15 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) paras 8–9

16 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 11; Mary Dejevsky ([RUS0007](#)) paras 2.2—2.3

view, the eastward expansions of NATO in 1999 and 2004 broke verbal guarantees that had been given to Russia at the time of German re-unification and the provisions of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.¹⁷

14. The evidence submitted to our inquiry by the Russian Ambassador to the UK, Alexander Yakovenko, also set out a narrative of the post-Cold War period that contrasted sharply with that advanced by the FCO. Ambassador Yakovenko explained how Russia perceives the 1990s and the consequences of what he regards as the West's aggressive behaviour:

The unilateral decisions made in the early 90-ies set [Russia and the West] on a collision course, having predetermined, in somewhat Darwinian way, this [sic] negative dynamics. Without revisiting those we can hardly cope with today's problems. I truly believe that given the experience of the past 25 years we could find better, truly collective solutions, which, I agree, might have been difficult to contemplate in the climate of the 'victory in the Cold War' euphoria. It goes without saying that the end of the Cold War had never been prepared intellectually. Perhaps, all share the blame for that. But, still, it is natural to expect more sense and magnanimity from those who are strong and stable as opposed to those who are undergoing momentous upheavals in their societies [...].

In the expert community and among political observers it is increasingly believed that the West made a fundamental blunder, when decided to expand NATO Eastwards. The strategy of combined expansion of the Alliance and the EU moved the dividing lines in Europe closer to Russia's border instead of doing away with them once and for all. It was short-sighted and petty-minded to hedge against Russia's revival. It worked like a self-fulfilling prophecy [...] Had we thought things through jointly, we would have saved ourselves the greater part of the present trouble, first of all in Europe, but also in the Middle East and other places. We would have a collective security system in Europe, that works and allows us to act jointly and timely in the European periphery.¹⁸

15. The FCO acknowledged that Russia understands the post-Cold War period differently from the West, but portrayed this narrative as a deliberate, and somewhat recent, attempt by the current Russian leadership to justify a more aggressive foreign policy:

The current Russian leadership sees the immediate post-Cold War period as a period of humiliation during which the West took deliberate advantage of Russia's relative weakness. Since 2000 this perception has driven a more aggressive, authoritarian and nationalist policy, the objective of which is to reassert Russian interests more forcefully and tilt the strategic balance of power in its direction. In the process Russia has increasingly defined itself in opposition to the West.¹⁹

17 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, *Global Security: Russia*, HC 51, para 22; Defence Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, *Russia: Implications for UK defence and security*, HC 107, para 10

18 Russian Embassy ([RUS0037](#)) introduction and para 10

19 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) para 9 (box)

16. This Russian view of the period is disputed by NATO itself, individual NATO Governments and by many independent commentators. For example, Anne Applebaum, the Pulitzer Prize winning author, wrote:

No treaties prohibiting NATO expansion were ever signed with Russia. No promises were broken. Nor did the impetus for NATO expansion come from a “triumphalist” Washington. On the contrary, Poland’s first efforts to apply in 1992 were rebuffed. [...] When the slow, cautious expansion eventually took place, constant efforts were made to reassure Russia. No NATO bases were placed in the new member states, and until 2013 no exercises were conducted there. A Russia-NATO agreement in 1997 promised no movement of nuclear installations. A NATO-Russia Council was set up in 2002. In response to Russian objections, Ukraine and Georgia were, in fact, denied NATO membership plans in 2008. Meanwhile, not only was Russia not “humiliated” during this era, it was given de facto “great power” status, along with the Soviet seat on the UN Security Council and Soviet embassies. Russia also received Soviet nuclear weapons, some transferred from Ukraine in 1994 in exchange for Russian recognition of Ukraine’s borders. Presidents Clinton and Bush both treated their Russian counterparts as fellow “great power” leaders and invited them to join the Group of Eight—although Russia, neither a large economy nor a democracy, did not qualify.²⁰

Other commentators have gone further in addressing this point. For example, historians Christopher Clark and Kristina Spohr stated:

In recent years, the tendency to misremember past debacles as humiliations has emerged as one of the salient features of the Kremlin’s conduct of international affairs. Amid recriminations over US and western European interventions in Kosovo, Libya and Syria, the Russian leadership has begun to question the legitimacy of the international agreements on which the current European order is founded. Among these, the centrepiece is the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany of 12 September 1990, also known as the Two-plus-Four Treaty because it was signed by the two Germans, plus the US, the Soviet Union, Britain and France. Yet the claim that the negotiations towards this treaty included guarantees barring NATO from expansion into Eastern Europe is entirely unfounded. In the discussions leading to the treaty, the Russians never raised the question of NATO enlargement, other than in respect of the former East Germany. Regarding this territory, it was agreed that after Soviet troop withdrawals German forces assigned to NATO could be deployed there but foreign NATO forces and nuclear weapons systems could not. There was no commitment to abstain in future from eastern NATO enlargement.²¹

17. Those divergent perspectives are not as new as the FCO suggested. In February 2000—one month after Vladimir Putin became Russia’s acting President and one month before his official election to the office—the then Foreign Affairs Committee noted that

20 Anne Applebaum, “[The myth of Russian humiliation](#)”, The Washington Post, 17 October 2014

21 “[Moscow’s account of Nato expansion is a case of false memory syndrome](#)”, The Guardian, 25 May 2015

the early pro-western stance of the Yeltsin regime has shifted towards a more independent “Russia first” stance. The psychological difficulties faced by the Russian political and military élite in adjusting to a new role in the 1990s are manifest in their attempts to ensure that international relations are based on a multi-polar world, as opposed either to the bipolar world of the Cold War or to a unipolar world of US supremacy.²²

18. The 2000 FAC Report also documented the growth in tension between Russia and NATO, noting that there was “a negative view of NATO across the political spectrum in Russia”.²³ The then FAC identified the severe damage that NATO’s actions in Kosovo in 1999 had done to NATO-Russia relations.²⁴ It also noted that NATO’s 1999 enlargement to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic had been “viewed in Russia as a threat to its security” and warned that any future enlargement would need to be handled with sensitivity:

We accept the Government’s argument that no third country can be allowed to veto the enlargement of NATO, but nonetheless recommend that enlargement must be considered sensitively in the context of Europe’s security as a whole. One important element of this is Russia’s relationship with NATO, which enlargement has clearly harmed.²⁵

The overall conclusion of the 2000 Report was that the FCO “must continue and develop its critical engagement with Russia in the mutual interest of our two European countries.”²⁶

19. The divergence in viewpoints between Russia and the West had become further entrenched by 2007, when the then FAC next reported on Russia. The 2007 FAC Report opened by exploring how Russia’s “increased assertiveness [...] manifested in a range of ways and across a range of policy fields”.²⁷ It explained the different ways in which Russia and the West had interpreted the “colour revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003–04. And it noted that many western leaders, “especially in the US [...] framed the events in terms of what the US Administration sees as the global battle for freedom and democracy”.²⁸ The 2007 FAC Report stated that

Russia’s perception of many recent developments in Europe and the post-Soviet space as losses rests on a continued view of the West as Russia’s competitor, and of international politics as a zero-sum affair [...] Zero-sum thinking and fears of encirclement are deeply rooted elements of the dominant Russian worldview which persist into Moscow’s new foreign policy thinking.²⁹

22 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 1999–2000, [Relations with the Russian Federation](#), HC 101, para 58

23 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 1999–2000, [Relations with the Russian Federation](#), HC 101, para 81

24 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 1999–2000, [Relations with the Russian Federation](#), HC 101, paras 83–84

25 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 1999–2000, [Relations with the Russian Federation](#), HC 101, para 86

26 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 1999–2000, [Relations with the Russian Federation](#), HC 101, conclusion

27 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, [Global Security: Russia](#), HC 51, para 10

28 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, [Global Security: Russia](#), HC 51, para 24

29 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, [Global Security: Russia](#), HC 51, para 29

20. The then FAC believed that Russia's "more assertive" foreign policy would persist well into the future, even though Vladimir Putin was due to step down from the Presidency in accordance with the Russian constitution. The 2007 FAC Report concluded that

driven partly by changes in Russia's economic position, and partly by the cumulative effects of the country's post-Cold War relations with the West, the results of Russia's recent rethinking of its international role are likely to endure beyond the presidential election scheduled for March 2008.³⁰

21. The 2007 Report criticised the FCO's understanding of Russia's point of view:

[The] FCO's approach to Russia still seems to consist of very general statements of Russia's importance, accompanied by issue-by-issue dealings in practice [...] We are not assured that the FCO is sufficiently thinking through, in a coherent fashion, the possible implications of Russia's foreign policy shift.³¹

22. The Russian perception of encirclement by the West was reinforced by the conclusions of the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008. At this meeting, Albania and Croatia were invited to join the alliance. However Macedonia was not invited due to its ongoing dispute with Greece over its name. Encouraged by strong support from the USA, Georgia and Ukraine had hoped to join the NATO Membership Action Plan, which they saw as a step towards future full membership. However as a result of strong opposition from several European states, particularly France and Germany, the Alliance declaration merely stated "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO".³² However, it was decided to review that request in December 2008. This decision was seen by many as a significant victory for President Putin, who in his speech at the Bucharest summit stated that "The emergence of a powerful military bloc at our borders will be seen as a direct threat to Russian security [...] The efficiency of our co-operation will depend on whether NATO members take Russia's interests into account."³³

23. Four months after the Bucharest summit, worsening relations led to a war in August 2008 between Russia, Georgia and the Russian-backed self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Since then Russian forces have continued to occupy these parts of Georgian territory, and Russia has now signed treaties to incorporate both their economies and armed forces into the Russian Federation. At NATO summits, since 2008, including in Wales in 2014, although NATO has consistently reaffirmed its willingness in principle to admit Georgia, it has continued to stipulate that the next step toward doing so is a MAP comprising reforms and other criteria that any aspiring NATO member states must meet to qualify. To date, neither Georgia nor Ukraine has been formally offered such a MAP, either because doing so would bring into clearer focus the time frame for admission, or because NATO's existing members are divided over whether the military and strategic benefits of admitting them outweigh the damage to NATO-Russian relations that would inevitably result.

30 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, [Global Security: Russia](#), HC 51, para 34

31 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, [Global Security: Russia](#), HC 51, para 38

32 NATO, [Bucharest summit declaration](#);

33 "[Stay away, Vladimir Putin tells Nato](#)", The Telegraph, 5 April 2008

24. From the perspective of Russia, western powers took advantage of a period of relative Russian weakness under Boris Yeltsin in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union to enlarge both the European Union and NATO. From the perspective of western European countries and the United States, membership of political or economic alliances is a matter for sovereign decisions by the applicant countries if they meet the criteria for membership, and Russia can have no veto on such matters. Moreover, both NATO and the European Union believe that they offered the hand of friendship to Russia in assisting in the process of economic and political reform and democratisation. That hand of friendship was rebuffed after President Putin came to power. The different narratives of Russian and western foreign policy thinking have been well documented, including in the reports of our predecessor Committees. Despite those warnings, we do not believe that our policymakers have adequately considered the full implications of the differences between western and Russian understandings of this period of history or have drawn the correct, albeit uncomfortable, conclusions from it. However, given the Russian leadership's apparent intent to develop a siege mentality, particularly for domestic purposes, it is uncertain to what extent constructive engagement would have been possible. There is also a need to understand why states on the Russian Federation's fringe feel threatened. Western, including UK, policy must accept a share of responsibility for the current state of relations.

2 Russia in 2017

Politics

25. In its 2007 Report, the then FAC observed that “the trend overall in Russia in recent years has been towards a less open and plural political environment, combined with continuing serious human rights concerns”.³⁴ This trend has continued. As the FCO reported in its evidence to this inquiry:

The Russian State exercises a strong degree of control over political life. Parliamentary opposition parties make up 47.1% of the Russian Duma but they, in reality, are able to provide little challenge to government. The political opposition face significant obstacles, with increasing restrictions on their activity and limited channels for communication with the public.³⁵

26. Vladimir Putin returned to the Presidency of Russia in 2012, having served four years as Prime Minister during Dmitry Medvedev’s single term as President. His return to highest office took place in the wake of widespread protests, particularly in Moscow, sparked by perceived corruption and vote-rigging in the late 2011 parliamentary elections. On our visit to Russia, liberal politicians and academic experts alike described these protests as a key turning point in President Putin’s approach to domestic politics. The experience of 2011, we heard, prompted President Putin to focus increasingly on shoring up his personal popularity by supporting nationalist and populist narratives while marginalising the liberal opposition.

27. The success of President Putin’s approach was evident in the September 2016 parliamentary elections, in which President Putin’s United Russia party won a clear victory in an election notable for the lowest turnout—around 40%—since the fall of the Soviet Union.³⁶ The success of President Putin’s approach is also reflected in his personal approval ratings.³⁷ President Putin’s personal popularity has been achieved through control of the state-run media and being seen to act decisively on the international stage. However, it is important to acknowledge the genuine depth of President Putin’s positive reputation. Professor Alena Ledeneva of University College London told us:

It is a bit unfair to say that the Russian population has been “zombied” by Kremlin propaganda and that there are no alternative ways to receive information. Yes, our television still covers about 89% of the Russian Federation and Channel 1 and Channel 2 are the only channels that cover that much, and it is still a primary source of news and information for Russians, but at the same time, the internet works. There are no restrictions on the internet as there are in China. People would have access if they wanted it. The trouble is that they don’t. They are not interested because they actually agree.³⁸

34 Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2007–08, *Global Security: Russia*, HC 51, para 49

35 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (RUS0011) para 64

36 Matthew Bodner and Mikhail Fishman, “*Elections 2016: an overwhelming victory for the Kremlin*”, The Moscow Times, 19 September 2016

37 “*Vladimir Putin’s unshakeable popularity*”, The Economist, 4 February 2016

38 Q82 [Professor Alena Ledeneva]

President Putin is widely expected to seek, and to win, re-election in 2018 at the end of his current term, which would leave him in office until 2024.³⁹

28. Apathy and fear of instability and reprisals among the wider Russian population also have an effect on Russia's political system. During our visit to Russia, for example, we met a group of students at the University of Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics (ITMO), one of Russia's major research universities. The students were bright and ambitious, and many planned to use their skills to work abroad or to improve their local communities. We were struck, however, by their apparent lack of appetite for political engagement and by their assertion that no political activity of any kind took place on campus. Students were not prohibited from taking part in political activities or forming political societies but, we were told, simply were not interested.

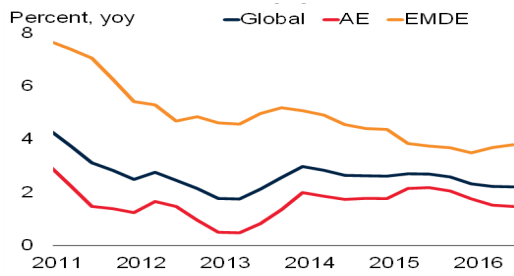
Economy

29. The economic climate that underpinned the Kremlin's foreign and domestic policies in the 2000s has changed radically. Owing to a combination of falling oil and gas prices and the effect of western sanctions, Russia has entered a recession that saw its economy contract by an estimated 3.7% in 2015, although recent indicators suggest that that contraction has slowed.⁴⁰ The contraction of the Russian economy must be set against developments in the world economy. The following charts drawn up by the World Bank set out the performance of the Russian economy in relation to a number of key indicators:

39 The maximum Presidential term was increased from four to six years in 2008 under President Dmitry Medvedev.

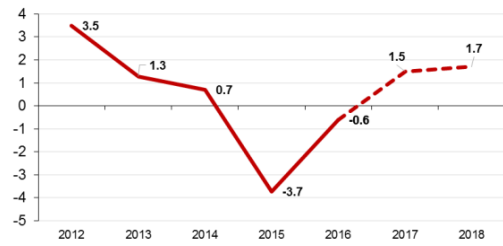
40 World Bank, [Russia Economic Report](#), 9 November 2016

Global growth (AE = Advanced Economies; EMDE = Emerging Market and Developing Economies)



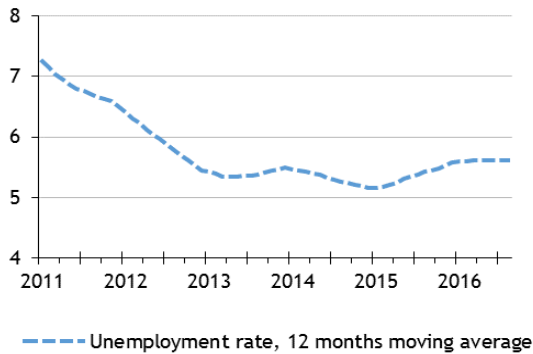
Source: World Bank

Real GDP growth in the Russian economy



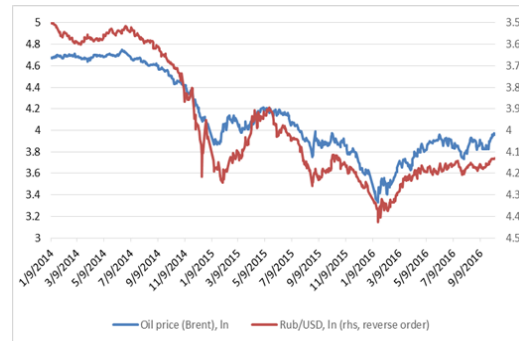
Source: World Bank staff estimate

Unemployment in Russia



Source: Rosstat and World Bank staff calculations

The relationship between the price of oil and the rouble exchange rate



Source: CBR and World Bank staff calculations

30. The appointment of liberal reformer Alexei Kudrin as economic adviser to the Russian Government in 2016 might be taken as a sign of President Putin’s willingness to consider wide-reaching reforms to reduce Russia’s dependence on commodities.⁴¹ However, the Kremlin may not be willing to take the steps proposed by Mr Kudrin, such as economic decentralisation and judicial reform to tackle corruption.⁴²

31. Russia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012, which showed some progress towards the development of an open economy and might have provided the basis for further economic reform. However, TheCityUK, an independent membership body representing the UK-based financial services industry, told us that Russia “is reportedly seen by WTO partners as one of the main actors in the imposition of unjustified trade restrictions on other countries, including WTO members that are its near neighbours”.⁴³ TheCityUK added:

Unusually, in May 2014, eleven WTO members spoke against what they saw as potential Russian violations at a General Council meeting. [...] Other members with concerns over Russian trade practices reportedly included Australia, Canada, Japan, Norway, Korea, Switzerland, and

41 “Kudrin’s resurrection fails to damp doubts on Russian reforms”, Financial Times, 8 May 2016
 42 “Alexei Kudrin wants to liberalise Russia’s economy to save it”, The Economist, 19 January 2017
 43 TheCityUK (RUS0031) para 25

Taiwan, and Ukraine, among others. [...] These are strong and unusually strident criticisms, particularly given that the WTO is a consensus-based organisation, with a degree of tolerance towards challenges commonly faced by newly-acceding members.⁴⁴

Human rights

32. Human rights are limited and declining in contemporary Russia.⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch pointed out that

The current human rights situation in Russia under President Putin is the worst it has been since the fall of the Soviet Union. The Russian authorities have introduced severe restrictions on freedom of association and expression, and political opponents, journalists and NGOs are harassed, threatened, repressed, imprisoned and sometimes killed for their criticisms of state policy. The country's discriminatory legislation on lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender (LGBT) people is used to harass LGBT and disrupt pro-LGBT events and the authorities largely fail to prevent or prosecute homophobic violence. Human rights conditions in the North Caucasus are also particularly poor, with abusive counter-insurgency operations, attacks on activists and ongoing threats to women's rights.⁴⁶

33. The deterioration of human rights is underpinned by the growing official and popular embrace of conservative religious and cultural values which are defined through negative comparisons with western liberal principles. This narrative associates western liberal standards with instability and decline. The Russian mindset was encapsulated by a cartoon tweeted by the Russian Embassy in the UK on 22 October 2016, which depicted a mighty Russian bear posing beside a group of pigs which have hoisted an LGBT pride flag and are standing beneath a Eurozone sign.⁴⁷

44 TheCityUK ([RUS0031](#)) paras 30 — 32

45 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) Annex D

46 Human Rights Watch ([RUS0005](#)) Summary

47 "[Russian Embassy depicts Europeans as 'gay pigs' in mocking tweet](#)", Metro.co.uk, 27 October 2016

Russian Embassy, UK
@RussianEmbassy



If Russia is in decline, why worry? Maybe, real worry is West's decline and that we manage things better?



34. Such anti-liberal rhetoric has been reflected in Russian law, particularly on LGBT and human rights issues. In 2013, for example, the State Duma passed a law imposing heavy fines on individuals and groups accused of “promoting” homosexuality to minors in order to protect the “religious feelings of the faithful”.⁴⁸ The author of that bill, Yelena Mizulina, was also responsible for introducing a recent law that decriminalised some domestic violence offences. Supporters of this provision described the measure as protecting traditional Russian values from encroachment by western liberal ideology.⁴⁹ However, others have pointed out that domestic violence is a significant issue with suggestions of thousands of spouses being killed by their partners in Russia each year.⁵⁰

35. In 2012, Russia passed a law requiring any NGO that received foreign donations and engaged in “political activity” to register as a “foreign agent”. NGOs forced to register in this way are subject to additional auditing procedures and must brand any publications or statements with the disclosure that the source is a “foreign agent”.⁵¹ Many NGOs have had to close as a result of that law. When we visited Russia, we met representatives of several groups that had been branded as “foreign agents”, including journalists, LGBT rights activists, social science researchers and veterans’ rights advocates. They described the huge practical impediments to their work that resulted from their being labelled in this way, including fines and the imposition of major bureaucratic obstacles. This included a

48 [“Russian Duma passes law banning ‘gay propaganda’”, BBC News, 11 June 2013](#)

49 [“Putin approves legal change that decriminalises domestic violence”, The Guardian, 7 February 2017](#)

50 Human Rights Watch, [“A Slap is Only the Start: New domestic violence law in Russia hurts victims”](#), 14 February 2017

51 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) Annex D, para 1

meeting with the Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia which attempts to expose human rights violations committed by the Russian military and is made up of the mothers of Russian soldiers who have served in the Russian military.

36. The 2012 "foreign agent" law was followed by a 2015 provision covering international NGOs. The FCO told us:

In May 2015, President Putin signed a law that allowed for foreign and international NGOs operating in Russia to be labelled "undesirable" if deemed to pose a threat to Russia's constitutional order, defence capability or national security. "Undesirable" organisations are prohibited from operating in Russia and are unable to disseminate information, hold public events or use bank accounts for anything other than paying fines incurred under the law. Russian individuals and organisations that cooperate with "undesirable organisations" risk fines and up to six years in prison. The legislation is seemingly an attempt to starve NGOs of international funding. Organisations labelled "undesirable" to date include the US-based National Endowment for Democracy and the Open Society Foundation.⁵²

In late-2016, the Russian Government branded the international branch of Memorial, a respected Russian human rights organisation, as a foreign agent. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe described the decision as "deeply disappointing".⁵³

37. Life is very difficult for civil society organisations and activists critical of the Russian Government. During our visit to St Petersburg, the Committee heard testimony from several domestically orientated organisations in Russia, most of which have been labelled as "foreign agents" as a result of criticising the Russian Government. This classification stops them from being able to co-operate with the Russian Government and throws up major bureaucratic hurdles. Human Rights Watch has raised the case of the AGORA Association, one of Russia's leading human rights organisations, which was closed by a Russian court due to supposed violations of the foreign agents law.⁵⁴ The organisation has also noted the detention in Crimea of two human rights lawyers who represent prominent Crimean Tatar leaders. Emil Kurbedinov was detained on 26 January 2017, and Nikolai Polozov was detained on 25 January 2017 after representing Akhtem Chiygoz and Ilmi Umerov, who were prosecuted on charges associated with their opposition to Russia's annexation of Crimea.⁵⁵

Rule of law

38. The rule of law remains "inconsistent and arbitrarily applied" in Russia.⁵⁶ Former oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who spent 10 years in a Russian prison in the early 2000s, told us that

a significant part of society's institutions and all state institutions in Russia only appear to resemble what all these names mean here, for example, in Great Britain. In fact their substance doesn't correspond [to their names].

52 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) Annex D, para 2

53 [Statement by Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland](#), 4 October 2016

54 ["Crimea: Defense Lawyers Harassed"](#), Human Rights Watch, 30 January 2017

55 ["Russia: Government vs. Rights Groups"](#), Human Rights Watch, 14 February 2017

56 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) Annex D, para 4

When they talk about a prosecutor, this is not a prosecutor. When they talk about a judge, this is not a judge at all. Even though he hears the greater part of his cases normally, he is nevertheless not really a judge, but a state employee who imposes punishment.⁵⁷

39. Anti-corruption campaigner and opposition politician Alexei Navalny was convicted in February 2017 of embezzlement and given a five-year suspended sentence, which will bar him from running against President Putin in the 2018 election.⁵⁸ He was first tried in 2013, but the European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2016 that he had been “deprived... of the basic guarantees of a fair trial”, and that the courts had failed to address the “arguable allegation that the reasons for his prosecution were his political activities”.⁵⁹ The verdict in the 2017 re-trial reproduced the 2013 judgment almost verbatim, indicating that the ECHR’s concerns remain valid.⁶⁰

40. When we met human rights activists in Russia and Ukraine who had experienced both the Soviet and the post-Soviet periods, we were struck by repeated assertions that the new regime differed from the old mainly with regard to the lack of ‘rules’. We were told, for example, that Soviet authorities had been required to produce papers before searching the homes of suspected dissidents. By contrast, we heard that today, instead of direct repression by state authorities, proxy groups are allowed—and sometimes encouraged—to harass, intimidate and assault human rights activists, with no clear rules governing their behaviour and little prospect of prosecution in the courts. **The evidence that we received on human rights is confirmed by international groups who are concerned about attacks on civil society and disrespect for the rule of law and human rights in not only Russia itself, but Crimea. The Committee shares those concerns.**

Russia’s current foreign policy

41. Russia’s dismissive attitude towards rules and norms is, we heard, reflected in its international ambitions and behaviour. Dr Derek Averre, Senior Lecturer in Russian Foreign and Security Policy at the University of Birmingham, argued that

Russia seeks the status of great power once again and, after a difficult period in the 1990s, independence from western interests. It wants to further Eurasian integration, preventing the further encroachment of western influence on its own sphere of privileged interests, as then-President Medvedev called it.⁶¹

42. Dr Andrew Monaghan of Chatham House added:

the overall drive of Russian goals on the international stage is first to meet their position as a ubiquitous power—that is, one that has Russia at the centre of the map, stretching across many time zones and many regions in the world. So it is a ubiquitous world power, but the Russian leadership

57 Q162 [see footnotes]

58 “*Alexei Navalny: Russian opposition leader found guilty*”, BBC News, 8 February 2017

59 European Court of Human Rights, [Press Release](#), ECHR 071 (2016), 23 February 2016

60 “*Aleksei Navalny, Viable Putin Rival, Is Barred From a Presidential Run*”, The New York Times, 8 February 2017

61 Q2 [Dr Derek Averre]

also wants and is trying to create a position for Russia as an indispensable partner. In essence, this means they want and need to have a seat at the table; otherwise they are concerned they will be on the menu.⁶²

43. In order to achieve this ambition, we were told that Russia aims to disrupt, if not completely overturn, the post-war international order that, in its view, has been used since the end of the Cold War to advance the West's agenda and marginalise Russia. To this end, Russia seizes opportunities to undermine the West's narrative, both by challenging it directly and by pointing out perceived mistakes or missteps in western countries' foreign policies. As Dr Andrew Monaghan of Chatham House told us:

First, the Russian leadership is trying to create a sovereign independent state, which would mean that Russia is prepared for, and looking ahead at, a 21st century of instability. Secondly, it means an evolution of international architecture. The post-second world war architecture—Bretton Woods, NATO, the European Union—is no longer relevant in their view, or is becoming decreasingly relevant. Thirdly, Russian foreign policy is increasingly guided towards a counter-colour revolution: colour revolution-proofing Russia first, but also counter-colour revolution, counter-regime change, policy, diplomacy and operations more broadly—including in Syria, as we have seen recently.⁶³

44. Ambassador Yakovenko's evidence to this inquiry exemplified the Russian revisionist approach to foreign affairs:

Why not integrate Russia and the rest of Europe wholesale immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union? And what we've got as a result of that fateful mistake? An irrelevant Nato which has given up on its 'globalization' and retreated, almost with joy, to the shell of the territorial defense. It is of no use in finding solutions to the real problems of the XXIst century, i.e. terrorist threat and migration onslaught (in both cases not without a role, played by Turkey, a NATO ally). We have got a dysfunctional EU, which is also due to the lack of imagination and complacency of its core members.⁶⁴

Ambassador Yakovenko's evidence also criticised the West's approach to the Middle East and North Africa, citing the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 2011 French and UK-led intervention in Libya as evidence of the West's misplaced "idea that the internal setup in Arab countries could be reordered at will by outside forces".⁶⁵

45. The Kremlin has achieved significant success with this approach to international relations. As Sir Roderic Lyne, former UK Ambassador to Russia, stated:

Tactically, President Putin has shown himself to be adroit, opportunistic, disruptive and ruthless in advancing his aims. He evidently does not feel constrained by domestic or international law. As the West, in his view, has abused international law and circumvented the UN, he is free to do so. He

62 Q2 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

63 Q2 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

64 Russian Embassy ([RU50037](#)) para 10

65 Russian Embassy ([RU50037](#)) para 4

argues that the rules of the game were imposed by the USA in the unipolar moment of the 1990s. Russia rejects this status quo. The rules should be rewritten to reflect Russia's status as a major power and include Russia in Europe's security architecture—as a decision-maker with the power of veto.⁶⁶

The link between Russian domestic and foreign policy

46. As the fall in commodity prices and the impact of western sanctions have combined with structural weakness further to undermine Russia's economy, President Putin's regime has increasingly relied on projecting a 'great power' image abroad to secure its legitimacy at home.⁶⁷ Dr Valentina Feklyunina of Newcastle University told us:

The transformation of Russia's foreign policy stems from a variety of factors, including the need to maintain the domestic legitimacy of the regime. We can expect that domestic factors are likely to become particularly important during the next two years as Russia is entering the period of the next electoral cycle. As Russia's economic situation continues to deteriorate, the Russian authorities in their effort to enhance the regime's legitimacy are likely to put even more emphasis on what they present as their achievements in the international arena.⁶⁸

47. This use of foreign policy as a tool of domestic legitimacy is bolstered by a Kremlin- and media-supported narrative that portrays Russia as under constant attack from hostile western powers. Sir Roderic Lyne, for example, describes this narrative as portraying Russia "as having been the victim of western attempts to undermine and humiliate the country."⁶⁹ Support for this siege mentality enables the Russian Government to "[use] the defence industry as a locomotive for growth", in the absence of political will to address the major structural defects in Russia's economy.⁷⁰

48. However, Alex Nice of the Economist Intelligence Unit warned against over-stating the domestic popularity of Russia's activities abroad:

I think there is an important nuance that we need to put on this notion that legitimacy is now about charismatic leadership and the projection of Russia as a great power [...] Yes, Crimea boosted the popularity of the President and the Government, but it appears that there is little support for wars involving high casualties. In fact, there was a great deal of sensitivity about Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine, the threatening of journalists who reported on casualties and a great deal of anxiety about the impact domestically of high numbers of casualties or the reporting of such. I think the notion that a downturn therefore means Russia will be seeking conflict everywhere needs to be finessed.⁷¹

66 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 15

67 Q131

68 Dr Valentina Feklyunina ([RUS0030](#))

69 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 11

70 Q58 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

71 Q74

49. Similarly, Professor Alena Ledeneva argued that the regime's reliance on foreign policy success will not be sustainable indefinitely, especially if the economic situation worsens:

the current situation in Russia could be described as a fight between television and a fridge. I have to say that the television has been working very effectively to advance Kremlin-driven propaganda to raise support for Putin—popular support for his foreign policy—and for Russian patriotism.⁷²

However, she added that as the proportion of the population who report that Russia is moving in the right direction falls, “the refrigerator is fighting back, which means that the economic position has fallen through”.⁷³ She added: “There is a limit to everything, in the sense that you could brainwash or zombie the state-owned media, but the population only so much. I think that resource has been exploited enough.”⁷⁴

Russia's foreign policy goals

50. Foreign policy decision-making in Russia is directed by the Kremlin, and its processes and fundamental drivers are therefore opaque.⁷⁵ Sir Roderic Lyne observed that

President Putin's overriding aim appears to be to retain power for himself and his associates. He has no perceptible exit strategy [...] I do not believe that [President Putin and his associates] are working to a master plan, and I think they are more concerned to defend their positions than to expand Russia's territory and global reach. They are conscious of the limitations and constraints on Russia's power, especially economic weakness. But they seek opportunistically to regain ground lost in the 1990s; and have a vision which is widely shared.⁷⁶

51. In the long term, Russia's foreign policy focus on its western borders may be misconceived, because its key strategic challenge arguably lies not to the west but the east, where its relationship with China is defined by potential disputes in relation to territory and resources. Bearing those challenges in mind, the China-Russia relationship may be the critical international relationship in the next 50 years. Sir Tim Barrow pointed out that “the biggest change with regard to Russia and its interests is the growth of China”.⁷⁷ Lord Truscott told us that China and Russia's relationship was a “partnership of convenience” and that “there will be no formal alliance between Beijing and Moscow.”⁷⁸ He added:

Were relationships to improve with the United States on either side, [Russia and China] would quickly move further apart [...] In the short and medium term the fact is that they are more concerned about what they perceive as the threat from NATO and the West, which is what is determining their policy currently. That is what is pushing these two unlikely bedfellows together.⁷⁹

72 Q75

73 Q75

74 Q76

75 Q66

76 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) paras 12, 14

77 Q328

78 Q179

79 Q180

52. The UK Government also appears ill prepared to deal with the challenges of dealing with Russian aspirations in the Arctic and the high north, not least the opening up of the northern sea routes. We look forward to the Defence Sub-Committee's conclusions in respect of this challenge in its forthcoming Report on *Defence in the Arctic*.⁸⁰

53. The Kremlin is prepared to be disruptive in foreign affairs. This opportunist, tactical approach to foreign policy means that Russia is already making strategic mistakes and pursuing short-term advantages rather than advancing a long-term, coherent, sustainable vision for its role in the world. Russia rejects international rules as they are understood by the UK and other western powers, and, in an effort to legitimise its approach, it seizes on every example where we have not lived up to our own standards and takes every opportunity to take advantage of weaknesses, problems and differences within eastern Europe and NATO. It believes that it has a legitimate sphere of influence in former Soviet territory in eastern Europe, that it should have a decisive say over those states' foreign policy choices and that other nations should recognise its sphere of influence.

54. The Russian assertion that it has a sphere of influence is contrary to the development of the international rules-based order over the past 50 years. UK foreign policy is predicated on a rules-based international order, international law and self-determination, as set out in the Helsinki Accords and the United Nations Charter. Russian foreign policy aims to undermine the current world order, prevent self-determination and independent decisions by neighbouring countries, which it sees as regime change, and to promote Russia's world view as a legitimate alternative to western values. The Russian Government's indifference to human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law underpins its foreign policy challenge to the international order and lies at the root of the collapse in UK-Russia relations.

80 House of Commons Defence Sub-Committee, [Defence in the Arctic inquiry](#)

3 Tensions in the UK-Russia relationship

Ukraine

55. In December 1994, the United Kingdom, the United States and Russia signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, under which the signatories made promises to each other as part of the denuclearisation of former Soviet republics after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Under the memorandum, Ukraine promised to remove all Soviet-era nuclear weapons from its territory, to send them to disarmament facilities in Russia and to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. Ukraine kept those promises. In return, Russia and the western signatory countries recognised the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine as an independent state, which involved applying the principles of territorial integrity and non-intervention in the Helsinki Accords.

56. In the Budapest Memorandum, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States promised that none of them would ever threaten to use or use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine. They also pledged that none of them would ever use economic coercion to subordinate Ukraine to their own interest and that they would refrain from making each other's territory the object of military occupation and from using force in violation of international law. All sides agreed not to recognise any occupation or acquisition and that they would consult each other if those commitments were ever called into question.

57. On 21 November 2013, Ukraine's Russian-backed President, Viktor Yanukovich, abruptly reneged on preparations to sign an Association Agreement with the EU under reportedly heavy pressure from the Kremlin.⁸¹ A similar process had taken place a few months earlier, when President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia was summoned to Moscow in September 2013 and over a weekend, without consulting either his Parliament or his Government, changed the Armenian position on the EU-Armenia Association Agreement. President Sargsyan's change of policy resulted in limited protests in Armenia, but in Ukraine President Yanukovich's decision prompted a wave of mass protest, known as the Euromaidan movement, which culminated in late-February 2014 with President Yanukovich's removal from office and flight to Russia.

Annexation of Crimea

58. Following President Yanukovich's departure from Kiev, pro-Russian demonstrations broke out in the Crimean city of Sevastopol. Tensions escalated on 26 and 27 February, when thousands of demonstrators supporting the new government in Kiev clashed with pro-Russian protesters outside Crimea's regional parliament in Simferopol.⁸² On 27 February, masked gunmen—widely thought to be Russian special forces—seized Crimea's parliament building and raised the Russian flag.⁸³ A referendum was then held on 16 March 2014, in which a large majority of those who voted reportedly supported joining Russia. Russia formally announced the annexation of Crimea two days later. The EU

81 ["Ukraine's EU trade deal will be catastrophic, says Russia"](#), The Guardian, 22 September 2013; ["How the EU lost Ukraine"](#), Der Spiegel, 25 November 2013; ["Ukraine protests after Yanukovich EU deal rejection"](#), BBC News, 30 November 2013

82 ["Crimean Tatars, pro-Russia supporters approach Crimean parliament building"](#), Interfax Ukraine, 26 February 2014

83 ["Ukraine crisis: 'Russians' occupy Crimea airports"](#), BBC News, 28 February 2014

declared the referendum “illegal and illegitimate” and refused to recognise the outcome, along with the vast majority of the international community.⁸⁴ Independent observers from the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe were not allowed to scrutinise the referendum.

59. The Russian–Ukrainian Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet, signed in 1997 and prolonged in 2010, allowed Russia to maintain military bases and vessels in Crimea. The Russian Black Sea fleet had basing rights in Crimea until 2042. Dr Andrew Monaghan of Chatham House told the Committee that the primary reason for Russia’s annexation of Crimea was to ensure that the peninsula “did not fall out of Russian strategic control”.⁸⁵ He said:

The Ukrainian Government in Kiev was renting out the main base at Sevastopol to them at a very, very high fee. One of their main strategic concerns was either that the price would be raised yet further or that the deal would be cut entirely, and not only that but the Ukrainian Government might then say, “Well, we will have NATO ships.” That is, I think, less important than the idea of the base being removed from Russian control. For me, that is the primary reason for the Crimean operation.⁸⁶

60. Although most human rights monitoring organisations are barred from Crimea, since its annexation the human rights situation has become “repressive”, especially for non-Russian ethnic minorities.⁸⁷ According to Human Rights Watch:

People who decline Russian citizenship and retain their Ukrainian citizenship experience serious difficulties in accessing education, employment opportunities or social benefits. The authorities have not conducted meaningful investigations into the 2014 enforced disappearances of Crimean Tatars and pro-Ukrainian activists.⁸⁸

61. In September 2016, the Russian Supreme Court declared the Mejlis—the representative body for Crimean Tatars—an “extremist” organisation.⁸⁹ In October 2016 we met with two representatives of the Mejlis in exile in Kiev. They, one of whom had been subject to the expulsions under Stalin, painted a grim picture of widespread arrests and intimidation of Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians by the Russian-installed authorities, as well as increasing restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly and the press.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine and the Minsk agreements

62. In March 2014, pro-Russian separatist groups began to stage protests in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Some of the leaders of the separatist movement, such as Igor Strelkov, were linked to Russian nationalism and the Kremlin.⁹⁰ Following referendums that were not recognised as legitimate by the

84 European Council press release [EUCO 58/14](#), 16 March 2014

85 Q18

86 Q19 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

87 Human Rights Watch ([RUS0005](#))

88 Human Rights Watch ([RUS0005](#))

89 The Crimean Tatars are a Turkic ethnic group that settled in the Crimean Peninsula. In the mid-1940s, the Soviet Union forcibly transferred many Crimean Tatars to Uzbekistan.

90 *Pro-Russian Commander in Eastern Ukraine Sheds Light on Origin of Militants*, The Wall Street Journal, 26 April 2014

international community, the separatists declared the two provinces to be “independent republics” in May. After a rapid initial advance by the separatists, a ceasefire deal (Minsk I) was reached in September 2014 on the basis of principles advanced by Ukraine’s President Poroshenko. The agreement broke down almost immediately.

63. On 12 February 2015, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France announced the signing of a second Minsk agreement. The provisions of the agreement included a ceasefire and immediate withdrawal of heavy weapons from the zone of contact. The agreement also placed a number of obligations on Ukraine, including constitutional reform to bring about political decentralisation and the introduction of “special status” for areas of Donetsk and Luhansk.⁹¹

64. On 17 July 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17 was shot down near Donetsk killing all 283 passengers and 15 crew on board, including 193 citizens of the Netherlands, 43 people from Malaysia and 10 British citizens. Although Russian officials denied that Russian personnel or equipment had been deployed in Ukraine, the subsequent inquiry by a Dutch-led Joint Investigation Team (JIT) concluded that

flight MH17 was shot down on 17 July 2014 by a missile of the 9M38 series, launched by a BUK-TELAR, from farmland in the vicinity of Pervomaiskiy (or: Pervomaiskyi). At that time, the area was controlled by pro-Russian fighters. Furthermore, the investigation also shows that the BUK-TELAR was brought in from the territory of the Russian Federation and subsequently, after having shot down flight MH-17, was taken back to the Russian Federation.⁹²

65. Although a nominal ceasefire remains in place in eastern Ukraine, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) has reported hundreds of explosions and incidents of mortar fire.⁹³ When we met OSCE SMM officials near the line of contact in October 2016, they told us that, at that time, both sides of the conflict were equally responsible for the ceasefire violations. The OSCE SMM recorded a major surge in violence in late January and early February 2017, including an unprecedented 11,000 ceasefire violations on 31 January, mostly around the area of Avdiivka and Yasynuvata.⁹⁴

66. Civilians living in the separatist-controlled zones and close to the borders also continue to face many challenges in their daily lives, including major damage to infrastructure, long waits at border-crossing checkpoints and lengthy periods without access to basic public services and facilities. We saw the distressing impact of those conditions on people’s daily lives during our visit to the region and witnessed the resilience of those affected including some who had established a university in exile.

91 *“Full text of the Minsk agreement”*, Financial Times, 12 February 2015

92 Joint Investigation Team, *“Presentation preliminary results criminal investigation MH17 28–09–2016”*, accessed 10 February 2017

93 OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, *Daily and spot reports from the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine*, accessed 16 January 2017

94 OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, *Latest from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM), based on information received as of 19:30, 31 January 2017*, 31 January 2017

67. FCO Minister of State with responsibility for Russia, Sir Alan Duncan, told us that Russia's actions in Ukraine

involved direct aggression towards a neighbouring country, and seeking to change borders by force. Russia has flouted the basic principles of European security and the international rules-based order and challenged the territorial integrity of a sovereign nation in Europe. The human consequences of this have been severe; with the death of almost ten thousand people, the wounding of over 20 thousand and the displacement of up to one million within Ukraine.⁹⁵

68. During the initial stages of the unrest in eastern Ukraine, Russia denied direct involvement or support for the separatists.⁹⁶ In December 2015, however, President Putin appeared to admit that Russian "military specialists" were on the ground in the region.⁹⁷ In evidence to this inquiry, Russia's Ambassador to the UK, Alexander Yakovenko, wrote that after what he described as the 2014 "coup d'état" in Kiev

Radical nationalists came to the fore, dictating their agenda to the Government, including the present one, formed after Petro Poroshenko's election as President. People in various regions were left to decide for themselves whether to stay in a nationalist Ukraine or leave. Some decided to leave taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the destruction of the Constitutional order. They were mostly ethnic Russians or other non-Ukrainian nationalities. It happened on our borders, including in the Crimea. Russia couldn't help supporting them, if need be by the force of arms (how in particular is another matter; here I'd rather refer you to a character in one of Guy de Maupassant's short stories, who suddenly had to face the reality of the Prussian occupation: he acted *comme ça se trouvait*).⁹⁸

69. Journalist Mary Dejevsky supported the Russian Embassy's narrative of events, telling the Committee that Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine had been "exaggerated from [a western] point of view", and that Russia did not have "the slightest designs on eastern Ukraine."⁹⁹ She added that Russia "has a degree of concern about the whole cultural thing and the Russophones in Ukraine, in Russia's view, not being able to have a federated system."¹⁰⁰ Dr Andrew Monaghan also told us that the "federalisation" of Ukraine is Russia's primary goal in supporting the separatists, but argued that Russia's aim was to create "a more broadly diluted sense of power" in the country.¹⁰¹

70. Other witnesses placed Russia's actions in destabilising Ukraine in the wider context of Russia's desire to prevent any of its neighbours from developing closer relations with the West. Sir Roderic Lyne, former UK Ambassador to Russia, wrote that "it is a core Russian belief that their security requires a cordon sanitaire of weak or neutralised territories which they can dominate."¹⁰² Similarly, Ian Bond of the Centre for European reform stated:

95 Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP, Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0046](#))

96 "[Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine](#)", *Briefing no. 79*, International Crisis Group, 5 February 2016

97 "[Putin admits Russian military presence in Ukraine for first time](#)", The Guardian, 17 December 2015

98 Russian Embassy ([RUS0037](#)) para 2

99 Q186 [Mary Dejevsky]

100 Q186 [Mary Dejevsky]

101 Q19 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

102 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 10

Russia has supported the separatist enclave of Transnistria in Moldova since the break-up of the Soviet Union, as well as backing other separatist groups and pro-Moscow political parties in the country; invaded and divided Georgia (creating internationally unrecognised statelets in Abkhazia and South Ossetia); and invaded Ukraine, annexing Crimea and deploying its troops covertly to remove other areas of eastern Ukraine from Kyiv's control. It dissuaded the Armenian government from signing an Association Agreement with the EU inter alia by selling arms to Armenia's enemy, Azerbaijan, thus reminding Yerevan that its security depended on staying on the right side of Moscow. For Russia, the 1944 analysis of the great American diplomat and Kremlinologist George Kennan still holds good: "The jealous eye of the Kremlin can distinguish, in the end, only vassals and enemies; and the neighbours of Russia, if they do not wish to be one, must reconcile themselves to being the other".¹⁰³

71. When the Soviet Union invaded and annexed the three Baltic States in 1941, the United Kingdom along with most other countries refused to accept the incorporation of the Baltic States into the USSR. The independence of the Baltic States was restored following the collapse of the USSR in 1991. **Today the UK must not accept or recognise the illegal Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea. This is particularly important because the UK is a signatory to the Budapest Memorandum (see paragraph 55). Ukraine is a sovereign state, and it must be able to choose its own future. The UK national interest would be served if Ukraine had positive relations with both Russia and the West. However, such an outcome cannot be achieved until Russia ends its illegal annexation of Crimea, stops supporting separatist groups in eastern Ukraine and abides by international law.**

Supporting reform and resilience in Ukraine

72. Ukraine held elections for a new President on 25 May 2014. Petro Poroshenko, a prominent oligarch and political independent, won in the first round with more than 50% of the vote, although votes were not cast in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk.¹⁰⁴ This was followed in October 2014 by parliamentary elections in which Poroshenko's Bloc received the most seats and formed a broad ruling coalition along with several other political parties. However, amidst difficulties in implementing the political and economic reforms demanded by the Minsk II process and Ukraine's international donors, the coalition began to break apart in late 2015.

73. President Poroshenko's Government is more openly committed to economic reform and anti-corruption than any previous Ukrainian Administration. The reform agenda has made considerable progress and has enjoyed some successes including police reform, liberalisation of the energy market and the launch of an online platform for government procurement. Recognising this progress, in September 2016 the IMF voted to unlock \$1bn in macro-financial assistance to Ukraine, ending a 13-month delay on the release of the funds due to concerns over corruption.¹⁰⁵ However, the challenges to this programme—including corruption and the Ukrainian economy's continuing reliance on oligarchs—remain significant.

103 Ian Bond, Centre for European Reform (RUS0015) para 5

104 "Petro Poroshenko claims Ukraine presidency", BBC News, 25 May 2014

105 "West shows \$1bn of faith in Ukraine", EU Observer, 15 September 2016

74. Progress in reforming Ukraine's judiciary and public administration has been slow.¹⁰⁶ Such reforms are key to tackling corruption and delivering good governance. To support the reform process, the UK Government set up the Good Governance Fund in March 2015. It will fund £20 million of technical assistance up to September 2018 to support economic reform and good governance in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁰⁷

EU-Ukraine Association Agreement

75. The UK is currently a party to the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The European External Action Service described the agreement as “unprecedented in its breadth (number of areas covered) and depth (detail of commitments and timelines)”.¹⁰⁸ It includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, and provides for co-operation across a wide range of economic sectors, governance and anti-corruption reform, foreign and security policy, and justice and home affairs. Elements of the agreement including co-operation on the rule of law and the fight against crime and corruption have been applied since November 2014, and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement has been provisionally applied since 1 January 2016.

76. The implementation of the Association Agreement has not been smooth. Dutch voters rejected the agreement in an April 2016 referendum, halting the ratification process. In an attempt to address the concerns expressed during the referendum, in December the European Council agreed a text that explicitly stated that the agreement did not make Ukraine a candidate for EU membership, did not issue a collective security guarantee and did not give Ukrainians the right to live and work freely in the EU.¹⁰⁹ The agreement included provisions to grant visa-free travel to Ukrainians seeking to visit the Schengen area for up to 90 days, but those provisions have not yet been fully implemented.¹¹⁰

77. In order to support the reform process in Ukraine, the UK and EU must follow through on the obligations they have undertaken both bilaterally and through the Association Agreement. David Clark of the Russia Foundation argued that

Nothing is more likely to shape Russian perceptions of its own future possibilities than the success of Ukrainian efforts to rebuild itself as a stable and prosperous European democracy. It would undermine Putin's assertion that liberal democracy is unworkable in Eurasian conditions.¹¹¹

We therefore welcome the FCO's commitment to “continue to show international leadership in supporting the Ukrainian Government's reform efforts, recognising how crucial these are to building a stable, democratic state which can withstand Russian aggression.”¹¹²

78. It is unclear how the FCO will organise and administer UK policy towards Ukraine after the UK's departure from the European Union. Sir Tim Barrow, then Political Director of the FCO, told us that

106 European Council on Foreign Relations, *“Keeping up appearances: How Europe is supporting Ukraine's transformation”*, 5 October 2016

107 Department for International Development, *The Good Governance Fund*, accessed 22 February 2017

108 European External Action Service, *EU-Ukraine Association Agreement*, accessed 16 January 2017

109 *European Council Conclusions on Ukraine*, 15 December 2016

110 *“Ukrainians fall out of love with Europe”*, Politico, 11 January 2017

111 David Clark, Chairman of the Russia Foundation ([RUS0035](#)) para 23

112 Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP, Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0044](#))

Clearly the EU relationship with Ukraine will continue and we will need to develop our own bilateral relationship with Ukraine, which we will want to do. It will be supportive of Ukraine and Ukrainian reform and trade, where our interests remain.¹¹³

Sir Alan Duncan added that “Where we are the United Kingdom outside the EU, we could do EU plus. We could do.”¹¹⁴ He could not clarify his meaning, however, when asked to explain what “EU plus” would entail:

It is a phrase that I just picked off the top of my head—don’t take it as formed Government policy with that language. We will be an independent, strong, significant power in the world. We could do further forward deployment. We may have further defence engagement. We may have more military and diplomatic engagement with individual countries on a bilateral basis. Any such thing is possible, as it always indeed has been.¹¹⁵

79. *The FCO should continue to work with the EU, Canada and USA on supporting Ukraine. The UK and its allies should pursue a robust policy whereby support is conditional on Ukraine addressing domestic corruption and maladministration. In the long term, the UK and its allies should support Ukraine in developing resilience to further Russian encroachment and in building its social, political and physical infrastructure, which will facilitate further engagement with the West and allow Ukraine to engage with Russia on a level playing field.*

80. *The £20 million Good Governance Fund seems woefully inadequate to address the task in hand in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ukraine alone would justify the investment of British resources of hundreds of millions of pounds to improve governance, if that were to secure the central objective of supporting Ukraine as an independent country with a liberal European outlook. Support could also be provided by embedding British diplomats and experts into Ukrainian administrative structures.*

81. *The FCO must clarify whether the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement will apply to UK-Ukraine political and economic relations post-Brexit. If the UK will no longer be a party to the Association Agreement after it leaves the EU, the FCO should begin planning a successor agreement as a matter of urgency, and we invite it to set out the areas that would be covered by this agreement in its response to this Report.*

Sanctions on Russia in response to events in Ukraine

82. *The EU and US introduced the first set of targeted sanctions against Russia in March 2014 in reaction to the annexation of Crimea. Those sanctions largely consisted of measures against some 151 individual Russian officials and a number of firms and entities, including asset freezes and travel bans. The EU stated that the list*

includes persons and entities responsible for action against Ukraine’s territorial integrity, persons providing support to or benefitting Russian

113 Q393

114 Q396

115 Q397

decision-makers and 13 entities in Crimea and Sevastopol that were confiscated or that have benefitted from a transfer of ownership contrary to Ukrainian law.¹¹⁶

The annexation of Crimea also resulted in a ban on importing products from Crimea, on investing in or providing services linked to tourism and on exporting certain goods for use in the transport, telecoms and energy sectors.

83. Wider economic sanctions were introduced in July 2014 and reinforced in September 2014 in response to Russian support for separatists in eastern Ukraine. Those sanctions included the freezing of credit to certain Russian banks, energy companies and defence contractors, the imposition of an arms embargo and the prohibition of the export of dual-use technologies with military applications and of specialist equipment used in the energy industry.

84. Both sets of EU sanctions must be renewed every six months, although they operate on different timetables. The sectoral sanctions are up for renewal in July and January, while the asset bans and visa freezes against individuals are renewed in September and March.

85. The UK is one of the strongest western supporters of the sanctions on Russia. The FCO told us:

By working with likeminded EU Member States and other international partners, the UK was at the forefront of efforts to ensure Russia was held accountable for its actions. We worked hard to ensure EU support for linking a robust sanctions package to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. With oil prices at a 12 year low and wider structural economic problems, international sanctions have added to the pressures on Russia's economy. Sanctions are designed to have the maximum impact on the Russian leadership while minimising the impact on the UK and EU.¹¹⁷

86. It is difficult to measure the precise economic impact of the sanctions on Russia, particularly since their introduction has coincided with a sharp decline in the price of oil and natural gas. Alex Nice of the Economist Intelligence Unit told us:

Trying to disaggregate the specific financial impact of sanctions on Russia at the moment is very difficult, because at almost the same point that sanctions were imposed, the oil price collapsed, so many of the things that have happened as a result of sanctions—reduced investments and a fall in the rouble—would have happened anyway. The IMF has come up with an estimate that they have cost 1% to 1.5% of GDP. Obviously, that also has an impact on ordinary people and on income levels, wages and employment, but I would treat that estimate with a lot of caution because the impact of the oil price so outweighs, in the short term at least, the impact of sanctions.¹¹⁸

116 "EU sanctions against Russia over Ukraine crisis", European Union Newsroom

117 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) para 19

118 Q96

87. The UK Government conceded that measuring the economic impact of sanctions is difficult, but argued that the regime has nevertheless succeeded in sending a message of disapproval to the Kremlin. Sir Alan Duncan, FCO Minister of State with responsibility for Russia, told us that the sanctions regime

has had a serious effect on putting economic pressure on Russia. [The regime] also targets some individuals, of course, and the Russian economy in general is under some pressure. It is quite oil-dependent. It is thought to have contracted by 3.7%. Perhaps up to half a per cent. of that general picture has been caused by sanctions. Put it this way; if you were to lift them, it would set them free and, I think, release a lot of activity, which we would regret. I think that to keep sanctions and keep the pressure on is the right policy; and so we should persist with this continuing, if you like, broad policy of disapproval, which is clearly making the statement and is understood and is causing a bit of pain.¹¹⁹

88. It is questionable whether the state of the whole Russian economy is an appropriate barometer by which to measure the effect of targeted sanctions. For example, the Russian manufacturing and defence sectors depend on parts imported from the West. Drilling down into the performance of those particular sectors might provide a more accurate measure of the efficacy of the sanctions regime.

89. UK and Russian business leaders whom the Committee met on its visit to Russia criticised the sanctions and highlighted their negative impact on business. They argued that sanctions only reinforced Russian feelings of exclusion and a “siege mentality” towards the West. This view was echoed by Lord Truscott, who told us:

My main idea or thought to put into the pot when you make your deliberations is that we should end sanctions against Russia because I don't think they are helping. I think, in fact, they play into the hands of those who demonise the West and point to us as an enemy. That is very much the message that is coming across in Russian. It is harmful to relations between Britain and Russia and does not achieve anything, apart from punishing the Russian people. The message they are getting from the media and the Kremlin is that the West is hurting them for its own particular reasons.¹²⁰

90. The Oxford Research Group suggested that the sanctions could actually be helping the Kremlin to deflect criticism from its own failings and that there would be benefits to normalising relations. It stated that

potential exists for the UK and the West to gradually and responsibly increase co-operation with Russia given Moscow's apparent appetite, and to some extent need, for normalised relations. This may be done through security dialogues, expanding trade and investment ties or engagement on culture, tourism, technology and science in exchange for Russian cooperation on, for example, international security. The point of doing so would, in the first place, be to stabilise relations. Secondly, there is a need to find ways to bolster the more progressive and liberal sectors within the

119 Q381

120 Q226 [Lord Truscott]

Russian state and society. This includes the Russian public, which suffers from coercive acts such as sanctions, leading them to turn their ire away from the Kremlin and towards the West. Ultimately, a Russia alienated from the West is more likely to move away from European integration and towards deeper integration with Asia, not least China.¹²¹

91. Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former oligarch and prominent critic of President Putin, agreed that the sanctions could prompt Russians to rally around the regime but cautioned against lifting or easing them:

I believe that Europe and the US have not acted very clearly or properly on the whole question of sanctions [...] I do not think that broader sectoral sanctions will have a big influence on Russia. It will actually bring my compatriots to rally round the Kremlin. I do not think it will help western Europe either. To my great regret, at the moment lifting sanctions will only mean that Putin will sell that line to the Russian public as his victory over the weak West and it will give him the possibility of saying to society in the future that there is no point in paying any attention to the positions or stances of western society.¹²²

92. Other witnesses also argued that sanctions should be maintained, but that more clarity should be given on the precise circumstances under which they would be lifted. Alex Nice of the Economist Intelligence Unit stated:

I agree that it is useful to have an off-ramp for the current tensions, to use that phrase—a road map of actions that could be taken that would lower tensions and possibly lead to a reduction in sanctions. The other side to that is that we have absolutely to be clear about and to maintain a principled stance on sanctions in the current environment. The Foreign Secretary has made this clear, and the EU as a whole has drawn a clear conditionality between the current sanctions regime and progress on the Minsk II agreement.¹²³

93. Recent developments in both the EU and the US have put the future of the sanctions regime in doubt. As the UK is among the strongest supporters of the sanctions regime inside the EU, its withdrawal from the EU might add weight to the voices of those inside the bloc who would like to see the sanctions eased or lifted.¹²⁴ In France, two of the most prominent presidential candidates, Francois Fillon of the UMP and Marine le Pen of the FN, have advocated ending the sanctions.¹²⁵ In the US, the question of relations with Russia has gained significant political salience in the wake of allegations by the Office

121 Oxford Research Group ([RUS0024](#)) para 1.4

122 Q134

123 Q101

124 Latvian Institute of International Affairs ([RUS0026](#)) para 1; Foreign Affairs Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2015–16, *Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK's role in the world*, HC 545, paras 30 and 54

125 "[France's election shows Europe's line against Russia is fraying](#)", The Economist, 3 December 2016

of the Director of National Intelligence that the Russian state was behind cyberattacks that interfered in the 2016 presidential election.¹²⁶ President Donald Trump has drawn criticism in the US for favourable comments that he has made about President Putin.¹²⁷

94. On 16 January, then President-Elect Trump stated in an interview that he would like to “make some good deals with Russia” and implied that he would consider lifting the sanctions on Russia in exchange for agreement on nuclear arms reduction.¹²⁸ In our view, such an approach would constitute an abrogation of the international community’s responsibility toward Ukraine and would embolden Russia in its efforts to dictate the terms on which it engages with the West. We agree with the assessment of FCO Minister of State Sir Alan Duncan, who stated:

If we were to ease sanctions, I do not think anyone would think the Russians would then say, “Oh, thanks very much, we are now going to behave much better as a result”. Probably you would end up fossilising the Ukraine. In my view, this would have a retrograde effect. What you need is agreement in advance for something that is properly implemented after which you might then contemplate reducing or removing sanctions.¹²⁹

95. **If the UK is determined to maintain a principled stance in relation to the sanctions on Russia, this may require uncomfortable conversations with close allies. The withdrawal of the existing sanctions should be linked to Russian compliance with its obligations toward Ukraine, and should not be offered in exchange for Russian co-operation in other areas. This approach would avoid ceding moral and legal legitimacy to Russia and departing from UK values and standards. The challenge in this approach is that the practical effect of economic sanctions on Russian decision-making is doubtful. It looks as though it will be increasingly difficult to sustain a united western position on sanctions, not least if they become a bargaining point during Brexit negotiations. The UK faces the possibility of becoming an isolated actor supporting a policy towards Russia that is failing. This could lead to further damage to Britain’s long-term ability to influence Russia.**

96. *The international community must remain unified in the face of Russia’s assertion of its perceived sphere of influence and its disregard for the international norms in its treatment of Ukraine. The FCO should prioritise international unity on policy towards Russia in talks with the new US Administration, and should continue to work closely with EU partners to maintain support for Ukraine, whether this is delivered through sanctions and/or assistance to Ukraine.*

Alternative pathways for drawing down sanctions

97. The withdrawal of some EU sanctions is specifically linked to the completion of the Minsk II process. Yet the process has stalled amid frequent ceasefire violations and debates in Ukraine over the decentralisation measures that Minsk II requires. Officials we met on our visits to Russia and Ukraine both blamed the other side for the lack of progress.

126 Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *“Background to ‘Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections’: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution”*, 6 January 2017

127 *“For Trump, Three Decades of Chasing Deals in Russia”*, The New York Times, 16 January 2017

128 *“Donald Trump: ‘Brexit will be a great thing... you were so smart’”*, The Times, 16 January 2017

129 Q384 [Sir Alan Duncan]

98. This stalemate in part reflects the flaws inherent in the text of the agreement. The terms of Minsk II require Ukraine to reform its constitution, to grant a “special status” to Donetsk and Luhansk and to hold elections there. Yet the agreement’s lack of clarity on the precise sequencing of these steps has led to disputes and deadlock in the Ukrainian parliament. By contrast, Russia is not named in the text, which requires only that “armed formations from certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions” adhere to the ceasefire terms and that “foreign armed formations, military equipment, as well as mercenaries” withdraw from Ukraine.¹³⁰ This allows Russia to deny any responsibility for implementing the Agreement, as Dmitry Peskov, spokesman for President Putin, did in an interview with BBC News’ HARDtalk programme in January 2017.¹³¹ The fact that Russia is not given any direct responsibilities also means there are no specific actions that would demonstrate Russian compliance with the process.

99. The FCO should be open to considering any proposals that the Russian Government may advance to resolve the situation in Ukraine outside the Minsk II process that are in line with international law. Russian actions demonstrating compliance with the rule of international law in Ukraine could be linked to the gradual removal of sanctions and would provide Russia with a route map to restoring positive relations with the West. We invite the FCO in its response to this report to detail the exact responsibilities of Russia with regard to the Minsk II agreement. The measure of success in relation to sanctions is their no longer being needed. It is therefore imperative that the international community recognises the need for an achievable route to rapprochement.

Syria

100. Russia’s relations with Syria have been its most longstanding and durable in the Middle East in the post-second world war period. After formal diplomatic relations between the USSR and Syria were established in 1956, bilateral relations have been further cemented and institutionalised through substantial military co-operation in the form of arms sales, training, and the establishment of a permanent naval base in Tartous in 1971.¹³²

101. Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011, Russia has maintained its support for the Government of Bashar al-Assad through continued arms exports, economic support and diplomatic cover.¹³³ Since 2011, Russia has exercised its veto in the UN Security Council on draft resolutions in relation to Syria on six occasions.¹³⁴

102. Russia has been directly engaged in the Syrian civil war since 30 September 2015, when US officials announced that they had been asked by the Russian military to clear Syrian airspace in order to allow Russia to carry out direct air strikes on Syrian rebels. On the same day, Russia’s Federation Council voted unanimously to approve the Kremlin’s proposal to allow the Russian air force directly to intervene on behalf of the Assad regime, in response to a request by the Syrian Government. Although Russia has conducted some airstrikes against ISIL, it has focused its military action on supporting the Assad regime in re-capturing Syria’s largest cities from rebel control.

130 *“Full text of the Minsk agreement”*, Financial Times, 12 February 2015

131 [HARDtalk](#), BBC News, 21 January 2017, accessed 23 January 2017

132 John McHugo, *Syria: A Recent History* (Saqi Books: 2015), p 136

133 *Exclusive: Russia steps up military lifeline to Syria’s Assad*, Reuters, 17 January 2014; Global Risk Insights, [How \(and why\) Russia and China are supporting Syria’s devastated economy](#), 13 September 2016

134 United Nations, [Security Council Veto List](#), accessed 22 February 2017

103. The position of the Syrian Government has improved considerably since the beginning of Russian operations in Syria, during which time Russia claims to have “eliminated” 35,000 fighters, 12,700 facilities, 1,500 heavy weapons, 725 training camps, and 405 weapons factories.¹³⁵ Russia claims to have supported 1,091 “reconciliations” to revert opposition controlled areas to Government control, notably in Homs, Daraya, and other smaller towns and villages,¹³⁶ and to have provided humanitarian assistance throughout Syria.¹³⁷ Russia has supported forces associated with the Assad regime to re-capture substantial territories from opposition control, notably Aleppo and Palmyra, although ISIL subsequently retook Palmyra in December 2016.¹³⁸

104. President Putin has twice announced that he would partially withdraw Russian forces from Syria, first in March 2016 and again in December 2016.¹³⁹ In practice, however, these announcements have heralded reallocations of Russian capacity, rather than genuine withdrawals from the Syrian theatre. On 14 March 2016, for example, President Putin stated that the “objective set before the Defence Ministry and the Armed Forces” had been “generally fulfilled”.¹⁴⁰ However, it was subsequently reported that while Su-25 strike aircraft and Su-34 bombers had been withdrawn, they had been replaced by Ka-52 and Mi-28N helicopters.¹⁴¹ Similarly, on 29 December 2016, President Putin’s announcement that Russia’s only aircraft carrier, *Admiral Kuznetsov*, would be recalled, was followed by the reported deployment of Iskander nuclear-capable missile systems and the redeployment of 12 Su-25s to the Hmeimim airbase.¹⁴² Justin Bronk of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) commented that “Russia’s declaration about scaling back in Syria is for political consumption only—to tell the Russian people that a corner is turned and that a short operation was delivered as promised.”¹⁴³

105. To date, Russia has facilitated three cessations of hostilities in Syria. The first two were brokered between the Russia and the United States in February and September 2016 and were due to be followed by peace talks between Syrian factions in Geneva. However, both cessations collapsed quickly, before progress could be made towards any resolution. The third cessation of hostilities was brokered between Russia and Turkey in December 2016 and was followed by peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, which also involved Iran but not the United States.¹⁴⁴ The third cessation of hostilities appears to be more sustained than the first two agreements. Russia, Turkey and Iran met in Astana on 6 February 2017 to discuss how to strengthen this agreement.¹⁴⁵ Subsequent UN-sponsored peace talks are due to take place in late February 2017.

106. Even with a cessation of hostilities, the ability and willingness of the Russian Government to bring Bashar al-Assad’s Government to the negotiating table in good faith

135 [“The Russian Embassy on Russia’s military effort in Syria”](#), Russian Embassy UK press release, 5 January 2017

136 [“The Russian Embassy on Russia’s military effort in Syria”](#), Russian Embassy UK press release, 5 January 2017

137 [“Twisting facts: Moscow slams Mogherini for saying EU alone in providing aid to Syria”](#), RT, 8 December 2016;

[“Russian MoD Delivers Over 11 Tonnes of Relief Aid to Aleppo Residents”](#), Sputnik News, 9 January 2017

138 [“ISIS captures most of Palmyra”](#), Financial Times, 10 December 2016

139 [“Putin says Russians to start withdrawing from Syria, as peace talks resume”](#), Reuters, 15 March 2016; [“Russia begins military withdrawal from Syria”](#), The Guardian, 6 January 2017

140 Carnegie Middle East Center, [“Interpreting the Russian withdrawal from Syria”](#), 15 March 2016

141 War on the Rocks, [“There is no Russian withdrawal from Syria”](#), 18 March 2016

142 [“Syria conflict: Russia ‘withdrawing aircraft carrier group’”](#), BBC News, 6 January 2017; [“ISI reveals Russian Iskander missiles deployment in Syria”](#), ISI, 5 January 2017; [“Russia sends more military gear to Syria after drawdown claim”](#), Middle East Eye, 10 January 2017

143 [“Russia sends more fighter jets to Syria despite announcing draw-down”](#), The Telegraph, 11 January 2017

144 [“Syria conflict: War of words as peace talks open in Astana”](#), BBC News, 24 January 2017

145 [Russia, Turkey, Iran discuss Syria ceasefire in Astana](#), Aljazeera, 6 February 2017

is still to be determined. Lina Khatib of Chatham House stated that “in Syria, ceasefires have become another tool of warfare. They are tools for making military gains, political statements, and playing power games.”¹⁴⁶

Alleged violations of International Humanitarian Law

107. Since their direct entry into the conflict, there have been widespread accusations that Russian forces have committed violations of International Humanitarian Law. The Atlantic Council report, “Breaking Aleppo”, stated that

the distinction between combatants and civilians is fundamental. Deliberately targeting civilians and conducting indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilian-populated areas, are potential war crimes. Reports in late-2016 from reputable organisations including Human Rights Watch and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights alleged that war crimes had been committed in Aleppo, precisely because of such attacks.¹⁴⁷

In one incident, on 19 September 2016, a United Nations aid convoy was attacked in a Syrian Arab Red Crescent Compound in Urem al-Kubra, resulting in the death of 10 people, the wounding of 22 others, and the damage or destruction of most of the humanitarian supplies. The Russian Government provided a range of contradictory explanations for the event, including that the convoy might have accidentally caught fire, have been struck by US forces, have been hit by opposition forces on the ground or have been a hoax.¹⁴⁸ The Foreign Secretary said that there was “strong evidence” that Russian warplanes were responsible, as the attack occurred at night and “we have our doubts about the Syrian capability to fly at night”.¹⁴⁹

108. Asked whether he considered the incident to be a war crime, the Foreign Secretary said that “a war crime is defined as when you attack something, attack a civilian target in the knowledge that it is a civilian target [...] we should be looking at whether or not that targeting is done in the knowledge that those are wholly innocent, wholly innocent civilian targets, that is a war crime.”¹⁵⁰

109. The UN Headquarters Board of Inquiry report into the incident concluded that the convoy had been attacked from the air and rejected the possibility that it had been a hoax. The Board also found that both the Russian and Syrian air forces had the capabilities necessary to conduct the attack, including at night. The Board was not able to determine whether the incident was a deliberate attack on a humanitarian target and therefore constituted a war crime.¹⁵¹

110. Russian involvement in the heavy bombing of Aleppo in the autumn of 2016 drew considerable international criticism, including comparisons to Russia’s levelling of

146 Chatham House, *“How ceasefires in Syria became another tool of warfare”*, 5 January 2017

147 Atlantic Council, *“Breaking Aleppo”*, p 7

148 *“Russian ‘experts’ claim Aleppo aid convoy attack was ‘staged hoax’ after UN releases satellite images of air strikes”*, The Independent, 5 October 2016

149 *“Boris Johnson: ‘strong’ evidence Russia carried out strike on UN convoy in Syria”*, The Guardian, 21 September 2016

150 *Andrew Marr Show (transcript)*, BBC, 24 September 2016

151 *Letter from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2016/1093, United Nations Security Council, 21 December 2016

Grozny in 2000.¹⁵² In October 2016, the Foreign Secretary directly alleged that forces allied or associated with the Syrian Government, including the Russian air force, were committing war crimes in Syria. Speaking to the Conservative Party Conference, the Foreign Secretary condemned the “continuing savagery of the Assad regime against the people of Aleppo and the complicity of the Russians in committing what are patently war crimes—bombing hospitals, when they know they are hospitals and nothing but hospitals”.¹⁵³ On 11 October 2016, the Foreign Secretary told the House of Commons that “Hospitals have been targeted with such frequency and precision that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this must be deliberate policy. As the House will know, intentionally attacking a hospital amounts to a war crime.”¹⁵⁴

111. In the United Nations Security Council, the British Ambassador to the United Nations, Matthew Rycroft, accused the Assad regime and Russia of using bunker-busting bombs, incendiary munitions, and targeting water supplies. He stated that “it is difficult to deny that Russia is partnering with the Syrian regime to carry out war crimes”.¹⁵⁵ Mr Rycroft walked out of the Security Council with the US and French Ambassadors when the Syrian Ambassador took the floor.¹⁵⁶

112. The Russian Government has repeatedly denied accusations that its forces are responsible for committing war crimes in Syria, and it has suggested that western powers and media are acting hypocritically in making these allegations. In a January 2016 interview with the German newspaper *Bild*, President Putin said that western powers accusing Russia of hitting civilians in Syria were “telling lies”. He added:

Look, the videos that support this version appeared before our pilots even started to carry out strikes against terrorists. This can be corroborated. However, those who criticise us prefer to ignore it.

American pilots hit the Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, by mistake, I am sure. There were casualties and fatalities among civilians and doctors. Western media outlets have attempted to hush this up, to drop the subject and have a very short memory span when it comes to such things. They mentioned it a couple of times and put it on ice. And those few mentions were only due to foreign citizens from the Doctors Without Borders present there.

Who now remembers the wiped out wedding parties? Over 100 people were killed with a single strike.

Yet this phony evidence about our pilots reportedly striking civilian targets keeps circulating. If we tag the “live pipelines” that consist of thousands of petrol and oil tankers as civilian targets, than, indeed, one might believe that our pilots are bombing these targets, but everyone is bombing them, including the Americans, the French and everyone else.¹⁵⁷

152 “*Russia aims to turn Aleppo into another Grozny*”, Financial Times, 28 September 2016

153 “*How British values help to make the world richer and safer*”, Speech by the Foreign Secretary to the Conservative Party Conference, 2 October 2016

154 HC Deb, 11 October 2016, [col 208](#) [Commons Chamber]

155 United Nations Security Council, [7777th meeting, S/PV.7777](#), (25 September 2016), p 9

156 “*UK, US and French ambassadors walk out of UN meeting on Syria - video*”, The Guardian, 26 September 2016

157 Russian Embassy ([RU50037](#)) Annex C

113. The Russian Embassy in London has also challenged the Foreign Secretary to substantiate these allegations. In an open letter to MPs, the Russian Ambassador to the UK wrote that “Members of Parliament with no grounds whatsoever accused Russia, along with the Syrian government, of deliberate strikes against civilians, which the Foreign Secretary tried to qualify as ‘war crimes’”.¹⁵⁸ The Ambassador called the British Foreign Secretary’s reference to information in “social networks” to substantiate claims as “bizarre, since serious accusations must be supported by strong evidence”.¹⁵⁹

114. The Atlantic Council report, “Breaking Aleppo”, stated that

Throughout the siege [of Aleppo], the Syrian and Russian governments waged a battle against the evidence, denying the facts, misrepresenting the victims, and attacking the witnesses. These attacks were consistent across so many platforms that they took on the appearance of a separate disinformation campaign, aimed at distracting attention from events on the ground by focusing on discrediting, and silencing, the ones who were reporting them.¹⁶⁰

115. On 13 December 2016, the Foreign Secretary told the House of Commons that the UK Government is “gathering all the information that we think will be necessary for the prosecution of those guilty of war crimes.”¹⁶¹ In oral evidence to our inquiry, Neil Crompton, Director of Middle East and North Africa at the FCO, told us that

[the FCO] have asked the UN commission of inquiry to look at the question of whether war crimes have been committed by either the regime or the Russians. We are providing evidence, and we have trained a lot of people on the ground in Syrian NGOs and others to provide objective evidence to support them in standing up in an international investigation or in a court of law, if it ever comes to that.¹⁶²

116. The UN Commission of Inquiry was established in 2011 to establish the facts and circumstances of potential violations of international human rights law. On 19 December 2016, the UN General Assembly resolved to establish the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (the Mechanism) to collect and analyse evidence of violations of international humanitarian law and to prepare files in order to facilitate criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts that have or may in the future have jurisdiction over these crimes. In terms of actually prosecuting individuals for war crimes committed in Syria, the Foreign Secretary told the House that “we do think that there could be advantage in the procedures of the International Criminal Court (ICC)”.¹⁶³ Sir Alan Duncan also told us in oral evidence that “we are pushing for a lot of this to go to the ICC”.¹⁶⁴

158 *“Open letter of Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the UK Alexander Yakovenko to Members of Parliament on the situation in Syria”*, Russian Embassy UK press release, 15 October 2016

159 *“Open letter of Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the UK Alexander Yakovenko to Members of Parliament on the situation in Syria”*, Russian Embassy UK press release, 15 October 2016

160 Atlantic Council, *“Breaking Aleppo”*, p 54

161 HC Deb, 13 December 2016, [col 669](#) [Commons Chamber]

162 Q348

163 HC Deb, 11 October 2016, [col 208](#) [Commons Chamber]

164 Q345

117. However, neither Syria nor Russia are members of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In addition, Russia can veto the referral of the situation in Syria to the ICC, because it is a Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council. When asked whether the ICC route was realistic given the Russian veto and the Russian and Syrian status as non-signatories, Neil Crompton admitted that it was “probably not”.¹⁶⁵ The Foreign Secretary has stated that the UK raised the possibility of imposing sanctions on Russia in response to its actions in Syria at the European Foreign Affairs Council in October 2016 and that EU partners did not support this proposal.¹⁶⁶

118. **There is currently no realistic prospect of the ICC mechanism being used to investigate and address war crimes committed in Syria.**

119. **The UN inquiry into the air strike on the convoy demonstrated the challenge of establishing the intent behind an attack on a plainly civilian target in order to sustain a conclusive view on whether or not a war crime has been committed. The Russian response to these charges was consistent with its view that it is held to different standards from those to which we hold ourselves. The Government is right to call out the Russian military for actions that potentially violate International Humanitarian Law. However, if the Government continues to allege that Russia has committed war crimes in Syria without providing a basis for its charge, it risks bolstering the Kremlin's narrative that Russia is held to unfair double standards by hostile and hypocritical western powers. Un-evidenced rhetoric from both sides also makes it difficult to implement the practical co-operation measures necessary to deliver lasting peace in Syria.**

120. **Breaches of International Humanitarian Law—with evidence of clear Russian violations in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria—are unacceptable.**¹⁶⁷ Those responsible must be held accountable. Coalition failures in Afghanistan and Iraq do not permit breaches of International Humanitarian Law in Syria.

121. **The introduction of powers in the Criminal Finances Bill to allow the civil recovery of the property of individuals involved in gross human rights abuses or violations carried out abroad is welcome and should allow the UK unilaterally to sanction Russian individuals who have committed or who have facilitated the commission of human rights abuses or war crimes in Syria.**¹⁶⁸ *The Committee invites the Government to present its assessment of how the new powers will be exercised and to report to the House orders made against individuals.*

Potential co-operation with Russia on fighting terrorism

122. Since the beginning of direct Russian participation in the war, Russia insisted that it is supporting the internationally recognised Syrian Government on the legal basis of a formal invitation to assist Syrian forces. The Russian Government claimed that its actions are targeted against “terrorists”, as permitted in agreements of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and UN Security Council Resolutions 2249 and 2254, which call on member states to “redouble and co-ordinate their efforts to prevent and suppress terrorist

165 Q348

166 *“EU leaders fail to agree on threatening Russia with sanctions over Aleppo”*, The Guardian, 21 October 2016

167 Human Rights Watch, *“Syria: Coordinated Chemical Attacks on Aleppo”* 13 February 2017

168 *Criminal Finances Bill*, clause 12

acts committed specifically by ISIL also known as Da'esh as well as Al-Nusra Front, and all other individuals, groups, undertakings, and entities associated with Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups, as designated by the United Nations Security Council.”¹⁶⁹

123. The definition and designation of terrorist groups in Syria has been contested since the outbreak of the war. The atomisation and complexity of identity of the Syrian opposition has hindered a common understanding between Russia and the wider international community regarding which entities are associated with Islamist terrorist groups such as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham.¹⁷⁰ President Assad publically dismissed the notion that there is a “moderate opposition” and stated that the West has not “been able to market this lie because the facts on the ground proved the opposite, that all those they support are extremists, whether they belong to al-Nusra, ISIS, or other organisations with the same extremist and terrorist ideology.”¹⁷¹

124. The Russian authorities take a similar view to President Assad. When Russia commenced operations in Syria, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that “If it looks like a terrorist, if it acts like a terrorist, if it walks like a terrorist, if it fights like a terrorist, it’s a terrorist, right?”¹⁷² Foreign Minister Lavrov has blamed the US for failing to fulfil promises to separate moderate forces from terrorist groups.¹⁷³ He also presented western requests for Russia not to target moderate groups as giving cover to Al-Qaeda.¹⁷⁴ In evidence to this inquiry, the Russian Embassy wrote:

No one should make a mistake of believing that terrorists can be used for whatever political purposes and can be later pushed aside. Surely, they accept financial, military and any other aid they can get, but they are ready to turn their back on their sponsors at any moment.¹⁷⁵

125. In 2016 Russia pushed for the UN Security Council to designate two groups in particular, Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam, as terrorist organisations, although this was blocked by the US, UK, and France.¹⁷⁶ However, in December 2016, Russia published a list of “moderate opposition” groups that joined the ceasefire and were invited to the Astana talks, which included both Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam.¹⁷⁷ This demonstrates the challenge to effective policymaking based on accurate analysis when it is confused by public rhetoric about terrorist status. The Russians are not uniquely guilty of this.

126. Neil Crompton, Director of the Middle East and North Africa at the FCO, told us that 80% of Russian airstrikes were not directed against ISIL and that Russia has largely been fighting the “moderate opposition” in Aleppo. According to Mr Crompton, the FCO estimated that there were only between 200 and 300 al-Qaeda fighters in Aleppo and that the rest were “moderate opposition fighters”. He acknowledged, however, that this group certainly included “large numbers of Islamist fighters” and that the FCO’s understanding

169 United Nations Security Council, [Resolution 2249 \(2015\)](#), [S/RES/2249 \(2015\)](#), 20 November 2015

170 Jabhat Fateh al-Sham were formerly known as Al Nusra Front.

171 *“Assad: US Supports Terrorists By Calling Them Moderate Opposition”*, The Syrian Observer, 15 December 2016

172 *“Russia’s Lavrov on Syria targets: ‘If it looks like a terrorist, walks like a terrorist...’”*, CNN, 1 October 2015

173 *“US Has Yet to Separate Terrorists From Opposition in Syria - Lavrov”*, Sputnik News, 25 October 2016

174 *“US asks Russia not to target Al-Qaeda branch in Syria - Russian FM Lavrov”*, RT, 4 June 2016

175 Russian Embassy (RUS0037) para 4

176 *“Russia proposes U.N. blacklist two Syrian opposition groups”*, Reuters, 28 April 2016

177 Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, [List of armed formations, which joined the ceasefire in the Syrian Arab Republic on December 30, 2016](#), 29 December 2016

of the situation was “certainly not 100%”.¹⁷⁸ Sir Tim Barrow, then Political Director at the FCO, said it was “absolutely” correct that this lack of clarity in defining which Syrian groups qualified as terrorists made the job of countering the Russian narrative more difficult.¹⁷⁹ However, he added:

The tragedy is that if you accept the narrative that lumps everyone together, you do, if you are not careful, create a greater terrorist threat from the people who are seeking to defend their own families and their own places, by saying that the only choice they have is to align themselves with the most extreme elements or, indeed, ultimately, terrorist elements.¹⁸⁰

127. In evidence to this inquiry, the Russian Embassy in the UK made clear its desire for the UK and Russia to co-operate more closely in the fight against terrorism:

We must realize that we are facing a dangerous and ruthless enemy who can be defeated only by a collective, coordinated effort, involving all players concerned both inside and outside the Middle East [...] It is evident that Isis will not be defeated by airstrikes alone and the Syrian army is the main force fighting terrorists on the ground. A broad global anti-terrorist front based on the UN Charter should be formed, relying on all those who combat terrorist on the ground [...] We believe that all forces that can be instrumental in fighting Isis—including the Syrian army, the Kurdish militias, patriotic groups of the Syrian opposition, and all those who are ready to support the ground operations from the air—should join the fight. Operations by the Russian Aerospace Force at the request of the legitimate Government of Syria have contributed to this task. We welcome Britain’s participation in air strikes at Isis targets in Syria.¹⁸¹

128. Dr Andrew Monaghan of Chatham House, however, warned that “the Russians define terrorism differently from us. They define the solutions and the outcome in Syria differently from us. The Russian counter-terrorism policy, shortly put, is to defeat terrorism by any measures possible.”¹⁸² Similarly, former UK Ambassador to Russia, Sir Roderic Lyne, wrote that “President Putin’s definition of a terrorist is not necessarily the same as ours, and Russia’s methods are not ours (Russia having been accused of many breaches of international humanitarian law in Chechnya and Syria)”.¹⁸³ Russia also has specific domestic concerns relating to the involvement of Islamist terrorists from the North Caucasus in the fighting in Syria. Dr Monaghan noted that

the Russians think about 4,500 people from the former Soviet Union are fighting in Syria and Iraq at the moment, and there is a concern that they will go home, and therefore measures are being taken to enhance security. I think those would potentially be more robust in Russia than here.¹⁸⁴

178 Qq373–379

179 Q380

180 Q380

181 Russian Embassy ([RUS0037](#)) para 4

182 Q30 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

183 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 27

184 Q33 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

129. Sir Roderic Lyne explained the potential pitfalls of co-operating more closely with Russia in the fight against terrorism:

The argument has been made, not only by President-elect Trump but also by some politicians in Europe such as Francois Fillon, that the West should bury its differences with Russia and seek to collaborate in order to defeat terrorism. The superficial attractions are obvious and the idea needs to be debated. However this would be a deal struck on President Putin's terms. He is demanding that NATO should pull back from measures to defend the Baltic States and other territory close to Russia. His annexation of Crimea and intrusion into the Donbas and Lugansk—blatant violations of international law—would be accepted as a *fait accompli*. Russia's claimed "zone of influence" around its borders would be recognised *de facto*; as would be its defence of the Assad regime in Syria.¹⁸⁵

130. Russia and the United Kingdom have a shared interest in combatting Islamist terrorism and extremism. It is difficult to envisage how to progress this shared interest considering the differences between the two countries' respective definitions and analyses of terrorism, and acceptable methods to defeat it. Any dialogue with Russia must be handled with the greatest care, but it is at least worth exploring. *The Government and its agencies should be having a regular dialogue with their Russian counterparts about the causes of Islamist extremist violence and the potential strategies to address it. This shared objective could be utilised to open constructive dialogue with Russia in the area of common shared security and anti-terrorism. That dialogue should be used to improve relations, better understand Russian foreign policy and initiate discussion on freedom of expression, the rule of law and human rights, and the ongoing issues in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.*

185 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 27

4 UK policy towards Russia

Current engagement

131. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the FCO, in addition to participating in international sanctions, decided to:

- Suspend several high-level mechanisms for co-operation (including the Minister for Europe's Strategic Dialogue with First Deputy Foreign Minister Titov; the "2+2" Foreign and Defence Ministers dialogue; Inter-Governmental Steering Committee on Trade and Investment; the Joint Commission on Science and Technology; and the Energy Dialogue);
- Cancel several senior visits to Moscow (including the Lord Mayor and a planned VIP visit to the Sochi Winter Olympics);
- Suspend all [military-to-military] co-operation;
- Withdraw ministerial and VIP participation from the 2014 UK-Russia Year of Culture.¹⁸⁶

132. Inter-parliamentary dialogue between Russia and the West shrank in parallel with the decline in Government-to-Government communications. NATO Parliamentary Assembly withdrew Russia's Associate Membership of the Assembly in March 2014 following Russia's military intervention in Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, the Russian delegation was temporarily suspended from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in April 2014.¹⁸⁸ This suspension lapsed in 2016, when the Russian delegation decided not to submit its credentials for ratification. This means that Russian parliamentarians are not currently represented in the Parliamentary Assembly, although Russia remains a full member of the Council of Europe.

133. The last visit to Russia by a British Minister took place in December 2015, when then FCO Minister of State David Lidington met First Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov in Moscow.¹⁸⁹ By contrast, United States Secretary of State John Kerry and Assistant US Secretary of State Victoria Nuland each visited Russia twice in 2016. German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier met Foreign Minister Lavrov and President Putin in Moscow in March 2016, while Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel also travelled to Moscow for talks with the Russian President in September 2016.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, France's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Marc Ayrault, met President Putin in Moscow in April 2016.¹⁹¹

134. Despite the suspension of most mechanisms for Government-to-Government dialogue with Russia and the relative absence of high-level ministerial visits, FCO Minister

186 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#)) para 22

187 NATO Parliamentary Assembly, [Russia](#), accessed 23 February 2017

188 [Russia delegation suspended from Council of Europe over Crimea](#), The Guardian, 10 April 2014

189 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "[Minister for Europe David Lidington visits Moscow](#)", 23 December 2015

190 Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia, [Meeting with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier](#), 23 March 2016; "[German Vice Chancellor Gabriel flies to Moscow for Putin talks](#)", Deutsche Welle, 21 September 2016

191 Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia, [Meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault](#), 19 April 2016

of State Sir Alan Duncan insisted that there is “a constant series of encounters” between British and Russian Ministers. When we pressed Sir Tim Barrow to provide examples of such encounters, he replied:

There are bilateral meetings as well. For instance, there was a bilateral meeting between the Foreign Secretary and Sergey Lavrov in the margins of the UN General Assembly. That was a proper sit-down bilateral meeting, at which there was discussion of many of the issues we have discussed today. There have been telephone conversations—11 August, 12 September and 22 November are the dates that have been proffered to me—between the Foreign Secretary and Sergey Lavrov. So there is contact, to answer your question.¹⁹²

135. Professor Alena Ledeneva of University College London, however, criticised the UK Government for failing to respond effectively to Russian diplomatic overtures:

When I look at policies towards Russia, what I see is a lot of missed opportunities. Those occur every time you have some initiative from Russia. For example, when Dmitry Medvedev in his presidency wanted to co-operate on EU security issues, there were no takers. These kinds of moments are where the policy failure is best seen. That was a chance to actually engage around the agenda, and it could have transformed the process, but there is always a sharp no. The way the Russians see it is that everything that comes from Russia is met with a no, but everything that comes from the West is imposed on them as if they are the inferior partner.¹⁹³

136. The Russo-British Chamber of Commerce wrote in their evidence to this inquiry that its members had “a number of concerns”, including

The long periods there have been when, it has seemed to us as interested observers, there has been little or no dialogue between the UK and Russian governments. In business, solutions are sought through engagement. We have the impression that that has not been happening, or not to a sufficient degree. That impression may be mistaken, but perception is important (particularly for example to a UK SME manufacturer / potential first time exporter to Russia) and the perception has been of little or no direct engagement and a vicious war of words through media. We know that the Russians do not respect this approach, and nor does quite a large part of the British business community. The question then arises as to the FCO's current experience of dealing face to face with Russians. The Russian approach is direct, sometimes confrontational. To gain their respect one has to be prepared to be equally direct and forceful.¹⁹⁴

137. Dr Monaghan stated that

there is no clear, coherent policy at NATO level, European Union level or UK national level of where we want to be with the Russians in, say, 2020, so the

192 Q414 [Sir Tim Barrow]

193 Q100 [Professor Alena Ledeneva]

194 Russo-British Chamber of Commerce ([RU50009](#)) para 7.3

end of this parliamentary term. There is no lengthy public discussion [...] policy often seems to be very reactive, in a constant state of surprise, and that makes the discussion of negotiations and diplomacy quite difficult.¹⁹⁵

138. However, he added that “before we start to engage with the Russians for the sake of engaging with them, we have to work out what we want from the Russians and what the Russians might want from us.”¹⁹⁶

139. Sir Alan Duncan told us that the FCO would like to follow a policy of “respectful engagement”.¹⁹⁷ When we asked Sir Alan what Russia wants from the UK, he could not offer a clear answer:

Maybe respect? I don't think there is an easy answer to that. Although I have dealt with Russians over many years in the oil business and subsequently in politics, I am not perhaps as deeply immersed in their thinking as to be able to answer that question.¹⁹⁸

Sir Alan then invited Sir Tim Barrow to comment. Sir Tim stated:

I think the Minister is absolutely right: [Russia] wants respect. It would like to see development on economic relations. I think the Russians would like us to see the world more like they do, but on that one I'm afraid the differences will continue. Clearly, they would rather that we did not have such profound disagreements with regard to Georgia or Ukraine or some of our actions in Syria, but I think they are also looking for some sort of common ground, potentially, on the question of terrorism with the West.¹⁹⁹

140. The UK Government has recently begun to indicate greater willingness to engage directly with the Russian leadership. Speaking at Chatham House in December 2016, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said that Britain could not “normalise” relations with Russia because of its actions in Ukraine and Syria, but added that neither he nor the Prime Minister “will relent in [their] pressure or in delivering those messages face to face”.²⁰⁰ In a speech in Philadelphia in January 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May said:

When it comes to Russia, as so often it is wise to turn to the example of President Reagan who—during his negotiations with his opposite number Mikhail Gorbachev—used to abide by the adage “trust but verify”. With President Putin, my advice is to “engage but beware”.²⁰¹

We agree with the Prime Minister.

141. We visited Russia in May 2016, where we met Russian Ministers, civil servants and parliamentarians. Although those exchanges were occasionally uncomfortable, we judged that some interaction with Russia is preferable to no interaction, if only to maintain the basis for a more positive relationship in future, to clarify areas of disagreement and to de-escalate points of difference. We therefore welcome recent

195 Q19 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

196 Q63 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

197 Q332

198 Q338 [Sir Alan Duncan]

199 Q338 [Sir Tim Barrow]

200 Chatham House, [Transcript: Global Britain: UK Foreign Policy in the Era of Brexit](#), (2 December 2016), p 6

201 Prime Minister's Office, [Prime Minister's speech to the Republican Party conference 2017](#), 26 January 2016

indications that the Government is willing to consider more direct, face-to-face engagement with the Russian leadership. While engagement for engagement's sake has merit, albeit limited, in sustaining contact, it is not a substitute for dialogue with a purpose. We are not convinced that the FCO and Government Ministers have identified what Russia wants from the UK, or what, if anything, the UK should seek to accomplish through bilateral engagement with Russia.

142. *The FCO should clarify what the UK wants to achieve in its bilateral engagement with Russia. This should involve dialogue on specific issues, such as counter-terrorism, cybersecurity or aviation security, in order to establish both points of agreement and points of difference. Having established its terms of reference, the FCO should conduct a meaningful and regular political dialogue with the Russian Government, including at the highest ministerial levels. Ministers should conduct this dialogue in a spirit of frankness and honesty, based on clear analysis of the UK's immediate and long-term strategic goals for its relationship with Russia. There is also scope for facilitating non-governmental contact in partnership with the EU and other allies.*

143. *The UK Government must explore ways constructively to engage with Russia in order to improve its record on human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law. The FCO must also work closely with other international partners and through the UN Security Council better to understand and to respond to the current Russian foreign policy and its 'sphere of influence' strategy.*

144. *The UK should give further consideration on how to respond, including with others in the international community, more robustly to Russia's indifference to human rights and rule of law, which undermines the international rules-based order.*

Making sanctions more effective

145. Mikhail Khodorkovsky concluded that sanctions against individuals might be more effective than sectoral sanctions.²⁰² Vladimir Ashurkov expressed the same view:

I think those personal sanctions can be extended, because there are many more people who are directly responsible for the annexation of Crimea, which was this brutal redrawing of European borders-the first one on such a scale after the Second World War. On the meddling in eastern Ukraine, the death toll is being counted, but it is around 10,000 people now. So personal sanctions can be extended, and I think they have been quite effective because, for Russian kleptocrats, it is very important that the money and the wealth that they obtain in Russia can be legitimised in the West for property purchases, business interests and so on.²⁰³

146. William Browder, CEO of Hermitage Capital Management, explained why, in his view, sanctions targeted on individuals were effective:

What you have to understand about personalised sanctions is that every Russian in the regime is terrified of getting added to one of these lists. They

202 Q135

203 Q122

might put on a brave face when they get added to the list, but behind the scenes, they are absolutely horrified and it completely changes their life. There is nothing worse than being sentenced to life in Russia.²⁰⁴

147. Individuals associated with the Putin regime who are reportedly responsible for gross human rights abuses or violations use British financial and legal services, invest in British property, holiday in the UK and send their children to British schools. The UK Government could influence those people's behaviour by introducing and utilising the civil recovery powers set out in the Criminal Finances Bill to seize assets held in the UK. The introduction of such powers would deter other Russians from committing or commissioning gross human rights abuses or violations.

148. Sanctions imposed on Russia owing to its actions in eastern Ukraine and Crimea are currently agreed and applied by EU Member States. *The FCO must clarify how the UK would impose sanctions post-Brexit, explain whether Brexit would entail changes from the current sanctions regime and analyse the costs and benefits of the possible models for future UK-administered sanctions. We expect the FCO to publish its analysis of how the UK would impose sanctions post-Brexit by March 2018.*

Response to propaganda

149. The Russian Government has spent significant sums on funding media such as RT and Sputnik News to advance its narrative on world affairs in the UK and elsewhere in the West. RT, which launched its first international news channel in 2005, received 17 billion roubles (£200 million) in funding from the Russian state in 2015.²⁰⁵ However, it has a relatively small market share in the UK. In December 2016, it captured a 0.04% share of total viewing. In comparison, BBC News secured 1.11% of total viewing while Sky Sports News, which is only available to subscribers, secured 0.47%.²⁰⁶ Sputnik News, which is owned by the Russian Government-funded news agency Rossiya Segodnya, has an annual operating budget of around £1.8 million.²⁰⁷

150. On 23 November 2016, Members of the European Parliament agreed a Resolution condemning Russian propaganda. The Resolution was approved by 304 votes to 179, with 208 abstentions. The Resolution stated that

the Russian government is employing a wide range of tools and instruments, such as think tanks [...] multilingual TV stations (e.g. RT), pseudo news agencies and multimedia services (e.g. Sputnik) [...] social media and internet trolls to challenge democratic values, divide Europe, gather domestic support and create the perception of failed states in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.²⁰⁸

204 Q148

205 Q288

206 Broadcasters' Association Research Board, [Monthly viewing summary \(December 2016\)](#), accessed 9 February 2017

207 Sputnik UK ([RUS0041](#)) para 27

208 European Parliament, "[Resolution on EU strategic communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties](#)", [2016/2030\(INI\)](#)", 23 November 2016

151. RT and Sputnik News portrayed themselves in their evidence as editorially independent, providing fact-based analyses that offer different points of view from the mainstream western media.²⁰⁹ Anna Belkina of RT told us that

there seems to be a bit of a knee-jerk reaction and a rather harmful trend to dismiss a voice that is saying something different simply for challenging the established narratives on particular issues.²¹⁰

Sputnik News disputed the claim that it operates as a propaganda machine for the Kremlin.²¹¹ However, in evidence to the Committee its representative, Oxana Brazhnik, could not provide any examples of reporting that criticised Russian military actions.²¹²

152. Since RT started broadcasting in the UK, Ofcom has recorded breaches by RT of UK broadcasting rules on 14 occasions.²¹³ In November 2014, Ofcom found that RT's coverage of the Ukraine crisis in March 2014, and specifically events leading up to the annexation by Russia of Crimea, breached its rules on due impartiality. Ofcom put RT management "on notice that any future breaches of the due impartiality rules may result in further regulatory action, including consideration of a statutory sanction".²¹⁴ In September 2015 Ofcom found RT in breach of the impartiality rules in its coverage of the events in Ukraine and Syria. It also upheld a complaint by the BBC that RT's allegations that the BBC Panorama programme had faked parts of a report on the Ghouta chemical attack in Syria were "materially misleading".²¹⁵

153. The rise of fake news in the UK is a real concern. Key questions as to RT and Sputnik's impartiality, integrity and actual news stories remain unanswered. The UK regulator should continue to take action against examples of outright falsehoods in Russian state-sponsored broadcasting. But the ability of broadcasters such as RT and Sputnik to operate in the UK should be considered a sign of British strength. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are core British values in which the UK has justifiable confidence. These values lie at the heart of Britain's soft-power challenge to the current Russian regime. Conversely, restrictions on the operation of international and domestic media in Russia reveal the Kremlin's fear that its narrative will not prevail in free and open debate.

Russian language broadcasting

154. In recognition of the reach and impact of the Russian Government's information campaign, the BBC World Service announced its largest expansion since the 1940s in November 2016.²¹⁶ Although welcome, this announcement also inadvertently supports the contention of agencies such as RT and Sputnik that their operations are analogous to those of the BBC World Service.²¹⁷

209 Sputnik UK ([RUS0041](#)) paras 9–13; Anna Belkina, RT ([RUS0042](#)) para 1.1

210 Q271

211 Sputnik UK ([RUS0041](#)) para 2

212 Qq245–251 [Oxana Brazhnik]

213 "[RT faces Ofcom inquiry over Turkish government genocide claim](#)", The Guardian, 25 April 2016

214 Ofcom, [Broadcast Bulletin, Issue number 266](#), (10 November 2014), p 22 (footnote)

215 Ofcom, [Broadcast Bulletin, Issue number 288](#), (21 September 2015), p 45–46

216 "[BBC World Service announces biggest expansion 'since the 1940s'](#)", BBC News, 16 November 2016

217 Sputnik UK ([RUS0041](#)) para 2; Anna Belkina, RT ([RUS0042](#)) para 2.6

155. For this reason, the Government must be creative in its endeavours to counteract Russia's information campaign, especially in Russian-speaking regions of states such as Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. On our visit to Ukraine, we were encouraged by the work of independent organisations such as Stop Fake, which receives support from the British Council.

156. We welcome the increase in funding for the BBC World Service to enhance its broadcasting into Russia and neighbouring states. *Looking beyond such broadcasting, the FCO should also increase its support for independent media in order to provide the Russian people and those living in neighbouring states with a broad range of perspectives.*

European Convention on Human Rights

157. In evidence to this inquiry, the FCO wrote that

In December 2015, President Putin signed a law allowing Russia's Constitutional Court to overrule judgments by the European Court of Human Rights where they are deemed to contradict the Russian constitution. In failing to implement European Court rulings, Russian officials have previously sought to justify their position by likening their stance to that of the UK on Prisoner Voting Rights. We continue to reject this comparison and assert the distinction between our approach to a difficult case and those of member States such as Russia who make no real attempt to engage. Russia has for some years been the Council of Europe Member State with the highest number of claims brought against it to the European Court of Human Rights.²¹⁸

158. In 2013, the Joint Committee on Draft Voting Eligibility (Prisoners) Bill noted that the UK, as a founding member of the Council of Europe, was regarded as “the best pupil in class”, and that the example it set would be used by other states to justify their actions.²¹⁹ The report concluded that refusing to implement the ECHR's judgement on Prisoner Voting Rights in the UK would “give succour to those states in the Council of Europe who have a poor record of protecting human rights and who may draw on such an action as setting a precedent that they may wish to follow.”²²⁰

159. The Government is reportedly considering withdrawing from the ECHR when the UK has withdrawn from the EU.²²¹ When we met human rights activists in St Petersburg, they unanimously urged the UK not to withdraw from the ECHR, because of the message that such an action would send to the Russian authorities. They argued that if the UK were to withdraw from the ECHR, it would weaken the Europe-wide consensus on human rights and undermine protections in Russia. Human Rights Watch advanced the same argument:

218 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (RUS0011) Annex D para 3

219 Joint Committee on the Draft Voting Eligibility (Prisoners) Bill, Session 2013–14, [Report: Draft Voting Eligibility \(Prisoners\) Bill](#), HL Paper 103, HC 924, para 109

220 Joint Committee on the Draft Voting Eligibility (Prisoners) Bill, Session 2013–14, [Report: Draft Voting Eligibility \(Prisoners\) Bill](#), HL Paper 103, HC 924, para 113

221 [“Theresa May to fight 2020 election on plans to take Britain out of European Convention on Human Rights after Brexit is completed”](#), The Telegraph, 28 December 2016; HC Deb, 24 January 2017, [col 153](#) [Commons Chamber]

The UK government's proposals on the European Convention on Human Rights, specifically the suggestion that they will ignore rulings of the Court that the UK doesn't like, is an invaluable gift to Russia and other governments who routinely violate basic human rights protections. The Russians have recently taken their own steps to undermine the European Court. But the UK's credibility in raising human rights concerns with Russia would be gravely undermined by UK withdrawal from the Convention or the attempt to selectively apply its rulings.²²²

160. UK withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights would risk sending a signal to Russia that it can freely disregard international human rights norms at home and abroad, and would undermine UK support for the work of human rights groups in Russia. It would also deprive the UK of a key source of soft power and influence among reformers and human rights activists in Russia. *In order to maintain international standards on human rights, the UK Government should not withdraw from the ECHR and should make it clear that no such step is contemplated.*

5 Future engagement

Culture

161. Although political relations between the UK and Russia have experienced a severe decline, cultural relations remain healthy. For example, the Cosmonauts exhibition at the British Science Museum in spring 2016, which explored the cultural, scientific and historical context to Russian space exploration and featured some artefacts that had previously been classified and some that had never left Russia. The exhibition was critically acclaimed and extremely popular. In addition, the co-operation between the museum and the Russian Government allowed British astronaut Tim Peake to unveil the Russian Soyuz TMA-19M capsule in which he flew to and from the International Space Station in December 2015 and June 2016. The capsule is now on display at the museum for public viewing. Similarly, the spring 2016 exhibition of British portrait painting at the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow caught the imagination of the Russian public, and the current Royal Academy exhibition of Russian Revolutionary art seems likely to do the same for the British public. Dr Monaghan highlighted the “sympathy for British culture, British literature and the British way of doing things at a popular or societal level”.²²³

162. The UK Space Agency and UK-based space companies work independently and through the European Space Agency (ESA) with Russia and its space agency, Roscosmos. Such collaboration was notable in the case of Tim Peake’s Principia mission in 2015 and 2016. Given the recent significant growth in the UK space sector, including plans to build a domestic spaceport, greater co-operation with Russia and Roscosmos, as well as with other international organisations such as NASA, the ESA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, could be highly beneficial to the sector and to the wider UK economy.

163. British and Russian charities and organisations also collaborate on conservation. For example, British environmental charities the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the RSPB are collaborating with Birds Russia and Moscow Zoo in a project to protect the spoon-billed sandpiper, an endangered species which breeds in Russia.²²⁴

164. The British Council, which has operated in Moscow since 1959, describes its ambition as “to promote ‘a friendly knowledge and understanding’ between the people of the UK and Russia, making a positive contribution to both UK and Russian agendas and, through this, making a lasting difference to the UK’s security, prosperity and influence.”²²⁵ They noted in their evidence to this inquiry that

Research by Ipsos MORI for the British Council in 2011 found that in Russia there was a 21 percentage point increase in net trust in people from the UK if Russians had been involved in cultural activities with the UK (studying in the UK, involvement in joint projects with the UK or attending a cultural event organised by a UK institution) (*Trust Pays*, British Council, 2012).²²⁶

165. However, we note that financial constraints may make it increasingly difficult for the British Council to fulfil its ambitions in Russia. The British Council’s non-Official

223 Q64 [Dr Andrew Monaghan]

224 Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, “[Saving the spoon-billed sandpiper](#)”, accessed 22 February 2017

225 British Council ([RUS0014](#)) 6.1

226 British Council ([RUS0014](#)) Summary

Development Assistance (ODA) grant is due to fall to £0 from 2019–2020 onwards.²²⁷ As Russia is not an ODA-eligible country, the British Council will have to rely on commercial funding and partnerships for its programmes. This is a cause for concern, given the importance of cultural relations in sustaining links between Russia and the UK despite the strained political climate. **The UK Government should reconsider the decrease in its grant to the British Council for its work in Russia, given the valuable work that the British Council does.**

Drug abuse and cheating in sport

166. The London 2012 Olympics were “corrupted on an unprecedented scale” by Russia’s Government and sports authorities, who colluded to ensure its sports stars were able to take a cocktail of banned performance-enhancing drugs while evading doping tests.²²⁸ A 144-page report by the Richard McLaren on behalf of the World Anti-Doping Agency found that more than 1,000 Russians athletes across more than 30 sports, including football, were involved in or benefited from state-sponsored doping between 2011 and 2015. McLaren called it “a cover-up that operated on an unprecedented scale” and pointed the finger at the Russian Ministry of Sport, the Russian security services and the Russian anti-doping agency for creating what he described as “an institutional conspiracy across summer, winter and Paralympic sports”.²²⁹

World Cup 2018

167. Russia will host the FIFA World Cup in 2018. The Committee remains concerned, given Russia’s questionable record in relation to human rights, the rule of law and state-sponsored doping, about whether Russia is a suitable host for the World Cup. Serious continuing consideration should be given by FIFA to whether Russia remains a suitable host for the World Cup. However, it is probable that at least one of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales will qualify for that tournament, in which case thousands of UK nationals are likely to visit Russia in the summer of 2018. We note that when England played Russia in Marseilles at the European Championships 2016, Russian fans fought running battles with England supporters.²³⁰

168. *With respect to the World Cup 2018, the FCO should:*

- *facilitate co-operation between British police and their Russian counterparts to minimise the possibility that serious trouble occurs again;*
- *plan to increase its staff in Russia during the World Cup to meet the likely surge in demand for consular services;*
- *review whether it is appropriate for British Ministers and VIPs to attend World Cup 2018 only on the basis of Russia’s management of the tournament itself and its commitment to fair sporting competition.*

227 British Council, *Corporate Plan 2016–20*, p 24

228 “*Russian state doped more than 1,000 athletes and corrupted London 2012*”, The Guardian, 9 December 2016

229 “*Russian state doped more than 1,000 athletes and corrupted London 2012*”, The Guardian, 9 December 2016

230 “*Euro 2016: England and Russia fans clash before and after match*”, The Guardian, 12 June 2016

The FCO should use this tournament and others to enhance and repair the wider relationship between the UK and Russia, rather than boycott sport in response to other strained aspects of UK-Russia relations.

FCO resources

169. Multiple witnesses to our inquiry highlighted the FCO's reduced capacity to understand Russia since the end of the Cold War. This point was also identified in the Lords Report on EU-Russia Relations in 2015 and the Defence Committee Report in 2016.²³¹ Dr Monaghan stated that

for the past 25 years Russia has not been a priority, so resources have been wound down on it. There are still some resources and they are generally focused on civil society and democracy, because that is where the funding has been. There are very few people who are expert on the Russian economy, even fewer who are expert on the Russian military and fewer still—we can count on one hand—who are real experts on the Russian security system.²³²

170. Dr Averre commented on the resources that the FCO currently commits to analysing Russian actions and motivations:

the Eastern Research Group [...] is staffed by excellent people who stay in the group for many years. They have a tremendous amount of knowledge about Russia—I would say on an academic level—but there is something like five or six of them dealing with the entire post-Soviet space less the Baltic states. They are looking at politics, political economy, security and so on. That seems to me to be pretty woeful. They engage with academia and the expert community—they try their best—but that is laughable really.²³³

171. Dr Averre also commented on Ministry of Defence resources in relation to Russia:

I was at the Ministry of Defence two or three years ago with a couple of colleagues talking to the defence economics department. A chap who had been there for 25 years, who joined at a time when there was something like two dozen people looking at the Soviet defence industry, defence capabilities and defence economy, was the last one working full time on it. He's since retired [...] so the Ministry of Defence is now seriously under-staffed as well.²³⁴

172. Dr Monaghan suggested that British policymakers found it difficult to understand the Russian Government's mind-set:

There is a strong degree of mirror-imaging. The British leadership and many others in western Europe, and perhaps the United States as well, think, as I

231 European Union Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2014–15, *The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine*, HL Paper 115, paras 67–68; Defence Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, *Russia: Implications for UK defence and security*, HC 107, paras 113–114

232 Q23

233 Q28 [Dr Derek Averre]

234 Q28 [Dr Derek Averre]

said, “We wouldn’t do that, so the Russians won’t do that.” The fact that they have come to the decision with a very different rationale and understanding of the evidence means that we tend to get it wrong.²³⁵

173. Dr Valentina Feklyunina argued that the UK should build its capacity to understand Russian politics:

Losing this capacity after the collapse of the Soviet Union, or allowing it to shrink, was a very significant mistake. It happened not only in the UK, but in the US and the West more broadly. This is very, very significant, regardless of what is going to happen to the Russian economy. Even if we assume that Russia is a declining power and its role will be less significant, it is still going to be very, very important for quite a long time, so it is extremely important to build this capacity. That goes to the learning of the Russian language, which is an extremely important and problematic issue in the UK at the moment, and it goes to the discussion of Russia more broadly.²³⁶

174. The former UK Ambassador to Russia, Sir Roderic Lyne, observed that

Analysis should be the foundation stone of strategic decision-making. During the Cold War the West invested heavily in all-source analysis of the Soviet Union. Information about today’s Russia is much easier to access, but the western analytical capacity and coherence has declined and needs to be rebuilt. EU governments proceed from very different starting points in their approaches to Russia. This is not the Cold War, for many reasons. But we need to define the problem. We need a better common understanding of the Russian adversary—of Russia’s motives, aims, capabilities and points of vulnerability.²³⁷

175. Ian Bond of the Centre for European Reform pointed out that the FCO does not have a good record on using the limited expertise that it possesses:

While they are small in number, the FCO already has experts on Russia and the former Soviet Union (as it has on other areas of the world and on key thematic issues) in the form of its Research Analysts. The expertise of Research Analysts was recognised by the Foreign Affairs Committee in its 2011 report on the role of the FCO in UK government. But it is not clear that the views of Research Analysts working on Russia (or on other subjects) reach ministers, particularly in cases where their analysis differs from that of generalist officials in policy departments.²³⁸

176. *The FCO must once again invest in the analytical capacity to understand Russian decision-making in order to develop effective and informed foreign policy. This should involve engaging with think-tanks and universities that study Russia, recruiting and training FCO Russia specialists and developing Russian language skills in the FCO. The FCO must set out detailed plans on how it will develop its internal capacity and harness external expertise, and how that will feed into policymaking.*

235 Q47

236 Q100 [Dr Valentina Feklyunina]

237 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#)) para 23

238 Ian Bond, Centre for European Reform ([RUS0015](#)) para 17

Ministerial responsibility

177. Sir Alan Duncan MP is the FCO Minister with responsibility for Russia. In addition to Russia, his responsibilities include the Americas, Europe, NATO, migration, and defence and international security.²³⁹ This portfolio includes a significant and diverse array of major challenges for UK foreign policy, particularly in the light of the UK's forthcoming withdrawal from the EU and changes that may occur due to the new US Presidential Administration.

178. Sir Alan Duncan is an experienced and capable Minister, but the scale of these challenges places an unsustainable level of demand on ministerial time and attention. Understanding this, we welcomed the fact that the Minister of State was accompanied by two of the most senior officials in the FCO when he gave evidence to this inquiry in December 2016, and we were grateful for their participation. However, the evidence session betrayed an uncomfortable lack of clarity about the strategic direction of UK policy towards Russia and raised concerns about the quality and depth of research and analysis on which those officials can draw.

179. We note the emphasis that Russian politicians and officials place on one-to-one relationships. For example, United States Secretary of State John Kerry committed himself to building a personal relationship with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, which provided a basis for diplomacy in relation to Syria. It is questionable whether the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas could commit sufficient time to building such a relationship given the breadth of that portfolio.

180. *The portfolio of the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas at the FCO is too broad to be covered effectively by any single individual. Our impression is that active policy responsibility remains principally the preserve of the Foreign Secretary and it would have been fairer for him to give evidence to the Committee on behalf of the Government. Bearing in mind the ongoing tensions in the UK-Russia relationship and its long-term importance to our security, the policy area would merit the appointment of a junior FCO Minister with more specific responsibility for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with sufficient resources to carry out the role.*

A long-term people-to-people strategy

181. President Putin is likely to see seek another term in office in 2018, leaving him in power until 2024.²⁴⁰ Mikhail Khodorkovsky of Open Russia observed that while President Putin remains in the Kremlin, UK-Russia relations are unlikely to improve.²⁴¹ For this reason, Dr Valentina Feklyunina of Newcastle University told the Committee that the UK should be “widening the engagement between the societies, and not focusing just on Putin when we think about Russian foreign policy”.²⁴² She said:

The extent of his domestic support and domestic popularity, and the support for his actions in the international arena, indicate that we have to engage with the society more broadly in a much more consistent manner, and with a long-term perspective. It is something that cannot be fixed within the

239 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “*The Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP*”, accessed 10 January 2016

240 Sir Roderic Lyne (RUS0039) para 21

241 Q129

242 Q100 [Dr Valentina Feklyunina]

next three years; it has to be dealt with in a very long-term perspective. And that is people-to-people relations; it is not necessarily something pursued from Government to Government. That is something that was to an extent successful even at the time of the Cold War, and we can argue that it is one of the factors that we can see is working. It is working at some points of the relationship better than at others, but I think it is something where the UK should develop its expertise and invest more resources.²⁴³

182. Education is a key way in which the UK can develop long-term links with the Russian people, and 2017 is the 'UK-Russia Year of Science and Education' which involves a programme of events and co-operation run by the FCO with the Russian Government to inspire young people and strengthen our scientific relationship. Ian Bond of the Centre for European Reform recommended that

The UK should use another element of its soft power, education, to make a long-term investment in Russia's development. Of 28 European universities taking part in the EU's 'Erasmus Mundus' programme of scholarships and other educational exchanges with Russia, only one, Glasgow, is British. Russians received around 14,000 visas to study in the UK in 2014; the UK should ensure that it is not just educating the children of the current elite, but that it is offering scholarships to the most promising students it can find in Russia. Apart from the academic benefits of student and professional exchanges, increased educational links are a long-term investment in improving the UK's and the West's relations with Russia.²⁴⁴

183. The British Council outlined the long term potential for growth in English language teaching and the broader education sector in Russia:

There are estimated to be 15 million learners of English in Russia, and the Russian English language teaching market is estimated to be worth £500 million. In 2013 Russia was one of the top 10 countries in the ELT world, sending 35,000 students per annum to study English abroad. There are 3,600 Russian students a year in UK universities, which is estimated to be worth £90 million a year to the UK economy.²⁴⁵

184. When we visited St Petersburg in May 2016, we met an impressive group of students and administrators at the University of Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics. However, the students and administrators told us that it was difficult for them to obtain visas for study in the UK and made clear the relative lack of major partnering and exchange relationships with UK universities. In their view, the opportunities available for Russian students to study at or engage in collaborative projects with UK institutions compared unfavourably with counterparts in Germany, the USA and Australia. This was discouraging. Given the international reputation of its universities, the UK should be a leader rather than a laggard in this field.

185. It is more difficult for the Government to foster economic and business links with Russia in the light of the sanctions regime and Russia's current economic difficulties.

243 Q100 [Dr Valentina Feklyunina]

244 Ian Bond, Centre for European Reform ([RUS0015](#)) para 33

245 British Council ([RUS0014](#)) para 6.4

However, UK Trade and Investment (UKTI²⁴⁶) officials in Moscow told us that there remains demand for UK economic and business expertise across a wide range of sectors including oil and gas, education, financial and legal services, pharmaceuticals, luxury goods, and food and drink. The officials said that companies in Russia would take a long-term approach to position themselves well for any future recovery.

186. The Russian Government has said that it aims to double the share of SMEs in the Russian economy by 2030.²⁴⁷ Co-operation in this area would provide a way for the UK to build direct, long-term links with Russian businesses and entrepreneurs in sectors that are not affected by the sanctions regime. It is therefore encouraging that the British Embassy in Moscow has included “growing the Small Medium Enterprise (SME) base and the number of entrepreneurs in Russia” as a priority area for funding bilateral projects in 2017–18.²⁴⁸

187. The FCO must look beyond President Putin and develop a long-term strategy to engage with the Russian people and to articulate a credible, positive vision of the relationship that the UK would like to develop with Russia. In particular, the FCO should resource more fellowships and exchanges between British and Russian academic institutions, as well as organisations for young professionals, to promote the development of shared values and mutual understanding between British and Russian people. The UK should also build links with Russian SMEs and entrepreneurs with an eye to promoting closer economic co-operation with Russia when the time is right. A people-to-people strategy building bridges with the next generation of Russian political and economic leaders could underpin improved UK-Russia relations in the future.

246 UK Trade and Investment was replaced by the Department for International Trade in July 2016.

247 Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, [News: The Government decided to double the SMEs share in Russia by 2030](#), 31 July 2015

248 British Embassy Moscow, [Press Release: New Round for UK Bilateral Projects Programme 2017–2018 to accept bids in Russia](#), 23 January 2017

Conclusions and recommendations

UK-Russia relations since 1991: Divergent perspectives

1. From the perspective of Russia, western powers took advantage of a period of relative Russian weakness under Boris Yeltsin in the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union to enlarge both the European Union and NATO. From the perspective of western European countries and the United States, membership of political or economic alliances is a matter for sovereign decisions by the applicant countries if they meet the criteria for membership, and Russia can have no veto on such matters. Moreover, both NATO and the European Union believe that they offered the hand of friendship to Russia in assisting in the process of economic and political reform and democratisation. That hand of friendship was rebuffed after President Putin came to power. The different narratives of Russian and western foreign policy thinking have been well documented, including in the reports of our predecessor Committees. Despite those warnings, we do not believe that our policymakers have adequately considered the full implications of the differences between western and Russian understandings of this period of history or have drawn the correct, albeit uncomfortable, conclusions from it. However, given the Russian leadership's apparent intent to develop a siege mentality, particularly for domestic purposes, it is uncertain to what extent constructive engagement would have been possible. There is also a need to understand why states on the Russian Federation's fringe feel threatened. Western, including UK, policy must accept a share of responsibility for the current state of relations. (Paragraph 24)

Russia in 2017

2. The evidence that we received on human rights is confirmed by international groups who are concerned about attacks on civil society and disrespect for the rule of law and human rights in not only Russia itself, but Crimea. The Committee shares those concerns. (Paragraph 40)
3. The Kremlin is prepared to be disruptive in foreign affairs. This opportunist, tactical approach to foreign policy means that Russia is already making strategic mistakes and pursuing short-term advantages rather than advancing a long-term, coherent, sustainable vision for its role in the world. Russia rejects international rules as they are understood by the UK and other western powers, and, in an effort to legitimise its approach, it seizes on every example where we have not lived up to our own standards and takes every opportunity to take advantage of weaknesses, problems and differences within eastern Europe and NATO. It believes that it has a legitimate sphere of influence in former Soviet territory in eastern Europe, that it should have a decisive say over those states' foreign policy choices and that other nations should recognise its sphere of influence. (Paragraph 53)
4. The Russian assertion that it has a sphere of influence is contrary to the development of the international rules-based order over the past 50 years. UK foreign policy is predicated on a rules-based international order, international law and self-determination, as set out in the Helsinki Accords and the United Nations Charter.

Russian foreign policy aims to undermine the current world order, prevent self-determination and independent decisions by neighbouring countries, which it sees as regime change, and to promote Russia's world view as a legitimate alternative to western values. The Russian Government's indifference to human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law underpins its foreign policy challenge to the international order and lies at the root of the collapse in UK-Russia relations. (Paragraph 54)

Tensions in the UK-Russia relationship

5. Today the UK must not accept or recognise the illegal Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea. This is particularly important because the UK is a signatory to the Budapest Memorandum (see paragraph 55). Ukraine is a sovereign state, and it must be able to choose its own future. The UK national interest would be served if Ukraine had positive relations with both Russia and the West. However, such an outcome cannot be achieved until Russia ends its illegal annexation of Crimea, stops supporting separatist groups in eastern Ukraine and abides by international law. (Paragraph 71)
6. *The FCO should continue to work with the EU, Canada and USA on supporting Ukraine. The UK and its allies should pursue a robust policy whereby support is conditional on Ukraine addressing domestic corruption and maladministration. In the long term, the UK and its allies should support Ukraine in developing resilience to further Russian encroachment and in building its social, political and physical infrastructure, which will facilitate further engagement with the West and allow Ukraine to engage with Russia on a level playing field.* (Paragraph 79)
7. The £20 million Good Governance Fund seems woefully inadequate to address the task in hand in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ukraine alone would justify the investment of British resources of hundreds of millions of pounds to improve governance, if that were to secure the central objective of supporting Ukraine as an independent country with a liberal European outlook. Support could also be provided by embedding British diplomats and experts into Ukrainian administrative structures. (Paragraph 80)
8. *The FCO must clarify whether the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement will apply to UK-Ukraine political and economic relations post-Brexit. If the UK will no longer be a party to the Association Agreement after it leaves the EU, the FCO should begin planning a successor agreement as a matter of urgency, and we invite it to set out the areas that would be covered by this agreement in its response to this Report.* (Paragraph 81)
9. If the UK is determined to maintain a principled stance in relation to the sanctions on Russia, this may require uncomfortable conversations with close allies. The withdrawal of the existing sanctions should be linked to Russian compliance with its obligations toward Ukraine, and should not be offered in exchange for Russian co-operation in other areas. This approach would avoid ceding moral and legal legitimacy to Russia and departing from UK values and standards. The challenge in this approach is that the practical effect of economic sanctions on Russian decision-making is doubtful. It looks as though it will be increasingly difficult to sustain a

united western position on sanctions, not least if they become a bargaining point during Brexit negotiations. The UK faces the possibility of becoming an isolated actor supporting a policy towards Russia that is failing. This could lead to further damage to Britain's long-term ability to influence Russia. (Paragraph 95)

10. *The international community must remain unified in the face of Russia's assertion of its perceived sphere of influence and its disregard for the international norms in its treatment of Ukraine. The FCO should prioritise international unity on policy towards Russia in talks with the new US Administration, and should continue to work closely with EU partners to maintain support for Ukraine, whether this is delivered through sanctions and/or assistance to Ukraine.* (Paragraph 96)
11. *The FCO should be open to considering any proposals that the Russian Government may advance to resolve the situation in Ukraine outside the Minsk II process that are in line with international law. Russian actions demonstrating compliance with the rule of international law in Ukraine could be linked to the gradual removal of sanctions and would provide Russia with a route map to restoring positive relations with the West. We invite the FCO in its response to this report to detail the exact responsibilities of Russia with regard to the Minsk II agreement. The measure of success in relation to sanctions is their no longer being needed. It is therefore imperative that the international community recognises the need for an achievable route to rapprochement.* (Paragraph 99)
12. There is currently no realistic prospect of the ICC mechanism being used to investigate and address war crimes committed in Syria. (Paragraph 118)
13. The UN inquiry into the air strike on the convoy demonstrated the challenge of establishing the intent behind an attack on a plainly civilian target in order to sustain a conclusive view on whether or not a war crime has been committed. The Russian response to these charges was consistent with its view that it is held to different standards from those to which we hold ourselves. The Government is right to call out the Russian military for actions that potentially violate International Humanitarian Law. However, if the Government continues to allege that Russia has committed war crimes in Syria without providing a basis for its charge, it risks bolstering the Kremlin's narrative that Russia is held to unfair double standards by hostile and hypocritical western powers. Un-evidenced rhetoric from both sides also makes it difficult to implement the practical co-operation measures necessary to deliver lasting peace in Syria. (Paragraph 119)
14. Breaches of International Humanitarian Law—with evidence of clear Russian violations in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria—are unacceptable. Those responsible must be held accountable. Coalition failures in Afghanistan and Iraq do not permit breaches of International Humanitarian Law in Syria. (Paragraph 120)
15. The introduction of powers in the Criminal Finances Bill to allow the civil recovery of the property of individuals involved in gross human rights abuses or violations carried out abroad is welcome and should allow the UK unilaterally to sanction Russian individuals who have committed or who have facilitated the commission of

human rights abuses or war crimes in Syria. *The Committee invites the Government to present its assessment of how the new powers will be exercised and to report to the House orders made against individuals.* (Paragraph 121)

16. Russia and the United Kingdom have a shared interest in combatting Islamist terrorism and extremism. It is difficult to envisage how to progress this shared interest considering the differences between the two countries' respective definitions and analyses of terrorism, and acceptable methods to defeat it. Any dialogue with Russia must be handled with the greatest care, but it is at least worth exploring. *The Government and its agencies should be having a regular dialogue with their Russian counterparts about the causes of Islamist extremist violence and the potential strategies to address it. This shared objective could be utilised to open constructive dialogue with Russia in the area of common shared security and anti-terrorism. That dialogue should be used to improve relations, better understand Russian foreign policy and initiate discussion on freedom of expression, the rule of law and human rights, and the ongoing issues in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.* (Paragraph 130)

UK policy towards Russia

17. We visited Russia in May 2016, where we met Russian Ministers, civil servants and parliamentarians. Although those exchanges were occasionally uncomfortable, we judged that some interaction with Russia is preferable to no interaction, if only to maintain the basis for a more positive relationship in future, to clarify areas of disagreement and to de-escalate points of difference. We therefore welcome recent indications that the Government is willing to consider more direct, face-to-face engagement with the Russian leadership. While engagement for engagement's sake has merit, albeit limited, in sustaining contact, it is not a substitute for dialogue with a purpose. We are not convinced that the FCO and Government Ministers have identified what Russia wants from the UK, or what, if anything, the UK should seek to accomplish through bilateral engagement with Russia. (Paragraph 141)
18. *The FCO should clarify what the UK wants to achieve in its bilateral engagement with Russia. This should involve dialogue on specific issues, such as counter-terrorism, cybersecurity or aviation security, in order to establish both points of agreement and points of difference. Having established its terms of reference, the FCO should conduct a meaningful and regular political dialogue with the Russian Government, including at the highest ministerial levels. Ministers should conduct this dialogue in a spirit of frankness and honesty, based on clear analysis of the UK's immediate and long-term strategic goals for its relationship with Russia. There is also scope for facilitating non-governmental contact in partnership with the EU and other allies.* (Paragraph 142)
19. *The UK Government must explore ways constructively to engage with Russia in order to improve its record on human rights, freedom of expression and the rule of law. The FCO must also work closely with other international partners and through the UN Security Council better to understand and to respond to the current Russian foreign policy and its 'sphere of influence' strategy.* (Paragraph 143)
20. *The UK should give further consideration on how to respond, including with others in the international community, more robustly to Russia's indifference to human rights and rule of law, which undermines the international rules-based order.* (Paragraph 144)

21. Individuals associated with the Putin regime who are reportedly responsible for gross human rights abuses or violations use British financial and legal services, invest in British property, holiday in the UK and send their children to British schools. The UK Government could influence those people's behaviour by introducing and utilising the civil recovery powers set out in the Criminal Finances Bill to seize assets held in the UK. The introduction of such powers would deter other Russians from committing or commissioning gross human rights abuses or violations. (Paragraph 147)
22. Sanctions imposed on Russia owing to its actions in eastern Ukraine and Crimea are currently agreed and applied by EU Member States. *The FCO must clarify how the UK would impose sanctions post-Brexit, explain whether Brexit would entail changes from the current sanctions regime and analyse the costs and benefits of the possible models for future UK-administered sanctions. We expect the FCO to publish its analysis of how the UK would impose sanctions post-Brexit by March 2018.* (Paragraph 148)
23. The rise of fake news in the UK is a real concern. Key questions as to RT and Sputnik's impartiality, integrity and actual news stories remain unanswered. The UK regulator should continue to take action against examples of outright falsehoods in Russian state-sponsored broadcasting. But the ability of broadcasters such as RT and Sputnik to operate in the UK should be considered a sign of British strength. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are core British values in which the UK has justifiable confidence. These values lie at the heart of Britain's soft-power challenge to the current Russian regime. Conversely, restrictions on the operation of international and domestic media in Russia reveal the Kremlin's fear that its narrative will not prevail in free and open debate. (Paragraph 153)
24. We welcome the increase in funding for the BBC World Service to enhance its broadcasting into Russia and neighbouring states. *Looking beyond such broadcasting, the FCO should also increase its support for independent media in order to provide the Russian people and those living in neighbouring states with a broad range of perspectives.* (Paragraph 156)
25. UK withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights would risk sending a signal to Russia that it can freely disregard international human rights norms at home and abroad, and would undermine UK support for the work of human rights groups in Russia. It would also deprive the UK of a key source of soft power and influence among reformers and human rights activists in Russia. *In order to maintain international standards on human rights, the UK Government should not withdraw from the ECHR and should make it clear that no such step is contemplated.* (Paragraph 160)

Future engagement

26. The UK Government should reconsider the decrease in its grant to the British Council for its work in Russia, given the valuable work that the British Council does. (Paragraph 165)
27. *With respect to the World Cup 2018, the FCO should:*

- *facilitate co-operation between British police and their Russian counterparts to minimise the possibility that serious trouble occurs again;*
 - *plan to increase its staff in Russia during the World Cup to meet the likely surge in demand for consular services;*
 - *review whether it is appropriate for British Ministers and VIPs to attend World Cup 2018 only on the basis of Russia's management of the tournament itself and its commitment to fair sporting competition.*
 - *The FCO should use this tournament and others to enhance and repair the wider relationship between the UK and Russia, rather than boycott sport in response to other strained aspects of UK-Russia relations. (Paragraph 168)*
28. *The FCO must once again invest in the analytical capacity to understand Russian decision-making in order to develop effective and informed foreign policy. This should involve engaging with think-tanks and universities that study Russia, recruiting and training FCO Russia specialists and developing Russian language skills in the FCO. The FCO must set out detailed plans on how it will develop its internal capacity and harness external expertise, and how that will feed into policymaking. (Paragraph 176)*
29. *The portfolio of the Minister of State for Europe and the Americas at the FCO is too broad to be covered effectively by any single individual. Our impression is that active policy responsibility remains principally the preserve of the Foreign Secretary and it would have been fairer for him to give evidence to the Committee on behalf of the Government. Bearing in mind the ongoing tensions in the UK-Russia relationship and its long-term importance to our security, the policy area would merit the appointment of a junior FCO Minister with more specific responsibility for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with sufficient resources to carry out the role. (Paragraph 180)*
30. *The FCO must look beyond President Putin and develop a long-term strategy to engage with the Russian people and to articulate a credible, positive vision of the relationship that the UK would like to develop with Russia. In particular, the FCO should resource more fellowships and exchanges between British and Russian academic institutions, as well as organisations for young professionals, to promote the development of shared values and mutual understanding between British and Russian people. The UK should also build links with Russian SMEs and entrepreneurs with an eye to promoting closer economic co-operation with Russia when the time is right. A people-to-people strategy building bridges with the next generation of Russian political and economic leaders could underpin improved UK-Russia relations in the future. (Paragraph 187)*

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 21 February 2017

Members present:

Crispin Blunt, in the Chair

Ann Clwyd	Daniel Kawczynski
Mike Gapes	Ian Murray
Stephen Gethins	Andrew Rosindell
Mr Mark Hendrick	Nadhim Zahawi
Adam Holloway	

Draft Report (*The United Kingdom's relations with Russia*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 15 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 16—(*Mike Gapes*)—brought up and read, as follows:

This view is disputed by NATO itself, individual NATO Governments and by many independent commentators. For example, Anne Applebaum, the Pulitzer Prize winning author, wrote:

No treaties prohibiting NATO expansion were ever signed with Russia. No promises were broken. Nor did the impetus for NATO expansion come from a “triumphalist” Washington. On the contrary, Poland’s first efforts to apply in 1992 were rebuffed [...]. When the slow, cautious expansion eventually took place, constant efforts were made to reassure Russia. No NATO bases were placed in the new member states, and until 2013 no exercises were conducted there. A Russia-NATO agreement in 1997 promised no movement of nuclear installations. A NATO-Russia Council was set up in 2002. In response to Russian objections, Ukraine and Georgia were, in fact, denied NATO membership plans in 2008. Meanwhile, not only was Russia not “humiliated” during this era, it was given de facto “great power” status, along with the Soviet seat on the UN Security Council and Soviet embassies. Russia also received Soviet nuclear weapons, some transferred from Ukraine in 1994 in exchange for Russian recognition of Ukraine’s borders. Presidents Clinton and Bush both treated their Russian counterparts as fellow “great power” leaders and invited them to join the Group of Eight—although Russia, neither a large economy nor a democracy, did not qualify.

Other commentators have gone further in addressing this point. For example, historians Christopher Clark and Kristina Spohr stated:

In recent years, the tendency to misremember past debacles as humiliations has emerged as one of the salient features of the Kremlin's conduct of international affairs. Amid recriminations over US and western European interventions in Kosovo, Libya and Syria, the Russian leadership has begun to question the legitimacy of the international agreements on which the current European order is founded. Among these, the centrepiece is the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany of 12 September 1990, also known as the Two-plus-Four Treaty because it was signed by the two Germans, plus the US, the Soviet Union, Britain and France. Yet the claim that the negotiations towards this treaty included guarantees barring NATO from expansion into Eastern Europe is entirely unfounded. In the discussions leading to the treaty, the Russians never raised the question of NATO enlargement, other than in respect of the former East Germany. Regarding this territory, it was agreed that after Soviet troop withdrawals German forces assigned to NATO could be deployed there but foreign NATO forces and nuclear weapons systems could not. There was no commitment to abstain in future from eastern NATO enlargement.

Question put, that the paragraph be read a second time.

The Committee divided:

Ayes, 6	Noes, 1
Ann Clwyd	Daniel Kawczynski
Mike Gapes	
Stephen Gethins	
Mr Mark Hendrick	
Ian Murray	
Nadhim Zahawi	

Ordered, That the paragraph be read a second time.

Paragraph 16 inserted.

Paragraphs 17 to 187 read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 28 February at 2.15pm]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 3 May 2016

Question number

Dr Derek Averre, Senior Lecturer in Russian Foreign and Security Policy, University of Birmingham, and **Dr Andrew Monaghan**, Senior Research Fellow, Chatham House

[Q1–64](#)

Tuesday 14 June 2016

Dr Valentina Feklyunina, Newcastle University, **Professor Alena Ledeneva**, University College London, and **Alex Nice**, Economist Intelligence Unit

[Q65–105](#)

Vladimir Ashurkov, Executive Director, the Anti-Corruption Foundation

[Q106–126](#)

Tuesday 8 November 2016

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Open Russia

[Q127–137](#)

William Browder, CEO, Hermitage Capital Management

[Q138–160](#)

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Open Russia

[Q161–175](#)

Tuesday 29 November 2016

Mary Dejevsky, journalist and broadcaster, and **Lord Truscott**, Associate Fellow, Royal United Services Institute

[Q176–227](#)

Anna Belkina, Director of Marketing and Strategic Development and Head of Communications, RT, **Oxana Brazhnik**, Bureau Chief, Sputnik UK, and **Nikolai Gorshkov**, Editor, Sputnik UK

[Q228–320](#)

Tuesday 20 December 2016

Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan, MP, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas, **Sir Tim Barrow**, Political Director and **Neil Crompton**, Director and Middle East and North Africa, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

[Q321–438](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

RUS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 A Political Risk Analyst ([RUS0027](#))
- 2 Alex Sinodov ([RUS0019](#))
- 3 Amnesty International UK ([RUS0032](#))
- 4 Anti-Corruption Foundation ([RUS0025](#))
- 5 Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain ([RUS0016](#))
- 6 BBC ([RUS0043](#))
- 7 BBC World Service ([RUS0034](#))
- 8 British Council ([RUS0014](#))
- 9 Dr Patrick Xavier ([RUS0001](#))
- 10 Dr Rebecca Niblock ([RUS0012](#))
- 11 Dr Richard Connolly ([RUS0010](#))
- 12 Dr Valentina Feklyunina ([RUS0030](#))
- 13 Eastern Europe Studies Centre ([RUS0036](#))
- 14 Embassy of Georgia to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ([RUS0023](#))
- 15 Embassy of Ukraine in the UK ([RUS0021](#))
- 16 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0011](#))
- 17 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0044](#))
- 18 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0046](#))
- 19 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0047](#))
- 20 GML Limited ([RUS0004](#))
- 21 Harm Reduction International ([RUS0006](#))
- 22 Hoffmann G Wattara ([RUS0045](#))
- 23 Human Rights Watch ([RUS0005](#))
- 24 Latvian Institute of International Affairs ([RUS0026](#))
- 25 Mikhail Khodorkovsky ([RUS0013](#))
- 26 Stephen Kinnock MP ([RUS0020](#))
- 27 Mr David Clark ([RUS0035](#))
- 28 Ms Mary Dejevsky ([RUS0007](#))
- 29 National Museum Directors' Council ([RUS0017](#))
- 30 Oxford Research Group ([RUS0024](#))
- 31 RT ([RUS0042](#))
- 32 Russian Embassy ([RUS0037](#))
- 33 Russo-British Chamber of Commerce ([RUS0009](#))

- 34 Scotland-Russia Forum ([RUS0003](#))
- 35 Sir Roderic Lyne ([RUS0039](#))
- 36 Sputnik UK ([RUS0041](#))
- 37 The Centre for European Reform ([RUS0015](#))
- 38 The Economist/CEPA ([RUS0022](#))
- 39 The Henry Jackson Society ([RUS0018](#))
- 40 The Scotland-Russia Forum ([RUS0040](#))
- 41 TheCityUK ([RUS0031](#))
- 42 William Browder ([RUS0038](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2016–17

First Report	The UK's role in the economic war against ISIL	HC 121 (HC 680)
Second Report	Equipping the Government for Brexit	HC 431 (HC 704)
Third Report	Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options	HC 119
Fourth Report	The use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen	HC 688
Fifth Report	The future operations of BBC Monitoring	HC 732 (HC 921)
Sixth Report	'Political Islam' and the Muslim Brotherhood Review	HC 118
First Special Report	The UK's role in the war against ISIL following the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria in February 2016: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2015–16	HC 209
Second Special Report	The FCO's administration and funding of its human rights work overseas: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2015–16	HC 545
Seventh Special Report	Committees on Arms Export Controls: unauthorised disclosures of draft Report on Use of UK-manufactured arms in Yemen	HC 935

Session 2015–16

First Report	The FCO and the 2015 Spending Review	HC 467 (HC 816)
Second Report	The extension of offensive British military operations to Syria	HC 457
Third Report	The UK's role in the war against ISIL following the Cessation of Hostilities in Syria in February 2016	HC 683
Fourth Report	The FCO's administration and funding of its human rights work overseas	HC 860
Fifth Report	Implications of the referendum on EU membership for the UK's role in the world	HC 545
First Special Report	The FCO and the 2015 Spending Review: Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16	HC 816