Kurdistan

 It is a great honour to be here at the American university in Kurdistan

 and I thank my hosts for making me feel so at home by organising such prodigious quantities of rainfall

  it was only a few years ago that the Kurdish peshmerga were in  the forefront of the fight against an evil Islamist death cult called Isis or Daesh

 and as Mayor of London I came out to see what the UK was doing to help

 because after all we were facing the same challenge in our city – from people who were being infected by the same nihilist ideology – and who were killing innocent people

 and your war was our war

and your battle helped to protect us

 I went out to a military camp near Erbil and met some UK officers and some peshmerga and my handlers said Mr mayor whatever you do don’t touch the gun

 but I am proud to say that I ignored them completely and posed with an AK pointed in the general direction of the enemy

because I feel a solidarity with the Kurds

  and you went on to overcome that enemy

the pershmerga were indispensable in the defeat of Daesh

 and I want you to know that the UK state will continue to stand with you

  That threat can emerge again, and together we must do everything in our power to ensure that it never again threatens the people of Kurdistan and the region

 it is more vital than ever that we are united in protecting our values

 of freedom and democracy and human rights

 when they are so grievously under threat from people who are willing to use force

to terrorise civilians

to commit massacres of the innocent

in Ukraine or in Israel

and we should never forget that the modern history of this autonomous region began in 1991

after the appalling treatment of Kurdistan by the government of Saddam Hussein

after his egregious and shameful use of poison gas, his terroristic attacks on innocent civilian communities

and it was the government of John Major that helped to set up the safe havens

wonderful to be joined here by Francis Maude a member of that government

 it was amazing to wake up in Erbil today

to see the construction that is taking place and to think of the future and the potential of this region

 I congratulate the government of PM Barzani on what you have been doing

 on your economic reforms, and the steps you are taking towards a digital government

 I appreciate the complexities of your relationship with Baghadad

and I can tell you that you will have my continued support in ensuring solutions that are fair to the aspirations of the people of Kurdistan

 Last time I was here I was proud to visit what was then the largest Jaguar Land Rover show room in the entire middle east

in fact I believe it still is

 and I drove out into the traffic of Erbil until I was restrained by some of the security people

but I know that since then many more JLRs have driven out of that show room

and that many more british companies have come here

 and our trade is up 83 per cent year on year

 may it grow and may this friendship and partnership go from strength to strength

 thank you for your kindness  and here’s to the UK and Kurdistan