



Second Report
from the
Foreign Affairs Committee
Foreign Policy Aspects of the
War Against Terrorism
Session 2003–2004

Response of the Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

*Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
by Command of Her Majesty
March 2004*

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**FOREWORD BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AND**

COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS,

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JACK STRAW MP

I welcome the latest report of the Foreign Affairs Committee on the foreign policy aspects of counter terrorism. In this Command Paper I set out the Government's response to the Committee's findings and recommendations.

The Government's reply to the Committee has added relevance in the wake of the murderous attacks in Madrid on 11 March that cost the lives of so many innocent people. These attacks were abhorrent, and were rightly condemned by people around the world, from all social, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Our thoughts remain with the victims and their families.

The attacks were a reminder that the threat from terrorism is very real. This threat did not begin on 11 September 2001, nor did it begin – as some commentators would have us believe – when we took action in Iraq. Over the last five years alone over 4,000 people have been killed in terrorist attacks against civilians. The breadth of this violence makes undeniable the reality that the international community faces a new order of challenge from terrorism: on a scale not seen before, with an indiscriminate disregard for innocent civilians that has not been seen before. This terrorism is an attack on order, democracy and respect for human life.

The nature of the threat, and the measures needed to tackle it are behind my decision to place counter terrorism and counter proliferation at the top of the foreign policy priorities in the strategy for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that I launched on 2 December 2003.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jack Straw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J' and 'S'.

JACK STRAW
Secretary of State
for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

“THE FOREIGN POLICY ASPECTS OF THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM”

SECOND REPORT OF SESSION 2003–4

RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Government welcome this latest report from the Foreign Affairs Committee, which deals with some of the most challenging issues facing British foreign policy – Iraq, instability in the Middle East, terrorism and weapons proliferation and has taken note of the conclusions and recommendations. The Government sets out its response below.

Iraq

- 1. We conclude that the Prime Minister was right to state that the trial process of Saddam Hussein should be determined by the Iraqi government – when it has been established-and by the Iraqi people. (Paragraph 17)**

It is right that the Iraqis should lead this process. In December, the Iraqi Governing Council established a Special Tribunal to try senior members of the former regime. The Iraqis are currently discussing the rules and procedures for this tribunal. We are currently considering what assistance we can offer the tribunal.

- 2. We conclude that since the removal of the Iraqi regime, a dangerous alliance of foreign fighters with terrorist allegiances and elements of the former Iraqi regime has been forming inside Iraq. It remains to be seen what effect the capture of Saddam Hussein has on this. (Paragraph 25)**

We judge that most attacks in Iraq continue to be carried out by former regime elements. But we believe some of the suicide attacks which have caused greatest loss of life have been orchestrated by foreign terrorists. The degree of any association between such people and foreign fighters in Iraq remains unclear, although there may be some limited co-operation. The distinctions between some of the groups are becoming increasingly blurred. The capture of Saddam Hussein will undoubtedly have had a demoralising effect on former regime elements who harboured the illusion of regaining power, although we agree it is too soon to judge what effect his capture may have on any relationships between such elements and foreign fighters.

- 3. We conclude it is unacceptable that comprehensive information is not available about detainees being held by the Occupying Powers in Iraq. We recommend that the British Government ensures that such information is provided as a matter of immediacy including the names of all detainees; their nationalities; where they are held; in what conditions they are held; what rights they have, including access to lawyers; the legal basis for their detention; the offences of which they are suspected or charged; and when and how they will be tried or released. (Paragraph 27)**

There are three categories of people who may be held by the Occupying Powers in Iraq: Prisoners of War are held under the provisions of the Third Geneva Convention; security internees are held under the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and anyone suspected of committing a criminal offence may be arrested and passed to the Iraqi authorities. The cases of internees are reviewed after 10, 28 and thereafter every 90 days. Anyone who is no longer assessed as “an imperative threat to security” is either released or passed to the Iraqi criminal system if they are suspected of committing a criminal offence.

Information about internees is available. When someone is arrested their details are passed to the International Committee of the Red Cross which then informs the person’s family. Iraqi police stations and CPA offices hold lists of all those in detention. The CPA is currently in the process of listing all detainees on the CPA website in Arabic. We accept, however, that the information flow on detainees could be further improved. We are working with our coalition partners on ways to achieve this.

The UK attaches great importance to upholding human rights in all circumstances. All UK prisoners in Iraq are held in conditions which conform to all of our international obligations. Coalition internment facilities are subject to regular inspection by the ICRC who are given full and unrestricted access to the internees.

4. We conclude that Iran and Syria have the potential to be destabilising factors in Iraq, and that maintaining co-operation with both is therefore essential for the success of Coalition efforts to bring stability to that country. We further conclude that the United Kingdom, through its diplomatic relations with Iran and Syria, could play a crucial role in ensuring this co-operation. (Paragraph 34)

As a neighbouring country, Iran has a legitimate interest in events in Iraq. A stable and prosperous Iraq is in the best interests of Iran as well as the Coalition. We are keen to see Iran play a constructive role, and have been clear that the Coalition will not tolerate moves designed to undermine its progress. Over the past year, we have sought closer contact with Iran on Iraq-related matters. We also welcome greater contacts between the Iranian government and the new Iraqi authorities. We shall continue to use our relations with Syria to encourage it to work in support of international efforts to restore stability to Iraq.

5. We regret that some members of the Security Council Permanent Five and other countries with the capacity to assist have decided against contributing forces to help establish security in post-war Iraq. We conclude that this failure to share the burden can only have increased the pressures on US and United Kingdom resources, both civilian and military, which in turn may have exacerbated the difficulties encountered by the Coalition in establishing and maintaining security in Iraq. (Paragraph 37)

We would of course have liked other nations to share the burden by contributing forces, but do not believe this is a major cause of difficulty in maintaining security. The Coalition and Multinational Forces in Iraq are adequately resourced for the task. In addition to US/UK forces there are 16,000 other Multinational troops in Iraq from 32 nations. About 5500 of these serve in the UK commanded Multinational Division South East (MND SE) and 9000 in the Polish led Multinational Division Centre South (MND CS). Other countries are under US command. In addition, South Korea expects to deploy 3000 more troops in late April to Northern Iraq.

- 6. We conclude that the early decision to disband the Iraqi armed forces was entirely understandable in the conditions prevailing at the time, but that the re-establishment of such forces is an essential component of creating a new, safe and sovereign Iraq. (Paragraph 40)**

We agree. The establishment of New Iraqi Armed Forces is a high priority. Creating effective, properly accountable armed forces is a demanding task, but training is well underway under the auspices of the multinational Coalition Military Advisory and Training Team (CMATT). Some of the first units to be trained are already operating alongside the Multi National Force in Iraq. However we are under no illusions that fully effective armed forces can be created quickly. Institution building and mentoring will require a sustained effort to which the UK is committed.

- 7. We recommend that the Government set out, in its response to this Report, the means by which Iraqis are currently able to feed information about terrorists or other criminals into the CPA structures; and whether the CPA has plans to enhance the links between its own staff and the Iraqi population to facilitate the transfer of information. (Paragraph 43)**

The Coalition Provisional Authority encourages Iraqi citizens to talk to the Coalition in various ways, including through posters, handbills and radio broadcasts. These also often advise Iraqis how best to impart information. For example in the Multinational Division (South East) area of Iraq, those who have information are encouraged to seek face-to-face contact with Coalition forces. In Baghdad there are a number of hotline numbers that may be called anonymously. The CPA advertises its hotline numbers and e-mail address on its website. Callers are assigned a pseudonym and reference number in order to protect their identity. Information is then recorded and corroborated where possible before being passed to the appropriate authority for action. In some cases a reward payment may be given to the source by the CPA.

- 8. We commend the Government for the energetic measures it has taken to help establish a new Iraqi police force and recommend that this assistance is intensified in the critical remaining months before the handing back of sovereignty to Iraq on 1 July 2004. (Paragraph 45)**

There is an extensive police training plan for existing and newly recruited officers. 72 UK police officers are deployed to the Iraqi police training facility in Jordan, which is expected to be have 2000 recruits in place from end-March. The Regional Police Training Academy in Az Zubayr near Basra has been open since December and is operating to capacity in delivering Transitional Integration Programme (TIP) training course to 300 existing Iraqi police officers every three weeks. There are currently 24 UK civilian police officers at the Academy.

To enhance current efforts in the run up to the handover in July, a new Coalition Police Assistance and Training Team is now being established with greater access to military resources, which is likely to be led by a British Brigadier. The UK is also examining more widely what more it could do to support the policing programme in the South. International involvement in policing in Iraq is expected to continue in Iraq after the hand-over for some time under the auspices of the multinational force.

- 9. Subject to the wishes of the new Iraqi government, we recommend that the Government and its Coalition partners scale down their armed forces only as Iraqi forces demonstrate their capacity to establish and maintain security, and that the terms of any status of forces agreements reached with the Iraqi authorities should be consistent with this objective. (Paragraph 48)**

We agree with the Committee that the key to lasting security in Iraq is progressively to transfer security responsibility to Iraqi security forces as their capability increases post-transition. This has always been our objective and consequently we, and our coalition partners, have been dedicating increasing effort to training and mentoring Iraqi security forces such as the Iraqi Police Service, Facilities Protection Service, Iraqi Border Police, Iraqi Civil Defence Corps and New Iraqi Army.

10. We conclude that United Kingdom personnel in Iraq, both military and civilian, are making a vital contribution to the administration and reconstruction of the country, despite having to work in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. Their performance deserves the highest praise, and appropriate recognition. (Paragraph 51)

We agree and will ensure that UK personnel in Iraq are made aware of the Committee's appreciation of their role.

11. We conclude that the Iraq operation has demonstrated once again the importance of security for the success of post-conflict peace operations. Though there was, perhaps understandably, insufficient anticipation by the British and American governments of the scale and severity of the security tasks facing the Occupying Powers in the immediate aftermath of the war, we reject claims that the Coalition's inability to create a fully secure environment in the immediate post-war period can be attributed entirely to serious failures either of policy or of planning. It is unfortunate and regrettable that the lack of law and order, and interruptions in essential services, resulted in a loss of goodwill among those worst affected, but we conclude that important progress is being made in winning this goodwill back. (Paragraph 57)

We agree. The security situation in the immediate aftermath was extremely challenging, and continues to be so. However, we are making progress in difficult circumstances. Lasting security in Iraq will be achieved by progressively increasing Iraqi security capability. That is why we are giving increased impetus to the development, training and mentoring of Iraqi security forces.

12. We conclude that it is unfortunate that the majority of Iraqis have very limited access to the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi Interim Governing Council, and probably have little knowledge of their actions or policies, or receive through their media a distorted or one-sided view. We further conclude that this isolation may well have increased Iraqis' sense of alienation from and hostility to the Occupying Powers and those working closely with them. This underlines the importance of continuing to move Iraq further along to road to fully democratic governance as speedily as possible after the handover of sovereignty on 1 July. (Paragraph 78)

It is true that the effect of long years of Baathist rule and the rapid transition to a post-Saddam era present challenges to effective communication. Also the security situation creates logistical challenges: CPA officials and public affairs officers must be escorted on calls; security checks on journalists are time consuming. Nevertheless, the Iraqi people have much greater access to information now than they were ever allowed under the former regime. A diverse media is flourishing, free from political interference, with over 140 newspapers and many private TV and radio stations now functioning. Access to many more channels is now available as satellite dishes become commonplace and access to the internet is increasing.

Visible progress on the ground, whether it be in the areas of reconstruction, the economy, the move towards Iraqi security services or the political transition to democracy, highlighted by the agreement of a new Transitional Administrative Law, sends a clear message of what is being done to bring about a new future for the people of Iraq.

- 13. We recommend that the Government, in alliance with its partners in the Coalition, do its utmost to improve the transparency of the CPA, the Governing Council and the Iraqi ministries. (Paragraph 83)**

We accept the Committee's recommendation. We are already working hard in this area. The IGC, Ministries, CPA and Multinational Forces have been mounting an extensive information campaign to explain the political plans for the transition to an Iraqi Government. Handbills, posters, and public broadcasts have been backed up by a series of town hall and other civic gatherings across the country where thousands of people have taken part in discussions. This follows the successful introduction of the new currency where similar means were used.

- 14. We conclude that the complexity of Iraqi society has rendered the development of broadly representative interim Iraqi structures extremely difficult. We recommend that the Government, through work with its partners in the Coalition and through greater engagement with Iraqi society, seek to ensure that currently marginalised groups are identified and, where possible, included in Iraq's new government structures. (Paragraph 87)**

We accept the Committee's conclusion. It is for the Iraqis primarily to decide upon appropriate interim political institutions, but we believe they should aim to be more representative of Iraq's varied society. We will work with our Iraqi and coalition partners to achieve this aim.

- 15. We conclude that the United Nations still has the potential to play an important role in facilitating political transition in Iraq, and in conferring legitimacy on the process. We further conclude that the attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad and the subsequent withdrawal of UN staff has had a serious – but, it is to be hoped, temporary – detrimental effect on the process of transition to a new Iraqi government. We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out what it is doing to promote, restore and strengthen the role of the UN in Iraq. (Paragraph 92)**

We strongly support a greater role for the UN in support of the transitional political process in Iraq. We welcomed the visit in February of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi. We hope he will return to Iraq soon to continue his consultations with Iraqis about the best way to establish an Iraqi Interim Government after 30 June. The UN has a lot to offer in building consensus in support of the political process and in helping to organise elections. We are working to encourage the greatest international support for a greater role for the UN in Iraq, including the full support of the Security Council. The coalition also stands ready to help provide security for UN staff and premises in Iraq.

- 16. We commend the Coalition's provision of substantially increased salaries to Iraq's public sector workers, and conclude that this has contributed to the social stability and economic revival of Iraq in the immediate post-war period. However, we also recommend that the CPA urgently address the unemployment issues evident in the Basra region. (Paragraph 96)**

We agree that higher public-sector salaries have contributed to social stability and economic revival in Iraq. We note the Committee's recommendation to focus on the unemployment situation in Basra. We are working hard to provide job opportunities throughout Iraq. Although figures for Basra Governorate alone are not available, the National Employment Programme has now created over 76,000 jobs, and overall it is estimated the CPA has created over 400,000 jobs. In addition a further \$125mn has recently been allocated to create an additional 125,000 jobs, and \$9mn for the creation of employment centres across Iraq.

17. We conclude that the lack of information available to the Coalition when assessing the scale of the reconstruction effort needed in post-war Iraq contributed to the problems that it has faced in establishing credibility and maintaining the confidence of the Iraqi people. (Paragraph 102)

We agree. While the coalition's contingency plans for a range of humanitarian scenarios were well-prepared before the conflict, not least through good sharing of information with the relevant UN agencies, the wider reconstruction challenges left by the collapse of Iraq's totalitarian state and the looting which followed the conflict were underestimated.

18. We conclude that despite some signs of economic revival since the war, Iraqis have been disappointed by the slow pace of reconstruction, although their expectations were probably unrealistic. We recommend that measures to increase the accessibility and transparency of the CPA, the Governing Council and Iraqi ministries are also used to ensure that Iraqi contractors are able to bid for reconstruction contracts. (Paragraph 106)

We agree that Iraqi firms should be given as many opportunities as possible in the reconstruction of their country. Iraqi firms are given preference in contracts funded by the Development Fund for Iraq and let by the CPA. In addition USAID contracts, which by law have to go to US prime contractors, give preference to Iraqi sub-contractors. The new Program Management Office, which is managing the \$18.6bn US supplemental grant for reconstruction in Iraq, has opened up bids on prime contracts to firms from 63 coalition countries, including Iraq. Preference will be given to bids that demonstrate that they are able to mobilise Iraqi sub-contractors.

19. We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out its understanding of the extent to which the Hague Regulations and the Geneva Conventions constrain the Occupying Powers' capacity to carry out economic reform, and how these constraints have affected the Coalition's operations in Iraq. (Paragraph 108)

The various measures of economic reform undertaken by the Coalition Provisional Authority have been undertaken within occupation law, as supplemented by Security Council Resolution 1483 of 22 May 2003. Occupation law does indeed constrain the capacity of an Occupying Power to carry out economic reform. Article 43 of the Hague Regulations sets out the general obligation to respect the laws in force in the occupied country, and the second paragraph of Article 64 of Geneva Convention IV expands upon the circumstances in which an Occupying Power may legislate; that is, where necessary to fulfil the Occupying Power's obligations under Geneva Convention IV (which would broadly cover humanitarian purposes), for security purposes, or to maintain orderly government of the territory. Legislation to achieve economic reform is permissible under occupation law within these limits. That position is supplemented by Security Council Resolution 1483, and in particular paragraph 8(e) which envisages assistance to the people of Iraq for the promotion of economic reconstruction.

20. We conclude that sustainable economic development and diversification will be essential for the long-term stabilisation of Iraq. We recommend that the Government do its utmost to ensure that the CPA and Iraqi ministries are staffed with experienced personnel, who are capable of drawing up and implementing plans for Iraq's economic development, including detailed and politically sensitive options for the distribution of Iraq's oil revenues. (Paragraph 110)

We agree. We have been seconding suitably qualified individuals with public and private sector experience (from HM Treasury, the Bank of England, and various City and consultancy firms) to act as advisers to the Iraqi Central Bank and Ministries of Finance, Planning, Trade and Industry and Minerals.

21. We conclude that a continued United Kingdom military and civilian presence in Iraq is likely to be necessary for some time to come, possibly for several years. We conclude that this presence must include a significant FCO component if it is to succeed, and we therefore recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out its plans for establishing full diplomatic and consular service in Iraq, including what services it intends to provide, who will provide them, where they will be provided, and over what timescale they will be introduced. (Paragraph 117)

We plan to have an Embassy in Baghdad, a Consulate-General in Basra and a Representative Office in Kirkuk. These would comprise:

- in Baghdad, an Ambassador, a large political section, a small consular and visa section, an economic/energy section, a defence section, a commercial section, a DFID presence, police advisers and British Council staff.
- in Basra, a smaller political section, military liaison, police trainers and UKTI and British Council staff. There will initially be a significant DfID presence (mainly through consultants), but this will diminish as programmes come to an end.
- in Kirkuk, a representative office staffed by one FCO political officer. The office would serve as a base for regional visits by UKTI, DFID and the British Council.

We envisage a total of around 160 UK-based staff resident at our posts in Iraq during the first year or so after 30 June 2004. That figure includes 40 police advisers/trainers and 40 DfID staff. More than half of the remainder will be FCO officers, and there will also be a significant MOD element.

As far as possible, we will have all the planned staff in place and functioning on 1 July 2004, i.e. immediately after the installation of the Interim Iraqi Government. Several of the staff will arrive between now and 1 July, to ensure a smooth start on 1 July. Some of our staff already in Iraq (in the British Office Baghdad, the Office of the UK Special Representative and the CPA) will transfer into the new diplomatic posts on 1 July. This will help to provide continuity.

22. We welcome the capture of Saddam Hussein, but conclude that the continued failure of the Coalition to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq has damaged the credibility of the US and the United Kingdom in their conduct of the war against terrorism. (Paragraph 119)

We disagree. The failure so far to find stockpiles of WMD does not change the fact that the Security Council had repeatedly determined that Iraq was a threat to international peace and security, most recently in UNSCR 1441. Iraq was in breach of 23 out of 27 obligations set by nine UNSCRs. This included all 14 of its WMD obligations, as well as its obligations to renounce terrorism and cease internal oppression. Iraq had had extensive WMD programmes, had co-operated as little as possible in dismantling them, had failed to account for huge quantities of materials, and was set to defy the international community indefinitely. The interim report of the Iraq Survey Group confirmed that Iraq was indeed in further material breach of its UNSCR obligations as well as providing further evidence of the former regime's intentions to hide and retain WMD programmes and capabilities.

It would have been wrong to play down the risks of allowing Iraq to possess WMD, with the possibility of it falling into the hands of those prepared to use it directly against us.

23. We conclude that the war in Iraq has possibly made terrorist attacks against British nationals and British interests more likely in the short term. A successful transfer of power to an internationally-recognised Iraqi government, which has the support of the Iraqi people and which is recognised by Arab and Muslim states generally, offers an important opportunity to reduce that threat and to assist the process of reform and stabilisation in the region. (Paragraph 123)

We disagree with the first sentence. The threat to British interests from terrorism has remained and would have remained high irrespective of coalition action in Iraq. We agree that a successful transfer of power will be central to Iraq's future security and defence against terrorism and will help the wider process of reform and stability in the region. But a successful transfer of power will more widely undermine al Qa'ida's cause and remove the opportunity for such extremists to exploit coalition action as a context for exhorting Muslims to engage in violence.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

24. Although we recognise that Israel must protect its citizens from terrorist attack, and that in the absence of terrorist attacks Israel would not launch such strikes, we conclude that punitive strikes such as that which it launched against Syria in October are likely to be counter-productive, and may also constitute a breach of international law. We therefore conclude that the Government was right to join its EU partners in condemnation of the 5 October attack. We recommend that the Government use its influence with Israel, its neighbours, the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian groups, to prevent the further spread of violence in the region (Paragraph 135)

We agree with these conclusions. We shall continue, as a priority, to use contacts with the Israelis, Palestinians and their neighbours to encourage them to do all they can do stop the cycle of violence.

25. We conclude that reform of the Palestinian security sector is central to the success of the RoadMap and we commend the Government for its efforts to ensure that the Palestinian Authority carries out these reforms. However, we are concerned at the lack of progress and recommend that the Government redouble its efforts to ensure the success of the reforms. In particular, more should be done by the PA to arrest and bring to justice those responsible for the recruiting, training, equipping and launching of suicide bombers and to prevent the honouring and even encouraging of suicide bombers and their masters by Palestinian media. (Paragraph 147)

We agree on the importance of Palestinian reform efforts in the security sector and are actively working with the PA on these; in particular to secure a new and more effective effort from it to stop attacks on Israelis and better to maintain order in Palestinian-controlled areas.

26. We recommend that the Government, with its European partners, apply further pressure on the Palestinian Authority to stop the terrorist attacks. (Paragraph 148)

We judge that while the Palestinian Authority's capacity to act has been gravely weakened by Israeli attacks on its infrastructure and personnel, it can do more to stop terrorist attacks. The UK, nationally and with EU partners, continues to urge the PA to fulfil its RoadMap commitments on security, and intensify its efforts to tackle groups and individuals engaging in terrorist activity.

27. We conclude that the case for building a security fence along the Green Line would be strong and understandable, but to build it within the West Bank is neither justifiable nor acceptable and gives rise to fears that Israel intends to annex this land. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government set out the steps it is taking to dissuade Israel from taking such unilateral measures in the Occupied Territories. (Paragraph 157)

The construction of the security barrier within the Occupied Territories is unlawful. It has further alienated the Palestinian population, so strengthening support for advocates of violence; and has led to the movement of Palestinian families from their homes nearby, contributing both to fears of annexation and to the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Territories. The government has made its views clear to the Israeli government, including during the recent visits to London of the Housing, Defence and Foreign ministers, and the Vice Prime Minister.

28. We conclude that the conditions under which many Palestinians currently live contribute to their radicalisation, and undermine support for moderate Palestinian leaders. We also conclude that Israeli actions within the West Bank are making the Palestinian economy unviable. (Paragraph 158)

We agree.

29. We recommend that the Government continue to urge Israel to help "create a climate within which moderate Palestinian leaders can prevail." We further recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government outline the steps it is taking to do this. (Paragraph 159)

We use our contacts with the Israeli government to urge them to re-route the wall; comply with their RoadMap obligations in relation to settlements; ease restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods; and ensure that the conduct of the IDF is consistent with international law and human rights standards. Israeli compliance with such proposals would strengthen support for the more moderate Palestinian leaders.

30. We are deeply concerned by Israel's maintenance and expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied territories and its construction of a 'security fence' on Palestinian land, and we conclude that these policies constitute a severe impediment to efforts to secure a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and to the creation of a viable Palestinian state. We

recommend that the Government make it absolutely clear in its public statements that Israel's fulfilment of commitments set out in the RoadMap – including the dismantling of all settlement outposts erected since March 2001, and the freezing of settlement activity consistent with the Mitchell Report – must proceed immediately. (Paragraph 161)

We agree, and accept this recommendation. But there is an equal obligation on the PA to comply immediately with its RoadMap obligations also, including and notably its Phase 1 obligations on security.

31. We recommend that the Government, with its European Union partners, apply further pressure to Israel to implement the commitments it has made in the RoadMap. (Paragraph 163)

Both sides need to implement their obligations under the RoadMap and we expect all parties to respond positively and start implementation without delay. We welcome Prime Minister Sharon's reiteration of Israel's commitment to the RoadMap and his subsequent announcement that he will remove settlements in Gaza. We shall continue to press for positive actions on the ground.

32. We conclude that conditions in the occupied West Bank are changing rapidly, and that the continuation of Israel's current settlement policies, and its construction of the 'security fence', will make the eventual establishment of a contiguous and economically viable Palestinian state increasingly difficult, if not impossible. (Paragraph 164)

We agree. This can best be avoided by an early return to a RoadMap-based negotiation towards a comprehensive settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

33. We conclude that if, over the next year to eighteen months, progress towards implementation of the RoadMap is further delayed, the two-state solution which is the current objective of international efforts to resolve the conflict will become increasingly difficult to achieve. (Paragraph 166)

We agree.

34. We conclude that early progress towards a negotiated settlement between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority is a necessary component in the Government's efforts to promote stability and security in the wider Middle East region (Paragraph 167)

We agree. Our efforts to promote the rule of law, and support reformers, in the Middle East region will continue hand in hand with our support for a RoadMap-based peace process.

35. We conclude that the speech made by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on 18 December stating that Israel may "initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians" and that this disengagement plan "will include redeployment of IDF forces along new security lines", coupled with the statement that "Israel will greatly accelerate the construction of the security fence" is a matter of deep concern. We recommend that the Government, in its response to this Report, set out what steps it is taking to dissuade the Israeli government from taking such unilateral action. (Paragraph 175)

We welcome actions by Israel and the Palestinian Authority which are consistent with the RoadMap, including Israeli withdrawals from the Occupied Territories and the closure of settlements there, and Palestinian efforts to enhance security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Israel's planning for unilateral steps of this kind is taking place against the background of its reiterated commitment to the RoadMap. The Israeli government is aware that we, and the international community, oppose unilateral steps which are not consistent with the RoadMap and, in particular, of our opposition to the construction of the security barrier within the Occupied Territories.

36. We conclude that the US is by far the strongest external influence on the parties to the conflict and that the RoadMap can only be restarted by the presence in the region of a very senior US representative willing and able to pressurise both sides into taking the necessary actions to make progress. We fear that forthcoming US elections are likely to diminish US commitment and action. (Paragraph 176)

We agree that the US is the most influential outside party. We are in close touch with the US Administration on how to restart the peace process. The US has played an important and high profile role in the RoadMap process, and its role remains critical. We do not believe that the Presidential election campaign means no US engagement, particularly in light of Israeli plans on disengagement.

37. We conclude that, regardless of its willingness to engage in resolution of the conflict, the European Union's capacity to apply effective pressure to the Israeli government is very limited in comparison to that of the United States. We further conclude that without sustained enhanced and effective external pressure, which at least in the short term appears unlikely, there are no prospects of an early settlement. (Paragraph 178)

The success of a new peace process will depend on both parties' commitment to it. We judge that commitment can be more effectively be created by external support and engagement than by "external pressure".

38. We recommend that the Government do its utmost to promote greater US engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by stressing publicly that resolution of this conflict is an essential component in the wider US-led campaign to defeat Islamist terrorism and to promote reform in the Middle East region. In particular, we recommend that the Government seek to convince the US of the importance of sending a high-level emissary to the region. (Paragraph 181)

We agree that the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is crucial to the defeat of radical Islamist terror and must be pursued alongside promotion of political reform in the Middle East. We remain in the closest touch with the US Administration on both issues, and on efforts to promote a peace settlement.

39. We conclude that the prospects for a diplomatic implementation of the RoadMap are slight. To make the RoadMap more efficacious, we recommend that its ambiguities should be clarified and its monitoring facilities strengthened to include a conflict-resolution mechanism. (Paragraph 183)

The RoadMap is internationally agreed and has been accepted by both parties. It describes a fragile consensus and neither we nor its authors, the Quartet, favour its re-negotiation. However we agree that its implementation needs effective monitoring, not least to build confidence between the parties and that there maybe scope for a conflict resolution element once implementation and monitoring get underway.

- 40. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government state its policy on a Chapter VII UN Security Council Resolution imposing a settlement along the Taba lines. (Paragraph 186)**

We do not rule out the use of any UN Security Council Resolution in appropriate circumstances but negotiation is key. The RoadMap clearly sets out the path to a two-state solution, Israel and Palestine, in the context of a comprehensive regional peace agreement. Our efforts will continue to focus on working with the parties and our international partners on implementation of the RoadMap to this end.

Other Threats to Security in the Middle East Region

- 41. We conclude that through its links with Palestinian terrorist organisations, Iran disrupts prospects for peace between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We further conclude that the Government, with its partners in the European Union, has a number of incentives – such as the Trade and Co-operation Agreement – which it can employ to help encourage Iran to cease its links with terrorist groups. We conclude that the Iranian authorities value these incentives and that their existence could be used to discourage Iranian support for Palestinian terrorist groups. (Paragraph 203)**

The Government remains deeply concerned about Iran's approach towards the fight on terrorism and the Middle East Peace Process. The EU has agreed that relations with Iran should move forward only if Iran takes action to address our political concerns. We continue to believe that progress can best be achieved through a policy of constructive but critical engagement, and we will use the means at our disposal to encourage Iran to adopt a more positive approach.

- 42. We commend the Government's decision to work with France and Germany to help ensure Iran's agreement to the Additional Protocol to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We conclude that this decision helped to ensure that the IAEA can now conduct intrusive inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities. We further conclude that this episode demonstrates the potential of co-ordinated European action to address common security concerns, and that it demonstrates the continued relevance of multilateral arms control mechanisms. (Paragraph 221)**

We welcome Iran's signature of an Additional Protocol to its Safeguards Agreement, and assurances that it will co-operate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency. But there is further to go before the IAEA can resolve to its satisfaction all the outstanding questions about Iran's nuclear activities, and the international community can have confidence that the intentions of Iran's nuclear programme are entirely peaceful. We need to see Iran comply with IAEA Board resolutions and implement its commitments. We will continue to work very closely with France and Germany, and with other partners in the EU and on the IAEA Board, to this end.

- 43. We conclude that although Syria's closure of the offices of terrorist groups in Damascus is a positive step, it continues to support terrorist organisations and has failed to restrain them beyond temporary efforts to limit their activities. (Paragraph 227)**

We have continuing concerns about Syrian support for Palestinian terrorist organisations and judge that Syria can do more to constrain their activities. While office closures are welcome, Syria should more tightly control the activities, including the travel and

contacts with the Occupied Territories, of known Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other leaders.

- 44. We are concerned about the pursuit of WMD by Syria. However, we conclude that pressure alone is unlikely to succeed in gaining Syrian co-operation on WMD, and recommend that the Government pursue dialogue with Damascus in order to address this threat. (Paragraph 232)**

The Government is committed to dialogue with Syria on all our differences, including any WMD ambitions. We support European Commission efforts to negotiate the inclusion in the EU-Syria Association Agreement of language which will commit Syria to take steps towards acceding to the relevant arms control treaties in the area of WMD, and the parties to work together to address the proliferation threat in the region.

- 45. We also recognise Syria's concerns about Israel's nuclear capability and recommend that the Government pursue this issue with the Israeli Government. We conclude that ultimately, a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Arab States will be required to address the issue of WMD and arms proliferation in the region, and we recommend that the Government seek to encourage Syria and Israel to return to the negotiating table. (Paragraph 233)**

The Government is committed to a WMD-free Middle East. While accepting the link between the absence of a comprehensive peace in the region and WMD and arms proliferation issues, we shall continue to pursue both objectives in parallel.

- 46. We conclude that, at this stage, it is better to foster gradual reform and co-operation with Syria than to push for unachievable objectives. Syrian co-operation is important for success in Iraq and the Middle East peace process. Given the failure of pressure alone to gain Syrian co-operation, we recommend that the Government continue to pursue constructive engagement and dialogue as the best way to foster co-operation. In particular, we recommend that the Government work to encourage Israel and Syria to resume peace negotiations, including giving its support to any regional efforts at mediation in the conflict, and generally to improve bilateral relations. We further recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government set out its position on the Golan Heights and the Israeli settlements there. (Paragraph 242)**

We remain committed to constructive engagement and dialogue with Syria. Since the Syrian President's visit to London in December 2002, contacts at ministerial level have continued. We look forward to renewed negotiations between Syria and Israel towards an agreed settlement of all their differences, and will support any credible moves towards these. The government continues to regard the Golan Heights as occupied territory, rejecting their annexation by Israel, and Israeli settlements there as illegal.

- 47. We welcome Libya's decision to relinquish its WMD programmes and we commend the Government for its role in bringing this about. We also commend the Government's policy of engagement with Libya and note that it was essential to creating the environment that facilitated the secret talks that ultimately resulted in Libya's decision to end its pursuit of WMD. We further commend the co-operation between United Kingdom officials and their US counterparts during these secret talks. (Paragraph 249)**

We welcome this conclusion.

48. We conclude that the Libyan announcement sets a precedent for how to deal with ‘rogue states’ and could encourage other countries to improve their co-operation with the West. While we accept what the Foreign Secretary has said about the need for “a partner with whom to negotiate” for diplomacy to reap rewards, we recommend that the Government seriously consider the implications of events in Libya for relations with both Iran and Syria. (Paragraph 250)

We agree. The Libyan example is one which other states with undisclosed WMD programmes and past links with terrorism should study closely. We are looking at the wider applicability of this example ourselves, as the Committee recommends.

49. We further recommend that the Government ensure that it does its utmost to fulfil its “responsibilities” to help Libya fully to enter the international community and derive the benefits of its co-operation, and that it work closely with the IAEA and OPCW to do this. We also recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government inform us of what steps it is taking to monitor closely Libyan compliance and to ensure that it does not lift the restrictions that remain on Libya too quickly. (Paragraph 251)

We agree. We must ensure that Libya delivers on WMD, while drawing Libya into the international community, strengthening UK-Libyan relations and creating benefits for both countries by developing trade, economic, justice and home affairs, education and security co-operation. We and the United States have been assisting Libya to comply with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Responsibility for monitoring Libya’s ongoing compliance lies with inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We will study their reports closely. We will remain in close contact with Libyan Government officials to ensure their continued compliance with their obligations under the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and their commitments under the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation.

50. While Syria and Iran have not taken as many steps forward as they might, for example in taking a more constructive approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we conclude that the United Kingdom’s approach to these two countries has already yielded some positive results. (Paragraph 252)

We welcome this conclusion. However we look to Syria for more decisive action not only against Palestinian terrorist groups, in relation to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, but also to prevent terrorists from crossing from its territory into Iraq. With Iran too, in most areas of concern, there has been less progress than we would have liked. But we agree that the right approach is one of engagement, combining support for reform with a robust dialogue in areas of disagreement.

51. We further conclude that establishing and maintaining Iranian and Syrian co-operation in efforts to fight international terrorism, to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to stabilise Iraq, will greatly increase the likelihood of success in the war against terrorism. We commend the Government’s decision to engage actively with these countries. (Paragraph 253)

We agree that continued critical engagement with Iran and Syria is the way to encourage their good behaviour over the whole range of regional and security issues. Baroness

Symons visited Syria on 9 December 2003 and we expect the Syrian Foreign Minister to visit London in April.

The Continuing Threat from International Terrorist Networks

52. We commend the Government for its swift action in response to the Istanbul attack, and for the setting up of the FCO 24-hour response centre. However, we conclude that security measures at the Istanbul Consulate were clearly insufficient. We welcome the Government's review of the security of all overseas posts, which was announced by the Foreign Secretary on 2 December 2003, as well as the decision to review the FCO's security strategy. We look forward to being informed of the results of the review by the Foreign Secretary. (Paragraph 257)

The security of our staff is paramount and we invest considerable time, effort and resources into protecting them. The security of our staff in Istanbul was kept under continuous review, and was adjusted in the light of the increased threat and in the light of everything we knew at the time we assessed it as sufficient. The Post's Security Committee met frequently and security staff were in close, frequent contact with the local police and security authorities.

Following the bombings at the synagogues in Istanbul the previous weekend, security arrangements were reviewed again. The number of guards was increased and the local police were requested to provide additional protection. Work on upgrading the CCTV system was already underway and security measures were being incorporated into the refurbishment of the main Consulate building, Pera House. However, the reality is that it is very difficult to guard against suicide attacks. We must not forget that the responsibility for the attack, and the deaths and injuries, rests with the terrorists.

The review of the FCO's security strategy is still underway. This review is focussing mainly on the difficult balance between security and operational effectiveness.

53. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government set out its plans for the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee and what bilateral assistance it is giving, for example to Commonwealth countries. (Paragraph 261)

Since the Committee's last report on this subject, there has been considerable discussion in New York of the best way to reform the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee. We welcome this and have been a leading contributor to the debate. With agreement on a Chairman's report to the Council on a way forward, the Council is now negotiating a draft resolution, which would establish a more coherent structure to back up the CTC. We fully endorse this approach.

In brief, our vision is that the CTC Plenary (i.e. the 15 Security Council members) should focus on giving strategic direction to the UN's counter-terrorism efforts, whilst an improved support team headed by an Executive Director should, under the direction of the Plenary, be responsible for the day-to-day work of the team of experts. We would not wish to see the CTC sacrifice the broad support it enjoys, but by making these changes we hope that the CTC Plenary members will have more time to focus on grappling with the difficult strategic issues and the expert team will receive the leadership that a committee cannot give.

The Counter Terrorism Programme of the Foreign Office's Global Opportunity Fund aims to build counter terrorism and security capacity in key states around the world. Developing an effective CT capacity is not just about intelligence agencies, police forces or the military. It is about having a coherent and complimentary range of capabilities in place that can prevent terrorists and their supporters from planning, financing, training for and undertaking terrorist attacks. Our projects are designed to help countries reduce the threat that directly affects our shared interests by increasing their ability to catch and prosecute terrorists, improving protective security, and helping them to make life gradually harder for the terrorists and their support networks, squeezing the space in which they operate.

The support that we and others are providing to countries covers this whole spectrum. From the drafting and implementation of counter terrorism legislation; training law enforcement, intelligence and military units; advice and assistance on protecting aviation and maritime transport and other important potential targets; developing resilience and crisis management systems and ensuring that financial institutions (banks, charities, etc) are protected against abuse. The UK is active in a number of countries, primarily in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, including Kenya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

For example, through the funding of a Commonwealth Secretariat programme, we are delivering a package of assistance to help common law countries in Africa and Asia to develop robust counter terrorism legislation that is human rights compliant. We are providing training to the police, prosecutors and judges to both understand and implement the legislation within the rule of law in order to ensure that cases against suspected terrorists are free and fair, so as to best ensure a solid conviction if a terrorist act has been committed.

54. We conclude that although international co-operation on the war against terrorism has continued, there continue to be problems with regard to international co-operation on the measures against al Qaeda and the Taliban. We recommend that the Government encourage greater international co-operation on the UN mandated measures against al Qaeda and the Taliban. We further recommend that it consider how best to strengthen the UN Security Council resolutions relating to international terrorism. (Paragraph 266)

Security Council Resolutions as they relate to international terrorism provide two things – basic standards that are expected of States, and monitoring regimes. The Government does not see a pressing need to elaborate further standards, given that the Council has already achieved a great deal – SCR 1373 was unprecedented in its scope and SCR 1267 unprecedented in establishing a sanctions regime that was not linked to a geographical area. But the Committee rightly points out that compliance with existing resolutions needs addressing. The Government is working with partners to improve the monitoring regime of the CTC, in relation to SCR 1373.

The Government agrees that there is a need to improve the performance of the international community concerning the AQ and Taleban Sanctions. In this regard, the Government notes the unanimous adoption of SCR 1526 on 31 January 2004. SCR 1526 establishes a new Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team with a strengthened monitoring remit. It specifically calls for all States who have not yet reported on implementation of the measures originally set out in SCR 1267, to do so by 31 March 2004. The Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team will notify the Security Council of any countries that have not submitted reports by the end of March. The Government will work with international partners to support the Team in its work and in discussions within the Council on non-reporting countries.

55. We remain concerned that al Qaeda and other terrorist organisations retain access to significant levels of funds. We commend the Government's efforts to tackle sources of terrorist funding and in particular its projects to tighten charity regulation. We recommend that the Government expand its programme of assistance in this field. We further recommend that the Government, in its response to this Report, provide us with a further update of its action in this area. (Paragraph 270)

The Government intends to continue with its significant counter-terrorism assistance programme, which includes helping other countries with combating the financing of terrorism. The programme is a collaborative effort across several government departments. In the coming financial year (2004–05) assistance with combating the financing of terrorism will include issues relating to legislation, financial services industry regulation, law enforcement, and charity regulation, depending on the relative need in different countries. This assistance will be directed at those countries where the terrorist threat is greatest to UK interests. Assistance will be co-ordinated with other international donors to avoid duplication, including through the G8 Counter-Terrorism Action Group.

The Committee requested an update of the government's efforts in the field of combating the financing of terrorism. The government has established a specific inter-departmental structure to focus its efforts in this area, pulling together policy and activity across a large number of government departments. The government will continue to play an active role in the EU, the UN, the G7/8, the Financial Action Task Force, and bilaterally with other international partners, to ensure that progress on combating the financing of terrorism continues as part of the overall fight against terrorism. The government will also continue to provide technical assistance to other countries as part of this overall effort.

56. We conclude that al Qaeda remains a substantial threat to the United Kingdom and to British citizens and facilities overseas, and that addressing the threat from al Qaeda and associated networks must remain a key priority in the United Kingdom's foreign policy. (Paragraph 276)

The Government agrees that addressing the threat from international terrorism must remain a top foreign policy priority. We welcome the Committee's endorsement of the findings of the FCO strategy launched by the Foreign Secretary on 2 December 2003, which highlights the protection of the UK from the threats posed by terrorism and weapons of mass destruction as the Government's top foreign policy priority.

57. We commend the Government for the success of its Provincial Reconstruction Team in improving security in northern Afghanistan, and in particular in brokering a ceasefire between rival warlords. (Paragraph 281)

The government welcomes the Committee's support of the UK Provincial Reconstruction Team in improving security in northern Afghanistan.

58. We recommend that in its response to this Report the Government set out its plans to improve the security situation in Afghanistan, including through extending the provision of Provincial Reconstruction Teams. (Paragraph 283)

The UK has led a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Mazar-e Sharif (northern Afghanistan) since July 2003. The UK fully supports NATO-led efforts to expand the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) beyond Kabul by deploying further PRTs to the regions under ISAF auspices. The current UK-led PRT is run under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) but may transfer to ISAF as planning develops.

The Secretary of State for Defence has announced that the UK is prepared to lead a second PRT and run a Forward Support Base for all PRTs based in northern Afghanistan. Planning for a second UK-led PRT in the north is under way but no decision has yet been made on where it will be based. The UK is also working hard to encourage other nations to lead or contribute to PRTs. Representatives from the FCO, MoD and DFID have presented a "PRT Roadshow" in Oslo, Stockholm, Helsinki, Berlin, Rome, Ottawa and NATO HQ in Brussels as a means of informing other nations about how PRTs work and how they might contribute. The team has also briefed officials from Poland, Turkey and New Zealand in London. Representatives from 26 nations attended the MoD-hosted PRT contributors' conference in September 2003. This explained the PRT concept to potential contributors and resulted in a number of offers to contribute to the UK PRT.

The UK PRT currently consists of around 100, mainly military, personnel, including a Danish troop contingent and a Lithuanian medical team, but includes representatives from the FCO and DfID, along with civilian representatives from the Afghan government, the US and Romania. The UK has deployed a development officer to the New Zealand-led PRT in Bamian and will be providing similar personnel for another two PRTs. The Mazar PRT continues to monitor the ceasefire it helped broker in October 2003, as well as assisting the UN with limited local disarmament in the region, including the cantonment of heavy weapons. The PRT has also provided support to local police units and we are considering further ways in which it might contribute to developing police capability in the region.

The key to long term security throughout Afghanistan is Security Sector Reform (SSR). The UK is committed to helping the Afghan government provide for its own security and has £18m available for financial year 2004/05, in addition to over £23m spent on SSR over the past two years. We are supporting a number of SSR projects including US-led efforts to establish a multi-ethnic National Army within a civilian-led Ministry of Defence, and German-led reform of the police force. We are also supporting UN assistance to Italian-led reform of the justice sector; the establishment of an Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission; and efforts led jointly by Japan and the UN to demobilise and disarm regional militias.

The UK is also engaged on a £6.7m project over three years to support the Afghan National Security Council (NSC). This project includes office refurbishment, equipment, advice on organisation, provision of trained staff and payment of staff salaries. Temporary offices were handed over to the Afghan authorities in mid December 2002 and the newly refurbished permanent building was handed over in October 2003. The project also includes a £1m program of support for the Counter-Narcotics Directorate within the NSC.

Taking Forward the War Against Terrorism

59. We commend the Government for supporting the development, together with its EU partners, of a Security Strategy. We conclude that the EU Security Strategy will help the Union to work more effectively towards the alleviation of common threats to the security of EU member states and their interests. (Paragraph 295)

We agree that the European Security Strategy (ESS) provides a good basis for enhancing the way the EU deals with a range of external threats, including terrorism. The horrific bombings in Madrid on 11 March underline the importance of doing everything possible to improve protection for our citizens.

How the EU follows up on the ESS will be the real test. Progress has already been made. In the field of counter-terrorism, the adoption of the Security Strategy has provided the impetus to review and update the 2001 action plan. Work is under way to set new goals across the whole range of EU policy. We hope that a new action plan, targeting action more precisely on problem areas, will be agreed by the end of the Irish Presidency. Aviation security and combating the financing of terrorism should remain at the top of the EU's agenda.

60. We would welcome the return of the United Nations to Iraq in 2004, and we recommend that the Government do its utmost to work towards a new Security Council Resolution setting out the UN's role in the period of transition to a new Iraqi government (Paragraph 302)

We will work hard to achieve Security Council unity behind a greater role for the UN in Iraq. This may well result in further UNSCRs.

61. We conclude that the United Nations has an extremely important role to play in the global campaign against terrorism, through provision of assistance through its specialised agencies, through establishing the legitimacy of interventions, and through providing the forum for dialogue between member states over the conduct of the campaign. We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to establish a panel to study global security threats and reform of the international system, and we recommend that the Government study its conclusions carefully when it makes its Report to the Secretary-General. (Paragraph 303)

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion on the importance of the UN's role in the global campaign against terrorism. The Government also welcomes the UN Secretary General's initiative in setting up a High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. This is expected to make recommendations on how the UN can improve its response to threats to international peace and security. We hope that the Panel's work will deal with the full range of global security threats, including international terrorism, and help to build consensus for effective multilateral action to counter these.

The Government has contributed some financial support to the Panel, and has already had a number of exchanges with Panel members. We intend to set out our views on the Panel's work and possible conclusions more fully over the coming months. We are also working with our EU partners on a joint submission to the Panel, as part of implementing the commitment to effective multilateralism in the EU Security Strategy. A first discussion of the EU's input was held in Dublin on 27 February.

The Panel is expected to deliver its conclusions in December 2004 and the Government will study its findings closely.

62. Effective peace keeping and peace enforcement are currently essential to the successful pursuit of the war against terrorism. We recommend that the Government continue to work with its partners in NATO towards building the Alliance's capabilities in this area. (Paragraph 308)

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation. The Government continues to work closely with NATO Allies to develop Armed Forces that are better able to deploy on peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. This capability transformation will be a key focus of the NATO Heads of State and Government Summit when they meet in Istanbul in June 2004. The Government is working with other international partners through the NATO-Russia Council, and NATO's Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council to encourage similar capability development. The Government is also at the forefront of work to help NATO and the EU work better together and alongside each other.

63. We commend the Government's decision to participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative, and we are pleased that the initiative "builds on efforts by the international community to prevent proliferation of such items, including existing treaties and regimes". (Paragraph 313)

The Government thanks the Committee for its acknowledgement of the value and importance of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and may welcome an up-date on progress. Some 60 countries have now indicated their support for PSI and their intention to apply its principles. The Government however believes that there is more that can be done to extend its possibilities:

The Government is working in the International Maritime Organisation to secure amendment to the Suppression of Unlawful Acts at Sea Convention, which will make it an internationally recognised offence to transport WMD, their delivery systems and related materials on commercial vessels. It is already an offence under the Chicago Convention of the International Civil Aviation Organisation to transport WMD on civil aircraft.

Agreements have been concluded in the past providing for the boarding of vessels that may be carrying drugs. We now plan to negotiate similar agreements with the main commercial flag states allowing for the boarding of vessels which may be carrying cargoes which could be used in WMD programmes. Shipping of the 10 largest commercial flag states covers some 70 per cent of maritime trade. So with a relatively small number of such agreements, a large proportion of the world's shipping would be covered. The options available to the proliferator and rogue supplier would be reduced.

We will also consider, with our partners, whether new penalties should be introduced to deter air or shipping lines from seeking to transport such cargoes. In this context the Government supports President Bush's recent call to use Interpol and all other means to help law enforcement agencies work against the traffickers. Within the EU, we see a case for Customs experts considering how to tighten regulations and practices, and how better to exchange information in order to prevent the trafficking of WMD. In the UK, we have begun work on the screening of traffic for the illicit movement of radioactive materials. This will eventually cover all air, sea and Channel Tunnel traffic – passengers, parcels, vehicles, freight and containers.

64. We recommend that in its response to this report the Government set out the steps it is currently taking to help prevent proliferation of WMD, together with their components and technologies, from the stockpile of the former Soviet Union, from North Korea and from other WMD proliferating states and groups. (Paragraph 314)

The Government takes the issue of the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) very seriously. Together with the spread of international terrorism, it represents the most serious threat to international security of the 21st century. The international non-proliferation treaty regimes have limited the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons successfully for over thirty years. But the treaties are not yet universal; and experience with Iraq and North Korea has demonstrated that more is needed to prevent determined proliferators from cheating on their international obligations.

There is a range of tools available to counter proliferation. The multilateral treaty regimes raise the political cost of pursuing WMD. When underpinned by effective inspection regimes, such as those of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), they also raise the economic cost. National and multilateral export controls on sensitive materials, technology and expertise also have a vital role: the UK is a leading and active member of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group, the Australia Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime.

Efforts to eliminate the proliferation risk posed by stocks of WMD-sensitive materials (often referred to as "co-operative threat reduction") are also part of the counter-proliferation toolbox. It is in this context, that the Government announced in 2002 a commitment of \$750 million over the next ten years to the G8 Global Partnership. Projects planned and under way in Russia concentrate on priority areas such as chemical weapons destruction, safe disposition of weapons-usable plutonium, dismantlement of submarines and secure storage of nuclear fuel which poses both an environmental and proliferation risk in North-West Russia, and retraining and employment for former Soviet nuclear scientists.

Diplomatic and economic pressure can be effective against some countries of proliferation concern: most often when it can be brought to bear multilaterally rather than bilaterally. Where possible, interception of illegal shipments of WMD-sensitive items can hinder covert proliferation programmes. All elements of the counter-proliferation toolbox are necessary; none is sufficient in itself. The UK believes it would be foolish to rule out any one. On the contrary, it is working to reinforce them all and strengthen its ability to deploy them to maximum effect. That does not mean that all are appropriate to every case. All proliferators pose a challenge to the international community, but our response must be tailored to the circumstances of each one. The Government's objective is always the same – elimination of WMD. But in pursuing that aim it deploys the measures that it judges will be most effective in each case.

It is also important to recognise that states do not, in general, pursue nuclear, chemical or biological weapons on a whim. They may be prompted by perceptions about security concerns, albeit wholly misconceived. In addition to raising the costs of such programmes, it is also possible to reduce the perceived benefits. In that respect, the UK's actions to revitalise the Middle East Peace Process, to encourage India and Pakistan to resolve their differences, to bring lasting stability to the Korean Peninsula and to eliminate the threat posed by Iraq to its neighbours also further non-proliferation objectives.

This is not a strategy that the UK can pursue alone. Proliferation poses a global challenge and requires a collective international response. In developing and applying the counter-proliferation toolbox, the Government is working with partners and allies bilaterally, in the EU, the G8, NATO, and through the United Nations Security Council.

The most recent report on the progress of our policy in this area was given in a statement by the Foreign Secretary to the House of Common on 25 February. A copy of this Statement is attached at Annex A.

65. We commend the Government for its efforts to promote democratic reform and to provide technical assistance in the Arab world. We recommend that, in its response to this Report, the Government provide us with updated progress reports in this crucial area. (Paragraph 319)

The government would be happy to brief the Committee and will be in touch with the Clerk about a suitable time. A copy of the Foreign Secretary's speech on Arab reform delivered at The Foreign Policy Centre on 1 March 2004 is at annex B. This speech was generally well received in the Arab world.

66. We remain concerned at the Government's lack of progress in ensuring the fair trial of British citizens currently detained at Guantanamo Bay. We note that the current situation of uncertainty surrounding the fate of the United Kingdom detainees is unsatisfactory. We recommend that the Government continue to press the US towards trial of all the detainees in accordance with international law. (Paragraph 323)

As the Foreign Secretary foreshadowed on 19 February and in the House on 24 February, 5 of the 9 British detainees were released and returned to the UK on 9 March as a result of discussions between the British and US Governments. The detainees were questioned by the British police and subsequently released without charge.

Discussions between the British and US Governments on the remaining 4 British detainees in Guantanamo Bay continue. The UK's position remains that they should either be tried in accordance with international standards or returned to the UK. The Government will continue to work to resolve their position.

Conclusion

67. We conclude that the threats facing the United Kingdom, both at home and overseas, in the war against terrorism have not diminished. We are encouraged, though, that the Government is working with partners in the European Union, the United Nations and NATO to reassess the respective roles of these multilateral institutions in tackling new security threats; and we commend the Government for its role in fostering this trend. (Paragraph 329)

We are grateful for the Committee's endorsement. In this context it is worth noting that (since the Committee wrote its report) the EU has begun to revise its Counter-Terrorism Action Plan, originally agreed on 21 September 2001. The European Security Strategy has given impetus to this work, but the revision will be far broader and look to set new goals for the EU across all strands of its activity. We hope that this revision will be concluded before the end of the Irish Presidency.

68. Those who predicted the destabilisation of moderate regimes and the strengthening of extremist regimes in the Middle East following the invasion of Iraq have not been proved correct. There are now enhanced prospects for stability and democratic reforms in Iraq's neighbours, as well as a more favourable context for peace between Iraq and her neighbours than there has been for many decades. (Paragraph 330)

We agree.

FOREIGN SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ON COUNTER-PROLIFERATION: 25 FEBRUARY 2004

Over the past year, there have been some significant breakthroughs in countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The United Kingdom has worked effectively with the United States in the case of Libya's programmes and in countering AQ Khan's network. We have played a leading role, with France and Germany, on the issue of Iran's nuclear programme. We have enforced UN Security Council Resolutions on Iraq. We have been active on the Proliferation Security Initiative designed to interdict the passage of cargoes intended for use in WMD programmes. We support the Six Party talks in North Korea. All of this demonstrates effective multilateralism in action.

I would like to set out for the House other steps we are taking and further proposals we will be discussing with our partners to deter, check and roll back WMD programmes in countries of concern, and to prevent WMD equipment and expertise falling into the hands of terrorists.

Proliferation Security Initiative

The Proliferation Security Initiative has developed well since it was launched in May 2003. Some 60 countries have indicated their support for it and their intention to apply its principles. There is more that we can do to extend its possibilities:

- We are working in the International Maritime Organisation to secure amendment to the Suppression of Unlawful Acts at Sea Convention, which will make it an internationally recognised offence to transport WMD, their delivery systems and related materials on commercial vessels. It is already an offence under the Chicago Convention of the International Civil Aviation Organisation to transport WMD on civil aircraft.
- Agreements have been concluded in the past providing for the boarding of vessels which may be carrying drugs. We now plan to negotiate similar agreements with the main commercial flag states allowing for the boarding of vessels which may be carrying cargoes which could be used in WMD programmes. Shipping of the 10 largest commercial flag states covers some 70 per cent of maritime trade. So with a relatively small number of such agreements, a large proportion of the world's shipping would be covered. The options available to the proliferator and rogue supplier would be reduced.
- We will consider with our partners whether new penalties should be introduced to deter air or shipping lines from seeking to transport such cargoes. Might the vessels and planes of any companies found to have engaged in such transport be denied landing or port rights around the world? Should we consider an international register of companies and individuals convicted of proliferation offences?
- We support President Bush's call to use Interpol and all other means to help law enforcement agencies work against the traffickers.
- Within the EU, we see a case for Customs experts considering how to tighten regulations and practices, and how better to exchange information in order to prevent the trafficking of WMD.
- In the UK, we have begun work on the screening of traffic for the illicit movement of radioactive materials. This will eventually cover all air, sea and Channel Tunnel traffic – passengers, parcels, vehicles, freight and containers.

Global Partnership

Eighteen months ago, the Kananaskis G8 Summit established a Global Partnership against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction. Under this initiative G8 leaders decided to support specific cooperation projects, initially in Russia, to assist the destruction of chemical weapons, the dismantlement of decommissioned nuclear submarines, the disposition of fissile materials and the employment of former weapons scientists. The United Kingdom announced that it would make up to USD750 million available over 10 years for this work. The first report of work undertaken by the UK was published in December.

Since Kananaskis, we have had the Iraq conflict and Libya's decision to dismantle its WMD programmes. Work is under way to develop a programme for the employment of former weapons scientists in Iraq. The UK has offered to help with a similar programme in Libya. We would like to see the Global Partnership expanded so that it is fully global in its geographical extent, and for the number of donor states to be expanded so that the target of \$20 billion can become a floor rather than a ceiling.

The United Nations and Counter Proliferation

An anomaly in the field of counter proliferation has been the lack of discussion since 1992 of proliferation in an overall sense by the UN Security Council. Following a proposal by President Bush last September, work is now under way on a resolution which will call on states to adopt tough national legislation to criminalise the possession, manufacture or trafficking of WMD, in particular for terrorist purposes; to develop effective export controls where these do not exist; and to maintain effective physical protection of sensitive materials. I hope the Council will pass this soon.

We believe the Council should also consider establishing an appropriate follow-up mechanism, perhaps a Counter Proliferation Committee, just as the Council's Counter Terrorism Committee was established in 2001.

The European Union

The European Security Strategy, adopted by the European Council in December, highlights the importance of work against WMD. The month before its adoption, the EU agreed that agreements with other countries should include a non-proliferation clause. We are working with our EU partners and the Commission to see this introduced as new agreements arise or existing ones are renewed.

Non Proliferation Treaty and International Atomic Energy Agency

The Non Proliferation Treaty obliges states party to enter into safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency to verify that nuclear activities are and remain legitimate. Article IV of the Treaty confirms states' rights to develop and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

But states which fail to comply with their safeguards obligations inevitably lose the confidence of the international community. The bargain which is at the heart of the Treaty is then called into question. We should consider whether such states should not forfeit the right to develop the nuclear fuel cycle, particularly the enrichment and reprocessing capabilities which are of such proliferation sensitivity. That does not mean that they would be deprived of the possibility of constructing and running civil nuclear power stations. These could still operate with fuel supplied by countries honouring their safeguards obligations. The fuel would be subject to Agency monitoring while in the receiving country, and would be returned to the country of supply when spent. This would prevent a seemingly civil programme masking a weapons programme.

Experience in recent years has shown the need for more wide-ranging Agency inspections of national nuclear industries. The Agency's Additional Protocol provides the basis for carrying out such inspections. It is important that all members of the international community adopt one. Suppliers of nuclear technology should increasingly see this as a key commitment when they judge export licence applications.

The Agency has done well to meet a growing verification workload within the constraints of its budget. But we should not ask it forever to do more within the same resources. We may need seriously to consider further strengthening of its Safeguards Division.

Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention

The Government set out in a Green Paper in April 2002 ideas on how to verify compliance with the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention. We continue to believe that we need a mechanism, possibly under the authority of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for investigating instances of alleged use and suspect biological weapons facilities. We will be putting forward proposals to follow this up at the next meeting of states party of the Convention in Geneva in July.

Conclusion

Countering proliferation remains as important today as it ever was. The part our intelligence services play in it is vital. We and they can be proud of what we have achieved over the past year. But we cannot let up. There is much work still to do. The proposals I have outlined are designed to assist that.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR REFORM IN THE ARAB WORLD – SPEECH BY JACK STRAW, 1 MARCH 2004

It's a great honour for me to open this first conference of the Civility Programme.

I want to talk today about why modernisation and reform in the Arab world matters to Britain and to the whole international community. I do so with some humility. It is not for me or for any Foreign Minister from outside the region to lay down prescriptions. That would neither be right, nor productive, nor would it show respect. I am therefore fully conscious of the sensitivities of this issue. But we are bound to take an interest in the matter, given that Europe and the Arab world are neighbours, and our interests in many areas, such as our economies and our security, are international and inter-dependent.

So I want today to try to correct some of the misperceptions that surround this complex subject; and to stress the importance of our relations with the Arab World, and of the need to build a partnership to address this shared agenda, working with the processes of change already underway. By partnership I mean one across government, among the international community, and, most important of all, partnership with Arab governments and peoples themselves.

The world is changing more quickly than at any time in its history. As Arab leaders themselves have recognised, the challenge, in the Arab world as elsewhere, is to manage change in a way which preserves the best in society, gives ordinary people ever-greater freedom and choice while protecting them from violence and injustice.

It is the people of the Arab world who are best placed to understand the challenges they face, and to decide how best to deal with them. The ideas must come from our Arab friends. We in Europe or the West cannot and must not dictate to them; but we can, and will, work with them to support and nurture reform.

The Arab World now matters more than ever

So we in Britain, and in Europe, want the Arab world to be stable and prosperous. As many in the region recognise, if it falls behind the global trend towards greater freedoms and development its stability and prosperity will be under threat. The challenges differ from country to country across the region – but there are worrying common threads. Regional economic growth is failing to keep pace with a growing population. In some countries, 60 per cent of the population is under 18 years of age. Youth unemployment averages over 50 per cent: according to the World Bank, the region needs to create 100 million jobs over the next 20 years to provide for this burgeoning workforce.

The last decades have seen the spread of representative and accountable government in many parts of the world, but less so in the Middle East. In some Arab countries, women are prevented from realising their potential in society – which means that fully half of the population is unable to play its part in economic growth and social development. Despite impressive gains over the last decades, literacy rates in some countries are now falling, and fast-growing populations are straining public services.

Many in the region realise the extent of these challenges and are working for reform so that they can be addressed more effectively. Many governments have already taken important steps on economic, social and political reform, and others are following. And as we heard in the introduction, it was Arab intellectuals who set out the challenges facing the region in the Arab Human Development Report of 2002, and the follow-up report published last year. The Declaration issued by the Sana'a Conference on 12 January was a further important contribution to the debate, calling among other things for greater empowerment for women, a strengthening of democracy and pluralism, the effective application of the rule of law and greater efforts to improve education.

Representative Government

I welcome all of that. But as many in the region recognise, much more needs to be done – and with a sense of urgency. Governments and peoples are talking about the need for more open, participative and representative government supported by a stronger civil society; for action to make the rule of law effective and transparent; for greater respect for human rights; for economic reform to create jobs and stimulate growth; for improved standards of education, in order to prepare young people for life and work in the twenty-first century; and for imaginative changes to enable women really to fulfil their potential in society.

No-one imagines this will be either quick or simple. As I said at the outset of this speech, we in Europe should always show some humility about the pace of change; after all, representative government is a very recent phenomenon in 11 of the 25 EU states, and the whole of our continent suffered the twin traumas of fascism and communism in the last century. It is not for us to preach.

It is for the Arab world itself to decide how best it can pursue a process of reform, development and modernisation. There is no template which fits each of the different countries in the region. The task for us in Britain and in the international community is to help to support it, drawing on our own experience of change – because we too have a vital interest in its success.

We need to recognise that this is a complex and sensitive subject. The pace of change is going to vary between different countries and regions, as it has in the EU. Change may be necessary, but it is never easy, and it can be seen as a threat to deeply-held beliefs and traditions. Moreover, history has left some in the Arab world with a perhaps understandable distrust of Western motives.

All that means that we must start by correcting some of the misperceptions and myths which have arisen, both in the Arab world and elsewhere, around this subject. Of course these misperceptions are by no means universal – but they do need correcting, so as not to become obstacles on the path to reform.

Change is possible

The first myth is that Islam is in its very nature incompatible with change. I reject that notion entirely. It seems to me that resistance to change comes not from Islam itself, but from those who claim religious justification for clinging to outmoded traditions. Christian societies in the West had to evolve in order to meet the challenges and problems that arose in a changing world. The moderate Islamic community has shown the same capacity to let society evolve. By contrast, extremism in any religion is not only a block on necessary change; it also feeds off those who are marginalised in society, to breed intolerance and resentment which in its turn can fuel violence. Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Morocco have suffered, at least as much as some European countries, at the hands of terrorists who pervert a peaceful religion to spread destruction and hate.

We all have a shared interest in defeating these extremists; which means we also have a shared interest in building the kind of pluralist, stable and tolerant societies which are the best bulwarks against extremism and violence. There are deeply-rooted traditions of consultation and consensus within Islam that make it far from incompatible with progressive change towards more open and participative government.

If I can be allowed one historical suggestion, the concept of Shura – or consultation – was established far earlier than in the Christian world.

Indeed there is nothing in Arab culture which makes change impossible – the region has in some senses changed beyond recognition over the last decades. Only 907 boys attended school in Oman in 1970; today about 600,000 boys and girls do so. Dubai had little or no modern infrastructure before the 1970s; today it is a thriving, ultra-modern transport and trade hub. Egypt has transformed itself from a state-controlled to a largely free-enterprise economy. And free speech and a free media have operated for many years in parts of the Arab world. (One of the great things that has happened in Iraq is that instead of state-controlled media there is now a burgeoning independent press which is contributing to change and political debate.)

Arab societies have adjusted to change, and will continue to do so.

Promoting values within traditional cultures

But even those who accept that change is right and inevitable sometimes argue that it can come only at the expense of religious and traditional values – that reform will necessarily breed individualism and the degradation of a traditional and devout way of life.

Again, the evidence shows this to be another misperception. Countries all around the world have managed to evolve towards pluralist and representative government without rejecting religion. Let me come back to the example of Europe. There is hardly a country in Europe without a Christian Democratic Party. A number of European countries accord a formal status within their constitutional arrangements to the church – as is the case within the UK for the Church of England and the Church of Scotland.

In the United States, where separation of church and state is a constitutional principle, large percentages of the population attend church regularly and cite religion as a central part of their daily lives. Pluralism and tolerance allow religion to flourish, as they have done for the over 2 million Muslims who practise their religion in Britain today. My own constituency has 25 mosques in it and I live opposite a madrasah. Indeed I am particularly proud of the fact that the Foreign Office every year sends a delegation to the Holy Places to offer support, consular help and medical treatment to the over 20,000 British Muslims performing Hajj. It is one example of the close partnership we have with British Muslim communities.

Promoting the values we believe in – good governance, human rights, tolerance and the rule of law – is not an attempt to impose ‘Western’ or ‘Christian’ values on Arab countries at the expense of their traditional culture. The values set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are just that – universal, and drawn from the traditions and values of countries around the world. They are values for which people around the world strive; and which are compatible with every single faith in the world. We want to see them fully realised everywhere.

Change does not have to come at the expense of the unique traditional culture which those in the region prize. Japan is no less Japanese today for having embraced democracy after the second world war. Indeed adapting to a changing world environment is the best route to ensuring that the Arab world's unique culture and identity can continue to prosper, and exert a greater influence for the good on us in the West. Without change, the build-up of political disillusion and economic stagnation can only threaten what Arabs hold so dear.

In recent years several Arab countries have struggled successfully with challenges to their immediate stability. I suggest that the new challenge is that of longer-term change. Change is in any case inevitable and therefore the choice is one between managed and unmanaged change.

There are risks involved in any reform. But the risks of doing nothing are far greater. Reform will not come overnight – it will take place over the period of a generation, and it must proceed at a pace which societies can bear. Like all change, it will not be easy. We in the West need to support our Arab friends in every way we can as they lead the process of change in their countries.

We need to work in partnership to address this shared agenda. Indeed that is for me the key to this whole issue: partnerships across government and within the international community; and, most important, partnerships with Arab governments and institutions themselves.

A role for Britain and the International Community

Britain can play an important role. Our imperial past has left some understandable sensitivities in parts of the Arab world. But our history has also given us a network of friendships across North Africa and the Middle East, and an understanding of the region. We can offer our expertise in adapting to a changing world, for example on educational standards, legal reform, the participation of women, market regulation or youth policy.

But whatever we do in Britain, we need international partnerships to achieve our aims.

For Britain, working through the EU will be crucial. The European Security Strategy endorsed last December makes the Middle East a priority – and rightly so. The EU is already strongly engaged. The so-called 'MEDA' programme of aid totals around 700 million Euros per year; the Barcelona Process and our partnership with the GCC give us frameworks for closer partnership; and bilateral Association Agreements link us even more closely to individual countries in the region. We now need to use these instruments more coherently and effectively to promote our shared goals – for example by focusing MEDA funds on our strategic objectives, and deepening the relationship with the Gulf states through the EU-GCC dialogue. The new European Neighbourhood Policy should also give us new opportunities to build partnerships for reform in the region. We need to work first of all with those countries which have shown a clear wish to reform; and we need to make sure the partnerships include conditions by which both sides are prepared to abide.

The United States will also have a crucial role. We in Europe should make clear that we share America's recognition of the need for reform, but that we need to work closely together and with the Arab world to ensure we get our approach right. The G8 also can also play an important part. For example we have put forward a suggestion for the G8 to work with business and with Arab governments to identify and reduce barriers to trade

and investment, and to deepen local financial markets. The UN too has much to offer, and UN bodies have the expertise, resources and legitimacy which are necessary for success. NATO should also be able to offer help in some areas, for example closer cooperation in the fight against terrorism, proliferation and smuggling.

So the international community has the will and the ability to help those in the region to manage a process of change. But we must match our common engagement in support of reform with renewed international efforts to make progress in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both sides have suffered far too much, and the Palestinians are still without the state which is their right. We continue to urge both sides to uphold international law and human rights. Despite the difficulties of the situation, and the mistrust and hatred which it can breed on both sides, I also want to encourage greater understanding and mutual respect between Islam and Judaism. One of the fascinating things for me as a Christian, brought up with the Old and New Testaments, is when I attend Islamic ceremonies and listen to the recitation of the Koran. I am struck not by the differences in the messages of our respective holy prophets but by the similarities.

We cannot let the violence in Israel and Palestine be a block on the process of change which the region needs. But equally, we have to recognise, quite aside from its terrible human cost, that the continuing conflict makes change only more difficult than it already is, and clouds the whole relationship between the Islamic world and the West.

As long as the current stalemate continues, the situation in Palestine will be cited by many to argue that a region still in conflict needs stability, not reform. Getting Israelis and Palestinians to re-engage on the RoadMap is vital, not just for their own sake, but for the process of change in the whole region. A new Palestinian state could be a leading example of reform in the Arab world. Even under uniquely difficult circumstances, Palestinians have shown in the past a genuine thirst for free institutions and education.

Both on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on reform in the region, our international partnerships will play an important role. But I want to emphasise again that our most important partnerships for reform must be with Arab peoples and governments themselves.

To take the example of the Foreign Office's own programme for engaging with the Islamic World, we have sought to make central in the development of our Global Opportunities Fund, the principle of partnerships with Arab societies and institutions. So for example we are working with Saudi Chambers of Commerce to organise seminars on accession to the World Trade Organisation. In Egypt we are backing a programme for legal training in human rights and civil liberties cases: this is particularly timely as Egypt has just established its own high-level Human Rights Council. In Yemen, we are funding a management and leadership training course for businesswomen.

These are just a very few examples of projects we are supporting – but they demonstrate how we are working in partnership with local organisations, responding to the demands of local people.

Conclusion

As many of these projects show, there is now a recognition across the region, and around the world, of the need for reform in the Arab world to meet the daunting challenges it faces.

Arab governments now have a great opportunity to take the lead by setting out a vision for long-term change, and mobilising their people behind it.

It is not for me, or anyone in the West to tell the Arab world exactly how that vision should look. But the international community can do a great deal to support Arabs in the necessary process of change.

We need now to strengthen our shared commitment to partnerships for reform with the Arab world, based on strong foundations of friendship, understanding and mutual interest. Reform will be difficult; and it will take time. So we must not only engage now: we must also, over the coming years, stand by that commitment and further strengthen our shared engagement.



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