



International Relations and Defence Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Defence concepts and capabilities: from aspiration to reality

Wednesday 6 April 2022

10.30 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Lord Anderson of Swansea; Baroness Blackstone; Lord Boateng; Lord Campbell of Pittenweem; Baroness Fall; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Sugg; Lord Teverson; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 9

Witnesses

[I](#): Professor Michael Clarke, King's College London and University of Exeter; Professor Malcolm Chalmers, Deputy Director-General, RUSI.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Michael Clarke and Professor Malcolm Chalmers.

Q1 The Chair: Good morning. Welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Committee in the House of Lords.

I thank our two witnesses, Professor Michael Clarke, visiting professor in the Department of War Studies at King's College London and director-general of RUSI from 2007 to 2015, and Professor Malcolm Chalmers, deputy director-general of RUSI, for joining us to give evidence for our new inquiry, "Defence concepts and capabilities: from aspiration to reality". This is our very first session.

As always, I remind witnesses and Members that the session is broadcast, transcribed and on the record. I also remind Members, as usual, that when asking questions they should declare any relevant interests at that point.

I always ask the first question, which is rather general in scope, although today I may have a more detailed supplementary. I then turn to my colleagues for their questions. Again, I anticipate that they will ask supplementaries. If we have time available at the end of our set period of an hour and a half, I will turn to colleagues who have not yet had the opportunity to ask a question and give them priority, as you would expect.

What do you consider to be the main messages of the Defence Command Paper? Were any of them unexpected? To what extent does the Defence Command Paper respond to the goals that were set by the Integrated Review?

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: Thank you very much for asking us to take part in this session. Of course, you have a massive agenda in front of you in this inquiry. I guess that Michael and I have the luxury of focusing on issues that are of most interest to us, but I suspect that we will raise many more questions than answers.

It is important to start by distinguishing between concept and reality, between narrative and practice. In a way, the title of your inquiry suggests that. There was a sense last year, when the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper came out, that the Ministry of Defence was beginning to develop a bit of concept fatigue. A lot of documents were coming out. There were the two documents on the integrated operating concept. There were also, of course, the two spending reviews, in November 2020 and November 2021, which were critical in this regard. Most recently, there was the 2021 defence equipment plan, which was published in February 2022 and gives you more of a sense of how the concepts are or are not translated into reality.

Rather than get into too specific a narrative interrogation of documents, which in the end are written by very small groups of people and are not necessarily entirely connected to investment decisions, it is important to look at those documents in the round. When one does that, I would

suggest that four key themes for capabilities come out of the reviews—the Defence Command Paper perhaps most of all, but also the others.

The first theme is the strong priority that the Government are giving to renewing the national nuclear deterrent force. It is the biggest programme, including both a submarine and a warhead component. If you look at the equipment plan, out of an equipment budget of £230 billion for the next decade, the DNO—the Defence Nuclear Organisation—accounts for £58 billion, which is about 25%. It is the biggest single top-level budget. For comparison, the figure for the Army is £41 billion, that for the Navy is £38 billion and that for the Air Force is £36 billion.

I think that the Ministry of Defence would admit that those costs are probably an understatement for both nuclear and combat air, particularly for the period after 2024, given the uncertainty about the costs of the future combat air system and, indeed, the new warhead. However, that gives you a sense of priorities in numerical terms and where the investment is going. It will inform some of the discussion that I am sure we will have later in the session about the changing nature or character of war as the MoD sometimes sees it.

The second key theme is the priority given to capability modernisation and retiring older generations of equipment. Plans for total defence spending in the period from 2019-20 to 2024-25 have remained broadly in line with the growth rate that you have had since 2015. Total MoD spending in real terms will rise by about 1.5% per annum, on average, over those five years, but frontloaded into the first couple of years.

Within that total, there has been a radical shift towards modernisation and some decline in running costs. That is a very big change from the 2015 review. MoD capital spending will rise by some 40% in real terms, but day-to-day costs will fall by about 2% to 3% in real terms over the period. The latter is made possible by savings in personnel numbers, but also by accelerating the retirement of older equipment.

Beyond 2024, the assumption is that capital spend will again be given priority. The narrative about investing in modernisation and accelerated retirement of older capability is reflected in the equipment plan in the budget.

Thirdly, the Defence Command Paper in particular, but also some of what is said in the other documents, reflects a decision to make a significant reduction in personnel numbers, but with more spent on making sure that those personnel are better equipped and more often forward deployed. There is quite a lot of emphasis on forward deployment, which, of course, is even more of a live issue now with the Ukraine invasion. In contrast to the 2015 review, which set fixed numerical targets for service personnel numbers, there is much more flexibility in that regard in relation to this review.

Finally, the fourth heading is a bit more of a grab bag. There are a number of other themes that I would term secondary themes. There is

more emphasis on research and development, cyber and space, but perhaps much less clarity in those areas about how great the resource investment is. In narrative terms, certainly, and to some extent in substantive terms, those are areas where there has been increased priority.

Professor Michael Clarke: My own take on this is very similar. I will just add a couple of points. Thank you, Chair, for the chance to address the committee, which is always a privilege.

My overall sense of the Integrated Review process was that it produced a very good set of essays on the nature of the challenges that a country such as the United Kingdom will face. I have long said that the 2020s will be a very uncomfortable decade for all the European powers—all the middle powers—because of the changing nature of world politics. I thought that the whole series of exercises reflected that very well. You could not fault the logic of the context setting of the essays. I would argue that they certainly do not need to be rewritten. We really do not want to go through this again. As the context was so wide, they may need to be reinterpreted a bit differently. I thought that the essays and the context were very good.

What comes out of that is, can we rise to the challenges that those essays created in the various documents? The theme that came through for me very strongly, as Malcolm mentioned, was transformation. Our forces have to go through a real process of transformation between now and 2030. While we are doing that, we aim to be more persistent across the world. We want our forces to be engaged more persistently, particularly below the threshold of overt warfare, because the competition from our adversaries is day in and day out. They do not take a break, and we cannot assume that our forces are only to be used when the need is manifest. The need is persistent. That came out as well.

A third theme was that all the documents had a big bet on science and technology and that a lot of the answers to these transformational challenges will be found through science and technology. The loose ends that the documents left, which Malcolm alluded to, were that it was not quite clear how that was going to be achieved. There is a lot of faith in science and technology, yet the level of ambition—for instance, that we should spend 2.4% of our GDP on research and development by 2027—means that we will come to the average spending among our OECD partners by 2027. That seems to me to be a pretty low ambition to have if we intend to put so much faith in science and technology to meet these requirements.

The final thing that I took away from all the documents was the sense that Britain wants to be clearly identified as playing a global role and as having some significance as a player. The tilt to the Indo-Pacific was not really consistent between the main document and the defence White Paper. I am happy to talk about that a bit more, if you are interested. I did not think that the emphasis was quite consistent, but it was part of a

more general emphasis that Britain is not going to draw in its horns and that Brexit Britain will have something to contribute to world politics.

In a sense, the themes were transformation based on science and technology, persistent operations and persistent presence in the world, and a fairly global take on what is in Britain's interests. A big series of challenges were laid out in the documents.

The Chair: From both of your responses, it does not sound as though you were particularly surprised by what was in the document. There was one new development over the period in which the Integrated Review was being developed—the creation of SONAC in December 2020. How important do you think that SONAC will be in achieving the objectives set out in the Defence Command Paper?

Professor Michael Clarke: SONAC, the Secretary of State's Office of Net Assessment and Challenge, is a very good development. It is a very good idea, because the thing that we probably lack most in trying to match aspirations to reality is a really good net assessment and challenge process.

I am not sure who is leading SONAC at the moment. I think the job is still advertised. I have not seen the name of the person who might be leading it. Initially, it is said to be a team of perhaps 15 people. That sounds okay to get going, but I suspect that it will need to have a considerably bigger staff to be genuinely important. I am also of the view that the current Secretary of State takes the idea very seriously indeed. I am glad that he does.

I am all in favour of an intellectually powerful office of net assessment. As I understand it, SONAC will answer to the Second Permanent Under-Secretary, but I hope that it will go directly to the Secretary of State, even if it answers to the Second PUS in organisational terms.

The Chair: Professor Chalmers, do you wish to add to that?

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: I agree with Professor Clarke. There has been discussion about this office for some time. We are waiting eagerly to see what it looks like. Even if you create an office, it is pretty much a question of MoD internal wiring: who the person is and how it relates to all the other sources of advice that the Secretary of State is getting every day.

Q2 Lord Stirrup: Good morning, gentlemen. I, too, am going to ask a rather general question. It could lead into all sorts of detailed avenues, but colleagues will be asking some specific questions on points of detail later on. I do not want to go into those.

I would like your assessment of the scale of the challenge. You have outlined what you saw as the key themes of the defence review. Did you then look at the force structures that we have and the future plans and programmes that were already in place and say, "Ah, yes, I can see that, with a bit of tweaking here and there, that will work", or did you say,

"Wow, this will require wholesale transformation"? What is the gap between what was set out in the Defence Command Paper and the plans and programmes that currently exist?

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: Mike can start on this one.

Professor Michael Clarke: You are absolutely right, Lord Stirrup. When I read it all, I thought, "This is the document that raises acutely the perennial question that has existed for 30-odd years of maintaining full-spectrum forces at very low absolute numbers".

We can talk about attrition rates, as seen in the Ukraine crisis now and in other conflicts. I am struck, for instance, by the fact that Britain gave the Ukrainians all our NLAW stock of anti-tank weapons. They have done extremely well, with apparently a hit rate of over 90%, which is extremely good, but they have used them all up, in a month of war. That is the rate of usage that one might reasonably expect. That is just a vignette.

Our special operations brigade will be a small unit, operating from global hubs. The security force assistance brigade will do the same, with a global hub at Dukhan in the Gulf and maybe other forces operating in and out of Singapore.

We are going to station two vessels permanently in the Indo-Pacific. They will be two overseas offshore patrol vessels. As somebody said to me, "I don't think anybody will notice two OPVs".

Lord Stirrup: Exactly.

Professor Michael Clarke: I am sure that they would do useful work, but the word is "useful", not "significant", I would guess.

My overall sense was that the ambition embodied in the Integrated Review document and then translated into more specific terms in the defence White Paper was a skeleton of a force structure that could perform the tasks that we think need to be performed, but everywhere I looked there seemed to be lots of bones and not enough flesh to operate under more stressful conditions. There was a fair amount of optimism as to what could be achieved by very small units.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: I do not dissent from anything that Mike has just said. When asking what defence forces the UK requires, it is important to make a distinction between those that we require for situations in which we are likely to be largely on our own, which include all the domestic roles of the Armed Forces, of course, and those situations and scenarios in which we are likely to operate, or, at least, because the future is always uncertain, we plan on the basis that we will operate alongside militarily powerful allies, most of all the United States, but to some extent also our European allies or, indeed, if you are talking about the Indo-Pacific, potential allies such as Japan.

The first point partly explains the focus on the nuclear force. Essentially, the nuclear force is a last-resort national force, the evident relevance of which has been increased during this crisis. That is one of the reasons why there is a big emphasis there. That is not something that we can use only alongside others. It is designed to be used independently and unilaterally. Clearly, there are other elements of force capability in that regard nationally. I refer to air defence and so on.

In a way, the answer to the mass problem, which is articulated in the review documents, is that mass is provided through alliance. We do not have the mass, as the UK, to confront Russia or China by ourselves at a large-scale war-fighting level. We may do so in response to grey-area, sub-threshold cyberattacks, or whatever you want to call them, but not in mass. Neither does any other European country. The only country that has that capability is the United States, which has a defence budget more than 10 times as large as ours. That is the main way in which I would answer that question. The alliance question is relevant to the Indo-Pacific as well as to NATO.

There are different ways of reading the Integrated Review on the question of the Indo-Pacific tilt. My reading, and the reading of the people I talk to who were involved in writing it, is that the Indo-Pacific tilt is most of all an economic and diplomatic concept. It has a military dimension, but it is not primarily a military concept. The Integrated Review makes clear that the authors believed then—and they have been proven right in the last month—that the most acute military threat that the UK faces comes from Russia and that NATO is at the heart of UK defence.

The Armed Forces are capable of operating more widely, but the presence in the Indo-Pacific—not just the OPVs¹ that we have permanently stationed there, but the deployment of much more capable forces from time to time—is not an indication that we are planning to be one of the major alliance partners of the US in the Indo-Pacific, alongside Japan, Australia and others. It is absolutely not that, because that would be inconsistent with the focus on NATO. I do not think that that is the intention.

There are things such as the AUKUS agreement², where the UK, for both prosperity and security reasons, is developing a closer defence and security partnership with regional countries, to our mutual advantage, and brokering some of the areas of comparative advantage that the UK has, such as nuclear submarine technology, which very few other countries have. This is a more nuanced interpretation of the Indo-Pacific tilt.

The other thing that I would mention is more in relation to what I would call the wider Middle East, stretching into east Africa, the Gulf, the Levant

¹ Offshore patrol vessels

² AUKUS is a security partnership between Australia, the UK and the US, announced in September 2021

and so on. Here, the Command Paper may have a rather different flavour from the Integrated Review. Partly because of the Army's recent experience and interest in that area, there is a bit more focus on it. The Integrated Review has some language that is about more of an economy-of-force approach to the Middle East that involves drawing down a lot, rather like the Americans are doing. The Defence Command Paper feels to me as if it is putting more emphasis on capacity building and persistent deployment to the wider Middle East area. You can argue the pros and cons of that, but I would keep an eye on those issues. In logistical terms as well, it is more possible for us to have a continuing role in that area than in the Indo-Pacific.

Lord Stirrup: Very briefly, may I press on the point about Ukraine, particularly Professor Clarke's point about the rate of weapon usage? It may be true that you can spread units and sub-units quite widely in the context of alliances. Nevertheless, they still have to be able to operate in a war-fighting context. Given the rate of consumption that we see in Ukraine, and that we expected, does the Defence Command Paper spread the UK too thinly in terms of the ability to support operations at war-fighting intensity? Is there enough investment going into the kinds of logistics support and resupply that will be required in those situations, rather than just spreading the UK's military presence for appearances' sake?

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: My instinct is that there probably is not. The focus on modernisation is very understandable. Without that big increment in capital spending, you would have had to get out of one capability area or another, which would have been very uncomfortable—but avoiding this has been at the expense of economies on the running costs side.

Across the services, I suspect that one of the results of what is happening in Ukraine will be that they will look again at whether you have both the kit and all the other things that you need to have forces at high readiness. If you do not have forces at high readiness that can operate for a relevant period of time, you are in real trouble. Whether it is an increment or whether it is a new trade-off will be for the Chancellor and the Prime Minister to work out.

Nevertheless, I will say something about the budgetary implication when we come to the spending review for the MoD this coming November. There will be some areas, such as replacing equipment that has been given to the Ukrainians, that will be funded from the Treasury reserve, but there may also be a case for saying, "Why were those stocks at the level at which they were in the first place? Shouldn't we have had more significant stocks of weapons in a number of different areas?" Rather than having more ships, more battalions and more aircraft, it may be that you need more of the weapons for them to operate. There is a bit of a short-term/long-term trade-off there. Maybe this crisis is suggesting that the short-term requirements are greater than we thought that they were.

It is a complicated issue. The other dimension of that review will have to be to look at our defence industrial capability, to produce a much larger number of munitions in particular areas than we have done so far. Those are all the issues that people are addressing right now in terms of what can practically be given to Ukraine.

Q3 Lord Wood of Anfield: Thank you both for coming today. I want to ask you about something that got a lot of attention when the Defence Command Paper came out: the proposed overall reduction in the number of military personnel. You alluded to it in your introductory remarks. This is the idea that the size of the regular Army should go down to 72,500 by 2025.

A year on, does that proposal still stand, in terms of the logic that supported it? At the beginning, Professor Clarke talked about trade-offs and the bet on science and technology. Presumably this is the flip-side of that bet. Does that strategic bet, involving a reduction in military personnel to historic lows, still hold up, particularly in the light of what is happening in Russia and Ukraine and what we know about the evolving main threat that we face?

Professor Michael Clarke: Let me offer two general points on that. The first point is that the Army has the furthest to go in transformational terms. In a sense, the transformation the MoD is looking for will be achieved by three separate routes by 2030. The Army, the Navy and the Air Force are all on a different track because they have their own specific issues. The hope is that, in a sense, they will come together by the end of the decade in a more integrated force, which is fine.

Of those three services, the Army has the furthest to go, for a number of historical reasons and because conceptually it is not entirely clear what transformational technologies the Army will acquire. It knows what capabilities it would like: deep fires, much greater mobility, et cetera. It does not quite know yet which systems will give it that benefit. When you look at the problems of, say, the Ajax programme, that puts the thing even further back. The Army has further to go and is on a more difficult or less well-charted route.

The Navy knows exactly where it is going, because it knows what ships it will have and how it can transform. The Air Force knows that it has quite a difficult job to perform between now and 2030, but it has a conception of where it should end up. The Army is still trying to arrive at a full conception of where it should end up.

That is my first general point. My second point is about the question of Army numbers. I remember when 82,000 was, first, the floor below which the Army will not fall. Then it became the target that the Army aims to meet. Now we are talking about 72,500 as the new floor. All that I can say is that, whatever the right number for the Army turns out to be, it will not be either of those numbers. It will not be either 82,000 or 72,500, because there is not a lot of strategic logic behind either of them.

I say that for this reason. If the fundamental purpose of the Army is to provide one really good combat division, 72,500 may be more than you need. If the purpose of the Army is to provide one good combat division and to do other things and to operate from global hubs, 72,500 cannot possibly be a large enough army, for the reasons we have already alluded to. I find that number is just curious. I can understand why it has been arrived at; it is because of the need to cut costs. Personnel costs are always the sort of costs that make a difference. One can always play with the numbers and still keep capabilities alive at low numbers, on the assumption that they can be expanded in a crisis.

Perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves here, but I think the Ukraine crisis has sufficiently transformed the nature of European security to put a major question mark over the number of troops and Armed Forces personnel that we could deploy before 2030, when this transformational project will be fully arrived at. Malcolm may disagree with me here, but 72,500 is a number that I find almost illogical from a strategic point of view, given what else is in the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: It is unfortunate in today's world that the main metric we use for army capability is the number of people. Every time I read a newspaper headline that compares the size of our army with what it was in 1815 and suggests somehow or other that that is a relevant metric is fanciful. A British Army of 20,000 would beat Wellington's army in 1815 hands down because it would be much more capable, so it is not relevant.

It is important to have an army that can make a relevant contribution to NATO, and indeed to non-NATO, missions in a timely fashion, and that means, because of our geography, our army has to be expeditionary. It has to get somewhere.

Compared with the Polish army, which does not have to get very far, or the Ukrainian army, which does not have to go anywhere at all because the threat is coming to it, a British Army, to be relevant to NATO, has to get to various parts of Europe quickly with the firepower, the protection and everything else they need—all the logistics and support, as Lord Stirrup said—for a relevant period of time.

In the Royal Navy and in the RAF, which are also facing personnel cuts during this period, we do not think of the main metric for the Royal Navy being the number of sailors. We talk about the number of ships available and how capable they are. It is the same with the RAF; we talk about squadrons and aircraft and the capabilities those aircraft have.

In the Army, we are still stuck in a rather older mindset, partly because people are maybe a bit more central to the Army ways of operating.

If the question is whether the Army has the trade-off right between investment and people, I think they have. If you are saying that you want a bigger army but you want them less well equipped, I would say

no. If you say you want to be spending more on the army compared with the other services, that is also a legitimate question. That would allow you to have mass—mass does have a quality of its own, providing it has quality, but not if it is at the expense of quality.

If you are talking about whether we should put more emphasis on land forces as a proportion of our capability, that then gets you into a NATO division-of-labour question, which has been in the UK defence debate ever since World War II, perhaps going back even further. We are now in a situation in which Germany could be spending as much or perhaps more than us in defence in total before too long, which will take some time to have effect. Over time, it will mean that it will, I certainly hope, be much more capable than it is now.

In contrast to Germany, we have a nuclear deterrent, which is a significant and almost unique contribution to the alliance, and a big driver for our maritime capability, our ASW³ capability and our SSN⁴ capability, all of which is really important, and also pretty unusual. The UK is the leading maritime power in Europe, including not only our submarine capability but also our much wider naval and maritime air capability—and a lot of investment is going into that area.

In comparison, the UK is not seeking to be Europe's most powerful land power. It is seeking to make an important contribution. How big that contribution will be is a matter for debate. The division is important in a number of ways, not least because it allows us divisional command and control capability and to play a role that is geopolitically rather important as well as militarily. It helps the UK be an integrator for northern European allies through the Joint Expeditionary Force.

One of the dimensions, I suspect, for our defence debate this year will be what the implications of Finnish and Swedish membership of NATO will be because that will change the geography of NATO. Finland and Sweden will not only be net recipients of security assistance; they will be contributors. They will be expected to be, and I think they will be, contributors, and the UK is in a really good place to relate to that. That integrating role in terms of land forces is really important.

There will be lessons to learn from Operation Orbital in Ukraine, which from early indications has been a really important game-changer—the fact that we were nimble and agile and did not wait for NATO. We operated independently in helping Ukrainians in their hour of need. Having the capability to do more of that sort of thing supported by strong kinetic capability will be really important.

It is only a partial answer to your question. In a period in which the use of our conventional forces is more likely in a competitive state environment rather than a counterinsurgency environment, we need forces that are highly capable in qualitative terms.

³ Anti-submarine warfare

⁴ Nuclear-powered attack submarine

The long period of focus on counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan meant that there was something of a gap in building army capability in regard to competing with Russia. As Mike said, the Army is putting a lot of effort into repairing that gap, but it is taking a lot of time and a lot of problems along the way.

Q4 Lord Anderson of Swansea: In the introduction, Professor Chalmers spoke of four themes of defence and Professor Clarke emphasised science and technology. The Command Paper seemed to envisage a reduction in the military mass, making room for an increase in the amount to be spent on higher-edge technology and so on. In your judgment, is that change in the balance justified?

Professor Michael Clarke: My argument would be that that shift in the balance is entirely a logical aspiration because military forces constantly have to move on. If we are going to retain world-class forces, they have to be capable at the cutting edge of modern technology. I have no problem with the concept of it at all. The difficulty is the transition. I worry that sunset capabilities are being retired before sunrise capabilities are fully available and, in some cases, even properly developed. If we are going to retire something like the AS-90 artillery or the multiple-launch rocket system, get rid of them earlier and save some money before we have the long-range deep fires that we know that the Army will need. I can see the logic of doing it, but I worry that a gap may be opening between the sunset capabilities that are to be retired and the sunrise capabilities that will be procured.

If we had assumed that Europe would not be pitched into a new cold war in 2020 and 2021, that might have been a reasonable risk assessment for the coming decade. That now looks a riskier assessment—it is not wrong, but it is riskier—it seems to me, because of the deeper implications of the Ukrainian crisis. That is the way I react to it.

I still go back to what I said before: I do not see as big a shift of resources towards the science and technology cutting edges that will be required as was implied in both documents.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: I would slightly parse the phrase “science and technology”. There is a science and technology budget and R&D budget within the MoD, which is stabilising in real terms. The MoD says it is increasing, but it has not given figures on how much it is increasing by, which will be interesting to see when they come out.

The bulk of the increase is on like-for-like replacements of existing equipment. The “like” is different; the new generations of frigates, destroyers, submarines or combat aircraft, or whatever it might be, will be much better than those that they replace and much more expensive.

It is the last bit that is driving some of the budgetary pressures. As unit costs grow, you have to have a growing capital budget in order to pay for that.

After the 2015 SDSR⁵, within a year—maybe even less, depending on whom you talk to—it was clear that the modernisation programme was not affordable within the budgets set, so every year there was a scrambling around to try to find some way to balance the books, and that simply was not sustainable. If there was a single achievement from this review process, it was that it made a very serious attempt to close that gap and fund the programmes that, by and large, the MoD was already committed to but simply could not afford.

I also agree with Mike that there will come a time this year when you have to look again and ask whether we have given enough priority to the shorter-term needs of the Armed Forces—what we need in the next one to five years—in order to ensure that our Armed Forces are capable for threats that feel a lot more immediate than they did a couple of months ago.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: Necessarily, a Defence Command Paper or White Paper looks at matters through UK national eyes, but there is a much wider spectrum outside. Do you think that given the additional cost pressures we can continue to expect to be excellent across the spectrum of abilities?

Professor Michael Clarke: That has been the fundamental question, as I think I said, for the last 30 years. At what point do we face the necessity to drop whole capability areas as opposed to keeping them alive at very small numbers? The logic of keeping them alive is that if you drop them it will be very hard to get them back. That was shown when we went back to 65,000-tonne carriers. We found that we had lost a lot of expertise in operating carriers of that size, and it was not easy just to scale up from our 22,000-tonne smaller carriers. The point at which we have to make that decision may be very close unless we are prepared to put quite a lot more into defence because of the new circumstances of European security than we were.

I note Mark Sedwill's comments a couple of weeks ago when he said he thinks that we need to spend about £20 billion a year extra across the board on defence, foreign policy, intelligence and R&D, which I have to say was exactly the figure I came up with in 2019 in a book I wrote called *Tipping Point*; £20 billion a year for five years as a strategic surge would make a difference.

My argument would be that unless we are prepared to take on something of that order—not on defence but on across-the-board increases in the external expression of our policy, in defence in particular—that issue of maintaining capability at very small numbers will become so acute that we may simply lose credibility in that capability area.

I argued some time ago that there is what I call a threshold of strategic significance. We may have forces that can do X or Y, but they are not strategically significant. They may be welcomed when they turn up to a

⁵ Strategic Defence and Security Review

coalition operation, but they are too small to make a significant difference. It is a perceptual threshold, but it is a threshold that our allies will always make a judgment on.

A threshold where you can do something but not at a level that makes a strategic difference is very important. I would argue that we have already slipped below that threshold in a few areas, and we may do so in more unless we are prepared to spend something more across the board on defence and related areas.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: Subcontract more to allies.

Professor Michael Clarke: Indeed. We can do that. We have shown some real ability to act as a framework nation. The carrier battlegroup when the Queen Elizabeth carrier went on tour was a really good example of the way in which the UK—unique among European powers—can act as a framework for other nations to plug into fairly easily. That is a great model for the future, as is the Joint Expeditionary Force, which Britain is now leading. The JEF, which includes 10 nations, eight of them NATO and two of them non-NATO, is a very good example of the framework nation concept and the leadership that the UK can provide. To do that, our capabilities have to be credible in the eyes of our allies. That raises the threshold that I always worry about—that we have capabilities that may fall below the threshold of credibility in the eyes of our allies or even of our own leaders.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: I am not as pessimistic as Professor Clarke. It is an interesting debate. The first point I would make is that if we had to choose between key capabilities—and I do not think we do, at least not to the extent that Mike has said—the choice needs to be made on the basis of national security. What contributory capabilities can we give up, or capabilities that are more relevant in a contributory fashion, but not those that are only relevant to ourselves? NATO is a very successful alliance, but nothing lasts for ever, and national security has to be the primary consideration in making those choices.

The second point I would make is that it all depends on strategic significance, which Mike talked about. If you look at the contribution that the UK made in Afghanistan and Iraq, we were the largest partner, which gave us something of a say at the table, although the key decisions were all made by Washington. Arguably, we were already below strategic significance, depending on how you calculate the numbers—maybe somewhere between 5% and 10% of the size of the US contribution, spending and people.

What is the metric for strategic significance? How big do you need to be? If our aim is to continue to be able, when the Americans are fully committed, to have a force that is 5% to 10%, as it has been, I am not sure on current budgets that we have such stark choices as Mike has put forward.

On the budget issue, you are the members of the legislature. Many of you are former politicians, so you are better judges of this than I am. The Integrated Review, which I thought was a very interesting document and was more than a national security strategy—it was an all-encompassing national strategy document—implicitly embodied a set of spending priorities. Defence and foreign affairs, including ODA, were given some of the lowest spending priorities of any government department, and there is certainly an argument for them to go up that league table.

At a time when our national debt is the highest since the 1960s as a proportion of GDP and our tax burden is higher than it was in the late 1940s, those who are suggesting that we spend 3% of GDP on defence, which is about £22 billion a year extra, or restore 0.7% on ODA, which is another £5 billion a year, have to ask where that money is going to come from. On defence, that is another 3p in the pound on the basic and higher rate of income tax. For ODA, it is 1p on top of that. Maybe the Government believe we are in a circumstance in which we are prepared to put that extra money in and we are prepared to raise taxes and persuade the electorate that that is the thing to do, or maybe we are prepared to cut the budget for health or education or science and technology, or whatever it might be.

As an observer of British politics and defence budgeting for quite a number of years, that does not feel right to me. I know some parliamentarians point to the 1960s and say, "Well, we should restore defence spending to the level of the 1960s", but the health budget in the 1960s was a fraction of what it is now as a proportion of GDP, and rising health has coincided with falling defence as a proportion of GDP. If you want to get more money for defence without raising taxes, you have to cut health spending, and I do not see the political appetite for that.

In terms of the political reality, in the short term I would argue that there probably is a case for more money on the operations side for the reasons we have already discussed. Thinking that it will all be catastrophe if we do not have a defence budget that is 50% bigger than it is now does not feel to me, with respect, really quite the real world, but I am happy to be convinced otherwise.

The Chair: Thank you. I am anticipating some really strong discussion among colleagues.

Q5 Lord Teverson: Of course, legislatively, we are excluded from decisions about public expenditure in many ways, but the political debate is absolutely there.

We are at the beginning of a very long and productive inquiry. This is our first session, as you know. I will start off with a very general question. What types of warfare are the UK Armed Forces currently prepared to respond to?

The Defence Command Paper talks a lot about threats below the threshold of war. You can argue that we are fighting a proxy war in eastern Europe at the moment. How well placed is the UK to develop and

deploy sub-threshold capabilities, and what should their weighting vis-à-vis conventional or nuclear capabilities be?

Professor Michael Clarke: I keep asking myself what the UK's defence capabilities are. In the spectrum that we are now looking at, as was the case in 2003 and 1991, it is major war fighting as an important component of a large US-led coalition. That is certainly still the case and should remain the case, as are expeditionary operations, either in coalition or up to a moderate level independently, but two expeditionary operations at once is a stretch, as we have discovered.

Below the outright war threshold, the UK is potentially quite well placed because we are ahead of the game in integrating PSYOPS⁶, intelligence, cyber defence and cyber operations, it seems to me. I am always impressed by what I understand and what I know about Britain's capabilities operating below the threshold. Very often, the limiting factor is, in a sense, political judgment.

I certainly believe that the Ministry of Defence wanted to help Ukraine quite soon after 2014, and there was quite a lot of resistance to that in the Foreign Office and probably in No. 10, so the help that we started to give Ukraine, which has turned out to be crucial and was an excellent piece of statesmanship and statecraft on our part, might have started earlier. Of course, some may argue that if it started earlier it might have been more provocative in some way. I understand that.

Nevertheless, Operation Orbital has been an excellent success for the sorts of contributions that the UK can make to allies and friends in the service of stability, particularly in our own neighbourhood. On that score, I am much more optimistic. I am fairly optimistic on the major warfare score; we can send a division abroad, with enough lead time, to perform very well.

I worry most about the mid-level of significant expeditionary operations because we have discovered how expensive they are and how politically difficult they are to sustain. Here we are on the anniversary of the Falklands, and the Falklands, as we know, was a close-run thing, was mercifully brief and did not strain the political consensus. If it had lasted for the rest of the year or off into 1983, one suspects that it would have really strained the political consensus given how difficult an operation it really was.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: To add to that last point, if we were in a situation, like we were in Basra and in Helmand, of a sustained quasi-occupation mission, we would struggle with that. We would clearly struggle politically, as well as operationally, certainly at that scale. That was evident. In Helmand, we struggled with it at the time, and the United States had to get involved latterly.

⁶ Psychological operations

One of my criticisms of the integrated operating concept, which preceded the Defence Command Paper, and to some extent the Command Paper, although it was not so marked there, is that at that time there was rather too much emphasis in the narrative on sub-threshold, grey area, transformational forms of conflict, or very different forms of conflict. There was not enough emphasis on conventional war fighting. Senior military leaders sometimes seemed keener to emphasise that "information is all" and "the narrative is all".

Very often, lots of things get jumbled up—propaganda, hacking elections, cyber espionage and so on - which are all relevant but actually mainly for other government departments, not for the Ministry of Defence. At the core of the Armed Forces' mission and of most of the investment in the Armed Forces is the ability to fight a conventional war.

That is not always an all-out war. One of the concepts that I would have liked to see more in thinking about the future of the Armed Forces is limited war. Most wars are limited in one regard or another. What is happening in Ukraine is not 'below the threshold'. This is a large-scale war. It is only below the threshold in the sense that the UK has not yet committed its forces to that war.

In an environment in which interstate competition is much more of a driver of our military and many other security capabilities, thinking about escalation management, the ways in which military competition happens and is happening right now in Ukraine, without it escalating to large-scale, conventional or even nuclear war is really one of the central, conceptual areas that needs further study and reflection. It is much more important than thinking about all the other things that we were doing and will continue to do below the threshold.

One reason why we were thinking so much about attempted assassinations on the streets of Britain or cyberattacks and so on was that conventional deterrence was working, so our adversaries were trying other mechanisms and will continue to do so, but that is not the same as thinking that this level is the main centre of gravity. The main centre of gravity, it seems to me, in relations with Russia and China on the security side remains a military one. It is of course about prevention of war, but that requires the capability to fight one.

Q6 Lord Teverson: I was going to ask about specialisation, but Lord Anderson has done very well on that. In looking at what other players are doing, if we look 20 miles across the channel at France, which in many ways I would see as the most equivalent military power to us, how are they dealing with those issues, and do we have anything to learn from them?

Professor Michael Clarke: French defence planners are watching what we do with great interest, as are many of our other European partners, because they see the aspirations that we have laid out in the Defence Command Paper and the Integrated Review. They have seen our transformational agenda, which is very ambitious and, in a sense, is a big

jump into a new world, and they are watching to see if we do it and how successful we may be in producing that.

France talks in the same terms as we do, but they are not doing it in as programmatic a way as we have now decided to do it. French forces are still, in a sense, trying to reconceptualise what they think they need to do for the next decade and a half. We think we have conceptualised it. Whether we can do it or not is the question we are discussing. France is watching very carefully.

Britain and France remain the two most capable military powers in Europe. It would be nice if we could say that, quite soon, Germany will come back into that fold, but there are all sorts of issues. There is encouraging movement politically, but we will see where that goes in real terms.

I had something else to say, maybe later on, about British-French-German relations. The mood music is relatively favourable, despite the political fallout from AUKUS and despite the delicacy of relations between our Prime Minister and President Macron and so on. The two armed services still get on pretty well, because they need to and have to.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: The only thing I would add is that France is in a different place in the cycle of disillusionment with counterinsurgency. It is behind us, but it is catching up in relation to the deep failure in the Sahel. Up to now, the French, particularly the army, have had that tension between, on the one hand, senior army leaders talking about wanting a heavier force more relevant to NATO missions, and, on the other, a lot of resource going into counterinsurgency in the Sahel. We have ended up where we are in terms of military takeovers in Mali and elsewhere. How they resolve that is still not clear to me.

It is still not clear to me that France is giving up, or should give up, on its missions in the Sahel, which to it are very important. The process of decolonisation of our two countries was very different. France has maintained those defence relationships with foreign colonies much more deeply than we have, and that continues to affect the way its military has developed.

Q7 Baroness Fall: A lot of the discussion has already covered the question I was going to ask, about whether the Russian invasion of Ukraine posed defence challenges that we already anticipated. Thinking about conventional, grey zone and nuclear, we have talked quite a bit about escalation, for which I thank you both very much.

I will move it on to a slightly different point about talk of escalation, chemical and biological. We heard what NATO and President Biden had to say about red lines. We have heard those red lines before. I am interested in your view. It is easy to put red lines in the sand; it is more difficult to actually do something about them. We heard Biden say something about "in kind". I would welcome your views.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: When President Biden makes a statement such as that and then you get clarification briefings coming out of his office within hours, it is perhaps better to listen to what the clarifications are saying rather than to what he said in a press conference or in an unguarded moment. That is reality. Certainly, I did not interpret “in kind” to mean that the United States would use chemical or biological weapons—absolutely not. That is most unlikely.

He wanted to give the impression in that regard that this would be a big deal, and the Americans would do something that they have not yet done. This is actually one of the reasons why it continues to be important to talk to the Russians. There will be continuing conversations at all sorts of different levels between the US and Russia to explain what those mean.

Regarding red lines, I do not think it necessarily means even that the United States would go to war with Russia conventionally, but it could mean some form of limited retaliation. As a coda to that, I would also say that there is a very significant difference between use of chemical weapons and use of nuclear weapons. Those are very different places in the escalation ladder, not least because chemical weapons have been used extensively by Syria with Russian support for specific tactical purposes, and nuclear weapons are much more strategic in that regard.

Professor Michael Clarke: Chemical weapons are a weapon of mass destruction, and in that respect that represents a threshold. As Malcolm said, we sold the pass on chemical weapons in August 2013 when, we all very well remember, President Obama said there was a red line and Britain lined up behind the United States, and then this Parliament did not agree to do it. There are all sorts of arguments that we can have about that. I remember that week in August 2013 extremely well. That was the point.

The world sold the pass on the use of chemical weapons on that occasion, and we have seen the use of them since then. If they were used in the Ukrainian crisis, that would be chemical weapons being used in Europe, which would be a more shocking threshold from our point of view. In theory, it should not be any more shocking than being used in Syria, but in reality it would be. I do not think it would change the strategy of the outside powers. We would do more of the same much more vigorously, more angrily and more outraged.

There are three areas in which pressure could really be ratcheted up. One is the SWIFT system. At the moment, only one of the five biggest Russian banks is out of the SWIFT system. The four biggest are still in it.

Secondly, there is the real question of Russian energy. If the West was prepared to take some genuine pain in energy security for the next 18 months, that could be ratcheted up a lot.

Thirdly, secondary sanctions, again, would be quite difficult and quite painful, would have an effect and would create a real investment drought across Russia as far as the outside world goes.

Use of chemical weapons would not create a new strategy. The western world led by the United States would be inclined to ratchet up the most effective parts of the current strategies. That would be my view.

Baroness Fall: In the Integrated Review, Russia was identified as a threat and China as a systemic challenge. Quite a lot of people feel that this is a bit of a running-up or a first stage in something that could happen between China and Taiwan. Do you still think that China is a systemic challenge, or should it be a threat?

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: The phrase “systemic challenge” partly relates to the much more all-encompassing, long-term nature of the challenge to China, certainly from a UK point of view, and I accept that it feels differently if you are in Japan. From a UK point of view, the challenge from China is significantly greater in Chinese control of technology, which can impact our own society at home, cyber responses, China’s economic weight and diplomatic weight in much of the world and in the global south and lots of other areas. Military is one of those, but it is not the only one.

In Russia, of course, it is not only military, but the military aspect is more acute and immediate and was seen as that even before the Ukraine invasion, so there is rather a distinction there.

Others are probably better placed to look at whether the Chinese challenge to Taiwan feels greater or less than it did a couple of months ago. I suspect in the short term it may be a bit less. The Chinese political leadership will be asking their military some very hard questions as to whether this very large military is a bit of a Potemkin creation given the Chinese military have barely been tested in combat since the invasion of Vietnam way back in 1980. This is not a tried and tested military, unlike the Russians, who have used their forces to some effect in Syria, but as it turns out that was not applicable to the disastrous performance of their forces in Ukraine.

It plays in different ways. I certainly do not buy the idea that the United States is distracted from that, and China, actually, for reasons we all understand.

One of China’s strategic purposes in recent years has been to try to divide the West, and it has had some success in that regard—dividing the Europeans from the Americans, and the Europeans from the Asians and so on. Who knows what will happen next? The short-term result is that the West, in which I include Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, is much more united than it was before, not least because those Asian allies are supporting sanctions against Russia in a way they did not to the same extent after 2014, in some cases at some significant economic cost—the Japanese-Russian détente is over, for example.

That is quite a big strategic gain that China will take notice of, and reliance on Russia as the only other major power with such an anti-American stance is something it is stuck with. It does not feel to me that China has gained from this crisis. I think it is losing, and it could lose more.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I am aware that the time is ticking way, and we have two more questions within the formal hour of questions to address. I anticipate that we may not conclude in time when the broadcast ends to ask the three supplementaries. With permission, I hope, of the witnesses, I am going to suggest to my three colleagues, Baroness Rawlings, Lord Boateng and Baroness Blackstone, that after this session they may orally give those questions to our policy analyst, Professor Wisniewski next to me, and he will submit them to you for response in writing if that is acceptable.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: Of course.

Professor Michael Clarke: I am happy to submit a paper of answers.

The Chair: That is very kind, thank you.

Q8 Lord Alton of Liverpool: You have already touched on this, but may I invite you to delve a bit deeper into how Putin's war, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, will change the way in which European countries think about their security, particularly NATO states? What does it mean for the evolution of the UK's key defence alliances, including the US, France and Germany? I am conscious that Professor Chalmers reminded us that Germany is now set to meet its NATO target of 2% of expenditure. How does that affect the relative weighting of such European commitments versus those elsewhere?

Professor Michael Clarke: European security has been fundamentally changed by the invasion of 24 February. My headline on this in a way is that this is not a crisis that we have to manage—most of these things are crises that we have to manage; it has become a challenge in which we have to prevail. The western world has to prevail in the outcome of what happens in Ukraine. I am very hawkish on this. It is a more aggressive way of saying what the Prime Minister says: that Putin must fail. My version of that is, yes, the West must prevail.

One reason I say that is because so much of the rest of the world is holding back to see what happens. China, of course, is partly protecting Russia and is uncommitted at the moment. It is not as supportive as it might have been. The Indian leadership is holding back. Pakistan's leadership is holding back. Brazil's leadership is holding back. Throughout Africa, nobody is joining in sanctions.

What I hear from friends and diplomatic contacts across part of Africa is that the view in African nations among the elites is that, "This is your war, not ours. As far as we are concerned, we don't really mind who wins. We're faced with domination by autocrats or domination by hypocrites. We don't mind. It doesn't really make a lot of difference as

long as the grain flows". In a sense, a lot of the world has not taken a moral position on this in the way we think people should take a moral position on it in favour of the rules of international order. For that reason, I take the view that we have to prevail. The West has to prevail in the outcome of whatever happens in Ukraine and it has made a big difference.

The second point is that, in a sense, NATO's deterrence has failed. NATO is making it clear that it is performing its basic task in protecting its 30 members, and it has been very clear that one step over the boundary line of NATO will provoke, if necessary, a military response. That is fine. The idea that NATO's presence was a stabilising factor in European security and that if NATO called out Russia enough in the build-up to this crisis it would somehow deter it obviously has failed, and that has been a setback.

My third headline point is that President Putin has burned so many bridges behind him. You just have to look at what he says in his speeches and in his statements. "What shall we do with Ukraine?" was written in the Novosti press agency 48 hours ago—RIA Novosti is a state-sponsored outlet; nothing is written in Novosti without the Kremlin's approval—and it was the nearest expression of genocide I have ever seen. It said that the Nazification of Ukraine is throughout society. It is not just the leadership, it said, who are Nazis; the whole society is Nazi. It said the de-Nazification of Ukraine will have to be accompanied by the de-Ukrainianisation of Ukraine. It was an astonishing op-ed that could only have appeared with Kremlin approval, and presumably the Kremlin is flying a kite for those ideas to be circulated much more widely in Russia.

The point I am making is that President Putin has left himself very little room to go back. I think he will keep going forward unless or until he falls, perhaps quite quickly within Russia, or, if he does not fall quickly, he will lead Russia to a state of real isolation in the next two or three years. I am genuinely haunted by the prospect that this may turn out to be the first phase in a much more general European conflict, not necessarily a war but a militarised European conflict, because I find it hard to see from all the evidence I can absorb—I am not a Russian specialist; I do not read Russian, but I have been reading as much as I can in translation of everything that is coming out of the Kremlin—the way back for this particular leader. He is now blaming his military and security services for failing to achieve what was an impossible aim.

Even plan A, to take over the state within 72 hours and finish it off with mopping-up operations by 8 March, was clearly impossible, clearly unrealistic, and a major strategic blunder. In the best Hitlerian tradition, I fear that President Putin will try to retrieve one major strategic blunder by making another one somewhere else. That throws everything up in the air, and as the cards land the autocratic leader thinks they can deal themselves a better hand because they feel that they are more in control of the crisis than anyone else.

For all those reasons—I am speaking very generally now—NATO is facing the greatest challenge, by far, since its establishment in 1949. As this war in Ukraine goes on, which I suspect will run for the rest of this year and become some sort of stalemate into the late summer and autumn, I hope that the consensus among the western allies does not get diluted. I fear it might.

This is the time for real leadership, certainly by the United States, which is in the lead but is not leading at the moment. It is in the front of us, but it is not offering as much leadership as required. Britain has played a pretty honourable role in this crisis so far other than on the refugee issue. In other respects, Britain has done really well and will need to do better, and will need to be better and lucky in the months to come. I am sorry; that is all very general and apocalyptic, but I am sharing with you an instinct and a set of analyses that I have been haunted by for the last month.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: I am afraid I am just as pessimistic as Mike. This is a very dangerous moment for European security and our relations with Russia. There is no going back to where we were before the invasion took place. The fact that so many people—even senior officials I talk to here, and certainly some of our allies—despite all the evidence, thought that he could not possibly do this has made us all reflect on what exactly is motivating him.

This is in part about Russia's attitude towards NATO, but most of all this war is about Russia's attitude towards Ukraine—the articles to which Mike referred are very much about Ukraine, a denial of Ukrainian nationhood and indeed the narrative that Ukraine has been Nazified, where in fact it is Russia that is becoming Nazified.

First, it is about Ukraine. Secondly, if we are to be true to our principles, we must accept Ukrainian agency. Ukraine is key. Ukraine has to make the really difficult trade-offs as we go forward if there is ever to be some sort of deal or ceasefire, which I think is a long way away, and what it wants to achieve. The prospects of Ukraine getting most of what it wants in terms of territory are a lot greater than they were even a couple of weeks ago. The rout of Russian forces in the north is quite incredible.

There is a debate out there among military experts about the extent to which Russia really has large reserves it can call upon in the relevant future. There is a possibility that Ukraine will be able to push back all the Russian advances in February and maybe even more, but, of course, that in many ways will be such a blow. If you read people from Moscow talking about the mood there, the mood among the elites and among the Russian population is still that they are winning this. It is triumphalist—“At last Putin is standing up for the country”, and so on. There is no sense of credible opposition within Russia. There are of course people who are opposing, but they are not politically relevant yet. That is an environment in which Russia can behave in ways that we really cannot predict.

I absolutely agree with Mike that it is very important for us to do anything we can to ensure that Putin is seen to lose this. It is also important that we do everything we can to avoid escalation to something much wider, because that will be costly for all the countries of Europe. There is a bigger risk of escalation to wider conflict between the major powers than there has been since 1962.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: In the context of Bucha, Mariupol and the war crimes that we have seen coming out of Ukraine over the last few days, what you have just said to us is, for me anyway, one of the most important and chilling appraisals I have ever heard here in 40 years in front of any Select Committee, so thank you for that.

Two weeks ago, I was in the Baltic states. I met a Lithuanian Defence Minister who raised with me particularly the need to increase the size of our presence in Estonia when we take the lead. They said we needed to increase from a battalion to a brigade. They asked about the possibility of an Israeli-style dome being provided over Lithuania and elsewhere to stop the depredations that we have seen in Ukraine. We have Article 5 obligations to the Baltic states. Can you give us a response on what you would have said?

Professor Michael Clarke: We have tripwire forces in the three Baltic states, which are a reassurance, and they have done their job and they do it pretty well. They could not begin to defend the Baltic states against an attack. The Baltic states could easily be cut off by land through the Suwalki corridor, and then they could only be supplied through the Baltic Sea itself, which would be a very expensive and dangerous process. The fact is that unless we defend the Baltics early they would have to be liberated quite late, and they would certainly want to be defended more than they would want to be liberated.

As this crisis develops, because of the sheer geographical difficulty of defending the Baltic in the way one would defend Germany, or even Romania or Bulgaria for that matter, there may well be a demand for real defence forces rather than tripwire forces into the Baltics with the full agreement of those states—I am certain you would get it—to make good on the Article 5 guarantee to the Baltics. To be honest, if that Article 5 guarantee was now really challenged in the Baltics, there is not much we could do about it with tripwire forces. If the wire was tripped, not much would follow without us, the NATO powers, having to fight back into the Baltics and liberate the Baltics, which is exactly what they do not want.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: Sweden is very important in this regard. Part of the Swedish offer to NATO has to be a more credible role in reinforcement. However many forces you have there on a static, permanent basis, you will need to reinforce them rapidly in a crisis. Having a permanent American presence in the Baltic states will be very important because American military power is what Russia really fears.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have just enough extension time from the broadcasters to enable Baroness Sugg to ask her question. After the responses from our expert witness, I will at that stage close the meeting, but I will invite Baroness Rawlings, Lord Boateng and Baroness Blackstone separately to provide their questions to Dr Wisniewski.

Q9 **Baroness Sugg:** Thank you for sharing your thoughts on Ukraine, deeply concerning as they are. I want to take you back to the beginning and the Defence Command Paper. How well placed is the Ministry of Defence to deliver on the ambitions of the Defence Command Paper? What changes do you think the organisation needs to take, whether that be cultural, institutional or procedural, in order to be able to deliver?

Professor Michael Clarke: The present Secretary of State was very clear in the build-up to this process that culture change in the MoD was required, partly because what is being asked of any organisation would require a lot of change. I think he was pretty well on record as saying that the MoD does not really have enough ambition in what it is trying to achieve, and that as a big organisation, to be honest, it has been reviewed to death over the last 30-odd years. There is a fatigue that builds into that. I think he has been successful in helping to gear it up.

The issue for me is not so much the MoD's organisational abilities, which I am really quite impressed by most of the time; it is the relationship between the MoD and the rest of Whitehall, and the National Security Council, which has not performed particularly well in recent years and should be the hub of a working system. For various reasons, the NSC is not the sort of organisation it was, even in 2015 and 2017. Undoubtedly cultural change is required because transformational forces will have to work very differently.

The sort of phrases that I kept hearing during the Integrated Review, which I think are absolutely right, is that we will need to be prepared to take more risks. We will need to short-circuit certain things and therefore take risks. Taking risks becomes expensive. Certain things then get quite hard to defend in the press if a whole system has gone nowhere because one took a risk and it did not work.

Whether or not we are making progress in that culture change I honestly do not know, but I fully applaud the idea that we have to try, and we have to be more bold and more tolerant of the failures as and when they occur.

The Ukraine crisis indicates that we do not have the rest of the decade to get this right. We automatically assumed that we would have the rest of the 2020s to sort this out, and we do not.

Professor Malcolm Chalmers: There is a strong commitment in the Command Paper to greater multidomain integration. Integration between the different services is an important part of that. One of the questions that your committee might want to look at in that regard is whether the balance between the Levene model of budgetary delegation to the

services, where the services largely set their own capability requirements, which has merit, and a more central direction of capability priorities is right in a time when, partly because forces are smaller but also because of the nature of warfare today, it is more important than ever that you have proper integration across the services.

The Chair: Thank you very much. As you can judge from the interest around the table, we could have extended this for another hour if we had the opportunity, but that is not possible on this occasion. Thank you much indeed for the evidence you have given us this morning, not only comprehensive as well as expert, but clear about the extreme challenges ahead, not only for those who are making decisions but for those who then, in consequence, have to bear the responsibility of carrying those decisions into effect. Both carry the heaviest burden on behalf of us all for our security, and indeed for the whole of western Europe and beyond. Thank you very much indeed.