Revised transcript of evidence taken before

The Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence

Inquiry on

SOFT POWER AND THE UK’S INFLUENCE

Evidence Session No. 7    Heard in Public    Questions 126 - 151

MONDAY 29 JULY 2013

Witnesses: Ian Birrell, Jonathan Glennie, Mark Pyman, Phil Vernon
Members present

Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman)
Lord Forsyth of Drumlean
Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts
Baroness Hussein-Ece
Lord Janvrin
Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne
Lord Ramsbotham

Witnesses

Ian Birrell, Columnist and Foreign Correspondent, Contributing Editor for Mail and Mail on Sunday, Jonathan Glennie, Research Fellow, Centre for Aid and Public Expenditure, ODI, Mark Pyman, Director, Defence and Security Programme, Transparency International UK, and Phil Vernon, Director of Programmes, International Alert

Q126 The Chairman: Welcome, and the first and most important thing is: jackets off if you so wish— it is up to you. Thank you very much, all four of you, for coming. You have before you, because it is an obligation and a proper thing, information about the relevant interests of everyone who is a Member of this Committee, so that will help you know what our particular concerns are and where we are coming from.

As you know, the official label for this Committee is to examine soft power and Britain’s influence overseas, a very wide subject which we are seeking to narrow through a series of hearings right through the autumn, before we report. I am going to start with really the obvious question, for each of you, if possible with a short summarising reply before we really get going. Bearing in mind that of course hard power and soft power—military power at one end and kinds of diplomacy and persuasion at the other—are not opposites in any way, they are all parts of the same spectrum, which is a changing one from merely the traditional division between gunboats and diplomats. It is not like that any more. My first and opening question really is, to each of you, do you see your activities and your operations—and you are in a sense at the spearhead, the sharp end, in many of these areas—as in that spectrum? If so, where in that spectrum? Or are they not in that spectrum at all? Going left to right, could I start with Mr Pyman of Transparency International on that broad question of how you see your work and the hard, soft and smart power—whatever you like—fitting together, if at all.

Mark Pyman: As an NGO, I hope we are not doing too much of the hard power side. What we are doing does have a soft power element, because we are working in any number of countries overseas and, although we are a global international organisation, it is never in doubt that we come from the UK. We can see the influence that we are bringing to bear and, yes, I do think it has a soft power component to it.

The Chairman: Actually, having said I would go left to right, Mr Birrell, do you mind if I come back to you at the end because you are, I hope, going to offer us a critique that may
be slightly different? So I shall go straight to Jonathan Glennie and ask him for the observation on the general question.

**Jonathan Glennie**: Would the Committee like to hear a very brief opening statement that I have prepared that basically does answer your question?

**Q127 The Chairman**: Yes, of course. That is absolutely fine.

**Jonathan Glennie**: I apologise; I have not printed it, so I am going to read from this laptop, which is going to be really annoying for everyone, but it is very short.

Firstly, thanks for inviting me. It strikes me that this Committee is asking questions of great importance to my line of work. Let me try and summarise my view on the relationship between aid and soft power from an internationalist perspective, which I think is the inevitable perspective for someone who works, as I do, in poverty eradication, human rights and sustainable development.

It is hard to exaggerate the mega-shifts in what I call “the geography of power” currently under way. We all know about the BRICS, and some of you will even have heard of the CIVETS, but countries like Peru and the Philippines will soon be among the 30 largest world economies, according to HSBC predictions. Developing countries and emerging countries are beginning to dominate global economic growth, and their political power is increasing as a consequence. They are also the home of rapidly increasing reserves of global savings—almost 50% of world savings, according to the World Bank—and therefore, of course, the source of growing foreign investments, including aid and concessional loans.

Even the smaller, low-income countries—less powerful countries—in places like Africa and elsewhere are finding a new assertiveness. Why? Because they are now living in what colleagues at ODI have termed an age of choice, in which many more external financing options are available to them than in the past, both private and public, as well as a huge expansion in domestic resource revenue in many countries. And they are looking to new examples of how to develop. As the exaggerated market fundamentalism of the so-called Washington consensus is tossed into the dustbin of history, poor countries no longer want to be the US or France only. They look to Brazil, Vietnam and, of course, China, and the term “Beijing consensus” has been coined—not a phrase I agree with, but it implies that countries are looking much broadly for examples and help than ever before.

For Britain, we are gradually going to become less powerful, continuing the trend since the end of the empire. Power is zero sum. Where we used to get our way, increasingly even poor countries are saying thanks but no thanks when they do not like the modalities or the conditions attached to our aid or trade relationships.

One response to this ebbing away of power has been to seek to defend our advantage—not just Britain, of course, but OECD countries in general. But as an internationalist I am naturally inclined against this approach. In fact, it is right and desirable that other countries become more wealthy and more powerful—that is the logic of working in international development. In seeking to increase the wealth of poor countries, inevitably they will become more powerful, which inevitably leads to us becoming relatively less powerful. I want a world in which we all share roughly the same standard of living, and I care as much about the interests of other peoples as British interests, especially given how immensely well off we are compared to the rest of the world. Notwithstanding that we are going through a crisis, we are still among the 30 richest countries in the world in terms of income per capita, and one of the 10 largest economies.
I have only got a couple more paragraphs to go, my Lord Chairman, so I will be very brief. Soft power is sometimes couched as another means, along with hard power, to promote Britain’s interests and security. But I would like to emphasise the importance of promoting values. The UK has played a role in promoting great causes with its aid, from civil rights and democracy, especially women’s rights and gay rights, to free healthcare and education, and peace in conflict countries. But it has also used the power of aid in ways of which we should feel ashamed—forcing countries to privatise key industries and basic services, forcing them to eliminate subsidies to crucial industries, et cetera, flying in the face of the evidence but suiting the interests of British corporates.

The temptation in the aid business has been to use aid as if it was hard power—in other words, paying for strategic advantage and economic preferment. There are many examples of this historically, from the US cutting aid to Yemen, one of the world’s poorest countries, when it failed to support the first Gulf war, to China today only giving aid—I do not know if you know this—to countries that do not recognise Taiwan as an independent country.

But the nature of soft power is that it is somewhat more nebulous—less direct. The UK is almost unique in its worthy insistence that aid is not used for political or economic gain, and it is right that that is so—the best aid relinquishes control to recipients who take the lead in spending it. It does not always work, but it is more likely to, and the respect earned is the soft power we are talking about. So, no, I do not believe aid should be used to promote our own interests. I think it should be used to promote international public goods and universally agreed values, which implies a move away from bilateral objectives and towards a more rules-based international public finance regime.

To finish—and thank you very much for your patience—in my view the question is not about how the UK can safeguard its power and interests, but how it can help the world transition to one in which power is spread more evenly, for the good of all.

Q128 The Chairman: Right, thank you. That states your position very clearly indeed and raises lots of questions which we will pursue. Mr Vernon, would you like to have a go?

Phil Vernon: Thank you, Lord Chair. If it is okay, I will do something a bit similar, but maybe a bit shorter in answer to your question.

The Chairman: A little bit shorter, because then I want to get to Mr Birrell.

Phil Vernon: I would just like to say, first of all, that at International Alert we are a peacebuilding organisation, so we are part of the aid sector but a specific niche within it. I think we are about 18% funded by the British Government—

The Chairman: 80%?

Phil Vernon: 18% funded by different parts of the Government. I would like to think we are pretty independent, so if we are talking about the soft power of the UK Government I think that our work is probably not very much part of that—but of the soft power of the UK as a nation, probably yes, and I will come back to that in a moment, if I could.

Soft power is perhaps the achievement of one’s aims and ends through non-coercive means—through not purchasing, through not bribing, but through attracting and perhaps co-opting, in the better sense of the word “co-opting”—as Joseph Nye says. I think he also says—I think I would agree with Jonathan—it is highly relevant to the current situation and the situation in the world. If the currency of soft power is, as Nye says, values, culture, policy and institutions, it seems to me that one’s soft power is embodied in the choices one
makes and the actions one takes. So it is not what you say that you say but what you do which gives you power.

I am not so sure about power being a zero-sum game. Power is not a commodity. One can really only talk about power vis-à-vis a particular objective or situation. I think one can look at soft power vis-à-vis a particular goal or aim. If it is fair to say that the United Kingdom Government and people have, as a long-term aim, a world which is increasingly liberal—in the general sense of the word—and democratic, prosperous and peaceful, then soft power is a very good way that this country can contribute to achieving that aim. A world that evolves in that way is not a linear process; that evolution is history—it is difficulties happening in the world. If the world becomes more liberal and democratic, it is not something that one can instrumentalise through coercion or through purchase, so soft power seems highly relevant to it.

Is aid part of soft power? That was one of your questions. The answer is yes, no and maybe. I think Winston Churchill is said to have said about the Marshall plan that it was the “most unselfish and unsordid” act by a great power in history. I know it is controversial whether he said it about the Marshall plan or about lend-lease, but if he did say it about the Marshall plan, that quote embodies the complications of your question. Obviously the Marshall plan was not only unselfish, but it was to some degree unselfish. That opens up some of the complications of the question “Is aid a soft power instrument?”

The act of giving, especially during a time of economic difficulty has got to be something that attracts people. If you divide aid into three areas—very briefly, my Lord, if I may—although all aid is political, humanitarian aid is probably the least controversial type of aid. The more humanitarian aid this country gives to people in difficult circumstances, the more I think a good press is going to accrue to this country, which gives us power and capital. I think development aid is a bit more complicated, but development aid that this country gives is not just money. A lot of what we do to support people in places like Uganda, Tunisia and Egypt is not just about money; it is support of other kinds, so we are contributing to progress in other ways. The third thing is that, through the aid budget and through our actions as a country, we are supporting the international system, which creates an enabling environment for a better world—a more prosperous, more peaceful and more democratic world. So I think, yes, there is a soft power element to overseas development aid given and supported by the UK.

Q129 The Chairman: Right. Mr Birrell, what do you think about that?

Ian Birrell: Well, it is interesting that we talk about humanitarian aid as being uncontroversial, because if you go to Haiti, of course, you can see a country which even before the earthquake three years ago had four times as much per capita in terms of aid as the Marshall plan gave to Europe, yet incomes have declined by a third, despite having so many more charities operating there than anywhere else. After the earthquake, there was huge resentment at this army of aid workers who came in and all lived in $5,000 flats and drove around in new cars while the people were suffering; in fact, the legacy is intense bitterness at how, according to the Prime Minister, 40% of the aid money went on supporting the aid workers who came to save the country—and failed to do so dismally that so many people are still living in abject squalor and without homes.

If we look at the issue of soft power, it is an interesting question because it of course implies that soft power, when it comes to aid, is also all about the donor and not the recipient. One of my key arguments is that it is, of course. This very question and session underlines that. I think that Britain has huge advantages worldwide in soft power. If you look at the obvious
things like the English language being so dominant; if you look at things like our education
links; even if you look at newer things like music—I speak as the co-founder of Africa
Express, a very successful project bringing together African and western musicians—and of
course Premier League football, which is so dominant across Africa, the continent that I
know best, Britain has these enormous advantages, along with issues such as our historic
traditions of tolerance and democracy. Unfortunately, the way that the whole aid agenda has
been allowed to dominate over the last 30 years, combined with a mixture of patronising
attitudes which came out of it and an arrogance about our own brilliance, really, in terms of
many of our institutions, gets translated when you see it abroad as looking down at a lot of
the countries that we are meant to be helping.

My issues with aid, in particular, I suppose can be summarised threefold, one of which is that
while we preach against welfare dependency at home we are encouraging it abroad. We are
doing so in a very, very regressive, devastating manner which is all about us coming along
and telling people what to do and not listening to people on the ground. That actually often
has disastrous effects. Secondly, we are supporting some of the most barbaric regimes in the
world with our aid money. That is hardly a good way to spread British influence and power,
when you are subjugating people and backing regimes which are guilty of appalling human
rights abuses and democratic theft. Thirdly, there is this idea that Britain has put forward
over the last 30 years—particularly our politicians and a couple of pop stars—that we can
save the world and that we are the saviours of the world. This has been continually
propagated with the idea that these countries are in need of our salvation—that they are
sort of basket-case countries that are helpless, that they are dominated by starvation and
conflict, that poverty is endemic everywhere, and that conflict is everywhere. That has the
negative effect that actually people do not want to trade there and do not want to go there.
They see Africa, particularly, as a horrible place of extreme violence, when the reality is so
different. That is putting off trade, putting off people going there for holiday and putting off
links, and therefore it is undermining our soft power.

On top of that, I would say finally that we talk all the time about soft power, but it is often
contaminated by hypocrisy. We talk of democracy when our own electorate is growing
increasingly disenchanted. We talk about improving tax regimes when our own tax regimes
have been so controversial in recent months and years. At the end of the day, there is the
issue of how we would feel if scores of young Africans came here and started telling us how
to run our own schools and hospitals. Of course they would not be allowed to come here
because our visa policies do not allow them to, but were they to be allowed to we would
not like it. That is as true in Africa. I hear more and more across Africa—you can see it with
academics, with the young middle class, with politicians—that people resent the aid and the
aid industry, which is growing so fast, and they resent the patronising and anachronistic
attitudes that lie behind it. That is very damaging to our British interest long term.

If I can, I will throw in just one last thing, which is to consider one country: Nigeria. Out of
the top 10 recipients of British aid, it is getting the biggest rise in percentage terms of any of
them—going up 116%. This is a country with the fastest-rising growth in champagne
consumption in the world, which has just started its own space programme and is about to
start training astronauts, and where our own aid watchdog has said how ineffective a lot of
the British aid going there is. Still we are pouring the money in, but at the same time we are
turning away their students who want to come and study in our universities, and we are just
about to introduce a bond of several thousand pounds to deter the sixth highest-spending
consumers coming to our shops. It is utter insanity, and it shows the ridiculous, twisted and
contorted nature of British policies towards the developing world that we have ended up
with, where on the one hand we think we are saving them by giving them aid, and on the
other we are saying to them, “Don’t come to our country to learn—to come to our universities—don’t come here to trade, and don’t come here on holiday”. To me, that shows everything that is wrong with our British soft power approach when it comes to aid, trade, tourism, development and immigration.

**Q130 The Chairman:** All right. I am going to give your neighbours a chance to take another view, shall we say, because I think that this creates a good contrast of views about the whole scene. Before I do so, I think that Members of my Committee might like to ask a question or two. Who would like to go in first?

**Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** I would just like to follow up what Ian Birrell said. The two points that you make, which fit together so well, are, first, that aid is resented—you mentioned that you think that is clearly the case; there are many and prolific examples of it—and, secondly, that we in a sense have depicted ourselves as saviours of the globe. That strikes very strong notes with me, yet Mr Glennie is suggesting that we should put a great deal more money into non-accountable multilateral expenditure in order somehow to help liberal democracy in the world. What is your answer to that point?

**Ian Birrell:** Well, I do not think that you impose democracy from outside; I have never thought that and I never will. If we want to help democracy, we should tackle the things that we can do at home. One of the biggest problems that Africa has is capital flight, with money being creamed off, whether by tax evasion, corrupt politicians or whatever. Where does a lot of it end up? It ends up in Britain, in British property, with British legal firms washing it and British banks hiding it. Why do we not start cracking down on the things that we can do at home, instead of lecturing the world on what it can do? If we could do that and start exposing a lot of these people who are stealing the money from their own people, it would have a huge impact on democracy.

**Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** But that is a bit of a red herring, because we are looking at soft power overseas.

**Ian Birrell:** But that is soft power, because soft power is also about, rather than lecturing people, actually doing something. Here is something that we could do at home but do not. Were we to do it, that might get a lot more credit abroad than telling people how to run their own countries all the time.

**Q131 Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** My question is for Mr Glennie about his opening statement. Distinguishing between development aid and humanitarian aid—and leaving humanitarian aid on one side—how do you think it can be justified to ask people, perhaps on low incomes, to pay taxes without any indication of a return for them, for their economy and for the country? If it is because you think that there is some moral duty for doing it, would it not be better to raise these funds through the NGOs and others by people making voluntary contributions? Surely the Government are taking money by force from people for this purpose. Is there not an absolute moral duty to show that value for money is being obtained and to show that there is some benefit to the people who are having to make that contribution, particularly when times are hard?

**Jonathan Glennie:** I would like to answer a couple of Ian’s points, but the answer to that point is really yes and no. Is there a moral obligation to demonstrate to rich Britons that there is a return on the taxes—

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** I did not ask about rich Britons; I asked about taxpayers.

**Jonathan Glennie:** Sorry. I am speaking about rich taxpayers in Britain—
**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** Most of the money from the taxpayers comes from people on low incomes.

**Jonathan Glennie:** I am sorry; I was trying to make an analogy. Is it okay for wealthy taxpayers in Britain to subsidise the living standards of the very poorest in Britain? Should those wealthy taxpayers expect a clear return on that or is it simply the right thing to do? Should London help to subsidise the poorest parts of Wales and some parts of the north of England? Should London expect a return on that or is it simply the right thing to do? My argument is that it is both. It is the right thing to do. I do not think that rich countries should expect a return on their help for poor countries. Nevertheless, they do get a return. I believe that when other parts of Britain are doing well, London also—in a somewhat nebulous way, admittedly—benefits. I believe that when other parts of the world are doing well, Britain also benefits, especially as we now live in a world where there are planetary resource limits and we all have somehow to divide our resources fairly and sustainably. I think that it is absolutely okay for Britain to support poorer countries without a clear, immediate return, even when we are going through economic turmoil and tough times, because our turmoil is nothing compared with the economic turmoil and tough times that other countries are going through. The response to people living on very low wages, with lowering wages and increasing inequality in this country, is to deal with our own policies. We have immense inequality in this country, so let us deal with the British policies and not—David Cameron is right about this and says it again and again—try to bring the rest of the world into it.

**Lord Hodgson of Astley Abotts:** I, too, have a question for Mr Glennie. I think that you said that we have been in the habit of using aid as a type of hard power and that, instead, aid should be used to promote what I think you called universal values. Who sets the universal values? Is it not patronising if we are setting them?

**Jonathan Glennie:** Admittedly it is a difficult academic question, but the UN Declaration of Human Rights is signed by almost every country in the world and, broadly speaking, those are the kind of universal values that I would say should underpin all our international cooperation. Since that declaration was made, there have been a series of declarations that, again, most countries of the world have signed. So there are, I would argue, some quite clear universal values, although I admit that it is a very difficult question—some countries sign them without really believing in them. We deal with that the whole time in international development. It is a complicated area.

**Q132 Baroness Hussein-Ece:** I want to go back to what Ian Birrell said. You were obviously being very challenging to us, which is very welcome, as it gets us thinking.

**Ian Birrell:** I thought that I was being quite moderate.

**Baroness Hussein-Ece:** You were challenging what we have heard so far in these sessions. One thing that resonated with me was when you talked about some of the aid programmes having the patronising attitude, “We know best”. That has always been a problem historically with this country, because of its colonial past, I suppose, especially with Africa. I was in the Sudan recently—I must declare all my interests, which are on the list. We have had a briefing from DfID about what it has been achieving and its outputs. You could not argue with some of the things: 5.9 million children in primary education per year; immunisation—

**Ian Birrell:** Do you want me to deal with that one first?

**Baroness Hussein-Ece:** I have just given you a couple of examples. If you stop people in the street in this country, generally they will say, “It is surely a good thing to provide
education rather than dishing out aid. These are things to empower people to do better in their own countries. Immunisation and all the rest are surely a good thing”. I hear what you are saying about visa restrictions here, which is an issue that comes up quite a bit. In terms of DfID responding, by the time that it has recalibrated its priorities or strategies, things have moved on in some of these countries and it is not quite keeping up. That is the first point that I wanted to ask you about. Also, my experience of talking to Ministers, MPs, various people and NGOs that I met when I was in the Sudan is that they want more investment. They want Britain to do more; they do not want Britain to go away. Even as a former colonial country, they are saying, “They are not supporting us in developing business to make our people prosperous, coming out of the conflict. We need business investment”. They did not talk about aid so much, but one of them said, “We want to go back to the golden days when we had a marvellous relationship and you supported us to become potentially a rich country with our energy, oil, gold and so on”. Do you think that we are not balancing those two things? The old slogan is “Trade not aid”. Should that be what we are looking at?

Ian Birrell: I think that it is slightly too simplistic just to go down to trade versus aid, but certainly trade will do far more than aid ever will. Mo Ibrahim said only this week that aid was never going to help Africa to develop. It is very easy to trot out statistics without bothering to look at what lies behind those statistics. Let us look at the one on primary education. Last year, I was asked to go out to Kibera by some of the people working for British charities who were so horrified by the patronising attitudes that they saw from the British charity workers. Kibera is billed as the biggest slum in Africa, but in fact it is not. In the middle of it is a fantastic primary school, which Gordon Brown once visited to proclaim how brilliantly this money was doing in terms of primary education. In fact, what happened there was that free primary education came in, but there were no extra teachers, no extra classrooms and no extra books. The school, which is very famous, is right in the centre of Kibera. It used to offer a fantastic and inspirational education to the kids in the area, but standards absolutely crashed because the number of kids going there doubled. What then happened was that all the rich kids left and went to private schools, which increased inequality. Now some of the poorest kids are setting up their own private schools, because standards have fallen so much. So, yes, we are putting more kids into primary education, but actually the standards are worsening.

This is not just me saying it. The independent aid watchdog said that £1 billion went into education in three east African countries but standards did not rise at all, for the same sorts of reason. They said exactly the same about Nigeria. It is easy to trot out these statistics from a department whose only interest is to give away ever bigger sums without ever monitoring effectively how that is being spent and turning a blind eye to unbelievably bad human rights abuses. We should look behind the statistics at the evidence.

It is all much more complex, of course. Is it just about trade? It is not just about trade. We can do many other things, such as the ones that I have highlighted, including dealing with visas and clamping down on corruption where it comes to our shores. But it is part of the equation. The problem is that we have been so blinkered over the last 30 years by this aid obsession. To some extent, I think that it is a weird colonial guilt, which has made us end up in a strange form of neo-colonialism today. The legacy of that is that we are missing opportunities. Look at what countries such as Turkey and Brazil are doing in Africa. It is incredible how much they are achieving—it is not just China. Yet we, who used to do more trade with Africa than anyone else, are being left behind because of this obsession with saving Africa through aid.
The Chairman: But is your point, Mr Birrell, that our aid does not work or that the whole principle of trying to improve a nation’s reputational position by aid and development programmes is wrong? I am not quite sure. Or is it both?

Ian Birrell: It is both. I think that aid is regressive and does not work and I think that increasingly it is resented and is bad for the British image. So it is both.

Q133 The Chairman: Now Mr Glennie.

Jonathan Glennie: I think that Ian is a brilliant writer and I agree with a lot of what he said just then. I just want to throw in the fact that I wrote a book called The Trouble with Aid: Why Less Could Mean More for Africa, not because I want you to read it, although if you wish to it is a very good book, but because I want to demonstrate that I am not sitting here as a mega aid lobbyist. I have criticised aid a lot, but nevertheless my view of Ian’s work—I have told him this—is that he is a polemicist. He has a line and he draws all the evidence that he can to follow that line. It is simply not okay to dismiss all the evidence, of which there is a vast amount, that aid has sometimes worked to deliver education and health in many parts of the world. I used to work for Christian Aid. We spent £1 million a year in Colombia. I can verify—Ian will disagree—that that aid meant a lot to the displaced communities in the north of Colombia and the poor women’s groups that we worked with in Bogotá. That is one tiny example, but my point is this: aid is very complicated. That is where I agree with Ian. I also agree that there is this big saviour complex. I think that we have totally exaggerated the importance of aid. The tax regime change that Ian is backing is something that we worked on at Christian Aid long before anyone else picked it up. I fully agree with all that stuff, but I do not think that it is okay to say, “All the effort of aid over the last 30 years is nonsense and rubbish”. That is just not true. Ian says that everyone resents aid. There is some resentment towards aid, yes. People in government do not like being told what to do and they are quite right not to. A lot of people see the long-term, cumulative effects of aid, which is to do with aid dependency. There is a brilliant book called Time to Listen—not written by me. You should look for that. It speaks to a whole bunch of aid receivers, who recognise the good that aid does. They also point out a lot of the problems with aid. That would be my slightly more balanced line.

Q134 The Chairman: I am just going to ask a soothing, moderating question in my proper role as Chairman before we go on with this theme. Building on my original question, do all four of you believe that something has changed? One of the reasons we are here in this Committee is that we have a sense, largely supported by outside opinion, that the conditions of Asia, Africa and Latin America have changed, that the political outlook has changed and that there is a rising not merely economic but intellectual and political power in these nations. They look at Europe as being the cock of the roost for the past few hundred years and they say, “We’ve had enough of that”. Whether you think that aid is patronising and the wrong thing or whether you think it is doing extra work—both propositions are true—are we in completely changed conditions from, say, 30 years ago? Can I have a view on that?

Phil Vernon: There is a very simple answer to that and it is yes, absolutely. Things have changed massively and are changing. I think that the way you have framed this inquiry is a very interesting way of looking at that issue. I am not here to defend aid. I am not actually here to present the idea that aid is a factor in soft power, but I think that the world has changed and that Britain’s role in the world is changing and will continue to change.
The Chairman: So that means that, if we are to do anything at all, we must couch whatever we do—humanitarian development or anything else—in terms that are different from the language of the aid lobbies of 20 or 30 years ago.

Phil Vernon: Absolutely. In a way, I would not be an adherent of the UK’s soft power objective. I am a big fan of liberal democracy, but I am not a Whig. As a liberal democracy, we have to admit that this country, which is relatively successful, can make a great contribution to the evolution of other parts of the world in that direction. I think that we have a very attractive set of institutions. Those—I do not necessarily mean Governments—in countries which are developing look to countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States and see things that they like, and they want to see what they can do along the same lines. We are an interesting model—although not a role model—for people to have a look at and learn from, and I think that that is part of the soft power equation. It is not the soft power for the United Kingdom; for me, it is the soft power of peaceful, prosperous and liberal democratic ways of living, for which I have a lot of ambitions for the world in the future.

The Chairman: I have just one more question and then Lord Janvrin and others may wish to come in. Mr Pyman, the word in front of you—“Transparency”—is now central to a lot of our discussion. Ten or 15 years ago it was not much use. Does that fit in with your view that we are dealing with new conditions, new values and new standards around the world?

Mark Pyman: The quick answer is that I do not know. I was not around 30 years ago in this industry, so I cannot give you a 30-year comparison. However, I am just thinking about the work that we do. We work a bit with conflict in poorer states but we work a lot more with countries that are in this rapidly developing environment, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Colombia and India. We are involved in tackling defence corruption and security corruption. I think that I am in agreement with Phil. These countries are well aware that they are growing quickly, and they are well aware that they are going to outpace the UK by miles, if they have not done so already, but I find a huge appreciation of what the UK has to offer. It is nothing to do with patronising; it is to do with saying, “You’ve got skills and competences that we want to have from you”. I find that sincere and genuine, and I find that it is clearly contributing to what is happening in a particular country. To take an example, Colombia has had huge problems with the guerrillas and narcotics over the past 10 years. They were well aware that one of the reasons they were failing was that the public rightly perceived that the Colombian military and the Colombian MoD seemed to be tied in with both illegal groups—it was perception, if not fact—and we worked with them for some years to try to untangle that. This has nothing to do with patronising or colonialism; they have big, serious and difficult problems, and we are a group that they think can help with those problems. That is what we find in country after country. I do not think of this as something very different from the situation 30 years ago. I think it is to do with providing really competent assistance on problems that quite often dwarf the scale of the UK’s problems.

Q135 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: The common theme coming across is more or less that aid only sometimes works, if then. However, that is not good enough, is it? This is a large sum of British taxpayers’ money that we are supposedly using to help individuals and communities. There seems to be a thread coming through that the world has indeed changed, yet thinking of the Declaration of Human Rights I am reminded that we are not in 1947 and that many conventions have followed it, sometimes competing with it. Indeed, a common values system can no longer really be found very easily in the United Nations conventions. Coming back to the point about common values—here, we are being instructed that perhaps UK values, such as they are, are ones that people search for from
us—would it not be better to have a look at what we are trying to achieve as a nation and
to try to see exactly how we can analyse, quantify and determine exactly what we want to
achieve as a nation, rather than perhaps as individual departments running in different
directions? I feel that no one has yet said what aid actually works. Is it possible that that is
because the very word “aid” is now so fuzzy, imprecise and unquantifiable that perhaps no
one here can tell us what it really means, let alone which element of it works?

Phil Vernon: I absolutely welcome your question and I completely agree with what is behind
it. I have also written something that was published a couple of years ago. I found it very
difficult to know whether I was talking about aid, development assistance or simply
“processes which make life better for people”. It is quite hard, and I absolutely think that we
have to look at what we do as a nation, and indeed as groups of nations that we are part of
as well. I do not think that we are alone in this enterprise. A lot of issues come out of what
you have said. I work for a smallish NGO. Our annual budget this year is £14 million. I think
that we do a heck of a lot with relatively little. You can call what we do aid and you can call
DfID giving £100 million to a Government somewhere aid, but they are very different
endeavours. Putting everything together, it is easy for Ian to say that aid is wrong. I am sure
that he knows as well as any of us that there are very good examples, as well as lots of bad
examples.

If I may, I shall give you just a couple of examples of our work that I think do work. We have
reported on some of the outcomes in the past year. We have supported interesting new
ways of working among political parties in Lebanon. We are doing that not with British
support but with Norwegian support. That is aid, if you like. We are, and have been for the
past three years, helping members of political parties in Lebanon to discover new ways of
working on issues which get them beyond the sectarian differences that they have. It is long,
slow work, but we have seen evidence of change there. That is aid.

We have helped local community members to support the resolution of conflicts in the
Congo and Kyrgyzstan. In many places we have helped to increase transparency and due
care in the way that mining and oil are managed in specific contexts. I could go on but these
are examples of actual outcomes with evidence behind them and of changes that have
happened. Most cases are not huge; they are relatively small. However, they are all part of
what I think is the incremental enterprise of fostering the evolution of change, which is non-
linear. You cannot preordain it. Certainly I could not be patronising and sit here and say that
in the Congo it is going to change like this. With Congolese colleagues, I can formulate a
strategy as to how my organisation, working with others, can support and thrust forward
the changes, but I cannot preordain it. No one can preordain how history is going to happen,
which is what development actually is. It is a very complicated enterprise that we are talking
about here.

The last thing I would say is that it is bound to fail a lot of the time because there is no clear
theory of change that one can put out there. One of the mistakes that we sometimes make
is to try to over-codify the business of political, social and economic evolution. Sometimes
things just happen. I think that the most we can do is to help to create an environment in
which things can happen more effectively, whether through capacity, skills, a bit of money,
capital or improved legal systems. All those sorts of things contribute, but it is definitely
down to the nation and not DfID.

Q136 Lord Janvrin: This very much follows on the theme of looking at the promotion of
values. You talk about liberal democracy, conflict resolution, transparency and that kind of
ting. Mr Vernon, we have been focusing very much on some of your thoughts but I should
be interested in hearing from some of the others. Looking five or 10 years ahead, is this the way in which we should be looking at how Britain, if you like, scopes its aid overseas? I am using the word “aid” in very broad terms. Given that a number of you have spoken about the international importance of this—the fact that you work with the Norwegians and so on—is Britain going to get some kind of benefit out of it? Where you are international organisations but are probably seen abroad as British, are you extending our soft power with this sort of international approach? In other words, I am trying to untangle what is in it for Britain—I am sure that some of you may consider that to be the wrong question but I think that you necessarily have to ask it—while, at the same time, promoting international values.

Phil Vernon: Perhaps I may quickly start off on that. I would say three things. The answer to your first question is yes. I think that is the way in which we should be thinking about scoping our support—call it aid or whatever. Secondly, is power accruing to this country? You are familiar with the millennium development goals. They are expiring in 2015 and will not be met. There are lots of reasons for that, and plenty that one can read about. I think it is fair to say that British NGOs and the British Government have been at the forefront—we have been intelligent voices—in shaping the next round of goals which are set to replace the millennium development goals. They are far more interesting than the MDGs. They are not subject/object goals; they are not about us doing things to other people or people “over there” getting a better life. They are supposed to be universal goals. They are an attempt to take the Millennium Declaration, which every country bar one, I think, signed up to in 2000, and convert it into a way of thinking about how change can happen differentially in different contexts and how the richer countries can support those changes. So I think that there is some soft power accruing to us but, as I said earlier, I think that one can only really examine the amount of power one has vis-à-vis a particular goal or end.

Q137 The Chairman: How do we avoid Mr Birrell’s concern, to put it mildly, that in these operations we might be helping undesirable regimes to do nasty things, or, because of an element of “We know best” and “We’ve got wonderful systems and we’d like to share them with you”, that we are being a bit patronising? How do we avoid those pitfalls and maximise the sorts of things that you have talked about? That question is for Mr Glennie.

Jonathan Glennie: Let me try to answer that quickly by saying what aid works. We have heard that a lot of the small aid—civil society-level aid and small interventions—works and I think that there is plenty of evidence of that. In terms of big aid, my line has always been that when you are talking about the cumulative impact of the aid as a small proportion of the recipient country’s overall finances—in other words, it is 30% or 40% of a country’s finances over a 20 or 30-year period, and that is the experience of many countries, especially in Africa—then I would argue that we are talking about the kind of analysis that Ian has given. A lot of very poor countries such as Rwanda and Liberia are seeking to reduce their aid dependency over time, and I think that that means that they can continue to use aid much more effectively, rather than just finish up with aid. How do we avoid the negative impacts? Life and history are complex. If you can take aid totally out of the equation, you still have Britain, America, China and a whole bunch of other countries supporting nefarious regimes. It has little to do with aid. Aid is one tool in the armoury of countries that sometimes want to support democracy and sometimes want to totally undermine democracy for their own interests. That is just life.

On whether we are working as a nation or working as DfID and other ministries, that is an interesting question. I can see the argument that says we should all be working together to achieve a similar objective. In our trade that is known as policy coherence—a nebulous term. Phil mentioned the 2015 goals. Those are going to be under the framework of sustainable
development. The whole idea is that everything comes together in a kind of Utopic, wonderful new world. There obviously is a case for everyone working together, but at the same time it is quite unlikely that that is going to happen. I can sit here saying that I do not really believe in putting forward British interests and that I think we should be trying to seed interests in favour of the poorest of the world, but I also understand politics. So there is something to be said—and this was the great genius of setting up DfID—for having a champion for the poorest within government. The MoD and the FCO are always going to have slightly separate objectives. DfID has had different objectives. There is a story that Tony Blair told in a speech that he was giving to the ODI. I think he said that he was visiting Sierra Leone. He was speaking to some of the DfID people there and he asked, “How does it feel to work for the Government?” This particular person said, “I don’t work for the British Government; I work for DfID”. Certainly in the early years, there was a very strong sense that DfID was specifically set up in order to champion causes that the overall British Government—quite understandably, because they are meant to represent the interests of the British people—might not champion in the same way. I just share that thought with you.

Q138 The Chairman: Mr Birrell, it is your turn, and then we will hear from Mr Pyman.

Ian Birrell: I think that spinning out DfID was one of the biggest mistakes that Tony Blair’s Government made, and there are a lot to choose from. All that has happened is that budgets have got bigger and bigger and bigger, and it has completely usurped the Foreign Office when it comes to foreign policy. It is driven not by any ideas of British interest but totally by the idea of giving away ever larger sums of money with ever fewer checks.

Going back to other questions about universal values, I think that there are universal values that we should uphold. The problem is that we do not uphold them. We talk about aid but you should look at what is happening with aid going to Rwanda. This is a country which has been accused time and again of ripping off minerals from the Congo, of invading the Congo and of provoking a war which has killed more people than any conflict since World War II. Scotland Yard has said that Rwanda has sent hit squads to kill British citizens in Britain. We gave aid to the Media High Council, which stopped independent newspapers being allowed to exist. We gave aid to the body which stopped rivals standing against a President who won the election by an absurd amount. We pour money into Rwanda, despite the fact that it has absolutely appalling human rights issues. I think that that symbolises exactly what has gone wrong with our aid. We talk about universal values and then display complete contempt for them. There is also Ethiopia. I have just come back from talking to people who are suing the British Government because they are among 4 million people being thrown off their land by a one-party state, which is effectively guilty of Stalinist practices. It is totally authoritarian. Again, we are giving money to officials from a one-party regime which is throwing people off the land, which is then sold to people abroad—outside investors—or given to people from the tribe which is running the Government. Again, in Ethiopia, just as in Rwanda and elsewhere, British taxpayers’ money is going on abhorrent human rights abuses, which have nothing to do with universal values which we, as a nation, should uphold and which I personally hold dear.

I shall give you just one other case, which is Somaliland. It has been quoted in an economics paper in Stanford. Because it was not recognised, it got virtually no aid. After a civil war which left the entire country destroyed, the main capital, Hargeisa, was flattened. Most people fled into exile and then had to come back to a country which had absolutely nothing in it in probably the hottest corner of the world, given its location. Then, because it got no aid, Somaliland had no option but to build its own country, its own tax system and its own democratic institutions. They got together and, without any help from outside organisations
in conflict resolution, democracy-building, good governance or anything like that, they got on and built a fantastic political system with two Houses—one democratically elected and the other based on a traditional system of elders. It took a lot of sitting around with the big conquerors to work out how to do it but, as a result, they have had elections which have gone to under 100 votes, and they have handed over power quite peacefully. That is a complete model for a country building under its own steam and without outside help. They take incredible pride in what they have done and in what they have achieved. There is even a fantastic maternity hospital, which is now exporting to other parts in the area. They have done it all themselves and they believe that they did it because they do not get aid.

Unfortunately, we are now beginning to see corruption because aid groups are moving in there, but I think that Somaliland—a country even in a place such as that with as unprepossessing a set of circumstances as that—has shown that it has managed to create something which in many ways is a model in terms of tax-raising and particularly in terms of governance. It is such a contrast to Somalia, which is just down below and has had a terrible history in recent years.

Q139 **The Chairman:** Mr Pyman, would you like to add anything to that?

**Mark Pyman:** I want to make a few slightly different points. First, Baroness Nicholson talked about achieving things as a nation rather than as DfID. In the world in which we work, which is security anti-corruption and defence anti-corruption, DfID has quite a good name. One reason is that it has worked quite hard to make things work across government departmental divides. For all its bureaucratic faults, it has the Stabilisation Unit, which operates across FCO, DfID and MoD. It is just a bureaucratic thing, but most other Governments that I speak to are hugely envious of such cross government working, because they are much more stovepiped than the UK. I think that there is a positive angle there.

The second point that I would like to make is about defining what is soft power. If I think about the analogy with the concept of corruption 30 years ago, absolutely everyone had an opinion on what it was and what the remedy was. It has taken 20 or so years before the understanding of the subject has got to a sufficient depth that you can really disaggregate corruption for different countries or different environments and move to solutions. My sense is that soft power is in the same state today, and that it is going to be five or 10 years before people have a real understanding of it. It is currently the vehicle for too many of our wishes for UK influence, which I do not think is a very effective starting point.

To think about DfID in five to 10 years time, DfID's statutory obligation is to eradicate poverty. If I remember my statistics, most poor people in terms of numbers are in places such as China, Indonesia and India; in other words, they are not in the poorest and most fragile countries - the Rwandas, the Burundis, the Haitis and the Timor-Lestes of this world. Either its priorities are somewhat in the wrong direction or it is a wrong statement of priority. I do not quite know the answer to that, but it is not quite what you expect. If India and China are where DfID should be putting its money to match the objective of eradicating most poverty, then something is wrong with the objective.

My third point is a very small example of benefit to the UK. My team works a lot in Ukraine, with the security services and the defence environment. Not only is it a hugely corrupt nation with huge corruption problems, but a major reason why a lot of people are poor is all the abuses by the defence and security system. Even though there is limited political will at the top to do anything about this problem, there is a huge body of well meaning people in the heart of the security and defence apparatus who really want to see this problem get better. They hugely appreciate the kind of input that folk like us are giving them, to the tune
of training thousands of senior officers and things like that. Phil put this in the context of small civil society things and maybe it is in that category but, to me, in terms of the influence that the UK directly gains from that, it is very tangible in a nation that has a long-term strategic interest for the UK.

My fourth point—and here I agree with what Ian said a little while ago—is that one of the problems with lots of aid is that corruption always comes with it. It is very hard for it not to. The aid agencies mostly have a pretty bad record at putting strong measures in place to limit that corruption. DfID is by no means the worst of them, but I think that this is an area where one can do a lot better. The other side of that is that the UK is, as Ian says, a centre for laundering huge amounts of corrupt cash. DfID does a bit about that; it funds the Metropolitan Police unit that deals with proceeds of crime from overseas—I cannot remember what it is called. It also funds a couple of similar units. But this is very small indeed. In terms of contributing to Britain’s image overseas, Britain as a whole could be 10 times stronger on this subject and have a lot more influence worldwide.

Finally, on the corruption story, the subject is so prevalent in almost all aid environments that it means not that you do not give aid but that you are a great deal more careful about how you give it, to whom you give it and what the conditions are with it. Awareness of that is much higher now after all the dramas of Afghanistan than it was 10 or 15 years ago.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. We have talked about whether aid is an investment and whether there is a return. Lord Forsyth, would you like to ask questions on that?

Q140 Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: Just before I pick up on your point, Mr Pyman, when you say that there is a lot more we can do about Belgravia and Chelsea being in darkness because of all this money, what specifically do you think we should be doing?

Mark Pyman: There are various relatively small initiatives for chasing the proceeds of illegally gotten assets. DfID has a very small initiative and the World Bank has one, but in terms of being ready to go after people where you think the money has come into this country illegally and corruptly, investigations and prosecutions is the short answer to your question, as well as the resources to enable that to happen.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: Are you saying that we are dragging our feet on that?

Mark Pyman: Yes.

Ian Birrell: I just want to add a tiny thing to that. There is quite a contrast with France. The French have recently cracked down on three countries where very obvious theft of assets was going on. They have taken quite strong action against the rulers and their families, including prosecuting them and stripping them of assets. That is quite a contrast with how little we have done in this country.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: Okay. Just going back to this aid question, I sat for many months on a different Select Committee of this House—the Economic Affairs Committee—when we looked at development aid. One thing that struck me during that inquiry was that we had former officials from DfID saying to us, “We can’t spend the money quickly enough”. Therefore, if people are spending money without clear objectives and clear methods of measurement, you are going to get waste and damage. The impact of that was huge distortions in the local wage economy and huge distortions on tax collection and so on. We are here not really to look at the merits of development aid as such but rather to look at it in the context of soft power. What I find quite difficult to grasp is that, if people argue that aid helps with soft power, when one asks how we can measure that and what are the examples—and listening to the diverse opinions from the four of you today—it tends to be
asserted, “Actually, we've done great things in this or that country”. But it is difficult to get metrics that enable us to quantify whether it adds to soft power or makes no difference to soft power. Mr Glennie gave me the impression from his evidence that he does not really care whether it affects soft power or not, because he sees it as something that we should do regardless of Britain's interest. But this Committee is looking at soft power, so is aid actually helping with soft power? If so, how can we measure the effectiveness of the benefits of it both in the short term and the long term, and are we doing it?

Phil Vernon: Yes, that is the 56 something or other dollar question, I think—

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: It is $11 billion, actually.

Phil Vernon: I think that the answer is probably that we cannot yet. This is the nub of the problem, I think. Turn back the clock 30 years. Aid was pretty simple. It was about building roads in places where we do not have roads. It was a very basic equation of investment in this in order to allow the possibility of that. Now, as we have peeled different layers of that onion over the decades, we have seen more and more of the complexity of what it means to—and I like to use this word—evolve, politically, economically and socially. I would say that I have learnt that it is virtually impossible to know exactly how to measure that. Not only that, but we will not know for some time.

Let me take the example of Rwanda as a way of throwing into sharp relief the challenge. Nobody would doubt that, if one could contribute to central Africa being a better place for its citizens, that would be a good endeavour and a good thing to do—“good” and “better” according to the values that we talked about earlier. The problem is: what is the historical process through which the people of central Africa might achieve that more prosperous, more peaceful life? We cannot know; we can only posit. Take Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda. One can look at him and his Government and say, “This is a corrupt, evil, et cetera Government that is stamping on people's rights. We should definitely not support him or anything that he is involved with”. One could say, as he does—and I do not know the answer to this; I have worked in Rwanda myself, but I do not know the answer—that he has a good idea of how his country, which he knows better than we do, might evolve. He believes in same sort of values as we do but, a bit like St Augustine, not yet, because he does not think that the country is ready for it yet. So he is trying to shape the future of his country, which will be more in line with our values. If you are the British Government or a British NGO thinking about whether to try to provide support to those historical processes that have yet to unfold in Rwanda and its part of the world, I think that you have a judgment to make. It cannot be a judgment made on the basis of science; it has to be more of an arts judgment. It is, “Do we think that by allying ourselves with those people who are in power currently in Kigali and in that country we can help them to create the possibility of a better future for the people of that country now and in the future, as well as in the region?” It is a judgment. The metrics are too difficult and we will be dead before it is clear. So it is a bit of an article of faith.

Q141 Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: But just to give you an example, and I shall probably get into trouble for saying this, I remember that a couple of years ago, when Andrew Mitchell was in charge of DFID, he wrote me a letter asking whether I would like to come to Rwanda for three weeks to help to paint a school. I thought, “What a ridiculous proposal”. I am sure that, to improve things in Rwanda, there are better ways of inputting the cost of me going there for three weeks to paint a school. I completely understood why a project like that might be helpful to the Government or to Britain's image, but I did not know whether it would be helpful to Rwanda. Did it represent a sensible way of using resources? I had my
doubts, so I did not accept his invitation. What I am trying to get to the bottom of is this. My perspective is that we should not be spending scarce resources unless we know that they are going to advance our interest or that of another country and we can see the benefit. How are we meant to progress, given the sums involved? If this is justified on the grounds of soft power, where is the evidence?

**Phil Vernon:** It is a big challenge, and I would say that we cannot know for sure the answer to that question. It is something that will take time. What I would say, going back to the question about whether it is a British or a DfID thing, is that if one chooses to invest one’s scarce resources in that place that I was talking about, one needs to accompany the investment of the money with people of the highest and most astute political calibre. It is not a technical investment; it is very much a political investment that one is making. So if one goes for that and one decides to invest those scarce resources in the ideas and the projects of the Government of Rwanda, one has to do it with one’s eyes wide open, create a genuine political partnership and take the risks that go with that.

**Jonathan Glennie:** I think, with respect, Lord Forsyth, that possibly you were not invited for your painting skills; more probably, it was an opportunity for you to experience life in Rwanda rather than for you to help with building a school. That, I think, is relevant when we look at the kind of approach that we take to aid. This is where I disagree with Ian. I agree with the use of soft power when it promotes, as I said, positive values—not when it promotes our own interests, which is not something that I am particularly concerned with. With regard to Rwanda, I think that it is useful to have people who know deeply about Rwanda. I do not agree that Britain should simply cut off ties with all countries. I presume that Ian also means trading ties, by the way. There is no reason why one should cut aid and continue to trade with these heinous human rights abusers, so presumably there would be trade sanctions as well, in which case why are we trading with China? Why are we trading with the United States, a heinous human rights abuser? There are all sorts of other countries, too. We do so because engagement is often—not always—as good a thing as cutting all ties. Aid is part of that. Knowing about the country deeply and politically is a crucial part of answering your question, which is how we know whether we are making any difference. It is incredibly complicated. It would be great to have some clear evidence. New ways are emerging—the famous randomised control trials—that demonstrate which aid interventions are really working and which are not. It is a kind of social-scientific analysis. The reality is that, with these big investments, we do not know. Where is the evidence in Britain that a huge investment in whatever it is, perhaps the big railway, will—

**Lord Forsyth of Drumlean:** Exactly.

**Jonathan Glennie:** Fine, but where is the evidence? Maybe that is a terrible example and everyone disagrees with it, but sometimes the British Government make big investments on the basis of some evidence and there is a huge disagreement about it. There is politics involved. Indeed, in aid there are huge disagreements about which aid has worked and which aid has not worked. Ultimately, it is an analysis of the evidence and a balance of it. I do not believe that we will ever come to a stage where there is clear evidence one way or the other. It is partly an art.

I have a thought on the Chinese way of doing things. We have just had a Chinese delegation over in ODI. This is a simplistic way of putting it, but the Chinese way of doing it is to assess the impact of their output. In other words, when they have built the road, they assess whether the road is any good. That is a much easier thing to do than the task that DfID sets itself, which is not to assess whether the road is any good but to assess whether the road has had an impact on reducing poverty, increasing economic growth and supporting
women’s rights—all those important outcomes, to use the technical language, that we really care about. That is really, really hard to check. DfID quite rightly sets itself a hard task. We will always be in this mire of, “It is not clear on the evidence”. My point is that we have the money to give aid. I do not think that we should be cutting aid on the basis that we are poor.

Q142 The Chairman: Did you say that we have the money?

Jonathan Glennie: Of course we have the money. We have huge amounts of money compared with the rest of the world and these countries that we are talking about.

My final point—and this agrees with what Ian and Lord Forsyth have been saying—is that we always end up talking about aid, thinking that it is the big thing, but if I was to make a list of 10 issues that Britain needs to focus on to increase poverty and to increase sustainable development around the world, and therefore to support soft power, if that is something that is a concern, aid would be down there at No. 10, possibly. It is not unimportant, but it is not as important as sorting out our tax regime, reducing our climate change emissions, sorting out the arms trade, making sure that our businesses are properly regulated or promoting human rights, which since the financial crisis we are doing less than we previously did, because we are more concerned supposedly with British interests. Those are the kind of things that we should be focusing on, not just aid.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: Just to be clear about this, are you saying that aid is 10th on the list as far as soft power is concerned? Are you saying that it does not matter?

Jonathan Glennie: What I am concerned about is the impact that we have on poverty reduction, where, yes, aid is 10th on the list.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: In terms of soft power.

Jonathan Glennie: I do not know. You were quite right when you said that I am not that interested in increasing Britain’s soft power. I am an internationalist; I think that Britain’s relative power needs to decrease over time and that other countries should become richer and more powerful.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: I got that.

Jonathan Glennie: That means that we are going to become relatively less powerful, which in my view is progress. It may not be from the perspective of people on this Committee, but it may actually be—

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: But are you saying that aid is No. 10 on a list of soft power or are you saying that it is No. 10 on your personal internationalist list?

Jonathan Glennie: I am saying that if Britain really wants to help to eradicate poverty from the world and to support the structural transformation required so that we develop sustainably without ruining the world, aid comes down to about 10th on the list of things that we need to do. You can relate that to soft power as you wish.

The Chairman: We must press on. I know that Baroness Nicholson wants to come in, but we have very little time.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: Could we just hear Mr Birrell answer the question, Lord Chairman?

Ian Birrell: Just very briefly, while we are talking about Rwanda, I will quote the former head of Britain’s aid programme in Rwanda. He said: “It is difficult to describe how surreal the industry begins to feel after you have worked in Africa. It’s certainly the least effective major
public sector funded by Western taxpayers”. It just seems to me bizarre that people who profess to have concern for the developing world think that it is absolutely fine to carry out some kind of giant social experiment on other parts of the world, which is really what everyone is admitting that the aid game is.

Q143 The Chairman: I want to press on because we want to ask you briefly about working with other organisations around the world. Lord Janvrin, you have a question.

Lord Janvrin: Yes. It picks up quite a lot of the theme of what we have been saying. However internationalist you are, are you actually identified as a British organisation, however labelled, or can you somehow stand above that label by working with others? Mr Vernon, you mentioned the Norwegians. I am back on the theme that if an organisation, which may be labelled international but is seen to be British, is promoting international values, some benefit accrues to this country. It is part of what I think soft power is about, which is projecting values. Do those of you who are looking at some of these international benchmarks, whether it be in transparency or in other fields, think that there is a British benefit to it?

Mark Pyman: From the point of view of my organisation, Transparency International, the answer is yes, definitely. Sometimes we speak worldwide on corruption purely as an international organisation. I lead the defence and security programme worldwide out of London, and in every country we are in people say, “Ah now, is that because you’re British?”—brackets for laughter at some of our defence scandals over the past few years. Leaving that to one side, it connects very directly with the question of whether they think that the origin of this particular initiative comes from Britain or not. That is seen in a positive light. So I think that, for us, the answer is a very distinct “yes”.

Phil Vernon: I would say it is not something for us. We are a British organisation. We work in 25 or 26 countries and there are about 210 of us. I think I am right in saying that we have 50 nationalities working in the organisation. Most people probably do not even see us as British, even though the headquarters are in London. In some circumstances, we prefer not to be seen as British. If I take the Lebanon example, personally I am not associated with that work but I am told by my colleagues that it is quite handy that our funding there is neither British nor American, and that to some extent we can be Norwegian in that context; it makes life a bit easier for us. We made a decision, which our board of trustees debated and agreed with, not to work in Afghanistan on the basis that, as a British NGO, we would be seen as part of the occupying forces. So sometimes we see ourselves as more British and sometimes as less so, but I cannot put my finger on what has accrued to Britain because of our work.

However, I would say that success creates legitimacy and that he or she who is successful gets associated with that success. Where we have made a positive difference and where people see that we are a British NGO, that cannot be bad for Britain, but we do not make a big deal of it.

The Chairman: It does not help or hinder that we are a member of the European Union or part of the Commonwealth family? Do either of those issues come into your work at all?

Mark Pyman: Not for us.

Ian Birrell: The only thing I would add, if I may wear my cultural hat for a second rather than my polemician hat, is that culture is obviously a huge part of British soft power, with the creative industries being so strong. Part of the reason for that now is the diverse nature of British society, and particularly London, but it is very, very hard to continue down that path.
when it is so hard for foreign performers outside Europe to come to Britain to work. You might be an African musician trying to get a visa to come to this country. If you are in, say, Mali, where a lot of them are at the moment, first you have to send your passport to Dakar. You might be summoned to an interview in Dakar and your passport and your details then go to Accra in Ghana. You can be without a passport for two or three weeks, and that stops you working. It costs more than it costs to get a visa for Schengen and, at the end of it, you might not get the visa anyway because of such paranoia about immigration issues.

Those things are not unique, and it makes it very, very hard for, say, a band of 10 or 15 people to come to Britain, where they are not going to earn much money given the state of the music industry. If we are trying to push our soft power, which I think we should, one of the things we should be looking at is how to make it easier for businesspeople, performers and people like that who want to come and work with British businesses and British artistic troupes to get visas. At the moment it is very, very hard, and that is going to have a long-term impact as these countries grow very fast and become richer. Actually, our artists need to get there. At the moment their artists are not coming here or they are going to play or tour in a Schengen area where they need only one visa and it costs less, or they will go to America. If I may, I should like to prompt the Committee to have a further look at the whole issue of visa requirements. I am not saying that you need to abandon them, but it needs to be made easier for people with quite prominent names in some of these industries to come and work here.

The Chairman: That is a common theme that has come up with many of our witnesses.

Q144 Lord Hodgson of AstleyAbbotts: Can I raise one point? I understand what you are saying about particular groups, but equally you have been suggesting that what these countries now need is not the ability to build a road but a much more sophisticated emergence of middle-class, politicised individuals. Is Britain's soft power helped or hindered by the fact that we often permanently recruit people to come and serve here in our National Health Service? We recruit nurses. I am told that the NHS has recruited in Malawi and that there are 330 nurses for 12 million people in Malawi. Does that help? It helps us here—I understand that—but does it help our soft power?

Ian Birrell: I refer you to a report by Michael Clemens at the Center for Global Development. He looked at this issue and found that their staff coming here is actually very beneficial to the countries concerned and that the idea that we are stealing their staff is all a bit of a myth. What happens is that a lot of them go back from here much better trained. They send back remittances and it makes it a more attractive industry. The Philippines is of course the best example of this. But actually it is a complete myth and it merits further looking at.

Jonathan Glennie: Just on that last point, I agree that Michael Clemens's work has thrown up some interesting questions about this, but I think that it would be dangerous just to dismiss the whole brain-drain problem as a myth. It could well be a problem, although I do not know the answer.

Ian Birrell: The other point is that surely people have a right to go where they want. If people want to go somewhere, who are you to comment? Would you tell a doctor in Birmingham that they could not go and work in Glasgow because it might not be good for people in Birmingham? Surely people have a right to travel where they want and to work where they want.

Lord Hodgson of AstleyAbbotts: I would say two things. First of all, do I have a right to say to a doctor from India on a visa, “At the end of it, you’re finished. You go back.”? All I
Ian Birrell: I am very happy to get into the immigration debate, where I suspect I have different views from you, but I do not think that that is necessarily what the Chairman wants.

Q145 The Chairman: I do not think that we want to get into that. Baroness Nicholson, you want to talk about how these gentlemen and their work comes up with the grimmer aspects of nation-building and development that we have seen in recent years.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Yes. The problem with some of the answers that we have heard—and they have been very interesting indeed—is that there is no real commonality, except to say more or less that aid is not working other than in small doses and in very small elements, which runs counter to the view of multilateral aid and Britain’s enormous amount of aid going that way. What about the concept of aid used as capacity-building and institution-building? At the moment, I am really only interested in the reference to “official aid”. I do not really think that it is any of our business what private aid does. It is the official aid flows that I think we are really interested in. How can those be used in terms of Britain’s overall goals of capacity-building and institution-building in order to provide unstable nations that could be a danger to us with greater stability and perhaps more investment either in Britain or vice versa? How can overseas aid be used, if at all, for that?

Jonathan Glennie: Another part of your question concerned whether we should be including private aid in our purview. I wanted to reply to the point about our relations and to the question about capacity-building. I do not know what we mean by private aid but I think that NGOs should be included within the purview of this Committee. In so far as soft power relates to Britain’s brand and reputation, I think that the work of British NGOs is absolutely integral to that.

Q146 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: I beg your pardon. Could I quickly interrupt on a point of accuracy? By private aid, I meant personal donations. Britain is the second highest personal donor on the globe, and that is money that people can give to be used in any way they want. I am talking about taxpayer money, whoever uses it. It can be used by NGOs. At the moment, a huge amount of it goes via DfID to Governments, where it is non-accountable. It cannot be traced and we do not know what happens to it, as reports from the House of Commons consistently tell us and as our own evidence shows. So it is the unaccountable, non-transferable use of official aid that is a major concern of mine—and, I am sure, of others as well. You have all identified to your satisfaction, although perhaps possibly not Ian, that small aid can be used effectively for the direct reduction of poverty in small doses, but the vast amount of official aid is not used in that way any longer. It was until about 1997 and then there was a big shift in DfID. It now goes straight to Governments, which, as Transparency International tells us, are self-evidently corrupt. Also, a huge amount goes through sub-contracting, sub-contracting and sub-contracting to very large NGOs, which gives rise to comments such as, “We’ve got to get rid of money fast”, because perhaps the public want it.

Ian Birrell: You have sort of answered your own question there, have you not? The truth is that capacity-building is as much of a sham as a lot of the other aid lobby work, as we have
seen so spectacularly in Afghanistan, where there are unbelievable amounts of money pouring out in suitcases to Dubai and helping the Dubai property boom. We see it in Pakistan, and yet DfID is ramping up the amount of money being given to Pakistan, despite the fact—I think it is correct to say—that not one politician bothers to pay taxes there. Only 2 million people do in a country of how ever many it is. I cannot remember how many. Is it 900 million? The truth is that capacity-building is just the latest fad within the aid world. When it is done through the multilateral bodies, all that happens is that they often tend, like the EU, to have administration levels which would not be accepted in Britain. If DfID gave money directly to aid groups, the administration costs would be higher. Of course, a lot of the EU money goes to places such as Turkey to help their accession, so that is another part of our aid budget. This capacity-building is just a complete sham. It goes through lots of hands to get there. Very little reaches the ground, and what does reach the ground is often just endless talking shops. When I was in Kenya, someone told me that they could live off the PDs they were being offered to go to a conference every single day, often in the 4 and 5-star hotels of Mombassa. It is capacity-building for the charities; it is not capacity-building for the countries.

Phil Vernon: I am very sceptical about huge dollops of money being given to Governments that are not yet accountable to their people—not only not accountable to these taxpayers here but not accountable to their people. Let me take a country such as Uganda, where I worked for five years several years ago now. If we the British taxpayer, through the Government, want Uganda to become more democratic, there is a serious logical flaw in the idea that we should provide the money. We know that the basic idea of democracy is that taxation and representation go together, so there is a serious flaw in that argument, and I am as sceptical as Ian is on that. I think that most of us would be. However, I can accept that there is a long-term view that this is part of a process in which things will get better and we have to accept that there is a leakage during the initial period. I am not saying I agree with it but I can accept that that view does exist. It is the World Bank's view and it is probably DfID’s view, or it was.

In several places where I have worked I have seen another kind of capacity-building which is really inspiring. This is where money flows from the likes of DfID, the US Government and others and from private donations to local NGOs and local organisations providing services in education, health and economic development—you name it. The places that I am talking about are where I have worked and they are all in Africa. You do not really have a policy dialogue. Policy is about cutting the cake. It is about who is in government, who is going to spend the money and whether you have some money. So there is not really a dialogue about which is the best policy—this policy or that policy—to provide better education for our children.

My aspiration would be that that policy dialogue should come about, and I have seen it happen. How? I have seen NGOs which have been given funding of relatively small amounts of money by the likes of the UK. I have seen some of the leaders of those NGOs get deeply frustrated about the fact that the policy environment within which they are working stops them being able to achieve what they are trying to achieve, which is better health outcomes, better patient outcomes and so on. They have become politicised, and I have seen some of them go into public life as politicians. So I think that there is capacity-building of a different kind, although, again, it is much harder to plan for. By spreading some of the British taxpayers’ money relatively thinly—because it is not a huge amount of money—through projects of national NGOs in some of the countries we are talking about, a certain number of those leaders become politicised and they get into policy debates and start to change things.
Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: But I thought that the purpose of DfID was to conquer poverty.

Phil Vernon: Well, I would go back Mark’s point, with which I agree. I think that DfID’s mandate is not completely correct and I think that you would find that most people who work for DfID, probably including the Ministers, would agree with that.

Jonathan Glennie: I would love to live in the world that I believe Ian inhabits, where everything is black and white, where capacity-building is a sham and where aid is a total disaster. I live in this really annoying world, where there is mixed evidence and the world is complex, where sometimes capacity-building has transformed a situation and sometimes it has been a complete sham and where sometimes budget support has really worked and sometimes it has not. I do not believe that there is evidence that suggests that budget support is less effective than other forms of aid going around the Government—I do not think that that evidence exists. Sometimes budget support works and sometimes it does not, but it is certainly more risky in one sense, in terms of fiduciary risk. As we are looking at aid effectiveness and value for money, I would like to share with this with the Committee. If you are just looking at fiduciary risk—the risk of money going astray—you can put down all the accountants you want, you can micromanage every penny and you can not devolve any power over decision-making. But all the evidence—30 or 40 years of research into this—suggests that when you do not allow aid recipients to take control of the money, you are less likely to achieve your objectives. We can minimise loss, but we are still wasting the money, even though I can account for every penny, because it does not achieve the development objectives. We have to take risks in aid and we have to take risks in relationships with Governments.

Q147 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Is there not a difference between control and accountability? To have transparency in expenditure is different from who controls it.

Jonathan Glennie: You have to focus on accountability as much as you can, but you cannot just have a total clampdown on who controls the money. The minute you allow other people to engage in that control, you also cede control of the accounting. That is what has happened in budget support.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: But control and accountability are not the same thing. You can give someone control and you can still put in full accountability in auditing.

Jonathan Glennie: The problem is when they do not account for it. Of course, all those things are in place. When we give money to Uganda, they are expected to account for every penny. It is not like giving; they are expected to account for it and to show how it has gone. What happens when they do not? That is the question. Does Britain just say, “Oh well, leave it then”? Or does it say, “Actually, aid is a risky business and life is complicated sometimes”? This sounds absolutely terrible and you are the ones who will have to relay it to the British public, not me. I understand that.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: So what percentage of official British aid from the taxpayer do you feel should be non-accountable and non-transparent?

Jonathan Glennie: I believe that something like 75% of private—


Jonathan Glennie: Just a minute—this is my analogy. I believe that something like 75% of private venture capital is wasted, but 25% makes a mega change. I think that we have to
move slowly towards that approach within aid. It is really hard to do, because this is British taxpayers’ money. But unless we do that, we will not make it effective. If every penny in every pound has to be accounted for and has to be effective, it is not going to happen and it is an unfortunate way to approach very complicated problems. We have to accept waste—not waste, but we have to accept that things will be lost, just as venture capitalists accept that 75%—

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Why?

Jonathan Glennie: Because sometimes you invest in something risky that is really going to make a difference and it does not work. You have to allow aid programmers that leeway, saying, “Go and do what you think is right”. It may not work, but that is exactly what venture capitalists do.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Is that not what is known as corruption by Transparency International?

Jonathan Glennie: No, not at all. I am talking about giving money to—

The Chairman: I think that we must move on, as we have two more questions. Do you want to just answer that, Mr Pyman?

Mark Pyman: No, I do not think that it is the same. Let us take the example of budget aid to Afghanistan, for example, leaving aside some of the horror stories. In the years after 2004, the Finance Ministry became quite competent. Could the UK give a bunch of money to the Afghan Finance Ministry and have them be very clear about what the money was doing and where it was going? At the time, it could. So was it non-accountable and non-transparent?

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Unaudited by outsiders?

Mark Pyman: That I do not remember, but I think you could perfectly well demand that it be audited by outsiders. The other example from my memory was when they were giving budget aid to the Liberians, where actually the way that they achieved accountability was to require dual signatures in each of the departments, as a way of being extremely clear as to how the money was being disbursed, department by department. So yes, some of it would still have been wasted—to take up the point from my left here—but actually I think that was a very strong example of accountability within giving on-budget aid. “It is possible” is the answer to your question.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: Your definition of waste, therefore—are you meaning that it would be misspent in terms of the particular objective of the programme? What I am searching for is accountability and auditing, which is something different. You can perfectly well spend the money the wrong way, if you like it, but it will still exactly validate precisely how everything has been spent. What is your definition of waste in that context?

Mark Pyman: The first one that you were saying, so you spend it on an objective and it happens—

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: But you can still account for it.

Mark Pyman: Absolutely, yes.

Q148 The Chairman: But you cannot pin it all down, as Mr Glennie was rightly telling us. Just one final question on this section: have any of you worked with the military?

Mark Pyman: Yes, I work a lot with the military.
The Chairman: We have had military witnesses before us saying that the military in modern forms of low-intensity warfare and post conflict have a role to play in all this. Is that your view?

Mark Pyman: Yes, it is. It is subject to all sorts of limitations, because they clearly cannot and should not be the lead player on this. Where would I start? Let me give you an example, and maybe it is a bad example in reply to your question, but let me try it anyway. We have been involved in Afghanistan for about five or six years. We have been making a noise since the beginning that says that corruption is not being taken seriously as an issue by almost anyone. The one body that has picked it up and said, “Actually, you were right and nobody is doing it properly, so we’ll see if we can do something about it”, is the military, and they actually put a string of measures in place to try to address corruption issues. They are not doing particularly well, inevitably, because it is 10 years after the conflict started, but they identified that they needed to be doing something in this area in order to give the intervention in Afghanistan any chance of success.

There is an example where the military came in rather reluctantly, but actually I think they have had rather a useful impact on this subject. I think if you are in an environment of post-conflict stabilisation, where usually the No. 1 issue is the police—who look an awful lot like the military in an awful lot of developing countries—then police and/or security force and/or military training to those police forces and security forces is absolutely one of the preconditions of stabilisation. That would be an example where I think it is completely essential.

The Chairman: That is useful. That is helpful. Mr Glennie?

Jonathan Glennie: When I was in Colombia, the British Government was providing human rights training to the Colombian military. I do not believe it was aid money as such; I think it probably came from the Foreign Office. Whether we were right or wrong, our line as British NGOs was that that should not happen—not because we thought that it was not being effective. It is a bit similar to what Ian was saying about Rwanda, I suppose. This military was indicted and implicated in very, very serious human rights abuses. That is why they were receiving human rights training. The question was whether this training was actually going to help, or whether it was providing a fig leaf and allowing them to say, “Look, we’re having human rights training” and then just continuing, which I think was our view at the time. That is the kind of conundrum that we had.

The Chairman: Yes. Quickly, Mr Vernon.

Phil Vernon: Very quickly, and bringing it back to the soft power question: I am slightly out of date, but I think what the British Armed Forces did in Sierra Leone—I do not mean the military intervention but the many years of security sector reform which we supported there through training and other capacity-building means—so far has been a success. I think in terms of maintaining some influence, if you are talking about soft power in that part of the world, it has been a good thing for the UK. If I compare that with the way that the United States has supported security sector reform in neighbouring Liberia, any objective observer would say we did a better job and our reputation would be better because of it. It was done in a very opaque way in quasi-military companies by the Americans, and it was done in a much more open way using the British armed services largely, and police as well, in Sierra Leone.

Q149 The Chairman: Finally, Lord Hodgson: just a final question on the other big aid givers—Japan, Saudi Arabia and so on.
Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots: We have touched on various other countries that have become major aid givers in our earlier conversations—China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Germany. What are the consequences for our foreign policy for our soft power reputation if they are to overtake us in quantum, approach or ability? Or should we just say, “Well, we’re a small country and that is the way it is”?

Ian Birrell: I think it is a sign of the changing world that countries like India, Brazil and Turkey are becoming such players in this world. I think it diminishes the impact of British aid. Obviously, hopefully, it might diminish it a little bit more. It is interesting. Again, there are lessons that can be learned, because of course Chinese aid, which is often very heavily criticised, is done in a very different way to the way western aid is given. They see it as a way of trying to raise countries out of poverty in the same way as they have brought so many people out of poverty at home, and they try and transplant some of the techniques there—sometimes successfully, sometimes very unsuccessfully. Often it is done through loans which have to repaid out of natural resource earnings, so it is quite a different approach. I think in some ways it is often more successful, because it is much more sort of mechanical and trade-based, but obviously going alongside it are all sorts of environmental and political issues.

Ultimately it is surely about learning from them and accepting that that is the changing world. But it does also mean, of course, that the aid industry is growing bigger and bigger all the time. I think it makes it even more a dangerous and unaccountable force in these countries, because it is growing bigger all the time. That is a problem, whereby you have such a large force involved in so many aspects of society and public services, and yet which is so unaccountable to the people on the ground. That is a problem that is going to get worse rather than better because of all the extra players coming in.

Phil Vernon: Just very quickly, I would add two things. According to Nye’s definitions—perhaps it does not matter—I think the Chinese approach is probably not soft power. It is probably much more of a sort of bribery or purchasing approach to power application. Maybe it does not matter that much. I think the other thing is that, whatever people might say in criticism of British overseas development aid—and I have got plenty to say and have said plenty about it myself—it is relatively transparent. It is relatively easy for people to find out what we are trying to do and why we are trying to do it. It is not easy to find out how much is leaked, because it is too sensitive, I think, but it is pretty easy to find out what is going on and why it is going on. In some of the other countries you mentioned, Lord Hodgson, it is much, much harder to find out; it is much more opaque and in the background. Therefore it could be more risky for the people in the countries that we are talking about.

Jonathan Glennie: I agree with that last point. I also agree that there are many, many more development actors, including official actors, round the table. I believe that Kazakhstan is the latest country to set up an aid agency. There are many South American aid agencies. South Africa has one. Yes, after years of attempting to harmonise some aid, it is now looking very fragmented, and that is going to be problematic in terms of accountability.

The answer to your question is that, with these arrivals of big new money—some of which is basically traditional aid, some of which is very different and looks more like trade and loans—undoubtedly Britain’s soft power is going to be relatively diminished. You just have to go to any African country to see that. Once you no longer rely so much on a particular source of finance, the power of that source of finance is going to be diminished. To end on a very positive note about British aid, as I said at the beginning, its focus on civil rights and democracy—those kind of issues—has been, in my view, incredibly positive throughout the
world. It is not the focus of some emerging players, and it would be a great loss if that pressure—British values in that sense—is lost to the world of development. As you know, I do not agree with our kind of slavish adherence to market fundamentalism—I think that has had an immensely denigrating impact on much of the world—but the focus on civil rights has been very positive.

Q150 Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: Chairman, just on this point: I do not want to be negative, but amongst the papers which were circulated to the Committee was an article which Mr Birrell wrote, I think in May of this year, about what was going on in Ethiopia and the Gambela region. Now, it is very difficult sitting on this Committee: here you are talking about civil rights. I do not know if you have read that article or you are aware of what has been going on—

Jonathan Glennie: I am, yes.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean: —but in terms of soft power it seems to me to be desperately counterproductive. It is also very hard to reconcile what you are saying with events like this taking place. To Ethiopia, we have contributed I think £1.6 billion over the period of this Parliament in aid. How that reconciles with your last statement, I find quite difficult to understand.

Jonathan Glennie: It is actually quite easy. I do not know the details of the Ethiopia land displacement case; I have read about. I have read Ian’s articles and I have read a number of other articles, and it is certainly a very serious case. It is quite possible, is it not, theoretically, that that is an exception to the rule—that generally speaking Britain is a very strong adherent of civil rights in a number of countries, and that in some cases it is not?

Ian Birrell: But do you really believe that?

Jonathan Glennie: I do, especially—and there is plenty of evidence—on the focus on women’s rights. Britain and others, and the west in general, have been part of a transformation in the way that women and girls are viewed around the world. That is partly to do with this aid. It is partly to do with a whole range of other issues. Let us call it the international development community, which probably sounds terrible to some people—the UN, all of those attempts to spread equality and those kind of values. There is lots of evidence to demonstrate that that has been incredibly impressive.

On Ethiopia, yes, there is absolutely no doubt that there are civil rights and human rights abuses—as there are, as I said earlier, in almost all countries in the world. I would like to hear what people think we should be doing with all the other countries in the world where these things happen. Do we just cut off ties? I do not believe in that. I believe actually that engagement can also work sometimes. Finally, in countries like Ethiopia and Rwanda, if you look at the actual economic and social progress that those countries have made, it has been absolutely phenomenal in the last 20 years—absolutely phenomenal. It has transformed the lives of millions of women and children especially. That is the plus side. To end this debate, let us just have that as well, not just the tyrannical human rights abuse, which is part of the story but possibly quite exaggerated.

Q151 The Chairman: That is fair enough.

Mark Pyman: Can I just come back to the question from Lord Hodgson? I think it is noticeable that for three of the four countries you mentioned—China, Saudi and Qatar—in terms of aid influence overseas, this is both about soft power and about hard power. It is not just about projecting their influence; it is also about military and security strength for
those countries overseas. To me that brings it a little bit back to where you started that
discussion, which is that soft power is only partly about aid, and it is partly about military and
geopolitical influence. So, to take the example of China and Sri Lanka, they have given all
sorts of aid to build ports. The purpose is nothing to do with helping the Sri Lankans with
their ports; it is so that the Chinese have got a deep-water base at the bottom of India for
the future. With the big donor countries, to me it is soft power but, actually in many of
these cases, there is a military and security purpose behind it.

On the second comment—when you were saying, “What should we do with them?”—it is
just a competition. That is the way I think of it. It is competing for influence and some of the
countries that we work in work with, say, the Saudis and say, “The Saudis are great. They
give us money and ask no questions”. Okay, but five years later they come back and say,
“But we like you, because actually you give us an answer that we can use and is useful”. To
me, the soft power bit here with examples of those countries takes you very quickly back to
whether there is a hard power element behind it, of which the soft power is merely the
front end of it.

The Chairman: I am going to halt it there, because we have kept you a very long time. It
has been fascinating, and we could go on for much longer. You have stated your various
cases with great articulacy, and we all know what the arguments and the counterarguments
are a little more clearly than we did a couple of hours ago. So can I say thank you very much,
Mr Vernon, Mr Glennie, Mr Birrell and Mr Pyman? We are very grateful to you for coming
to us on this warm afternoon, and thank you again.