



**Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign  
Affairs Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2013-2014  
(HC88)**

**The UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain**

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

January 2014

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## **Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2013-2014 (HC88)**

### **The UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain**

This Command Paper presents the Government's response to the Foreign Affairs Committee's report of 22 November into the UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The Committee's recommendations are in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Headlines and paragraph numbers refer to those in the 'Conclusions and Recommendations' section of the Committee's Report.

#### Conclusions and recommendations

**1. The Gulf is a region that remains important to the UK's defence interests and offers substantial commercial opportunities. The UK has benefited from its historical links with the Gulf States, including with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The UK's long-standing relationships in the Gulf place it in a good position to extend and benefit from these ties in the coming years. (Paragraph 12)**

The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion that the Gulf remains an important region for the UK's interests. Our historical role in the region and long-standing relationships with the Gulf States continue to benefit the UK, and we are taking action further to strengthen our ties. The Gulf will be vital for UK interests for the long term, and we are committed to developing a strategy to ensure the UK is best placed to maintain, deepen and broaden our relationships with the Gulf States. (See our response to recommendations 48-51.)

**2. The UK is correct to prioritise its Gulf relations, which remain key to the UK's national interests. We are satisfied that the Gulf Initiative is being appreciated by the UK's partners in the Gulf. It is largely a re-branding exercise, but that does not invalidate its worth as a signal of the UK's commitment to the region. However, we find no conclusive proof of neglect by previous governments. (Paragraph 18)**

The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion that we are correct to prioritise relations with the Gulf. We are committed to continuing to use the momentum built by the Gulf Initiative to signal our commitment to the region at the highest level. In 2013 there were 65 outward Ministerial visits to the Gulf and 38 inward visits from senior Gulf interlocutors, as well as the State Visit to the UK by HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nayhan of the UAE in May 2013. The Government notes the Committee's finding of no conclusive proof of neglect towards the Gulf by previous governments

**3. The Arab Spring in 2011 revealed some of the differences between the UK and the Gulf with regard to differing domestic governance systems and approach to the revolutions. The Government had to reassure its old allies in**

**the Gulf of its reliability while simultaneously pressing them more urgently for change and reform. In this context, the Government's emphasis on gradual reform based on participation and consent is a realistic approach, though the Committee believes the FCO should continue to monitor the effectiveness of its policy closely. (Paragraph 26)**

The Government agrees with the Committee's assessment of the UK's emphasis on gradual reform based on participation and consent as a realistic approach. This policy, as set out in the Arab Partnership Strategy, is based on the premise that in the long-term societies with greater citizen participation in the political and economic spheres are more likely to deliver lasting stability. Our approach in each country of the region reflects the particular circumstances and context of that country. We continue to monitor the effectiveness of this policy, including through an annual report to the FAC on the Arab Partnership Fund.

#### **Bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia**

**4. The UK-Saudi relationship continues to be important for the UK. We have no reason to suspect that the failure so far to establish a formal 'Strategic Partnership' indicates that the friendship between the UK and Saudi Arabia has suffered. It appears that practical reasons have prevented progress. However, we agree with the Government's original position that structured relations can provide a useful forum to enhance co-operation on common interests and to raise issues of concern, and the lapse of regular annual talks is therefore regrettable. The FCO should include the reinstatement of talks via a strategic partnership, or the reinstatement of the Two Kingdoms Dialogue, as a goal in its business plan and should continue to represent the benefits of such structured talks to the authorities in Saudi Arabia. (Paragraph 34)**

The Government strongly agrees that our relationship with Saudi Arabia is important to the UK. Saudi Arabia is a critical partner for the UK across our key portfolios of foreign policy cooperation, defence, counter terrorism, energy and prosperity. The Prime Minister has now visited Saudi Arabia three times and we maintain a regular and close high level dialogue across Government.

The UK and Saudi Arabia launched the Two Kingdoms Dialogue in 2005 and agreed to hold regular meetings at Foreign Minister level to discuss a wide range of issues including education and business. We have long seen Saudi Arabia as a key strategic partner and this partnership sought to formalise the already excellent high level relationship we have. We have not yet moved the partnership to a structured, formal footing, but the Foreign Secretary speaks frequently to Foreign Minister HRH Prince Saud al Faisal and our joint commitment to the bilateral relationship remains strong.

The Government continues to believe that structured relations provide a useful forum for progress on areas of mutual interest, and is pleased with the many positive steps our working groups with the other Gulf States have made. We are seeking to reinstate the Two Kingdoms Dialogue with Saudi Arabia.

**5. Evidence of negative perceptions of the UK among young Saudis is deeply concerning, particularly in a state in which over 60% of the population is under**

**30 years old. It is difficult with so little evidence to draw conclusions as to the reason for the low level of trust in the UK, but we recommend that the Government set out in response to this report any research it has conducted on the public perception of the UK in Saudi Arabia, and its views on the reasons for the poor public perception of the UK. (Paragraph 39)**

The Government is concerned about any negative perception of the UK within Saudi Arabia. As the Committee has noted, there is little evidence available regarding Saudi perceptions of the UK or other countries. The Government has not conducted any specific research into public perceptions of the UK in Saudi Arabia.

Reports, such as the annual Arab Youth Survey by Asda'a Burson Marsteller, suggest that perception of the UK among youth across the Arab world was 23% favourable in 2010, 43% favourable in 2011 following the Arab Spring and declined to 32% favourable in 2013. Comparably, in 2013 the US had a favourable perception of 30% while France and Germany had 43% and 39% respectively. There has been no further analysis undertaken into specific factors for positive or negative perception in the region. The UK continues to be the second most popular destination for Saudi students overseas, after the United States.

**6. We recommend that the Government make public engagement with the wider Saudi population a priority for its digital diplomacy team in the Gulf and Embassy in Saudi Arabia. The Government should also set out in response to this report its public engagement strategy, including the steps it is taking to engage with Saudi youth on social media, how it is representing the UK to the younger generation in Saudi Arabia, and what staff and resources it is dedicating to this task. (Paragraph 44)**

The Government is committed to engaging the Saudi population through digital diplomacy. Saudi Arabia has the highest percentage of Twitter users of any country in the world, at 41%. We are increasing our digital presence, particularly on social media. Our recent campaign of digital engagement resulted in an increase in followers on the Embassy Facebook page from 4000 to 5400 and increased our Embassy Twitter followers from 2500 to 4500. Our Ambassador in Riyadh, Sir John Jenkins, is on Twitter and increasing his personal following.

In 2013, the Embassy carried out a question and answer session on Twitter and a number of other online events, including a photography competition, a UK themed quiz, and Olympics legacy events.

HMA Riyadh also publishes a fortnightly editorial in Al Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's most popular Arabic language daily newspaper with an approximate circulation of more than 300,000, which is also widely read online. The Embassy uses this to address key issues and address misconceptions. For example, recent editorials have set out the UK's policy towards Iran, and addressed issues in applying for UK visas from Saudi Arabia, among other subjects.

In total the public diplomacy department of the British Embassy, including digital, print and other media is equivalent to three full time positions, including a full time local officer responsible for public diplomacy. Funding for all public diplomacy and

outreach is managed centrally across the Middle East region by the FCO in London. In financial year 2013/14 we have so far spent almost £15,000 on specific public diplomacy and other outreach events in Saudi Arabia. The Embassy's GREAT event celebrating One Year on from the Paralympics was broadcast on pan-Arabic television, reaching a potential audience of over 40 million people.

**7. The work of the British Council is particularly useful in Saudi Arabia as it is one of the only channels of direct contact between the UK and Saudi public. As a provider of valued language training services, it is able to co-operate with and support the Saudi authorities at the same time as engaging directly with the Saudi public and promoting a positive image of the UK. (Paragraph 45)**

The Government welcomes the Committee's assessment regarding the importance of the British Council's work in Saudi Arabia. The 17,000 Saudis who enrol at British Council teaching centres, the 100,000 UK qualifications delivered each year and the 16,000 students who choose Britain as their study destination show the important role the UK plays in offering educational and cultural opportunities to young Saudi Arabians.

The British Council's activities in Saudi Arabia include: 'Connecting Classrooms', a school linking programme; developing women's leadership skills; and hosting cultural activities, such as the first British modern art exhibition and accompanying workshops.

**8. The growing Saudi market and the Saudi government's spending plans offer huge opportunities for British businesses across a wide range of sectors. Given the large-scale opportunities available, we see no reason why the UK should not set ambitious targets for growth in UK-Saudi trade and investment. (Paragraph 56)**

The Government fully agrees about the importance of the Saudi market. The Government has a target to increase worldwide exports to £1 trillion by 2020. Saudi Arabia remains an important trade partner for the UK and will make a significant contribution to this target. The UK Trade and Investment teams in Saudi Arabia have a target of increasing exports year on year by 10% and they are focused inter alia on seven High Value Opportunities - major projects with multiple opportunities for UK firms over the lifetime of the project: please see the response to the next answer. The latest statistics for trade in goods from January to September 2013 show a 23% increase to £3bn. The Saudi British Ministerial Trade Council will meet in a new format in February 2014 and will continue to prioritise this issue.

**9. We recommend that the Government facilitate a leading role for British businesses in international consortiums to bid for projects in Saudi Arabia. In its response to this report, the Government should set out what resources it is dedicating to this task. (Paragraph 57)**

The Government's High Value Opportunity Programme, led by UK Trade and Investment, has identified seven key projects in Saudi Arabia on which UKTI has formed campaign teams and recruited industry specialists to promote UK

capabilities. These are: railways, covering 7000 km and £60 billion investment; Red Sea Oil and Gas, which is expected to generate 100 billion barrels of new oil and will require major new infrastructure and technology; a nuclear and renewable energy programme, which will provide £75 billion of investment and the construction of 16 reactors; healthcare, which is part of a five year programme involving 32,000 new hospital beds and 19 new hospitals and medical centres; Saudi airports which will see the redevelopment of its four international and seven regional airports by 2020; education and training opportunities provided by a £25 billion annual education budget which accounts for 26% of overall Government spending; and water and waste water projects including 25 new desalination plants. The total accessible UK value for these projects is £10.5 billion.

**10. We recommend that the Government assess whether it would be beneficial to lower the costs of its introduction services to British businesses for a temporary period in order to boost the UK's participation in the Saudi market, particularly for small and medium sized enterprises. (Paragraph 59)**

The Government is aware of the challenges faced by companies and is conscious of the need to ensure its charging policy does not in itself present a disincentive to small and medium sized enterprises seeking to export. UKTI is offering a discount to eligible companies commissioning an Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS). The scheme is available to companies using OMIS for the first time, looking to their first high growth market or attending a UKTI, Scottish Development International, Wales Government or Invest Northern Ireland supported mission or market visit support. Qualifying companies will receive a discount of 50%, up to a maximum discount of £1,000.

**11. The current visa regime is a significant source of difficulty and inconvenience for both Saudi and British businessmen and undermines the UK Government's stated priority of increasing trade with Saudi Arabia. The improvement of the visa terms would be of benefit to both states and we are disappointed that the UK has not managed to secure reciprocal terms for its business visas. We recommend that the Government make improving the visa regime a priority in its discussions with the Saudi government when seeking to establish a strategic partnership. (Paragraph 62)**

UK Visas and Immigration continues to ensure that the UK maintains a competitive and innovative visa system to serve the ever-changing needs of business. The Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office are exploring with the Saudi government ways of making travel easier for business visitors from the UK.

**12. Saudi Arabia is an important buyer for the UK defence industry, and defence sales are important to the overall UK-Saudi relationship. The UK provides valued training alongside its defence sales that is beneficial to both UK and Saudi forces. With other competitors in the market, there is little to suggest that ending the UK's defence sales would have any effect on overall defence sales to Saudi Arabia, or that it would give the UK additional leverage to effect positive improvements. The government must adhere strictly to its existing policy to ensure that defence equipment sold by UK firms are not used for human rights abuses or internal repression. In its response to this**

**report the Government should provide further evidence that it is doing so in practice, including any evidence gathered by end-use monitoring. (Paragraph 78)**

Saudi Arabia is at the heart of an unstable region and has legitimate defence and security needs which the Government seeks to support. The situation in Syria, turbulence in Egypt, Iraq and Yemen and the threat from international terrorism are legitimate reasons for Saudi Arabia to protect its borders and be able to counter any acts of aggression. The export of arms and controlled goods to all destinations, including Saudi Arabia, is assessed on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria.

The Criteria include the requirement that exports of all UK controlled goods are only permitted if, after a thorough assessment, there is no clear risk that they might be used for internal repression. Any evidence of the misuse of similar UK or non-UK supplied goods in the end user destination is factored into this assessment. There are rigorous pre-licence checks and, for open licences, compliance audits at the exporters' premises in the UK. We will continue to scrutinise carefully all arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

**13. Saudi Arabia continues to be a vital but complicated counter-terrorism partner for the UK and wider international community. Counter-terrorism co-operation has proven to be of great and practical benefit to both sides and has been instrumental in protecting British lives and interests. However, Saudi Arabia is part of the problem as well as part of the solution. We recommend that the Government make it a priority to engage with its counter-terrorism partners in Saudi Arabia to improve the monitoring of the funding flowing from Saudi Arabia to organisations with an extremist message so that it can be more effectively disrupted. The Government should also encourage Saudi Arabia to ensure that its legitimate promotion of religious values does not inadvertently contribute to the furtherance of extremism, especially with regard to states in North Africa that have been particularly vulnerable to the influence of extremist groups, as well as in states in other regions such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia. (Paragraph 85)**

The Government agrees that Saudi Arabia is a key counter-terrorism partner for the UK and stands ready to share best practice with Saudi Arabia and learn from the Saudis' experience in the field of counter terrorism. Saudi Arabia has suffered from the effects of terrorism and has developed mechanisms to prohibit the promotion of extremist messages within the Kingdom. Saudi authorities have been unequivocal in condemning al-Qaeda's actions and we note that Saudi Arabia is taking the issue of terrorist finance seriously, for example by imposing strict measures on official fund-raising. The UK continues to provide support to build Saudi capability to investigate terrorist financing and disrupt individuals and groups. We work closely with Saudi Arabia and other members of the Gulf Co-operation Council as part of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force. One of the key aims of this taskforce is to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating terrorist financing.

**14. Given that the Saudi government does not acknowledge that torture is ever used by its officials, we would welcome further information on the safeguards the UK government has put in place to ensure that intelligence**

**shared by Saudi Arabia does not result from torture. Counter-terrorism is an area in which Saudi authorities appear to be willing to be innovative and to co-operate with international partners. The UK should build on this co-operation to support improvements in standards and best practice. The British Embassy in Riyadh should pursue the chance offered by Saudi authorities to attend a counter-terrorism trial and the Government should update the Committee in its response to this report. (Paragraph 87)**

The Government is utterly opposed to torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. We never condone it, nor do we ask others to do it on our behalf. We have published the Consolidated Guidance which provides clear directions for intelligence officers and service personnel dealing with foreign intelligence services regarding detainees held overseas. This consolidated guidance sets out the principles, consistent with UK domestic and international law, which govern the interviewing of detainees overseas and the passing and receipt of intelligence relating to detainees. This guidance must be adhered to by officers of the UK's intelligence and security agencies, members of the UK Armed Forces and employees of the Ministry of Defence. Cooperation on counter terrorism is covered by the Government's Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidance, which aims to ensure that work in this area meets our human rights obligations and our values.

There is an agreed framework in place that governs the security relationship between the UK and Saudi Arabia in the interests of both countries' national security. Part of this framework guarantees that information shared with the Government of Saudi Arabia will not result in torture, or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Our Embassy in Riyadh, whose staff have regular contact with their Saudi counterparts on a wide range of issues relating to counter-terrorism, is confident that this is the case and regularly reviews the situation. The Embassy will continue to press the Saudi Ministry of Justice to be allowed to attend terrorism trials.

**15. We were surprised and disappointed by Saudi Arabia's decision to reject a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. We believe that Saudi Arabia's concerns are best expressed from a position on the Council within the UN system. The Government should encourage its counterparts in Saudi Arabia to re-engage with the UN Security Council on these important regional issues. (Paragraph 92)**

The Government was saddened by Saudi Arabia's decision, but respects it. We had been looking forward to working with Saudi Arabia on the Security Council; it is the Security Council's loss that they will not be bringing their authority and experience to strengthen its ability to tackle the many regional challenges before it. The Government agrees with the Committee on the importance of encouraging Saudi Arabia to engage with the UN Security Council on important regional issues. We are encouraged that Saudi Arabia will join the UN Human Rights Council in 2014 and we will continue to work closely with them in this forum.

**16. Saudi Arabia is an important regional partner, which is taking an increasingly active international role. It shares many of the UK's goals in the region and it is important to work closely with Saudi Arabia on these shared**

**outcomes. However, the government should be vigilant with regard to where Saudi Arabia's promotion of religious values may have a destabilising effect in the long-term, and must take steps with its international partners to discourage this policy, or to mitigate its effects. (Paragraph 96)**

The Government agrees with the Committee that the UK and Saudi Arabia have many shared goals in the region and we view Saudi Arabia as a key ally in this regard. The Saudi government's experience and understanding of the region and its particular religious position enable it to add value in areas that serve our shared interests, such as through the development of sophisticated programmes to prevent individuals from developing violent extremist views and to rehabilitate those that have already been radicalised. We will continue to work closely with the Government of Saudi Arabia to ensure that our activity is complementary and directed to promoting peace and prosperity in the region.

**17. Although there is a long way still to go in bringing stability to Yemen, this is a good example of UK-Saudi co-operation to try to bring stabilization and to promote development in a country that is key to Saudi Arabia's interests. As such, it could act as a model of high-profile and substantial British support for locally-led solutions to regional problems. (Paragraph 100)**

The Government will continue to support the Government of the Republic of Yemen bilaterally and in co-operation with the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition that this engagement could act as a model of high-profile support for locally-led solutions in future. The Saudi Arabian and Yemeni Foreign Ministers and the Foreign Secretary co-chair the Friends of Yemen group, which was founded in London in 2010. It comprises members from 39 countries and organisations, with the aim of providing support to Yemen's political transition as well as economic and security support. Our partnership with Saudi Arabia has been crucial to delivering these reforms and we look forward to working with them closely in the run up to the next Friends of Yemen meeting in March 2014.

The Government will continue to work closely with the Saudi and Yemeni governments and other partners to support Yemen's political transition, help in its fight against terrorism and provide assistance to tackle its economic and humanitarian crises.

**18. The UK and Saudi Arabia share immediate and critical concerns with regard to Iran's nuclear programme and its interference in states in the region. It will be important for the Government to work closely with Saudi Arabia on engaging with Iran as a more constructive regional player. Saudi Arabia provides vital support for international action via sanctions. Saudi Arabia's broader rivalry with Iran on ethnic and religious lines is a cause for concern, but the Saudi leadership has shown itself willing to act as a pragmatic and useful foreign policy partner in containing the Iranian threat to regional and international security. (Paragraph 104)**

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion. The UK and Saudi Arabia share concerns about Iran's nuclear programme and its interference in the region.

On 25 November 2013 a statement from Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Iran's interim nuclear deal with world powers could be a step towards a comprehensive solution, provided there was goodwill in the implementation. The Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with Foreign Minister HRH Prince Saud al Faisal on the progress of the deal announced in Geneva on 24 November and Iran's wider role in the region. We welcome Saudi Arabia's support on this issue.

**19. Saudi Arabia has been a strong voice in the Gulf and Arab world in support of international action on Syria. The UK and Saudi Arabia share a deep concern about the conflict, a desire for a political solution, and the requirement for an international multilateral response. (Paragraph 108)**

The Government agrees that the situation in Syria is a key concern for both the UK and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is leading the Arab world's response to the crisis in Syria. In April 2012, Saudi Arabia was an important supporter of UN Security Council Resolution 2043, which authorised deployment of an unarmed military observer mission in Syria and co-sponsored the UN General Assembly Resolution of 22 November 2013 which called for the cessation of violence and killings and the protection of human rights.

While the Government of Saudi Arabia has been critical of the international community's response to the situation in Syria, in particular certain states blocking action through the UN Security Council, Saudi Arabia remains a key part of international efforts to resolve the crisis. Saudi Arabia participates fully in the 'Friends of Syria' group, and Foreign Minister HRH Prince Saud al Faisal attended the 'London 11' meetings on 22 October 2013 and 12 January 2014, and signed the communiqués in which the participants agreed to put their full and collective weight behind the UN-led Geneva II process. The Government also welcomes the Arab League's statement endorsing the Geneva II process in September 2013. The Foreign Secretary and HRH Prince Saud remain in regular contact about the situation in Syria. Saudi Arabia is also providing significant humanitarian support to those affected by the crisis in Syria, providing over \$373m to date. Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry announced a further \$8.5m in humanitarian support on 8 December. Our priority remains advancing a political transition that ends the conflict, allows refugees to return to their homes, and prevents further radicalisation in Syria. We will do all we can to ensure the forthcoming Geneva II conference delivers that outcome.

Through the Friends of Syria Core Group the UK and Saudi Arabia are engaging closely with international and regional partners to coordinate support for the National Coalition, which both the UK and Saudi Arabia recognise as the sole legitimate representatives of the Syrian people.

**20. We note the reported supply of arms by Saudi Arabia to groups in Syria; the Government should set out in its response to this report its assessment of the situation and the actions it is taking to monitor any groups that are receiving funding and arms from Saudi Arabia, and its efforts to engage with the Saudi authorities regarding any concerns about those groups. (Paragraph 109)**

The Government is aware of reports that Saudi Arabia, among other countries, is arming the opposition in Syria. The Assad regime's brutal oppression of the Syrian people's legitimate political grievances has created the vacuum for external, extremist groups to operate. This only re-emphasises the importance of intensifying our support to the moderate opposition. The UK and Saudi Arabia are part of the 'London 11' Friends of Syria core group, whose Ministers are committed to supporting the National Coalition, and the armed groups represented in the Supreme Military Council under General Idris. The London 11 Ministers have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to ending the violence through a negotiated political settlement, on the basis of a democratic and pluralist vision for Syria.

**21. Given the UK's close relationship with both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the Government should engage with Saudi Arabia on the UK's efforts to promote the reform process in Bahrain and an inclusive and substantive National Dialogue. (Paragraph 115)**

The Government fully supports the National Dialogue process in Bahrain and respects its national ownership. The only way to promote peace and stability in Bahrain is through an inclusive dialogue that addresses the legitimate aspirations of all Bahrainis and builds the trust and confidence necessary for longer-term reconciliation.

Saudi Arabia has long acknowledged the importance of dialogue between groups in Bahrain. On 3 February 2013 the Government of Saudi Arabia issued a statement welcoming King Hamad's call for National Dialogue, and supporting his call for participation from all Bahraini society. The statement expressed Saudi Arabia's aspiration that the dialogue contributes to ensuring and reinforcing national unity and preserving the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Saudi Arabia has also made clear in further public statements that it rejects reports that representatives of the Government of Saudi Arabia were meeting political societies in Bahrain, viewing such contacts as interference in another nation's domestic policy.

**22. Despite some recent improvements, the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia remains very poor. The absence of civil and political rights and the use of extreme punishments with inadequate judicial safeguards remain of deep concern, as do the rights of women and minorities. We recognise and welcome the significant steps that have been taken toward improved rights and freedoms, particularly with regard to women's rights, but this has started from a very low base. (Paragraph 125)**

The Government agrees that the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia remains of real concern. Saudi Arabia has been designated an FCO human rights country of concern since we introduced the classification in 2004. The FCO country report and, since 2011, the quarterly updates have made clear our concerns about civil and political rights, the judicial system, use of the death penalty, and the rights of women and minorities. The Government agrees that some improvements in rights and freedoms have been seen in Saudi Arabia, particularly under the leadership of HM King Abdullah. While some of these reforms may be from a low base, such as the codification of the Kingdom's first law against domestic violence in August 2013, they are very welcome steps.

The Government will continue to support the Saudi government's steps towards long-term reform, which will give citizens, particularly young people and women, a greater stake and interest in the political and economic life of their country.

**23. Although we recognise and are concerned about the poor human rights record in Saudi Arabia, we are unconvinced that constant and severe public criticism by the UK Government would result in anything other than disengagement by the Saudi side. This would achieve none of the UK's goals and could result in a worsening situation in Saudi Arabia. However, it is important that the UK maintain credibility at home and abroad with regard to its human rights work. (Paragraph 133)**

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion. The Government must choose the most appropriate means to achieve our human rights objectives with individual states, balancing public criticism and private discussions to best achieve our objectives. We are committed to providing public updates of our key assessments through the annual FCO Human Rights reports and the quarterly updates for countries of concern, which include Saudi Arabia.

**24. Democratic governments such as the UK face a challenge in trying to reconcile their liberal constituencies at home with the need to maintain relationships with undemocratic and conservative regimes that are important to our interests on a regional and global level. We understand that to encourage a Government such as that of Saudi Arabia toward reform, a combination of private and public pressure is required. By their very nature, private conversations are difficult to explain publicly. However, we are particularly concerned that some witnesses not only disagreed with UK policy but appeared to disbelieve the Government's account of its private conversations with Saudi Arabia on reform. The Government appears to have a credibility problem and must do more to explain its policies and consider where it can point to specific progress as a result of its human rights work. We recommend that the Government consider what confidence-building measures it could put in place, such as supporting access to Saudi Arabia for NGOs and journalists, and conduct a review of what information it is able to make available either to NGOs or in the public domain. (Paragraph 134)**

As set out in the previous answer, the Government will continue to take regular opportunities to set out our concerns. In addition, through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Embassy in Riyadh, the Government regularly engages with journalists and NGOs, and stands ready to support access to Saudi Arabia.

**25. The UK is well-placed to provide legal and judicial reform assistance and we recommend that the government make this constructive contribution a focus of its human rights work with Saudi Arabia. Despite the considerable challenges, promising steps appear to have been taken toward providing constructive assistance but these must be converted into solid and reportable programmes. The UK should also encourage the development of Saudi Arabia's consultative systems, and we particularly welcome initiatives such as parliamentary exchanges in this regard. (Paragraph 135)**

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that the UK should provide constructive support to Saudi Arabia's ambitious legal and judicial reform programme. Our support to date has included assistance to the Saudi government to prepare Saudi women to vote at and run in the 2015 municipal council elections and hosting visits to the UK by the Saudi Minister of Justice in 2012 and December 2013 to gain a better understanding of UK procedures and expertise. We will continue to offer UK expertise in legal and judicial capacity building, including through the Arab Partnership Fund.

The Government agrees the UK should seek to engage and support the development of Saudi Arabia's consultative systems. We welcome parliamentary exchanges and are pleased that a delegation led by the Speaker of the Shura Council, accompanied by seven members of the Council including two of the newly appointed women members, visited the UK in March 2013 as guests of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The Government also welcomes the activities of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Saudi Arabia, and the British MENA Council designed to facilitate and improve contacts between UK parliamentarians and Saudi Arabia.

**26. The UN provides an important forum for constructive discussion of Saudi Arabia's progress and continuing challenges. Saudi Arabia's Universal Periodic Review is an opportunity for the UK to make clear its concerns about and support for progress on reform and human rights in Saudi Arabia. Following Saudi Arabia's Universal Periodic Review in October, the government should encourage Saudi Arabia to engage constructively with the United Nations. (Paragraph 138)**

Saudi Arabia undertook its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the Human Rights Council at the UN in October 2013. The UK submitted advance questions and made a statement on the UPR, available online at [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org) and [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). In our statement we expressed our disappointment that Saudi Arabia had not implemented all the recommendations it accepted under the last Universal Periodic Review and stressed that this should be given priority. In particular we called for the abolition of the guardianship system for women. The UK's advance questions also raised several other issues including recommending codifying Saudi Arabia's criminal law to bring it into line with international law; requesting more information on steps taken to define 18 as the age of majority; raising freedom of expression and freedom of religion; recommending the establishment and operation of genuinely independent human rights organisations; and calling on Saudi Arabia to ratify the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture.

We now await the report of the Working Group into Saudi Arabia's UPR, and will encourage Saudi Arabia to engage constructively in response to the review.

In November 2013 both Saudi Arabia and the UK were successfully elected to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and will sit on the HRC for the period of 2014-2015. We are pleased that Saudi Arabia has sought to engage in the work of the HRC and look forward to working with Saudi Arabia and our other partners in the HRC over the coming period.

## **Bilateral relations with Bahrain**

**27. The UK's two recent ambassadors to Bahrain have taken different approaches to their work in response to the situation in Bahrain at the time of their tenure. We commend the energy that both former Ambassador Jamie Bowden and current Ambassador Iain Lindsay have brought to this role in a difficult situation. (Paragraph 157)**

We welcome the Committee's comments on the work of our two most recent ambassadors to Bahrain. We are committed to helping Bahrain promote peace and stability through a constructive and inclusive dialogue which addresses the legitimate aspirations of all Bahrainis and to implement the important programme of reform it has set out, whilst continuing to enhance our bilateral relationship.

**28. The aggressive manner in the way that the Bahraini security forces handled events in 2011 has deeply damaged Bahrain's international reputation, and complicated its relationships with Western governments, including the UK. Bahrain's failure quickly to implement the important and practical recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry has created further difficulties in its relationship with the UK, and has squandered the good faith and goodwill that the BICI could have helped to restore. (Paragraph 160)**

**29. In our view the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry made sensible recommendations and the Bahrain government's failure to implement them fully is inexplicable. If it had done so, it would have been easier for the international community as a whole to engage with the Bahraini leadership. (Paragraph 161)**

The Government assesses that the establishment of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), in direct response to the unrest in 2011, was an important step towards political and human rights reform in Bahrain. Progress has been made in a number of areas, in particular relating to judicial and security sector reform. This has included the establishment of a national preventative mechanism against torture; a Special Investigations Unit to investigate allegations of unlawful or negligent acts; an independent Ombudsman for the Ministry of Interior to receive complaints and to oversee and conduct investigations; the rebuilding of Shia mosques destroyed during the unrest; reform of the National Institute of Human Rights; and a Royal Decree to establish an independent Prisoners' and Detainees' Commission.

However, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry revealed a number of deep-rooted issues that pose significant challenges for the Bahraini government, some of which involve fundamental institutional, behavioural and cultural change which we acknowledge will take time to address fully. As stated in the report the Government submitted to the Committee in 2012, we are concerned that Iran, and other foreign actors, are exploiting the situation in Bahrain by offering more direct support to some radical and violent opposition elements. We have no evidence to suggest that Iran was involved in orchestrating the trouble in Bahrain in February and March 2011.

We commend the steps already taken by the Bahraini government to improve its human rights record and welcome the Bahraini government's commitment to implementing the recommendations set out in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. We encourage the government to build on the positive steps already taken and ensure that the remaining recommendations are implemented soon.

**30. The Government was correct to take a firm line in 2011 urging an end to the unacceptable violence and expressing its deep concern to the Bahraini authorities. The Government's efforts to re-establish close relations since 2011 appear to have been successful, and the UK is now well placed to help Bahrain as it shapes its future. The Government must, however, continue to monitor its policies in respect to Bahrain closely. (Paragraph 162)**

The UK expressed its deep concern to the Bahraini authorities over the handling of the unrest in 2011. We welcomed the establishment of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry and have regularly emphasised the importance of implementing its recommendations fully. We also welcomed the Government of Bahrain's initiatives for reconciliation, including through political dialogue. We continue to urge all sides to remain inclusive and constructive.

The Government's long term goals in Bahrain remain a political settlement leading to meaningful reform, and an enhanced bilateral relationship, with our defence and prosperity interests protected.

**31. While criticism of the UK in Bahrain is not new, it is a cause of concern. The UK's high profile in Bahrain is an asset for the UK that can be used to influence and support Bahrain's reform, but it also makes British actions and statements a target for scrutiny and criticism. Given the detailed attention that statements and actions by the British Embassy receive, the UK must be extremely careful about the message it sends to the broader public in Bahrain and internationally as it positions itself as a "critical friend" to Bahrain. We conclude that the UK Government is correct to try to use its high profile and influence to good effect to support evolutionary reform in Bahrain and to act as a critical friend. (Paragraph 167)**

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion on our approach, and its broad endorsement of our action to date. We are careful to ensure that our messaging to the Bahraini government reflects our analysis of the situation on the ground: where we see evidence of progress we are supportive, but our public statements reflect our concerns as and when they arise. We will continue to be vigilant in ensuring our public communications are robust and defensible.

**32. The British Council provides a valuable vehicle for the promotion of British values and the provision of useful skills in Bahrain. We particularly welcome its commitment to learning and debate, which is a critical service in a society that appears to be becoming more divided. We recommend that in response to this report the Government provide details on what skills training the British Council is providing in Bahrain in order to enhance their students' skills to participate more effectively in the political process of evolutionary reform and change. (Paragraph 170)**

The Government welcomes the Committee's positive assessment of the role of the British Council in Bahrain. The British Council enjoys a strong reputation in Bahrain. Its teaching centre in Manama delivers language training annually to around 7,000 students. Its other skills training include: 'Connecting Classrooms', a school-linking programme; professional development to teachers and Ministry of Education officials; capacity building workshops for academic staff and leaders; and capacity building, training and skills development for local artists.

**33. The UK is well placed to capitalise on its business reputation in Bahrain as it begins large-scale infrastructure spending. (Paragraph 175)**

The Government agrees, and pursues trade and investment opportunities with the Bahraini public and private sectors at all levels, including through the biannual ministerial-level UK-Bahrain Joint Working Group. UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) in Bahrain are proactively consulting with the Bahraini government to identify key infrastructure projects which match UK skills. Through its UKTI network, business opportunity programme and webinars, the Government is promoting these opportunities to a wide range of UK companies. We will continue to position UK companies to win a substantial share of future business from Bahrain's re-development plans, including opportunities arising from the \$10 billion GCC development fund. Key areas identified include Bahrain Airport expansion, waste-water projects, refinery modernisation and the GCC rail link and wider transport sector opportunities.

**34. The Government should not grant any licence that could contribute to internal repression and should make decisions on other export licences on a case-by-case basis, ensuring the strict implementation of existing policies. The Government should provide in response to this report further evidence that it is adhering in practice to its own strict policies with regard to British defence equipment sold to Bahrain including any evidence gathered by end-use monitoring. (Paragraph 180)**

The Government takes its arms export responsibilities extremely seriously and operates some of the most rigorous export controls in the world. All export licences are considered on a case-by-case basis against the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, in light of the prevailing circumstances at the time of application and depending on end use. For example, following the unrest in February 2011, the Government reviewed export licences to Bahrain and any licences for equipment that could be used for internal repression were revoked. The revoked licenses covered equipment that could be used for riot control including tear gas, crowd control ammunition, body armour and radio communications equipment. Other licenses were approved where it was clear that there was not a risk that they would be used in internal repression. This rigorous approach continues to be applied to all export licence applications.

**35. Both the government and the opposition in Bahrain view UK defence sales as a signal of British support for the government. The UK Government should take this into account when considering high-profile sales, such as the Eurofighter Typhoon, to Bahrain. (Paragraph 181)**

The Government supports the sale of Typhoon to Bahrain because Bahrain is an important ally in the region with whom we have a positive defence relationship. Bahrain lies in an unstable region and has legitimate defence and security needs which the British Government seeks to support.

**36. Bahrain provides the UK with an immensely valuable home in the Gulf and the defence co-operation is mutually beneficial. Ending defence co-operation and naval basing in Bahrain and seeking a substitute would be an extremely costly and difficult step. (Paragraph 192)**

The Government agrees. The UK has a clear national interest in peace and security in the Gulf and freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. Bahrain is an important ally in the region and we will continue our positive bilateral defence relationship to support our wider regional security objectives. There is currently no intention to end defence cooperation or naval basing in Bahrain.

**37. We recommend that UK-supplied training, delivered in the UK or Bahrain, should always include human rights elements, and that the Government should set out in response to this report the elements included in its each of the training programmes provided to Bahrain that cover rights, the rule of law and the correct use of force. (Paragraph 193)**

The Government provides extensive reform assistance programmes in Bahrain in support of the implementation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) recommendations. All UK reform assistance focuses on strengthening human rights and the rule of law. Through capacity building work with the Office of the Ombudsman, Commission on the Rights of Prisoners and Detainees, Ministries of Human Rights and Justice and the National Institute of Human Rights, UK Government advisors assist Bahraini institutions to implement BICI recommendations in line with human rights standards and through exposure to UK best practice. The Government does not currently provide training on the use of force.

The UK provides world-class defence training and education to many countries, including in the Gulf. In doing so we always act in compliance with our domestic, and international, legal obligations and our values as a nation. All requests for defence training are considered on a case-by-case basis and requests would not be granted if we thought such training would lead to human rights abuses. All courses and training delivered to the Bahrain Security Forces comply with international humanitarian law, the law of armed conflict and the requirement to act with respect for human rights in the most demanding of circumstances.

**38. We are disappointed that the Government has provided so little detail to Parliament and this Committee on its most recent defence accord with Bahrain. It was predictable that Bahrain would consider it a public signal of support and, if the Government did not mean it to send this message, it would have been more sensible to have immediately released information about the Accord and the UK's reasons for agreeing it at this time. We understand that the Government does not publish Defence Accord Agreements but in its response to this report, the Government should consider what, if any, further**

**information it could release about this Defence Accord and the UK's reasons for signing it at this time. (Paragraph 194)**

The Secretary of State for Defence and the Bahraini Minister for Foreign Affairs signed the Defence Cooperation Accord on 11 October 2012. The Accord is indeed a practical demonstration of the UK's commitment to the security of Bahrain. The Government notes the Committee's recommendation, but it is Government policy not to publish such Accords.

**39. Bahrain's implementation of the BICI recommendations has been disappointingly slow and has further damaged its international reputation. Swift implementation of the recommendations would have gone a long way toward preventing the breakdown in trust and fracturing of opposition in Bahrain. (Paragraph 200)**

The British Government welcomed the establishment of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry. The Government of Bahrain has made clear its commitment to implementing its recommendations and we encourage the government to build on the positive steps already taken and ensure that the remaining recommendations are implemented soon.

**40. We are particularly concerned by recent reports that the Bahraini authorities have banned political groups from having unrestricted access to diplomats. In its response to this report the Government should provide its assessment of the situation including information on whether it has affected any of the Embassy's meetings, along with any representations it has made to the authorities to lift the ban. (Paragraph 201)**

Freedom of speech, including the ability for legal political societies to operate freely, forms an integral part of the Government's international human rights agenda. The Bahraini government's ruling on contact between political societies and foreign parties, including Diplomatic Missions, to which the Committee refers, stipulated that political societies are required to notify the authorities of any such meetings. Senior Minister for State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Baroness Warsi, delivered a *démarche* on this issue to the Government of Bahrain on behalf of the UK and the EU during her visit in September 2013. The same month, the FCO's update to its Annual Human Rights Report, expressed concern and urged the Government of Bahrain to provide space for political societies to engage. We note that since the decision, there has been no impact on our Embassy's engagement and our staff continue to meet regularly with individuals and groups from political societies, including the opposition.

**41. We conclude that the Government is right to pursue a strategy of engagement with Bahrain and to demonstrate the benefits of a reforming, moderate approach. However, British engagement and support should not be unconditional in the face of continued violations and slow implementation of reforms. There is a danger to the UK's credibility if it allows itself to become associated with the problems in Bahrain rather than solutions. (Paragraph 210)**

The Government agrees. We remain supportive of the reforms already underway and continue to encourage the Government of Bahrain to show energy in their implementation. The Bahraini government has itself acknowledged that more work needs to be done and the UK will continue to assist. All of the practical support we provide to Bahrain is considered against the Government's Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidance to ensure it is compliant with human rights standards.

**42. We recommend that the UK seek to meet members of the opposition groups whenever possible, and advocate on behalf of international and British NGOs for access to Bahrain. In its response to this report, the Government should set out the meetings held with Bahraini NGOs and opposition figures in the last 12 months, and the steps it has taken to improve NGO access to Bahrain. (Paragraph 211)**

FCO officials in Bahrain and in the UK frequently meet members of opposition groups and regularly see over 50 individuals from political societies (including opposition figures), civil society and NGOs to seek the widest views possible. Our engagement is constructive and focused on supporting political progress, including the National Consensus Dialogue. The Government continues to press for greater access for NGOs to Bahrain, including at Ministerial level.

**43. We recommend that the Government make securing an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture a priority in its next Joint Working Group with the Bahraini authorities. (Paragraph 213)**

The Government regularly urges the Bahraini government to reinstate the visit to Bahrain of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, both privately at official and ministerial level and publicly, as we did in our statement at the UN Human Rights Council session in September. We will continue to discuss this with the Bahraini government, including at the next UK-Bahrain Joint Working Group meeting in spring 2014.

**44. The UK is right to be understanding of Bahrain's dilemmas. For its region, prior to the protests it was liberal and reforming, and there is not an easy answer to its internal political issues. However, many of Bahrain's problems are of its Government's own making. The UK must press with greater urgency and force for Bahrain to implement the BICI reforms, engage seriously in dialogue and welcome UN mechanisms in order to re-establish good faith in its intentions. If there is no significant progress by the start of 2014, the Government should designate Bahrain as a 'country of concern' in its Human Rights Report. (Paragraph 214)**

We note the Committee's assessment that there are no easy answers to Bahrain's political issues. We regularly meet the government, opposition and others involved in Bahrain's National Consensus Dialogue, urging all to remain involved constructively to enable a political settlement to be reached.

We note the Committee's recommendation to designate Bahrain as a "country of concern" if there is no significant progress by the start of 2014. Bahrain became a case study in the FCO Human Rights Report in our 2011 following the unrest. The

FCO introduced case studies for the first time in the 2011 report as a way to strengthen reporting in light of fast moving events in the region. This process has allowed us to include countries where there are significant human rights concerns, but which we judge do not fully meet our criteria for inclusion as countries of concern. As a case study, rather than a country of concern, we have taken into consideration the fact that the Bahraini government is working to improve its record but also that concerns remain in some areas, such as freedom of expression, inconsistencies in sentencing and limited accountability.

The FCO's bi-annual review system for country case studies provides regular opportunities to express concerns publically and demonstrate the UK Government's commitment to transparency in its assessments of Bahrain's progress.

**45. We conclude that Bahrain is subject to intense pressure from other states in the Gulf, which have strong and opposing interests in what happens in Bahrain. The UK Government should work to improve the international context in which Bahrain seeks a national reconciliation. Regional players must be involved in the reform and reconciliation process if it is to have any chance to succeed. The sectarian element to Bahrain's troubles are a complicating factor, but also make Bahrain's reconciliation even more of a prize: if these communities can find a way to reconcile and work together then it will be an example in the region. (Paragraph 219)**

All six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council share a vision of a secure and stable Bahrain. Regional issues, including the conflict in Syria, instability and sectarianism in Iraq and the E3+3 negotiations with Iran, also have an impact on Bahrain's domestic affairs. The Government encourages all regional actors to play a constructive and supportive role in the reform and reconciliation process in Bahrain.

As noted in the answer to Question 29, the Government is also concerned by the increasing support from foreign proxies to some radical and violent opposition elements. Any attempt to exploit sectarian difference is unacceptable and the Government encourages all regional actors to play a constructive and supportive role in the reform and reconciliation process in Bahrain.

The Government notes that Saudi Arabia has long acknowledged the importance of dialogue between all communities in Bahrain. As noted in the answer to question 21, on 3 February 2013 the Government of Saudi Arabia issued a statement welcoming King Hamad's initiative for the National Consensus Dialogue, and supporting his call for participation from all members of Bahraini society.

The Government agrees with the Committee on the importance of reconciliation between communities in Bahrain. We are clear that the only way to promote peace and stability in Bahrain is through a constructive and inclusive dialogue that addresses the legitimate aspirations of all Bahrainis. The Government continues to call on all sides in Bahrain to build the trust and confidence necessary for reconciliation.

## FCO resources in the Gulf

**46. We welcome the Government's efforts to improve the FCO's Arabic language skills in the Gulf, in particular by designating more posts as 'speaker slots'. However, it appears that 25% of staff in those speaker slots have low levels of Arabic proficiency, and 40% have not reached the required standard for their grade, undermining the effect of this policy. For reasons of public diplomacy (to local television interviews, for example), as well as to demonstrate respect for the partner state, it is important that high-level FCO diplomats speak Arabic even in those states where they can manage in English or with a translator. In this context, we welcome the re-opening of the FCO's language school, fulfilling a pledge made by the Foreign Secretary in 2011. (Paragraph 226)**

**47. We understand that it will take time to re-build Arabic language capacity, particularly at the senior levels of the FCO, but we believe that it is important that the Government demonstrate its commitment to the goal of improving language skills at all levels of the FCO and incentivise FCO staff to learn Arabic. We recommend that the FCO set a timeframe in which it expects to make a minimum level of Arabic language skills mandatory for those who wish to be appointed to senior diplomatic posts in the region. (Paragraph 227)**

While the number of Arabic speaker slots is now much more closely aligned to our business needs, the relatively low target level achievement rates in operational and extensive speaker slots rates across the Foreign and Commonwealth Office network is a concern. Our research shows that the root cause of this problem is insufficient training time, rather than a lack of competence or incentives. The FCO has identified and is taking action on three key areas:

the Hiring Phase: We are now ensuring longer lead in times for appointments and declining requests from those staff who bid for jobs without the required lead-in time; the Training Phase: We are underlining the importance of students sticking to their Course Learning Plans and have introduced a 'red flag' system with the Language Centre so we are alerted to any student who significantly deviates from their schedule so we can take appropriate action; the Operational Phase: we are sending Heads of Mission lists of staff who have already started at post but have not reached their target level so the appropriate level of support can be given to continue their studies and take their exams.

We agree with the Committee that all Ambassadors posted to the region should have a minimum level of Arabic skills. We are specifying this as a requirement when we advertise jobs, and are advertising jobs earlier so that those who do not already speak Arabic have time for language training.

In addition to the 17 members of staff currently undergoing full-time Arabic training in preparation for their posting to the region, a further 97 are undertaking after work or lunch time classes and 74 are using an e-learning package.

## **Future of UK-Gulf relations**

**48. The UK must make the most of what it can offer the Gulf: an established partner with understanding of the region, and a bridge to the larger powers of the United States and European Union. (Paragraph 231)**

The Government notes the recommendation that the UK should maximise its offer to the Gulf. As well as foreign policy co-ordination, under the Government's new Gulf Strategy, we will be building up further our co-operation with the Gulf states across key areas for the future, including health, education, energy and culture as well as defence and security. We are seeking to build on our legacy of historical engagement in the region, as well as the advantages of English language, particularly on the internet and its status as the effective second language of the Gulf. We will continue to maintain high-level cross-government engagement, underpinned by strong personal relationships across the Gulf.

**49. The UK will have to work harder in future to maintain its influence and secure its interests in the Gulf. The Government should ensure that it does not lose its current momentum and should be willing to dedicate further staff and other resources to this important region. (Paragraph 231)**

The Government recognises the importance of maintaining momentum and ensuring the UK's relationships with its Gulf allies remain strong. As noted in the response above we are in the process of formulating a new Gulf Strategy to ensure the UK's position in the region is strengthened over the next generation. We keep staffing in the region under review, and are committed to ensuring that we have the right staff in the right posts to maximise their effectiveness.

**50. The Government should set out in its response to this report how the FCO is contributing to the Prime Minister's review of UK-Gulf relations, and what will be made public as a result of this review. (Paragraph 231)**

The Government has already engaged a wide range of interested parties in its review of UK-Gulf relations, including the Gulf States themselves, and will continue to seek views from outside of Government as this work progresses. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other key Whitehall departments are fully involved in this process. We recognise the Committee's identification of the importance of effective communication, both within the UK and in the Gulf itself and we will take this fully into account when deciding how best to communicate the results publically.

**51. The Government must make the UK's public profile and reputation a more central part of its work in the Gulf, and ensure that constructive relationships are built with a wide cross-section of society, if it is to remain a principal partner in the future. (Paragraph 232)**

The Government engages with a wide range of people across the Gulf – from specific contact with government, civil society groups, journalists, academics and future leaders, to broader engagement with society, including through traditional and non-traditional media, culture and sport.



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