



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 26 - 30 March 2018

Welcome to my *This Week in Parliament*, my weekly newsletter on events and developments in Parliament. **Your feedback is always welcome!**

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This week has been very much focused on Foreign Affairs. The solidarity shown by our allies and partners around the globe was a much welcome development in the on going tensions with Russia over the attack in Salisbury. In times such as this, unity is important to show that we will not be bullied and cajoled against our will. These actions had broad cross party support in the House.

With 2018 being the 100 Anniversary of the RAF it was a pleasure to welcome Air Officer Wales and the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff into Parliament to give a briefing to Welsh MPs on what is happening in Wales to celebrate and how they can get involved.

Celebrations are happening throughout the year and I would urge anyone who can to play that part in something in their local community to show their support for the RAF.

Monday

The week began with [questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions followed by an [Urgent Question](#) on the UK Passport Contract.

European Council

The Prime Minister then came to the [Dispatch Box](#) to make a Statement on the recent European Council meeting. Members recognised the unity and solidarity shown by our European allies in expelling Russian Diplomats, but questioned the Prime Minister on how this co-operation can be continued after Brexit.



***Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab):** The Prime Minister's welcome remarks about European co-operation on Russia show the continued importance of co-operation with the EU after Brexit. She has rightly proposed a security treaty on extradition, Europol and data sharing to be in place by the end of the transition period. But she will also know that a new treaty could take 18 months for other countries to ratify, could yet be referred to the European Court of Justice and will have to deal with some tricky legal and constitutional issues—for example, on extradition, which Norway has taken over a decade to try to resolve. So why is there no fallback clause in the withdrawal agreement, why has the Prime Minister set a hard deadline of December 2020, and what will she do if the security treaty is not in place in time?*

***The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** We are absolutely ready to start negotiations with the European Union on the security partnership and treaty for the future. It is in both sides' interests to have that treaty in place. So far, that has been the very clear message from my European partners. I think that they will have every intention, as we do, of ensuring that those security arrangements are in place when we end the implementation period.*

This statement was followed by an application for an emergency [debate](#) on Electoral Law following the revelations emerging surrounding companies such as Cambridge Analytica and allegations about the EU Referendum.

National Security and Russia

Following the series of revelations and attacks on UK soil emanating from the Russian state, a [debate](#) was held on the threat of Russia to this Country and what could and should be done. I used the opportunity to highlight the threat of Russian Information Warfare to the House.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** I spent last weekend at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly gathering for the spring session in Vilnius. There was a statement from the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon). We then discussed the attack that had taken place in the UK. I take great pleasure in telling Members that, from across political parties and across the nations of the Parliamentary Assembly, there was complete unanimity in condemning the attack and in recognising the source of the attack as coming from Putin's Russia. The solidarity of the NATO alliance was wonderful to see.*

This is not the first chemical weapons attack in the UK. We know of at least one other, and, yet, here we are again, deliberating on how we will look at our defence and security in the light of such attacks from Russia. We must understand that these attacks are part of an ongoing hybrid warfare—not peace, but not war. They are a challenge to NATO states, and a threatening message to those within the Russian dissident community that their lives are at risk if they oppose the Putin Government.



This is Russian hybrid warfare in action. The aim is to sow insecurity, distrust and disinformation, to influence, to confuse, and to demoralise. According to Russian defence doctrine, this practice is called IPb—information confrontation. Its aim is to provide both information and psychological effects, neutralising political opposition and diffusing recognition of Russia's interference in business, banking and politics. Typically, the information contains a mixture of true and false information. The majority of the information is true. That builds a trust in all of the message, which means a vulnerability to the lies and the influence messages being sent out. The messages often fit with the pre-existing world view of the intended audience, so they are easier to accept. We know that this is happening, and I cannot say how much I disagree with the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) in his belief that we are immune to such attacks; clearly, we are not.

Across the alliance, we have seen a growth of cyber-enabled psychological operations, compromising networks gathering intelligence information that can be used to embarrass, discredit or falsify information that is leaked to the media. German troops serving in Lithuania have had phone calls, telling them that their wives are having affairs. Those calls are an attempt to destabilise those troops defending Lithuania.

NATO parliamentarians have received phone calls from apparent friends asking them for their views and opinions on political matters. The voice sounds just like their colleague, but, in fact, it is someone impersonating their colleague. The conversation is then relayed on Russian media.

Since 2010, Russia has been building what it terms "information confrontation"—a holistic concept ensuring information superiority both during peace and war. It consists of hacktivists and CyberBerkut—false persona carrying out denial-of-service attacks against NATO, Ukrainian, German, US and Estonian sites, among others. These people leak

documents to demoralise and embarrass. Trolls are online commentators who seek to change the narrative of a story to turn it in Russia's favour. The Russian Internet Research Agency blogs and tweets on behalf of the Kremlin. Bots are automated pushers of content on social media. They drown out unwanted content or push a specific message, sometimes overwhelming the information space, drowning out real information and facts.

Interestingly, Russia does not believe in a free internet for its own subjects. It has laws curbing domestic media and increasing control of technology and content; it bans websites; monitors online activity and limits news media ownership. During a Defence Committee visit to Russia, we took evidence about the intimidation and murder of journalists and the constant harassment and intimidation of political figures.

We must wake up. The west is being attacked. Systematic information warfare is being waged against us. We should not see the attack in Salisbury as simply a chemical attack; it is part of a concerted attack. I urge the Government to establish an independent Russia commission to examine the role that Russia is playing in our social media and in our financial, business, political and legal spheres. We need to educate our public, as the Lithuanians have done, in how to recognise these cyber-enabled psychological operations.

The public needs to know that there is a campaign to destroy and disrupt NATO command, control, communications and intelligence capabilities. This is all very real to the 800 British soldiers heading up the forces in the enhanced forward presence in Estonia. They are there to protect Estonia and to enhance Euro-Atlantic security. The men and women of the Royal Welsh are providing the alliance's combat-capable infantry force. Estonia is now Britain's eastern border, so an attack on the Baltic states is an attack on Britain. We must recognise that and understand that our forces are now our frontline.

Distrust, disinformation and disregard sum up the Russian approach towards the latest, and arguably most serious, situation we are witnessing towards our country and our allies. Our allies and our people require us to stay strong and to acknowledge the threats that are being sent in our direction.

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Cable Standards: Fire Safety.

Tuesday

Questions to the Secretary Of State For Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

The Foreign Secretary Stepped up to the Dispatch Box to answer [Questions](#) from Members to begin the day's session. Questions ranged from the Illegal Wildlife trade, Iran and Russia. The line of questioning almost inevitably fell back on Syria once again though.



[Mike Kane \(Wythenshawe and Sale East\) \(Lab\)](#): Christian Aid is saying that there are now 98,000 internally displaced people in Afrin. What assessment has the Minister made of our relationship with Turkey on this matter?

[The Minister for the Middle East \(Alistair Burt\)](#): As I indicated, the conversations I had in Ankara last week covered humanitarian assistance and the need to be able to get in to provide that, although the situation remains one of some risk. Afrin has a number of improvised explosive devices and booby traps, which has made progress and humanitarian access difficult. I made very clear the concerns about both humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians in any ongoing incursion in the area. We stress the need for a

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de-escalation as quickly as possible.

The Foreign Secretary also drew the ire of Mr Speaker after a disrespectful address to the Shadow Foreign Secretary.

***The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):** I passionately agree. [Interruption.] “Say no”, say Labour Front Benches. That is their attitude. Is not that extraordinary? “Say no”, says the noble and learned Lady, the Baroness, whatever it is—I cannot remember what it is. [Interruption.] Nugee. What an extraordinary thing. The Commonwealth is an institution that encompasses 2.4 billion people and some of the fastest growing economies in the world. We have an unrivalled opportunity to embrace them here in London, and we are going to do it.*

***Mr Speaker:** Order. I do not want to be unkind or discourteous to the Foreign Secretary, but I say on advice, as the Clerks swivel round to me, two things. First, we do not name-call in this Chamber. Secondly—I am dealing with the matter, and the right hon. Gentleman will listen and benefit from listening—we do not address people by the titles of their spouses. The shadow Foreign Secretary has a name, and it is not Lady something. We know what her name is. It is inappropriate and frankly sexist to speak in those terms, and I am not having it in this Chamber. That is the end of the matter. No matter how senior a Member, that parlance is not legitimate. It will not be allowed, and it will be called out. I require no chuntering from a sedentary position from any occupant of the Treasury Bench. I have said what the position is, and believe me, that is the end of the matter. I hope I have made the position extremely clear to people who are not well informed about such matters.*



Questions were followed by a flurry of Statements. The [first](#) of these was a Rail announcement, immediately after the Government made [another](#) on Northamptonshire County Council. Finally, another [Statement](#) was made on GKN: Proposed Takeover by Melrose.

The House then Read for the first time a [Bill](#) on offences for discarded needles.

EU Referendum: Electoral Law

Follow the revelations and allegations coming to light in the past few days surrounding the EU Referendum, an emergency [debate](#) was held to establish what went wrong and what the House could do to ensure our Democracy was not manipulated in the future. The chief concern among Members, whether they voted leave or remain, was that the Law governing elections may have been broken.. I took the opportunity to pose the question of whether the Electoral Commission had the power to do its job.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** In yesterday’s Russia debate, I called on the Government to pull together a Russia commission so that we can have a root and branch examination of where Russia has interfered not only in our elections, but in our economic, legal and accounting systems. Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem we currently have is that the Electoral Commission and the Information Commissioner lack the powers and the numbers of staff required to carry out the sort of inquiry we need to the depth that we need?*

***Geraint Davies:** I certainly agree with my hon. Friend’s last point. The Electoral Commission and the Information Commissioner are going to have a great deal of difficulty evaluating Cambridge Analytica’s role and the dirty money involved. Russia is a much bigger question. There are questions around whether the targeted bombing of innocent civilians in Syria in the run-up to Brexit, in the knowledge that the Germans were allowing in a million refugees, was instrumental in the Brexit result and whether that was intentional; there are questions about whether President Trump was elected through the influence of the Russians; there are questions about whether the fascists in France got a third of the vote because of the Russians; there are questions about how the Russians influenced the German elections; and there are certainly questions about how they influenced Brexit.*

I suggest that I limit my comments here to Cambridge Analytica, its abuse and manipulation of British voters and the dirty money behind it.

This concern seemed unfortunately lost on the Government side, with only the Minister electing to speak from the Government benches.

The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Council Housing.

Defence Committee

Away from the Chamber, the Defence Committee held an [evidence](#) session looking into Veterans Mental Health Services. I was particularly concerned with what the studies showed in relation to female veterans as it can often be an overlooked aspect.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *What about in the veteran community? Certainly, information that has been brought back to me suggests that women with mental health problems and post-traumatic stress disorder in the veteran community are not going to the established groups. That is largely because they would be unhappy dealing with their problems, which are sometimes associated with their service, and with male colleagues. Is that something that you have any insight into?*

Professor Nicola Fear, Director, the King's Centre for Military Health Research, King's College London: *We could probably look at that with the data we have collected, because we ask men and women who say that they have a problem about their help-seeking pathways, and who they have sought help from. We have not looked at that by gender, but it is clearly something that we would be able to do.*

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The DCMS Committee took [evidence](#) this week from Christopher Wylie, one of the whistle-blowers in the Cambridge Analytica allegations.

Mr Wylie was a Director of Research at Cambridge Analytica and, over a 4 hour evidence session, gave a detailed account of the activities the company engaged in which led to the allegations in recent weeks. Written submissions further detailing the activities of Social Media companies were also [submitted](#).

Wednesday

Prime Ministers Questions

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was first at the Dispatch Box and, after a short and sharp [questioning](#), he was followed by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister was questioned hard on the Government's record on Mental Health.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): *Mental health spending fell by £600 million between 2010 and 2015. Far too often, a mental health crisis has to be dealt with by police, friends, neighbours or people in the community, and too many of our fellow citizens suffer alone because there are insufficient staff to help them at a moment of crisis. It is quite clear that the mental health budget is insufficient. The Prime Minister mentioned young people. Can she explain why only 6% of the overall mental health budget is spent on children and young people when they make up 20% of our population?*



The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): *As I have just said, we are in fact increasing the services that are available to children and young people, but this is not just about what happens in NHS trusts. It is important we look at this in the round. That is why we are ensuring that there is training in schools to help young people. We have committed to ensuring that 70,000 more children and young people each year have access to high-quality NHS mental health care by 2020-21. We have backed those proposals by additional funding for the work we are doing in schools and how they deal with children and young people's mental health.*

We are also taking action in other areas. When I was Home Secretary, one of the issues I saw was the fact that the police found it very difficult to deal with people in mental health crises because they did not have the training to do it. Putting those

people, including young people, into a cell overnight was not helping them. We have changed that. We have seen a dramatic reduction in that number, and we have made it clear that young people will never be taken to a police cell as a place of safety.

The Government went on to answer an [Urgent Question](#) on the Kerslake Arena Attack Review and a [Statement](#) on the Worboys Case and the Parole Board.

The House then moved on to the First Reading of [Bill](#) on Same Sex Marriage in Northern Ireland.

Opposition Day

Opposition Day focused on two areas of funding. The [first](#) was a look into Local Government Funding, whilst the second was a [debate](#) on Police Funding.

Members were concerned about not just the level of Police funding, but how that funding is acquired.

[Eddie Hughes \(Walsall North\) \(Con\)](#): I appreciate that I have yet not been in the House for a year, but I am slightly confused. If the money does not come from taxation, where else does the hon. Lady think it comes from?

[Louise Haigh \(Sheffield, Heeley\) \(Lab\)](#): In their announcement on police funding, the Government attempted to claim to the public that they were making £450 million available. That is not the case. They are asking people to pay more in tax, and we are asking them to be clear about that. They are forcing local ratepayers to pay more for a lesser service because they are making real-terms cuts in police funding.

As I have said, funding the police through council tax is fundamentally unfair. Last week the chief constable of West Midlands police issued a warning about the aggressive use of council tax to raise funds, because the police forces that have already been forced to make the most cuts will raise the smallest amount of money. West Midlands, which has lost a staggering 2,000 officers since 2010, will be able to raise a little over 2% of its budget from the precept, and will still have to make substantial cuts next year thanks to the unfunded pay rise, pension fund strain and other inflationary pressures. Surrey, which has half the population of the west midlands, will raise almost the equivalent in cash terms.



The day in the Chamber ended with an Adjournment [Debate](#) on Patient Safety.

Thursday

Questions to the Secretary of State For International Trade

Thursday began with [Questions](#) to the Secretary of State for International Trade. Members wanted to know what progress had been made on negotiating future trade agreements, and whether Parliament would be given the final say on these deals.

[Christine Jardine \(Edinburgh West\) \(LD\)](#): When there is a new EU trade treaty, the European Scrutiny Committee can review it and the European Parliament can veto it; when there is a new UK treaty, all this House can do is delay its ratification by 21 days. Far from taking back control, does the Minister agree with the Commons Library that post-Brexit Britain

“may be seen as diminishing democratic accountability in relation to trade treaties”?

Will he fix that by supporting the inclusion of new clause 3 in the Trade Bill?

[The Minister for Trade Policy \(Greg Hands\)](#): I will take no lessons from the Liberal Democrats in this regard. The hon. Lady voted against the Second Reading of the Trade Bill, which will allow this country to transition its 40 or more existing EU trade agreements into UK law. Those agreements have already been scrutinised in Parliament. As I say,

future trade agreements will be a matter for future proposals.

This was immediately followed by [Questions](#) to the Secretary of State for Women and Equalities.

Contaminated Blood

The Government then came to the Dispatch Box to answer an [Urgent Question](#) on the ongoing investigations into Contaminated Blood. This issue has been allowed to roll on for a long time and Members wanted to make it clear that their Constituents needed resolution and soon.

[Dr Julian Lewis \(New Forest East\) \(Con\)](#): My constituent Lesley Hughes was infected with hepatitis C back in 1970, and that timescale suggests that thousands of documents must be held by the relevant Department. Will the Minister assure us that full disclosure of all such relevant documents will be made?

[The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office \(Chloe Smith\)](#): Technically, it is for the inquiry chair to give that assurance, but Ministers, officials and the machinery of Government will be fully co-operating with the inquiry and will give evidence if asked. All the relevant papers will be submitted, and the inquiry can also request evidence under oath.

[Business](#) of the House followed this exchange.

Counter-Daesh Update

The Government then gave a [Statement](#) to the House updating Members on the Counter-Daesh developments.



[Hilary Benn \(Leeds Central\) \(Lab\)](#): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to the bravery and dedication of all those who have helped to defeat Daesh on the ground and to liberate those whom it enslaved. Evidence of that is to be found in an exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall this week, where the stories of Yazidi women who survived Daesh's attempts at genocide, and who suffered sexual enslavement and rape, are told in the form of their words and art, as they seek to come to terms with the harrowing experience they went through. Will the Secretary of State tell the House what further efforts are being made to collect evidence of the genocide and crimes against humanity that Daesh committed, so that those responsible can finally all be brought to justice?

[The Secretary of State for International Development \(Penny Mordaunt\)](#): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for publicising that amazing exhibition. I know that many colleagues from both sides of the House have visited it, and it was incredibly moving. It is absolutely right that we capture and record the immense suffering and cruelty that has taken place across both countries throughout the duration of this conflict. Clear processes are in place for that to be done. It is also vital that we are monitoring the existing humanitarian atrocities that are being perpetrated, not only by Daesh but by other groups, which I have alluded to in my statement. In future updates to this House, we may be able to share more information about the evidence that has managed to be collected, both photographic and forensic.

The House was then updated with a [Statement](#) by the Education Committee and a [motion](#) on Autism was heard.

Finally the House considered any urgent [Business](#) needed before the Easter Recess, the day in the Chamber ending with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Air Quality and Store to Chip Charging.