

House of Commons debates
Monday, 25 November 2013

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Mr William Hague
Iran Nuclear Agreement**

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr William Hague):

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about our negotiations with Iran. Two weeks ago I reported to the House on the negotiations in Geneva between 8 and 10 November. I explained then that our aim was to produce an interim first-step agreement with Iran that could then create the confidence and time to negotiate a comprehensive and final settlement addressing all concerns about its nuclear programme.

We have always been clear that because Iran's programme is so extensive and crucial aspects of it have been concealed in the past, any agreement would have to be detailed and give assurance to the whole world that the threat of nuclear proliferation in Iran would be properly addressed. I said that we believed that such a deal was on the table, and that we would do our utmost to bridge the narrow gaps between the parties and conclude a strong agreement.

On Wednesday last week the E3 plus 3 and Iranian negotiators resumed their work in Geneva, and on Saturday morning I and the other E3 plus 3 Foreign Ministers joined the talks. At 4 am yesterday we concluded the negotiations successfully, agreeing with Iran a thorough and detailed first-stage agreement that is a significant step towards enhancing the security of the middle east and preventing nuclear proliferation worldwide. In this statement I will cover the extensive commitments that Iran has made, the sanctions relief that it has been offered in return, and the steps we will now take to implement and build on what was agreed.

First, we have agreed a joint plan of action with Iran, with the end goal of a comprehensive settlement that ensures that its nuclear programme will be for exclusively peaceful purposes. The agreement has a duration of six months, renewable by mutual consent, and it sets out actions to be taken by both sides as a first step, as well as the elements to be negotiated in a final comprehensive settlement. I have placed a copy of the agreement in the Library of the House, but I wish now to highlight its most important aspects.

Iran has made a number of very significant commitments. Over the next six months Iran will cease enriching uranium above 5%, the level beyond which it becomes much easier to produce weapons-grade uranium. Furthermore, it has undertaken to eradicate its stockpile of the most concerning form of uranium enriched above 5%, by diluting half of it to a level of less than 5%, and converting the remaining half to oxide.

Iran will not install further centrifuges in its nuclear facilities or start operating installed centrifuges that have not yet been switched on. It will replace existing centrifuges only with centrifuges of the same type and produce centrifuges only to replace damaged existing machines, on a like-for-like basis. In other words, Iran will not install or bring into operation advanced centrifuges that could enable it to produce a dangerous level of enriched uranium more quickly. Iran will cap its stockpile of up to 5% enriched uranium in the highest-risk UF₆ form by converting any newly enriched uranium into oxide, and it will not set up any new locations for enrichment or establish a reprocessing or reconversion facility.

Iran has agreed to enhanced monitoring of its nuclear programme, going beyond existing International Atomic Energy Agency inspections in Iran, including access to centrifuge assembly workshops and to uranium mines and mills. Iran will also provide the IAEA with additional information, including about its plans for nuclear facilities. At the heavy water research reactor at Arak, which offers Iran a potential route to a nuclear weapon through the production of plutonium rather than uranium, Iran will not commission the reactor, transfer fuel or heavy water to the reactor site, test additional fuel, produce more fuel for the reactor, or install any remaining components.

This agreement means that the elements of Iran's nuclear programme that are thought to present the greatest risk cannot make progress during the period of the interim agreement. In other words, if Iran implements the deal in good faith, as it has undertaken to do, it cannot use those routes to move closer towards obtaining nuclear weapons

capability. Moreover, some of the most dangerous elements of Iran's programme are not only frozen, but actually rolled back. For instance, the agreement involves the eradication of around 200 kg of 20% enriched uranium that Iran has been stockpiling for several years.

Secondly, in return for those commitments Iran will receive proportionate and limited sanctions relief from the United States and the European Union. For its part, the US will pause efforts to reduce crude oil sales to Iran's oil customers, repatriate to Iran some of its oil revenue held abroad, suspend sanctions on the Iranian auto industry, allow licensing of safety-related repairs and inspections for certain Iranian airlines and establish a financial channel to facilitate humanitarian and legitimate trade, including for payments to international organisations and Iranians studying abroad.

It is proposed that the EU and the US together will suspend sanctions on oil-related insurance and transport costs, which will allow the provision of such services to third states for the import of Iranian oil. We will also suspend the prohibition on the import, purchase or transport of Iranian petrochemical products and suspend sanctions on Iranian imports of gold and precious metals. But core sanctions on Iranian oil and gas will remain in place.

It is intended that the EU will also increase by an agreed amount the authorisation thresholds for financial transactions for humanitarian and non-sanctioned trade with Iran. The EU's Council of Ministers will be asked to adopt legislation necessary to amend those sanctions and the new provisions would then apply to all EU member states. The total value of the sanctions relief is estimated at \$7 billion over the six-month period. There will be no new nuclear-related sanctions adopted by the UN, EU and US during that period.

However, the bulk of international sanctions on Iran will remain in place. That includes the EU and US oil embargo, which restricts oil purchases from Iran globally, and sanctions on nuclear, military-related or ballistic missile-related goods and technology. It includes all frozen revenue and foreign exchange reserves held in accounts outside Iran and sanctions on many Iranian banks, including the Central Bank of Iran, which means all Iranian assets in the US and EU remain frozen, apart from the limited repatriation of revenue agreed under this agreement. Iranian leaders and key individuals and entities will still have their assets in the EU and US frozen and be banned from travelling to the EU and US, and tough financial measures, including a ban on using financial messaging services and transactions with European and US banks, also remain in place. Those sanctions will not be lifted until a comprehensive settlement is reached, and we will enforce them robustly. That ensures that Iran still has a powerful incentive to reach a comprehensive solution, which is the third aspect of the agreement on which I wish to update the House today.

The agreement sets out the elements of a comprehensive solution, which we would aim to conclude within one year. These elements include Iran's rights and obligations under the non-proliferation treaty and IAEA safeguards; the full resolution of concerns related to the heavy water research reactor at Arak; agreed transparency and monitoring, including the additional protocol; and co-operation on Iran's civilian nuclear programme.

In return for the international community's full confidence that Iran's programme is solely peaceful, the plan of action envisages a mutually defined enrichment programme with agreed parameters and limits, but only as part of a comprehensive agreement where nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This comprehensive solution, if and when agreed, would lead to the lifting of all UN Security Council sanctions as well as multilateral and national sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme.

Reaching this interim agreement was a difficult and painstaking process, and there is a huge amount of work to be done to implement it. Implementation will begin following technical discussions with Iran and the IAEA, and EU preparations to suspend the relevant sanctions, which we hope will all be concluded by the end of January. A joint commission of the E3 plus 3 and Iran will be established to monitor the implementation of these first-step measures, and it will work with the IAEA to resolve outstanding issues. The fact that we have achieved, for the first time in nearly a decade, an agreement that halts and rolls back Iran's nuclear programme should give us heart that this work can be done and that a comprehensive agreement can be attained.

On an issue of such complexity, and given the fact that to make any diplomatic agreement worthwhile to both sides it has to involve compromises, such an agreement is bound to have its critics and opponents. However, we are right

to test to the full Iran's readiness to act in good faith, to work with the rest of the international community, and to enter into international agreements. If the Iranians do not abide by their commitments, they will bear a heavy responsibility, but if we did not take the opportunity to attempt such an agreement, then we ourselves would have been guilty of a grave error. It is true that if we did not have this agreement the pressure of sanctions on Iran would not be alleviated at all, but it is also true that there would be no restraint on advances to their programme—no check on their enrichment activity and stockpiles, no block on their addition of centrifuges, no barrier to prevent their bringing into operation their heavy water reactor at Arak, and no limitation on the many actions that could take them closer to a nuclear weapons capability.

The bringing together of this agreement with all five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council united behind it sends a powerful signal in itself. While it is only a beginning, there is no doubt that this is an important, necessary and completely justified step, which through its restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme gives us the time to negotiate a comprehensive settlement. I pay tribute to Baroness Ashton, to my Foreign Minister colleagues and to our Foreign Office staff who played an indispensable role. We will apply the same rigour and determination we have shown in these negotiations to the implementation of the agreement and to the search for a comprehensive settlement. At the same time, we will continue to be open to improvements in our bilateral relationship on a step-by-step and reciprocal basis, and our new chargé d'affaires will visit Iran shortly.

This agreement has shown that the combination of pressure expressed through sanctions coupled with a readiness to negotiate is the right policy. For a long time, that has been the united approach of this country, from the efforts of the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) to pursue negotiations a decade ago to the cross-party support in this House for the wide-ranging sanctions that we have adopted in recent years. We have been steadfast in pursuing that twin-track policy and seeking a peaceful solution. This agreement is true to that approach and to that sheer persistence in Britain and among our allies. This will remain our policy over the coming months as we build on and implement this first step on the long journey to making the middle east—and the whole world—safer from nuclear proliferation.

3.44 pm

Mr Douglas Alexander (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab):

May I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and for advance sight of it? He was generous to end his remarks by recognising the reality of the bipartisan approach that has been characteristic of this House and, indeed, this country to these issues over recent years, including the approach of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) when he was Foreign Secretary. Let me echo that and add that all those involved in the Geneva negotiations, including the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Office officials, deserve real credit for their role in helping secure this deal.

In particular, the work of the European Union High Representative Baroness Cathy Ashton has been fundamental. Indeed, as the Foreign Secretary acknowledged in his statement—a little late, I would argue—she was “indispensable” to ensuring that agreement was finally reached. We on this side of the House feel a particular pride in the role that Baroness Ashton has played and the determination, skill and diplomatic perseverance she has shown, and we offer her our sincere congratulations.

The international community stands united in believing that if Iran were to develop a nuclear weapon, that would make the world less safe, so the deal agreed in Geneva was a necessary and important first step. Iran has, of course, over recent years proceeded at pace with its enrichment programme despite repeated calls by the international community for it to stop.

This is not a perfect deal, nor is it guaranteed to lead to a comprehensive resolution, but, based on the Foreign Secretary's statement, it appears to address a number of central concerns. First, it caps every aspect of Iran's nuclear programme. Secondly, it includes strong verification mechanisms and measures. Thirdly, its text does not concede that Iran has an inalienable right to enrich. I would like to ask the Foreign Secretary about each of those three points.

The Foreign Secretary will be aware that the agreement does not call for the dismantlement of the Fordow plant, so will he set out what steps are envisaged to help ensure that that deeply buried facility will ultimately be decommissioned?

The Foreign Secretary referred to the heavy water research reactor at Arak. Although the deal specifies daily access for the International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors to Natanz and Fordow, it does not set out the frequency with which inspectors will have access to Arak, so will the Foreign Secretary give us further details of how they will gain access?

The Foreign Secretary did not mention Parchin in his statement, and neither did the final text of the agreement agreed yesterday, so will he now clarify whether the deal requires Iran to grant IAEA inspectors access to the Parchin military base, where Iran is suspected of carrying out tests related to the detonating of a nuclear weapon?

There has been much speculation over the past 24 hours about the absence from the final agreement of the phrase, “right to enrich”. Will the Foreign Secretary set out the British Government’s understanding of whether that absence reflects a continuing point of difference between the P5 plus 1 and Iran, or whether the omission reflects a shared understanding on the issue?

Although an interim deal seeks to prevent Iran from developing its enrichment programme while talks are ongoing, it could also ease the pressure on Iran and, in fact, undermine the urgency with which a comprehensive resolution may be sought. Given that risk, will the Foreign Secretary set out how he intends to prevent that outcome and what steps he will take with others to continue negotiations on a comprehensive deal within the time frame that has been set out?

The announcement of \$7 billion of sanctions relief, effective immediately, will be seen as a necessary step to secure the concessions agreed by Iran as part of the interim deal, but pressure must still be maintained. Will the Foreign Secretary offer the House assurances that the net effect of that sanctions relief will not exceed the projected amount?

As of yesterday, Iran’s so-called critical capability will be extended. That, of course, is welcomed by everyone in this House, but while the interim agreement sets Iran back, it does not prevent future progress. It would, of course, be far better to secure the end of all enrichment and to see the dismantling of all relevant facilities.

One key test of the interim agreement will be whether what has now been agreed in principle can be implemented in practice. That means keeping sanctions tight, verification intrusive and all options on the table. A second key test will be whether the interim agreement can, in the months ahead, be translated into a comprehensive agreement. That means building on this weekend’s agreement through urgent and sustained negotiations on a final resolution.

The interim agreement reached over the weekend will give us the time and flexibility to negotiate the much more difficult and complex final agreement to dismantle much of Iran’s nuclear programme. The Government can be assured that they will have our support in pursuit of that objective in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr Hague:

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman the shadow Foreign Secretary for his clear support. There has, indeed, been a bipartisan approach for a long time, and it is clearly continuing in relation to this agreement.

The right hon. Gentleman is quite right to say, as he did at the end of his remarks, that it is very important to keep sanctions tight and verification intrusive to maintain the confidence and the pressure needed to reach a comprehensive agreement. He is also right that no such agreement can be perfect—it is the product of negotiations and compromise—or guaranteed to lead to a comprehensive agreement, but in my judgment it is the only route to a comprehensive agreement.

Some have made the criticism that we should have concentrated on moving straight to a final and comprehensive agreement, but from everything that I have seen, I know that that would not have been possible, and while we negotiated such a comprehensive agreement, the progress of the Iranian programme, which has now been brought to a stop in many ways, would have continued. This is therefore a crucial step on the way to a comprehensive agreement and makes it possible to set about negotiating one.

The right hon. Gentleman asked some specific questions. He asked about how the agreement relates to the plant at Fordow. The agreement specifically refers to that:

“Iran announces that it will not make any further advances of its activities at the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant..., Fordow...or the Arak reactor”.

Footnote 2 on the second page of the agreement states in relation to Fordow that there should be

“no further enrichment over 5% at 4 cascades now enriching uranium”,

and no feeding of uranium hexafluoride into the other 12 cascades and so on. There are therefore specific requirements on that plant. As for each of the plants, its longer-term future, including whether it operates at all, will be up to the final and comprehensive agreement and must be addressed at that stage.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about inspections at Parchin. That remains a point of difference between the IAEA and Iran, including in their latest talks, and it is another aspect of the Iranian programme that must be addressed as part of a comprehensive and final settlement.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the urgency. On that, it is important to put the \$7 billion of sanctions relief into perspective, because he referred to it as being effective immediately. The \$7 billion of sanctions relief is actually available to Iran over the six-month period once that period has begun, which we hope will be by the end of January. A good deal of the \$7 billion involves the unfreezing of assets, so those assets will be unfrozen in stages. Iran will not therefore receive \$7 billion on the first day, and then decide whether to implement its side of the agreement.

It is also important to see that \$7 billion in perspective. In January, Iran’s Oil Minister acknowledged that the fall in oil exports as a result of sanctions was costing Iran between \$4 billion and \$8 billion every month. Reports suggest that Iran currently has between \$60 billion and \$100 billion of assets frozen overseas that it cannot access. The \$7 billion of relief is therefore a very small proportion of the total frozen assets and of the total effect of sanctions applied to Iran.

That is why I have said that how we apply sanctions relief leaves Iran with a huge incentive, since it wants wider relief from sanctions, to negotiate a comprehensive and final settlement. That will help to maintain the urgency, but of course all our diplomatic activity—seeking to maintain the momentum behind the agreement, and to ensure that it is implemented and that we can go on to negotiate a comprehensive settlement—will also convey that urgency. The right hon. Gentleman can be assured that we will leave no stone unturned to try to bring that about.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD):

May I briefly add my tribute to the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw)? It is fair to say that the initiative he took all those years ago was not met with universal approval throughout the House.

In the light of Mr Netanyahu’s public response to this agreement, what assessment has my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made of the risk of Israel taking some unilateral action that might undermine the agreement, and what representations has he made to the Israeli Government against taking any such action?

Mr Hague:

We are in constant touch with the Israeli Government. The Prime Minister discussed matters with Prime Minister Netanyahu during the negotiation of the agreement over the past few weeks. It is important to understand the concerns of those who are sceptical about any agreement on the grounds of Iran’s past deceptions. It is also important to ask those people what the alternative to the agreement would be. The alternatives would involve Iran getting to nuclear weapons threshold capability, Iran having a nuclear weapon, a conflict with Iran or all those things. We have to be clear that there are compelling arguments for the agreement. We would discourage anybody in the world, including Israel, from taking any steps that would undermine the agreement. We will make that very clear to all concerned.

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab):

May I thank the Foreign Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mr Alexander) for their generous remarks? May I also, in turn, express my great appreciation and congratulations to the Foreign Secretary on the personal effort that he has put in to this negotiation? I recognise that the Iranians are among the toughest negotiators in the world and extract every last ounce from negotiations.

I hope that the Foreign Secretary accepts that it is crucial that the momentum is kept up. The agreements that we made between 2003 and 2006 were undermined not only by the difficulties in Tehran, but by a desperate Faustian pact that was developed between hard-liners in Tehran and hard-liners in Washington who fed off each other. That ended up with President Khatami being replaced by President Ahmadinejad. The United States helped to produce that situation.

Lastly, may I ask a question that follows on from the previous question? Will the Foreign Secretary make it clear to the Americans that if Prime Minister Netanyahu's efforts at the United States Congress prevent President Obama from continuing with the negotiations, the UK, Germany, France and the EU will have to detach themselves from America and reach their own conclusions, along with other members of the P5?

Mr Hague:

I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's remarks and I agree very much about the importance of maintaining momentum. It was possible to see that even over the past two weeks. The 10-day gap between the negotiations that took place two weeks ago and those this weekend brought forth a great deal of criticism in Iran, in the US Congress and elsewhere in the world that could easily have fatally complicated the efforts to reach agreement. Considering the months of work that need to go into the implementation of this agreement and into attaining a comprehensive and final agreement, it is vital to maintain the momentum all the way.

The agreements that the United States has made can all be implemented by Executive order. That does not mean that the debates in Congress are over. What happens in the US Congress is up to the United States. However, the right hon. Gentleman can be assured that the United States Administration are extremely strongly committed to this process. The leadership and persistence of Secretary Kerry were crucial in bringing about the agreement and the clarity of President Obama on the matter is clear. I do not think that we need, at this point, to start looking at the other scenarios that the right hon. Gentleman brought in of acting separately from the United States.

Several hon. Members

rose—

Mr Speaker:

Order. I am afraid that we have got through only two questions in five minutes, which by normal standards would be very slow. We need to speed up. We will be led in that important exercise by an immediate past Minister of great experience and versatility.

Alistair Burt (North East Bedfordshire) (Con):

The wealth of detail that has been offered by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary indicates that this is no casual agreement, but one that has been carefully thought through. I pay tribute to his persistence and that of Cathy Ashton in holding the P5 plus 1 together. Does he agree that for Israel to be assured, every dot and comma of the interim agreement must be held to; that for the Arab world to be reassured, we must make serious progress on a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the middle east; and that for the world to be reassured, the Iranians must stop their murderous activities in Syria immediately and contribute to an end to that conflict as quickly as possible?

Mr Hague:

Absolutely. On a day of tributes—we must not have too many tributes because I think there are many troubles ahead—I pay tribute to work done by my right hon. Friend on these issues in the Foreign Office over the past three and half years. He is right about all those things. This wealth of detail, as he put it, must be implemented in detail. It will also be helpful in the debates that take place in this country and the world over the next few days for that wealth of detail to be examined in detail by everybody who comments on it, and I hope they will take the trouble to do that.

The extent to which the agreement means a change in any of Iran's other policies, such as that on Syria, remains to be determined. Of course, we also encourage Iran to play a more responsible role more broadly in world affairs.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):

The European Union, the Government and the United States are to be congratulated on this brave and bold step towards reducing tension in the middle east. Would it be right for the Government now to approach Israel and ask for a reciprocal gesture and for it to open its nuclear facilities to international inspection, in order to denuclearise the whole middle east?

Mr Hague:

Politics is the art of the possible, as I think we all know in this House, and it has turned out that this agreement is possible. The hon. Gentleman is trying to lead me into something that it would probably not be possible for us to obtain.

Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con):

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a most welcome moment for a world that has grown weary of conflict to see the great achievements of diplomacy and engagement? Does he agree that a full and comprehensive agreement would not be possible without a proper interim agreement of this type, and that the key to confidence in the future will be verification and inspection?

Mr Hague:

I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. It is vital to build trust and confidence in the habit of working together to get to a comprehensive agreement. It is also vital to have time to create that comprehensive agreement. Time was running short for any agreement, given what was happening in Iran's nuclear programme, so for all those reasons, this is an essential step on the way to a comprehensive agreement. Anyone who fancies that, alternatively, we could have just jumped to a comprehensive agreement, needs to revise that judgment.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):

I warmly congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his role in this, but may I urge him to be a bit more effusive in his praise for Baroness Ashton for the simple reason that I think the agreement shows that where the European Union can combine, it can achieve far more than individual countries working on their own?

Mr Hague:

I am never lacking in effusion for the role of Baroness Ashton. She has handled things brilliantly, particularly in creating confidence between the Iranian negotiators and the E3 plus 3 team. Over the past three and a half years I dare say that I have praised her and worked with her a great deal more than the hon. Gentleman has experience of doing.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) (Con):

We have the very unusual scenario of Saudi Arabia and Israel agreeing with each other in publicly criticising the agreement. That is understandable: elements in both countries believe they have an existential fight on their hands that will get only tougher with a more confident Iran. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that we have a duty of care to those allies, and that there is a long way to go in persuading them that the agreement is in their best interests?

Mr Hague:

Yes, we do have a duty to understand those concerns. As I said, given past history on this matter we should never be surprised that some people are sceptical about the agreement, and we should understand those concerns. It is therefore incumbent on us to explain the detail and say how we will keep up this work, and to maintain the confidence of as many nations as possible in this work. That will include discussing the issue in detail and extensively with both countries mentioned by my right hon. Friend.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab):

I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman, my right hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mr Alexander), Secretary Kerry, and all others involved on achieving this exceptionally important agreement. It must be hoped that not only will it lead to Iran re-entering the international community, but that it will ameliorate oppressive

aspects of its internal policies. Will the right hon. Gentleman point out to the Prime Minister of Israel, who yesterday said that nuclear weapons are the most dangerous weapons in the world—he should know because he has a stockpile of several hundred nuclear warheads and the missiles with which to deliver them—and who in addition refuses to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, that any attempt to damage or attack the agreement in any way will be unacceptable and will be opposed?

Mr Hague:

As I have said, we would strongly discourage any country from seeking to undermine the agreement, but I have not seen any sign that any country will do so in any practical way. Every country in the world understands how serious that would be. Some may disapprove of the agreement, but they know it has been made by, among others, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and that it must be given its chance. I believe it will be given its chance.

Mr Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con):

Does my right hon. Friend agree with Mark Fitzpatrick, a nuclear proliferation expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, who has often backed what Israel has had to say about Iran, and who has concluded that:

“Seeking to undermine the deal would bring benefit to no party except those who prefer war”?

Mr Hague:

Yes, I heard some of Mark Fitzpatrick’s comments yesterday in the media. I thought they were well informed and balanced in coming to the conclusion that it was a good deal. He did so on the basis of the analysis carried out in the IISS. Anyone who goes through the detailed examples I have given to the House and who sees the range of activities of the Iranian nuclear programme that are covered, how specifically they are covered, and the importance attached in the agreement to obtaining a comprehensive agreement, will be very reassured.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab):

Those who mocked Lady Ashton’s appointment—they certainly do not include the Foreign Secretary—may wish to apologise accordingly.

Is there not a kind of unholy alliance, certainly including Israel, but also including Saudi Arabia and possibly elements within the Iranian regime, that would want to undermine or destroy the agreement? Should we not be very much on our guard against that?

Mr Hague:

We will be on our guard against any attempt to undermine the agreement, but it has the backing of the US Government, Russia, China, France and Britain—the five permanent members of the Security Council—and it has clearly received widespread support around the world. Therefore, as I have said, we would discourage anyone from undermining it, but I believe the world will give the agreement the chance to succeed.

Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con):

My right hon. Friend is right to be cautious if not sceptical. To persuade us of the genuineness of Iran’s intentions, would it not help if it were to end its involvement in terrorism in that region of the world, including in Syria, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) has rightly said; and end its involvement in the repression of religious minorities, including Christians and Jewish people, in Iran? Would it also not help if Iran stopped the hate speech against Israel, a recent example of which came from the Supreme Leader, who just a few days ago referred to Israel as

“the sinister, unclean rabid dog of the region”?

That seems to have escaped the attention of the right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell).

Mr Hague:

I agree on the importance of those issues and of Iran changing its approach to them. Clearly, the negotiations were solely on the nuclear programme. It is right that they were, because in order to make progress, we must focus

exclusively on that. However, in our wider discussions with Iran, which have become possible with the upgrading of our diplomatic relations that I have announced, we will want to address the full range of issues, including the sponsorship of terrorism in other countries and the hate speech to which my hon. Friend refers. We will go on to discuss those other issues with Iran.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab):

I congratulate the Foreign Secretary and all those engaged in the negotiations, not least the Iranians, on this major step forward in international diplomacy, and indeed thank them for it. However, to reiterate the comments of the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), is now the time to urge Iran to do everything in her power to bring an end to the desperate civil war in Syria? There are millions of refugees, and we have learned today that 11,000 children have been deliberately killed in Syria, some at the hands of torturers.

Mr Hague:

It is time to do that. It is too early to say whether the agreement on Iran's nuclear programme foreshadows any other changes in its foreign policy. We would of course like to see such changes, particularly in relation to Syria. We, with other countries, have worked hard to assemble the Geneva 2 peace conference and in the past two hours, the date of the conference has been announced, and it will take place on 22 January. I urge Iran to play a constructive and helpful role in the peace process.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con):

Following on from the excellent question by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) on verification and inspection, does the Foreign Secretary agree that the IAEA will need more resources to ensure that the interim agreement is fulfilled?

Mr Hague:

The IAEA will need to devote more resources to this from within its budget. On page two of the agreement, there is a long list of additional things it will be expected to do, including agreement on the safeguards approach from the reactor in Iraq, daily inspector access for various purposes, managed access to centrifuge assembly workshops and so on. The IAEA has applied itself extremely well in trying to deal with Iran's nuclear programme in recent years, and it will be well up to those tasks.

Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op):

I welcome the agreement, but given Iran's history of concealment will the Foreign Secretary say more on the monitoring and verification process, and the oversight of that process by the international community?

Mr Hague:

That is an important point, which links to the previous question. I was giving examples of some of the additional IAEA inspection work that will result from the agreement. In addition, a joint commission will be formed from the E3 plus 3 countries and Iran to work on implementing and monitoring the deal. That means that there will be constant discussion between the E3 plus 3 countries and Iran, which will require the Iranians to respond to any concerns we have about inspection and verification. This is a big step forward in inspection, including intrusive inspection and verification, and we must keep up our determination to do that.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD):

Over the years, several thousand Iranian students have studied in the UK, with many paying full fees, renting properties and spending very large sums of money while resident here. Will the Foreign Secretary clarify what consideration he has given to lifting the sanctions that prevent their families and sponsors from transferring money into the UK during their stay? Will he at least consider nominating a single bank in the UK as a conduit for student support, much as the United States has done during the whole period of its sanctions against Iran?

Mr Hague:

I will look at those points as part of the step-by-step upgrading of our bilateral relations. It is possible that in some cases students could benefit from the new authorisation rules in the European Union that I mentioned. While Iran cannot operate the embassy with Iranian staff, we are considering it being able to increase the number of locally

engaged staff who can help with such issues. There may be things that help people in that situation, but I will look at the issue in more detail.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab):

I thank the Foreign Secretary for his statement and draw his attention to what he said about momentum in the process in the region. I obviously hope that a detailed agreement is reached within six months. Will he now turn his attention to the need for a nuclear weapons-free middle east, and the importance of reconstituting the conference, which Finland was supposed to have held, involving all countries in the region? Without an agreement on a nuclear-free middle east, somebody will develop nuclear weapons or Israel will go on being unchallenged as the only nuclear weapons state in the region. This is urgent.

Mr Hague:

As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are keeping our focus on that. I pay tribute to him for keeping his focus—relentlessly—in his questions in Parliament, but we are also keeping our focus and continuing our work to bring the conference together. If we can carry our success on this agreement through to the success of a comprehensive and final settlement, it will be a big advance towards what he has been campaigning for and remove more of the excuses of other nations against such discussions. I think, therefore, that he can view this as a step forward in that regard.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):

Many people regard Iran as the Soviet Union of the middle east, because it practises repression at home, it exports terrorism abroad and it says it wants to wipe Israel off the map. How will my right hon. Friend judge whether this is genuine perestroika and glasnost or whether it is deception by Iran, and what steps can he take to ensure that over the six months it not only stops work on nuclear enrichment, but stops supporting Hamas, Hezbollah and the Assad regime?

Mr Hague:

My hon. Friend raises a wide range of wholly legitimate issues. We have many differences with Iran, including on many of those issues and on its appalling human rights record. This agreement does not make any of those differences go away. I do not want to mislead the House. The agreement does not mean there is necessarily a change in its other policies, but it must be judged on its own merits and on whether it is operated in good faith and succeeds in dealing with the nuclear issue. Of course, however, we will use the opportunity for dialogue with Iran to raise the sorts of issues he describes.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab):

I join others in congratulating the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) on all their work.

The Foreign Secretary previously announced the appointment of Ajay Sharma as the chargé d'affaires in Tehran, but our embassy remains closed. Bearing in mind the 81,000 British Iranians resident in this country who wish to see their relatives, what progress can be made to ensure the embassy is opened as quickly as possible?

Mr Hague:

We will take a step-by-step approach. Ajay Sharma, who, as the right hon. Gentleman says, is the new non-resident chargé d'affaires, has been closely involved in the talks and will visit Iran shortly. If visits in both directions by officials go well, we will contemplate other steps that could lead ultimately to the reopening of embassies, but I judge it better to take a step-by-step approach. In a different way from the nuclear programme, that, too, requires the building up of trust, confidence and, above all, clarity that a reopened embassy could operate properly and with all the normal functions of an embassy. We would have to get clarity from the Iranians on that before we could reopen an embassy, so we will continue to take a step-by-step approach.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):

Given that Syria and Iran are joined at the hip, is it not clear that no such agreement would have been reached had the plan for an Anglo-American military attack on Syria gone ahead? So while we are busy conferring praise on Governments past and present, can we at least have a pat on the back for Parliament for its role in preventing such an ill-considered move?

Mr Hague:

I always want to pat Parliament on the back, even when I disagree with it, but I do not agree with my hon. Friend's analysis. I agree—not with him, but with others—that the contemplation by the United States of military action produced a very important breakthrough on the dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op):

I congratulate the Foreign Secretary, alongside Baroness Ashton and Secretary of State Kerry, on his role in this matter. Does the agreement not show the effectiveness of united, co-ordinated EU action, just as the agreement did on normalisation between Serbia and Kosovo, which was also brought about by the efforts of Baroness Ashton seven months ago? Does he agree that we need effective co-operation between EU partners to get results?

Mr Hague:

I do not regard it as a revolutionary thing to say that it is desirable to have good co-operation between European nations in foreign policy. Indeed, that often helps to produce results. The scale and effectiveness of EU sanctions, agreed by all EU countries, has made a big difference on this issue. It is important to add, though—this is something of a qualification to the hon. Gentleman's question—that here the work with the United States has been absolutely indispensable. Such an agreement cannot be made without the United States. Indeed, the assistance of Russia and China has been important, too. So this is something that includes European unity, but goes beyond that, which is why it is so powerful.

Several hon. Members

rose—

Mr Speaker:

Order. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) was sighing loudly from his seat; he may now speak forcefully on his feet.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con):

How can we trust the Iranians—a terrorist regime that poses a grave danger to the Arab world and to Israel and has a long history of lying and duplicity? This is from their own chief nuclear negotiator:

“While we were talking to the Europeans in Tehran, we were installing equipments in parts of the nuclear conversion facility in Isfahan... By creating a calm environment...we were able to complete”.

So now they keep their centrifuges; they go on enriching uranium by up to 5%; and they pocket £7 billion. What is to stop them doing a North Korea and holding us to more blackmail in six months' time?

Mr Hague:

My hon. Friend asks how we can trust people with whom we have many differences—we certainly have them—and who have concealed aspects of their programme in the past. The answer is that this agreement is so specific and so extensive that we will soon be able to see whether they can be trusted or not. We will all be able to judge whether these commitments are being entered into or not. If we are to take the approach that, whatever we agree, the Iranians cannot be trusted to deliver it, we can, of course, never have an agreement on this issue. That would not even allow us to test whether an agreement could be made and implemented. That would be a disastrous course to embark upon.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC):

These welcome developments are due in no small part to the election of the moderate President Hassan Rouhani of Iran, who stood on a platform of improving relations with the west and achieved a landslide victory. Considering that he had been in post only for a few weeks when we had a debate on the proposed military attack on Syria in August, does the Foreign Secretary think that military action by the west in Syria would have strengthened his position with the Iranian President or destabilised it?

Mr Hague:

This is a similar question to the one from my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis). It is, of course, a hypothetical question, because such action did not take place. The debate about such action did, however, produce a change of policy by Russia and the Assad regime, and we are now seeing the dismantling of Syria's

chemical warfare programme. It is idle to speculate what might have happened in many different scenarios. Relations with Iran on this issue should be viewed on their own merits and on their own terms, and they are not necessarily related to Iran's other policies and to its involvement in, or opinion about, Syria. We should be careful about making those linkages.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con):

Iran's enrichment programme has cast a terrible shadow over the middle east and beyond for over a decade, so I very much welcome this landmark agreement—even if it is only for an interim period. I know that my right hon. Friend hoped to be here to make this statement last week, and its being made today is a tribute to his determination to see this through. Can he confirm that the IAEA will have full and free access to all Iran's nuclear facilities, so that Iran's commitment to the agreement can be properly measured?

Mr Hague:

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. To give him a flavour of what is in the agreement on this, it requires the

“Provision of specified information to the IAEA, including information on Iran's plans for nuclear facilities, a description of each building on each nuclear site, a description of the scale of operations for each location engaged in nuclear activities, information on uranium mines and mills, and information on source material”—

all to be produced

“within three months of the adoption of these measures.”

If the agreement is implemented in good faith, it will involve the provision of a lot more openness and information to the IAEA.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab):

At the risk of sounding like the ugly fairy godmother at the christening—[Hon. Members: “Never!”]—may I ask the Foreign Secretary to tell us what discussions would take place if the reintroduction of sanctions were required, and how speedily does he think that could proceed?

Mr Hague:

That is a perfectly legitimate question. We are talking about either sanctions that will be suspended—not lifted or abolished—or about the unfreezing of a specified amount of frozen assets on a one-off basis. The sanctions relief that is being offered to Iran can easily be reversed if it does not abide by the commitments into which it has entered.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD):

Of course we thank the Foreign Secretary and his Security Council and European Union colleagues for a very successful agreement, but we are mindful that the proof of Iran's sincerity lies in an inspection and verification in the next six months. Does he think that, while that is proceeding, Iran might be encouraged to participate in the other conversations in the middle east that must happen—the discussions on Syria that he has announced will take place in January, and discussions on other issues further down the track relating to Israel and Palestine?

Mr Hague:

I hope so. There have been several questions about that topic. As I have said, it is too early to conclude from this agreement that other aspects of Iranian foreign policy will change, but of course we should like that to happen. I have said to Foreign Minister Zarif that if Iran—along with nearly all the rest of the world—were to accept last year's Geneva communiqué on Syria as the basis for future discussions on the subject, many countries would be much more open to its involvement in those discussions. That is up to the Iranians, and I hope that they will respond positively to such suggestions.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):

I warmly welcome this breakthrough. The Foreign Secretary has referred to Iran's appalling human rights record and to the prospect of future bilateral discussions about it. What prospect does he see of some movement on issues such as the Iranian Government's practice of imprisoning church pastors?

Mr Hague:

I think that we all hope that there will be movement on those issues, irrespective of anything relating to the nuclear issue. The right hon. Gentleman gives just one example of a truly appalling human rights record. Of course we will wish to discuss human rights with Iran as part of our bilateral discussions, and we will impress on the Iranians not only the importance, in our opinion, of universal human rights, but the positive impression that they would make on the world if they were to deal with those issues as well. Let me stress again, however, that it is much too early to say that we can read from this agreement a change in Iranian policy on other matters.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con):

May I add my support for the agreement? Given how long it has taken to reach to this very limited stage of progress and given that the track record of the Iranian regime makes constructive dialogue with it so difficult, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be perverse to turn our backs on this agreement and that the operative phrase in his statement is “if Iran implements the deal in good faith”? How confident is he that Iran will implement it in good faith?

Mr Hague:

I am grateful for my hon. Friend’s support and for his wise words. Only Iran can determine whether it implements the deal in good faith, but I will say that, on the basis of our dealings with Foreign Minister Zarif—who has conducted all the negotiations from the Iranian side—I believe in his sincerity about reaching the deal and about implementing it. I hope that he will continue to have the necessary support in Iran—where there is, to put it mildly, a quite opaque and complex power structure—to ensure that the agreement is fully implemented.

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab):

The Secretary of State talked about the need for Iran to operate in good faith, but that is not what we have seen from Iran in recent decades. Is there a plan for action in six months’ time if we find that it has not operated in good faith and has not complied with this interim agreement?

Mr Hague:

In that eventuality, we would not be able to renew the agreement. As I pointed out earlier, all the sanctions relief that we have signed up to here is reversible or is one-off, so it would not be repeated if Iran does not implement this agreement, but I think the Iranians have a clear understanding of that and that is part of the pressure on them to make sure that they do it.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his ability to function without sleep, seemingly. One of the issues is the interpretation of any agreement that has been reached. The interpretation that seems to be coming out of Iran is that the world has accepted its right to enrich uranium and to retain all the facilities that could enrich uranium if the agreement falls apart. What can my right hon. Friend say to the House and the world about Iran sticking to what we believe has been agreed?

Mr Hague:

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks, but all of us who were in the House in the 1990s, before the procedures of the House were changed, are entirely used to functioning without sleep, including speaking without sleep. Just to be clear, this is not a recognition of the right to enrich, which we do not believe exists under the non-proliferation treaty. The agreement envisages that if we agree a comprehensive solution, that would enable Iran to enjoy its basic rights of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, with a mutually defined enrichment programme limited to practical needs;\$\$ but to get to that point, Iran needs to implement all the detailed measures—there is more detail than I have been able to give the House in the statement—that I described earlier.

Mr Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab):

As the person who had the interesting privilege of being the first British Minister to visit Iran after a 21-year gap following its 1979 revolution, may I both warmly welcome the progress made by the Foreign Secretary, Baroness Ashton and everyone else who has been responsible for the advances that have been made leading to this agreement, but at the same time echo the concerns expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw)

about the risks of agreement being frustrated by those both in Iran and elsewhere who do not want this to lead on to a more permanent agreement? Remembering the frustration of the hopes that were placed at that time in the Khatami presidency opening the door for greater understanding, may I urge the Foreign Secretary and all concerned to do everything possible over the next six months to not let this opportunity drift out of our reach?

Mr Hague:

Yes, absolutely; I am fully conscious, as are the Government and our allies, of the importance of that. That is one of the reasons why it has been important to respond quickly to Iran's readiness to make such an agreement—so people in Iran can see that it is possible to make an agreement, that there are compromises that can be made and that it is in the interests of everyone, including the people of Iran, to do so. Showing that quickly gives the opportunity to those in Iran who want to be able to carry that on for the future.

Mr Ben Wallace (Wyre and Preston North) (Con):

May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on all the hard work and effort he and the other P5 plus 1 nations have put into getting this interim agreement, often in the face of vested-interest opposition both here and in Iran? Of course, as many colleagues have mentioned, verification and inspection will be the best way to put aside those who oppose this deal. When President Rouhani was part of the nuclear negotiation teams in the past, he was instrumental in getting Iran to sign up to, or commit to, the additional protocol of the nuclear proliferation treaty. Was that discussed and should we seek that in future, because surely the best way to achieve this is through international law and UN verification?

Mr Hague:

Of course we would want Iran to observe the additional protocol. This is an issue that will have to be addressed in the discussions on a comprehensive agreement, and my hon. Friend will be aware from his knowledge of Iran that Iran's ratification and observance of the additional protocol would be dependent on the Majlis. It would have to have a vote about that, in the Iranian system. That could introduce an additional complexity, but it is something we would certainly want it to do.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):

We welcome this agreement, although it is a first step in a long process. I remind the Foreign Secretary that President Obama and the American Congress postponed a decision as a result of this Parliament stopping the Foreign Secretary and the Americans having an attack on Iran. More importantly, if it is sufficient to sit down with the Iranians to discuss what is a very serious issue, why are we not facilitating talks on Syria? Are we going to wait another six months, allowing that carnage to go on?

Mr Hague:

The debates that we had, whatever side people were on, about military action in August were about military action relating to Syria, not Iran. It is very much part of our policy, as the hon. Gentleman knows, to promote a political solution in Syria, including supporting a peace conference on Syria, and I hosted the Friends of Syria core group in London last month to agree our approach to that. I met the Syrian opposition in Istanbul last week to encourage their participation in a peace conference; that has now been announced for 22 January. Of course, we will do everything that we can to bring about progress in finding a peaceful solution on Syria, just as we have on the Iranian nuclear programme.

Mr Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury) (Con):

I apologise, Mr Speaker, for missing the first few moments of the Foreign Secretary's statement—

Mr Speaker:

Well, that is a very, very significant admission. On this occasion—[Interruption]—honesty should be rewarded, as somebody is kindly suggesting. But I must say to the right hon. Gentleman that, notwithstanding his immense distinction, I am afraid that it will not be allowed again. On this occasion, we will let him; he has been very candid.

Mr O'Brien:

I am most grateful, Mr Speaker. Given the question that I am about to put, I thought that transparency was the better decision.

This will all depend on the transparency of the monitoring and verification processes, and how much trust can be placed in efforts to remove the drivers of instability to gain greater security—an issue that is wider than just the nuclear issue. Can the Foreign Secretary comment on the expectations?

Mr Hague:

If everyone involved is as honest and transparent as my right hon. Friend, there will be no problem in the implementation of this agreement, and I would strongly encourage that. Of course, in addition to all this inspection, all the monitoring and the joint commission, in the end any agreement is going to require good faith and commitment from the other side, and that has to come from political will. So we will do everything that we can to make sure that there is rigorous inspection, but it will only work if there is a real commitment from Iran as well.

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con):

My right hon. Friend has spoken about the appointment of a new British chargé d'affaires to Tehran, but an Iranian Government mob smashed up the British embassy only a relatively short time ago and did millions of pounds-worth of damage which, under the Geneva diplomatic protocols, they now owe in compensation to the British taxpayer. Is any progress being made with Iran in securing that compensation before diplomatic progress is made?

Mr Hague:

This is a good question. Indeed, the United Kingdom should be entitled—is entitled—to compensation for the damage done, and compensation will be one of the issues that we need to discuss in this step-by-step upgrading of diplomatic relations. As I mentioned earlier, the most important consideration will be whether an embassy is allowed to operate with all the normal functions of an embassy, but we will address compensation as well.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con):

Back in 1994, an agreement was signed to curtail the development of nuclear weapon capacity in North Korea. At the time, President Clinton stated that the agreement

“will make the United States, the Korean peninsula and the world safer”.

We all know how that ended, so how confident is the Foreign Secretary that history will not repeat itself and, on this occasion, the monitoring of the agreement will be sufficient to ensure transparency in the process?

Mr Hague:

The provision for monitoring, as my hon. Friend can gather, is very extensive and very detailed—to a much greater degree than on any comparable agreement made in the past. How confident can we be that all these things will be abided by? Time will tell. I have spoken about the sincerity, I believe, of the Iranian negotiators; but implementing this is another matter. Our confidence must be based on what actually happens. I would only say, as I said earlier, that the provisions are sufficiently detailed about a sufficient range of sites and activities in Iran that we will be able to see whether confidence is justified or not.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con):

I commend the Foreign Secretary's role in the negotiations, but does he agree that the concession to the Iranians on uranium enrichment in this deal is quite remarkable, given that all previous United Nations resolutions have explicitly stated that Iran should stop all such enrichment at its plants?

Mr Hague:

It is true that this is different from past UN Security Council resolutions, although it is also true that it would not be possible to reach any agreement with Iran without this aspect to such an agreement. It is also true that this will go along with the other parts of the preamble to the agreement, which talks about the transparency measures, and that Iran has reaffirmed that in no circumstances will it ever seek or develop any nuclear weapons. When the world can be satisfied with that last sentence, it will be possible to make an agreement on the enrichment provisions of which I spoke earlier.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con):

Many of my constituents are concerned about the vagueness of the deal in relation to addressing further uranium enrichment. What reassurance can the Secretary of State give us, particularly when President Rouhani has stated:

“No matter what interpretations are given, Iran’s right to enrichment has been recognised”?

Mr Hague:

I mentioned earlier the interpretation of the so-called right to enrich. The E3 plus 3 countries do not recognise a right to enrich, but we have referred to enrichment in the way that I read out earlier. I can assure my hon. Friend that there is nothing vague about the agreement. It includes these words, at the bottom of page 1:

“Iran announces that it will not enrich uranium over 5% for the duration of the 6 months.”

The agreement goes on to make other detailed provisions.\$\$

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con):

I welcome the Foreign Secretary’s personal commitment to securing the interim agreement that was arranged over the weekend. I am also pleased to hear that any sanctions relief will be phased. Will he confirm that any release of oil revenues held in frozen foreign bank accounts will happen only if Iran lives up to the commitments that it made at the weekend, month in, month out, and to its ongoing commitment to a comprehensive agreement?

Mr Hague:

Yes, absolutely. This will happen on a phased basis over a six-month period, and as I mentioned, it involves the release of frozen assets on a one-off basis. That can therefore be stopped at any time, so it will be important for all sides to see that Iran is really fulfilling the agreement for confidence to be maintained. The position is therefore as my hon. Friend has set out.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):

“Past actions best predict future actions, and Iran has defied the United Nations Security Council... Simply put: Iran has not earned the right to have the benefit of the doubt.”

Those are not my words, but those of the Canadian Foreign Minister yesterday following the announcement of this deal. There is no doubting the Foreign Secretary’s commitment to the agreement, but many of our closest allies and friends in the region and elsewhere are deeply concerned about it. Over the next six months, will he commit to working with those allies and friends, so that their views on the final deal can be taken into account?

Mr Hague:

Yes, absolutely. My hon. Friend makes an entirely fair point about the need to work with other countries, including some whose scepticism about such agreements we should understand, given Iran’s past record. It is important to understand their natural scepticism, but it is also important to think about what on earth the alternatives to reaching a workable agreement would be. My judgment is that this is a good enough agreement, because the alternatives could involve Iran developing a nuclear weapons capability, or getting to the threshold of that, in the not-too-distant future, or a conflict with Iran. We will, however, work with other countries and reassure them along the way.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):

Is it not the case that Iran is the biggest and nastiest bully in the middle east playground and that despite having been kept after class to complete its lines, it has failed to do so and yet has been given its catapult back? If I am wrong, can the Foreign Secretary confirm to the House that, as a result of this agreement, Iran is not in a position to complete a nuclear weapon?

Mr Hague:

Yes, that is right; all the aspects of the Iranian programme that I have listed are stopped from going forward over this six-month period, and some of them, as I have set out, are rolled back. The comprehensive agreement that we are seeking after this first step will make it clear that, as I was just quoting, in no circumstances will Iran ever seek or develop any nuclear weapons. So this is not so much a case of giving the Iranians the catapult back as of ensuring that they will never have a catapult.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con):

The election of President Rouhani last summer, not least its landslide nature, came as a surprise to many people. I believe firmly that it happened because he was the only candidate to say that the direction of Iran had to change

because the sanctions were so crippling. With that in mind, may I urge my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to outline to the House the efforts that will be gone through to tighten the grip of sanctions if Iran does not stick to its side of the deal, rather than looking at military options?

Mr Hague:

I have no doubt that if Iran does not stick to its side of the deal, first, the limited sanctions relief of which I have spoken, which comes from the suspension of sanctions and one-off unfreezing of assets, would certainly come to an end. I have also no doubt that, in those circumstances of a breakdown of an agreement that we and our partners have entered into in good faith, there would be very strong pressure for an increase in sanctions on Iran. That is what Iran would have to expect in those circumstances.