

Free trade

My critics have complained that in recent years I have urged the UK to make and grow more of the things it needs at home. I have been accused of resiling from a belief in free trade all assumed I had. Let me reassure. I accept that free trade does increase the prosperity of all embracing it. My problem with it has always been that so few practise it. There are many countries and big companies that see a nation or company that practises free trade as weak, an opportunity to exploit. It is important not to be a naive free trader.

My own industrial experience reminded me how difficult it is to find others who play by free trade rules. When I helped take an industrial group into China to sell product there to our global customers who were establishing factories we soon found product circulating copied from ours without permission and even found a case where someone else's product was being sold in lookalike packaging with our brand name on. When we sought to take one of our technology advances into Germany, offering to joint venture with them to gain wider access to their market there was no deal. The players bought single copies of our product to see what they could learn and apply to their own without needing our assistance or joint investment.

Many US and UK companies have had difficult experiences with China, where joint ownership structures and investment vehicles are required and used to transfer technology. Today we see how dangerous it is for countries and companies that have come to rely on Russian energy or other necessities. There is a sudden disruption to supply brought on by bad conduct by the counter party country.

The UK promotes free trade where it can, and works closely with the WTO to bring it about. The UK also needs however to be worldly wise and cautious about trusting some foreign jurisdictions too much. If they are not themselves equally pledged to play by the rules and accept the give and take successful free trade needs we should not make it easy for them to cheat. EU managed trade was not very free or fair for us in many areas including fish and farm products. We should promote multilateral free trade, whilst taking care to build sufficient national resilience in crucial areas that are especially prone to disruption.

Ukrainian refugees

The U.K. government launched a scheme to grant entry to Ukrainian refugees who wish to join family here in the U.K. They will have somewhere to stay, they have people to welcome them and they may well speak English to ease their lives here. I strongly support this policy.

The U.K. government have listened carefully to what the refugees crossing the land borders out of Ukraine want. Many want to be given temporary accommodation and support near to the Ukrainian border, so they can return home easily once the fighting is over. Many of them are women and children who want to be rejoined with their husbands, brothers, fathers who have stayed at home to fight. They want as soon as possible to return to their own homes. I support the generous approach of the U.K. to assist the host states near to Ukraine with money, supplies and expertise. This is the way we can help the most refugees in the way they want. They want to stay in a country closer to and more like their own.

The U.K. is now drawing up a third scheme to offer 3 year visas to refugees without family contacts. This scheme will harness the generous spirits of U.K. citizens who want to offer free accommodation to Ukrainian refugees. I would be interested in your thoughts on this scheme.

My questions about the emerging shape of this scheme include

Why a 3 year period? It is a long time to be out of your country and we all hope there will be a peace long before then. If there is no peace why limit it to 3 years.

What provision would be made if we are talking large numbers to ensure there are enough school places with special teaching to overcome the language barrier? What extra capacity will be added to GP and hospital services?

If it is based around the free offer of accommodation by U.K. home owners what legal agreement will there be to ensure security of tenancy for the refugees? In what circumstances could the U.K. citizen back out of the offer? What fall back accommodation does the state have? Will there be any stipulations about the standards of the accommodation?

Sanctions disrupt

Russia's economy will suffer badly from the sanctions now imposed. Many companies are pulling out of their businesses in Russia, stopping trade with Russia and looking elsewhere for supplies. The ruble has collapsed making imports so much dearer. Russia cannot access a lot of foreign exchange.

These sanctions also impose costs on us. Wild price movements in energy have just made the cost of living problems that much bigger. the war will disrupt the grain trade and is propelling some food prices up. Russia is likely to look to China to work round the banking sanctions and to find new markets for its energy and other commodities. the much higher prices in world markets will increase Russian revenues and will be paid in hard currency by those who want the oil and gas.

The government needs to adjust its tax policies for these new developments. There is an even more compelling need to ease the squeeze.

Will the Secretary of State set out the range of assumptions of virus spread and severity of illness used in his covid-19 response planning?

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will set out the range of assumptions of virus spread and severity of illness used in his covid-19 response planning.

Maggie Throup, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Social Care: The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) provides advice to the Government on its response to the COVID-19 epidemic. Its operational subgroup, Scientific Pandemic Influenza Group on Modelling (SPI-M-0), modelled potential scenarios for the Omicron variant using a range of assumptions on indicators. These include parameters such as the transmission advantage and intrinsic severity of the Omicron variant over the Delta variant. SPI-M-0 modellers use contemporaneous academic studies when setting their assumptions.

Such modelling is regularly updated to reflect changes in assumptions as and when more detailed studies are released. Where there is uncertainty in a parameter value, sensitivity analysis is used to explore the range of impact and inform the Government's response. Given the large number of assumptions made for the parameters that feed into the modelling, the latest underlying assumptions used by SPI-M-0 academic groups is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spi-m-0-chairs-statement-on-covid-19-19-december-2021>

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) also informs the scientific advice presented to the Government. The UKHSA undertakes studies and risk assessments on selected emergent variants, assessing transmissibility, immune evasion, growth advantage and infections severity based on available data from the UKHSA and academic partners. Variants are selected for assessment on the basis of growth, and the number and type of genetic mutations present. Risk assessments are updated regularly until stable assessments are reached and are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investigation-of-sars-cov-2-varian>

[ts-of-concern-variant-risk-assessments](#)

Detailed analyses of the indicators are published in the Technical Briefings, which are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investigation-of-sars-cov-2-variants-technical-briefings>

My intervention in the Government's Economic Crime Bill debate

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Home Secretary has a lot of support on the Government Benches for the compassionate and sensible way in which she is going about this. Will she confirm that she is listening both to what the refugees want, which is often not a long-term settlement a long way from Ukraine, and with regard to the security issues that this all poses?

Priti Patel, The Secretary of State for the Home Department: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I must emphasise that every single crisis requires a bespoke and unique response. There are two very big calls coming from the region and from our counterparts. First and foremost, they are asking for help on security measures right now; that consistent theme is coming over. That comes down to checks—they are undertaking checks—but they are also very concerned about wider security issues, some of which I simply cannot discuss in this House, for clear reasons. The second point—even the Ukrainian ambassador made this point to me yesterday and I hear it every single day from my counterparts—is that there is a call to keep people in region. There is a big demand for that, and that is where the wider aid effort has to focus, in addition to the work that we are doing on humanitarianism.