



HOUSE OF COMMONS

## Defence Committee

### Oral evidence: US, UK, and NATO & Russia-Ukraine Crisis, HC 608/167

Tuesday 19 April 2022

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Sarah Atherton; Dave Doogan; Richard Drax; Mr Mark Francois; John Spellar.

Questions 67 - 120

#### Witness

I: General (ret'd) Sir Richard Barrons, former Head of Joint Forces Command.



## Examination of Witness

Witness: Sir Richard Barrons.

Q67 **Chair:** Welcome to this Defence Select Committee hearing on Tuesday 19 April 2022, at which we continue our study into Ukraine, Russia, the United States, the UK and NATO. I am delighted to welcome an old friend to the Committee, General Sir Richard Barrons, who has had a long and distinguished career starting with the Royal Regiment of Artillery in 1977—a long way back. He served in many theatres of operation, not least in Germany, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, along with other appointments with the UN and NATO.

It is a real pleasure to see you here today. We know you have been commenting on developments in Ukraine and we are keen to explore some of those issues. We have a copy of your *Sunday Times* article on the role of the tank and how that will develop in future, which is something everybody has been watching with interest, to see where things go. Thank you for your time this afternoon. I invite Richard Drax to open up the questioning.

Q68 **Richard Drax:** Good afternoon. Have Putin's goals changed since the start of the invasion?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes, his goals have changed because of the fundamental lack of success of the military campaign to date. The original objectives were assessed to be to remove the regime in Kyiv; to dismantle the Ukrainian military so that Ukraine represented no military threat at all to Russia; and to secure, at least, the full extent of the Donbas. It has become clear that he cannot remove, currently, the regime in Kyiv and he is a very long way away from dismantling the military, but he is still embarked on trying to seize the Donbas.

Q69 **Richard Drax:** What started as a multi-pronged assault has now turned into one from the east, it seems. They have redeployed and are coming in through the Donbas in greater strength. Was that a serious error on his part, or was it an underestimation of his troops' ability to fight? What led to the early failure, as the West sees it, of the invasion?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** This is a question that staff colleges will pore over for years to come. At the outset, what we saw was the Russians fundamentally mis-appreciating the opposition they would face in Ukraine. That cannot have been a failure of intelligence, because they have plenty of people who understand Ukraine. It was a failure of process, which meant that, somewhere in their intelligence and assessment machinery, good information was converted into the information that senior leaders most wanted to hear.

Secondly, they suffered from hubris as a result of, as they saw it, the successful intervention into Crimea. They thought this would be a similarly straightforward operation.



Thirdly, they seem to have cast aside the necessary preparations for an effective operation, which are, first of all, communication and planning. A surprise is something best inflicted on the enemy, but they inflicted it mostly on their own forces at that stage, with some having only 12 to 24 hours' notice that they were going to enter Ukraine and that it would be a fight rather than an exercise. So there was a failure of planning and therefore of logistic preparation. There was a failure to establish what form the Ukrainian opposition would take, which caused them to put in the wrong forces on the wrong basis.

There was also a failure, fundamentally, of leadership and training, which caused them to try to do too much at once. They broadly failed, except in the south. Now they have reset to do the thing that makes more sense, which is to try to do one substantive thing at once. They have sequenced their campaign in order to focus their resources of all types behind a single goal at a time under a single commander.

**Q70 Richard Drax:** Is their goal still to subjugate the whole of Ukraine or to take part of it? What do you think their goal is now?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** At the outset, in the Russian imagination, they would have seized the whole of Ukraine in terms of being able to put force where they wanted to. They know that is now beyond them, and they are also confronted by the true nature of trying to conduct an occupation by force in the face of resistance rather than an occupation by consent, which is what they had persuaded themselves they would feel. In terms of territory, they understand that what is achievable is now a fight about the east of Ukraine. What they still intend to do, however, is so reduce Ukraine as a state that it is essentially a vassal of Russia.

**Q71 Richard Drax:** Do you think they will go on flattening every town and every city, if they have to?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The current situation is very finely balanced. The focus is this fight in the Donbas. In the Russian view, they have now focused their forces on a 300-mile front and they will find a way of breaking through and probably encircling the two-fifths of the Ukrainian military that are in the Donbas. If they were able to do that, they will imagine they could close up to the Dnipro river, which would be a natural bifurcation in geographical terms. They will then consider seizing Odessa, because that isolates Ukraine from the sea. They will then think again about what they do about the regime in Kyiv, if they break through.

Let us say they fail to break through, and the price is at the same level as the price they have paid in military terms so far. They have lost about 29 of the battalion task groups they started out with. They have about 120. Let us say they were to lose another 30 in not getting through the Donbas. Their military ability to take more territory would be much reduced, and we will then be looking at a stalemate that will be on a line somewhere in the Donbas.



Q72 **Sarah Atherton:** General, I am just wondering about the relationship between Russia and Serbia at the moment. Do you have any thoughts about what is going on there?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes. We know there are very close relationships between Russia and the Serbian regime. We have confronted that in recent decades in the Balkans, which includes Bosnia, Croatia, Kosovo and Albania. We are now seeing real nerves among many Bosnians who are not Serbian about the more assertive sense they are getting from Serbia as a result of the intervention in Ukraine. We should assume that, as this confrontation with the West continues to play out—I am using the word “confrontation” rather than “conflict”—Russia will use its ally, Serbia, to make life more difficult for NATO and the European Union in the Balkans.

Q73 **Chair:** Just going back to the number of battlegroups that you mentioned—120—this is a number that we became familiar with as they were amassing on the other side of Ukraine. You are saying that 29 have now been destroyed or somehow dismantled. They may have been merged to form other forces.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes.

Q74 **Chair:** Either way, while I am not suggesting you said this, there was a lot of international commentary to say that Russia had regrouped and re-armed after 2014. I am curious as to why we got it so wrong. Why did an army that is so huge and that has invested so much in this make such fundamental schoolboy errors as rolling tanks down a main road without using any combined arms capabilities whatsoever? There were no dismounted infantry, no APCs and so forth. What went so fundamentally wrong that the command and control disappeared so obviously?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** We now know what we know. All Russia watchers, military and civilian, were surprised at how poorly the Russian military has performed in the air and on the ground. After 2014, we saw the modernisation of equipment. Russia spends about \$61 billion a year on defence. It had bought a great deal of modern equipment. We know that some of that equipment overfaces, by design, excellent Western equipment. The S-400 air defence system is a genuine threat to any NATO aircraft at ranges out to 450 km. We saw a lot of investment in equipment in the air, in space, on the ground, at sea and under the sea. We know that that equipment is very good, but we tended to see individual platforms.

What we did not see was what we have now understood to be a comprehensive lack of training in combined arms operations on the ground, which is the way armour, infantry, artillery, engineers and logistics co-operate. We did not see the failure of training between the air force and the ground forces. We did not understand the weakness in leadership. We did not understand how poor their logistic planning was. We absolutely did not see the pervasive effect of corruption on equipment



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maintenance, the provision of basic supplies, fuel and food, and equipment support.

Take those factors in combination and add to them the surprise they inflicted on themselves. These surprised, untrained, unprepared and poorly led troops ended up driving nose to tail down roads with woods or urban terrain on either side. That was partly because they believed they were going to take a surrender, and partly because they were led badly and did not know much better. As you know, they were heavily taken in flank by very agile Ukrainians with a different approach to leadership—for which we can take some credit—different equipment and great determination.

We should be careful to learn the right lessons from that. For example, it is not that armour in combination has had its day, but that armour in combination, if it is ineptly deployed, has always had its day. We should not assume, in the fight we are about to witness, that the tactics the Ukrainians applied will work again.

**Q75 Chair:** We need to make progress, but my concern is the huge absence of understanding or intelligence as to the Russian capability or absence of capability, because it is astonishing. I am concerned that it paved into the decision making, prior to 24 February, not to push a division into Ukraine, as Zelensky requested from NATO, to say, "Let us hold our ground. Let us defend a European democracy. Let us stand up to the Russians." This idea that the Russians had these all-singing, all-dancing capabilities, which clearly they did not, affected our judgment on whether we could put our troops into and support Ukraine. Would that be fair?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** It is partly fair. The overestimation of the Russian conventional capability has made NATO very slow to understand where the boundary could be set in supporting Ukraine against Russia. Russia remains a nuclear power with 6,000 warheads and has its own views on the process of escalation. I doubt that NATO would have achieved consensus about putting a NATO flag in Ukraine in these circumstances.

**Chair:** That is the political, but that is obviously another dimension.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes.

**Q76 Dave Doogan:** I have a quick follow-up or supplementary question. Is it your assessment, General, that the rumours of the death of the main battle tank are a little bit premature at this stage, because there are so many other contributory factors to the performance we have witnessed in Ukraine?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Tanks, armoured infantry vehicles, self-propelled armoured artillery and supporting engineers, as constructed in the 1990s, have had their day, but armour on the battlefield in the 21st century has not had its day. There is no way you can move around the battlefield in Ukraine, for example, except under armour, because the biggest killer remains artillery.



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We are going to see—we should not be surprised by it—the evolution of armoured vehicles from the things we were familiar with from the Cold War into armoured vehicles that take advantage of a whole range of digital-age technology—materials, sensors, weapons, communications. That will take us into a new generation of firepower, protection and mobility on the land battlefield.

**Q77 Dave Doogan:** How well do you think Challenger 3 will match up to that specification requirement?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** I do not think Challenger 3 is the answer.

**Q78 Dave Doogan:** Okay. In terms of the support from the United Kingdom to Ukraine, are we sending the right types of weapons? Ukraine has had success with NLAW and Javelin. We note that the UK is sending Stormer vehicles equipped with Starstreak. Over and above missiles, what more could the United Kingdom be doing to provide support?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** In my view, the support to the Ukrainian military is a process of evolution. It started in the period from 2014 to 23 February 2022 with a very limited range of training advice and a very narrow set of weapons. It was a failure. It failed to equip the Ukrainian military with the capability to deter or defeat the Russian invasion they knew was coming.

We have therefore been in recovery since 24 February, and we have provided a range of equipment that has been effective in the circumstances in which we find ourselves—in particular, easily moved and easily used anti-tank weapons, easily deployed anti-aircraft missiles and a range of useful things like boots, body armour and ammunition. That has played an enormous role in delaying, and in some cases defeating, the Russian invasion.

We are now in a different phase of the war: the battle in the Donbas, where the Russians have reorganised themselves on a 300-mile front and will try to concentrate their force. They have done a terrible job of it so far, but they will try to concentrate their force. The Ukrainians now need weapons with greater range, precision and lethality that are capable of breaking up large attacks mostly built around armoured vehicles and the supporting logistics. That takes you into the realm of heavy artillery: 152 mm, which they are used to; 155 mm, the NATO calibre; and multiple-launch rocket systems with the appropriate surveillance and target acquisition—they have to find their targets at some distance. That is what they are asking for. That is harder, because learning to use them takes longer and they take longer to move to get to the right place.

We are going to see two further evolutions of this, which we should be prepared for. The first is that, more likely than not, this battle will dissolve into some sort of stalemate in which nobody has won, nobody has lost and nobody is going anywhere. It will become necessary to sustain that stalemate. I imagine the Ukrainians will want to develop the



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capability to allow them to be more offensive and remove the Russians from their territory. That takes you into the realm of 21st century combined arms capability. We will also be supporting an insurgency, which is quite hard to do, in what may well be an enduring stalemate.

As we understand the limits of Russian will and capability, and we understand how this current phase turns out, we should assume that the requests for us will change. We should recognise that it is in our own best national interests to ensure the Russian incursion into Ukraine is defeated.

**Q79 Dave Doogan:** That being the case, on that very final point, in terms of contributions to Ukraine as a percentage of GDP—you may or may not know this—out of the top 12 contributors the United Kingdom comes ninth behind Croatia, the Czech Republic, the United States, Sweden, Slovakia, Lithuania, Poland and Estonia. In fact, it is ahead of only France, Italy and Germany, which are also net contributors to the EU, which has made a separate contribution to Ukraine. Is there an argument—I realise this is dancing with a political argument—for redoubling efforts to support the campaign on behalf of the Ukraine from the UK?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The UK support to Ukraine includes supporting 5 million refugees and probably another 5 million displaced people. That is really important in sustaining how Ukraine stays in the fight. The support needs to include support to the Ukrainian economy. The European Union may be best placed to do that sort of thing.

In terms of the military support, we should recognise that we have a finite amount to give. We have limited stockpiles and there is no point sending quite a lot of our heavy equipment to Ukraine because the Ukrainians do not know how to use or maintain it. We are now going to have to consider the revitalisation of our own defence and security. In the way we rebuild our Armed Forces and our stockpiles, we now need to factor in the percentage that connects our industry to the Ukrainian fight.

**Q80 Chair:** Are we in a proxy war?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The term “proxy war” is a bit loaded. It is simpler to say that there is a war between Russia and Ukraine, and there is a confrontation not just between the West and Russia but between western liberal democracy and autocratic capitalism. We should not be surprised by what has happened in Ukraine. We are entitled to be shocked by it, but it should serve as a strategic wake-up call. If we had clung to any thought that the comfortable post-Cold War era was still with us, it has now firmly gone. Our own policy advisers have been telling us for some years that we needed to raise our game. We now need to raise our game in rather more adverse conditions.



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We are now clearly looking at a confrontation, for the rest of this century, in which we are going to have to stand up for our security, prosperity and values in ways that we have not had to do for a generation.

**Q81 Chair:** I am going to politely throw the question out one more time in a different way. We have political skin in the game: we want Ukraine to win. We are investing heavily in military capability to the point where some of our own quartermaster stores are being depleted. Does that not equate to a proxy war?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** I would say it equates to the low end of the proxy label, because we do not have advisers deployed on the ground.

**Chair:** For you, that is the difference.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes.

**Chair:** That is interesting.

**Q82 Sarah Atherton:** General, are we equipping the Ukrainians for a good surrender or are we equipping them to win?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** In the circumstances in which we find ourselves right now, we are equipping them, with others, sufficiently to delay and possibly stall a Russian invasion of their country. We are greatly aided by the fact that the Russians have been so poor. If the Russians had been as proficient as we thought they were, this would already be over.

We should recognise, strategically, that Ukraine is buying us all time to reset the balance between the relatively far more powerful West—500 million people, massive GDP and massive defence expenditure—and the relatively weak Russia. We have allowed a balance to come to pass in which the relatively weak Russia is aggressive and mobilised, and the relatively far more powerful West is comfortably asleep and demobilised. We should recognise that the Ukrainians are fighting, if you like, a delaying action to allow us to reset our own game. We should be really grateful for that.

**Q83 Richard Drax:** General, just quickly, what is the line, so far as you are concerned? Here we are, giving them all this kit, which is good. You are saying that they are buying us time so we can re-equip, rethink and all these things we need to do, not that there is much sign of that happening in this country. When, if it all, do we say that time has run out and we have to do something? As the Chair was suggesting, when will a soldier, a fighter pilot or someone have to go across and physically help them? I suppose what I am asking is: could it spill over into us sooner rather than later?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** We should recognise that we are confronting a policy choice here. Is this a war between Russia and Ukraine where we have an interest but do not wish it to become a war between us and Russia, or is this going to be so dreadful that it is going to become a war





between us and Russia? The two things we are banking on right now are the will and proficiency of the Ukrainian military, despite their relative disadvantage, and above all the incompetence, corruption and poor state of training of the Russian military so far. We should expect that to change over time.

There is one outcome in which what happens in Ukraine dissolves into a stalemate and it is not necessary for the war to be expanded. There are of course other outcomes, one of which is that the Russians suddenly raise their game in Ukraine and put in jeopardy a very much larger part of the country, perhaps including Kyiv, at which point we will have a call to make. That call would be easier if we had made any preparations at all to act in those circumstances at the speed required, and frankly we have not.

The second aspect would be if whatever happens in Ukraine causes President Putin to escalate it for his own purposes into other parts of NATO. Then it is a very much easier question, because we will be dealing with a breach of article 5. My overall concern in answering that question is that the main reason we are keen to avoid a war between Russia and NATO is that NATO is not ready, and it should be ashamed of that.

**Chair:** That is quite a powerful statement, which we will probably return to when we look at the Madrid summit. That might be the time when we can focus on that.

Q84 **Sarah Atherton:** We have heard unsubstantiated reports that white phosphorus has already been used on mixed targets, and we hear the alarm bells ringing from various sources that Putin is happy to use nuclear weapons. If biological, chemical, radiological or nuclear weapons are used in Ukraine, what should be NATO's response?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** We would have to come to terms with the fact that there are different grades of weapons of mass destruction. We think there has been use of white phosphorus. White phosphorus against a military target is allowed under the conventions; white phosphorus used indiscriminately against a civilian target is not. We do not have any proof either way.

The use of non-persistent mustard or blister agent on a military or civilian target—these are becoming increasingly hard to distinguish in Ukraine—would be consistent with Russian doctrine, in that you unstick a problem by resorting to chemical weapons, as we have seen in other theatres. We know well that, when you cross that line and you inflict chemical casualties on Ukrainians, you are in a different league in the way that you inflict fear on the civilian population. You also render the casualty chain unmanageable, because it has to be prepared to deal with chemical casualties.

In those circumstances, we should recognise that this war has become existential. In those circumstances, any vestiges of continuing to trade



with Russia and allowing it a place in the international community will evaporate. The question will then be asked as to whether the Ukrainians should be provided with a different capability—long-range precision fires—to strike in Ukraine and in Russia to remove that means of destruction from affecting them again. Would we help the Ukrainians, in the first instance, to do that?

There is then a step up, which is the use of a so-called tactical nuclear weapon. Again, in Russian doctrine, that is consistent with de-escalation. The discharge of a nuclear weapon in Ukraine would take us to the same place. It would be terrifying to everybody else in the world.

Q85 **Chair:** When you say “tactical nuclear weapon”, this is new on the battlefield. Can you explain to the Committee what you mean? What is the threshold? What is the yield? What does it equate to? How many football pitches, for example, would it take out?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The smallest nuclear weapon is probably from a 203 mm artillery gun. In its nuclear role, that gun has a range of about 18 km. The nuclear bang at the end of it, whether it is an air burst or a ground burst, is going to be devastating over about 500 metres with a residual radiation problem, depending on the nature of it. It is devastating if you are under it, but the effect is not at the level where it would flatten a city or lay waste to an entire country.

Q86 **Chair:** Britain has none of these.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** We no longer have weapons like that, no.

Q87 **Sarah Atherton:** We talk about attritional fighting. You spoke about stalemate. How much of a threat is this to Ukraine? Should we be preparing them and supporting them for such a threat?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The most likely outcome, given the way this war has turned out so far, is that a stalemate will result in the south and east of Ukraine, where the Russians have not broken through but have not been ejected and the Ukrainians have not been defeated but cannot go on the offensive. We should recognise that there are many examples of this in history. Stalemate happens regularly. In the First World War, everyone was going to win by Christmas 1914. By February 1915 they were exhausted, and it then took another three years to sort it out. There are many other examples.

Much as we would wish it, there is no clock or script attached to this war in Ukraine that says, “This is going to be finished cleanly or quickly.” We should establish in our heads at least that a stalemate may occur—I would say by late spring—that no one knows how to unstick. In those circumstances we will have choices to make, but we will be supporting an insurgency. We will be supporting resistance on what will have become some sort of line of demarcation, whether there is a ceasefire or not.



We will be invited by Ukraine to help to rebuild its offensive capability to throw the Russians out. The sanctions regime and those other things that are applied to the place of Russia in the world will become harder to sustain—we may be at peak Ukraine unity—but they will still be important. Conditioning ourselves, our people, our industry and our politics to a long-drawn-out stalemate seems to be as likely a requirement as managing some speedy outcome.

**Q88 Sarah Atherton:** Lastly, if necessary, is NATO prepared to trigger article 5?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** If one inch of NATO territory is the subject of aggression by Russia, article 5 will have been triggered. The question for many years has been what NATO actually does about it. NATO has quite poor answers to a small breach of article 5 somewhere along the alliance boundary. Let us say Russia has done something to breach article 5, but the breach is tiny and the consequences for NATO of mobilising to deal with it are enormous. Essentially, it is a war with Russia. The danger there is that NATO's bluff is called.

In the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, Mr Putin needs to be left in no doubt that NATO's bluff will not be called in those circumstances—that we mean what we say. In order to do that, we have to embark on the revitalisation of the alliance so it is ready to deal with the immediate problem of Russia in the 21st century, as part of the wider strategic review of NATO about NATO being an effective alliance globally in the 21st century.

What will not work is retaining our Armed Forces in NATO at the bottom of a trajectory that you can trace back to the end of the Cold War, because there was no imperative. I can explain why the Armed Forces are as broken and as small as they are, but I cannot excuse it in the world we now find ourselves in. That is what we need to fix.

**Q89 Mr Francois:** General, it is good to see you again. As you have intimated, within chemical weapons there is a ladder of escalation. This is not a black-and-white field. If you start at the bottom of that with white phos and you come up through blister and mustard agents, which are awful in themselves, you get to things like chlorine gas, semi-permanent nerve agents like sarin and permanent nerve agents like VX.

If we look at the general who has now been given overall theatre command in the Donbas, he is associated with what happened in Syria, where in places like Ghouta—from memory—they deliberately used gas that seeped into cellars in order to kill people sheltering from artillery fire. He is hardly going to ring you up and tell you but, on the basis of this man's track record, is there a real chance that he will advise President Putin to resort to weapons like that in order to attack civilians in the Donbas region?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** As the senior commander in Ukraine, he will understand how to use that capability. We should recognise the danger—



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this is common to all conflicts like this, but it is now prevalent in Ukraine—of the demonisation of the enemy. You no longer see your opponent as human; you get into feral “us and them”. Then the use of these weapons becomes more tolerable in principle.

However, the global politics of this are very different. President Putin must understand how he has united the West against him. The lack of success of their military must have significantly reduced their confidence and their ambition. They must worry greatly that, if they do resort to chemical weapons, frankly in any way excluding white phosphorus perhaps, their ability to manage the consequences in the way it mobilises the West against them would be out of all proportion to the local tactical benefit these weapons might bring them.

**Q90 Mr Francois:** The reason I ask the question is that we know Putin dominates Russian public opinion. Yet, bluntly, the body count of killed Russian servicemen will at least be at the back of his mind, if not the front of it. If you are going to clear Ukrainian cities in the Donbas and—thinking back to Stalingrad—you are into street-to-street and house-to-house fighting, that is going to be intensive in terms of likely Russian casualties. You could see the temptation—if that is the right word—to resort to chemical weapons. That is presumably going to be part of the calculation, is it not?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** When the Russian military gets stuck in the way you have described, in its doctrine it would be consistent to apply chemical weapons to unstick the problem. However, in the way this war has turned out over the last 50 days, you are right to assert that he controls Russian opinion through state TV and there is strong cultural support for this war among perhaps 80 million of the population of 130 million. He also understands very well that there is a major price to his economy. The youth of Russia—the internet generation—are not in the same place. Although he has built up very powerful machinery of repression, his confidence in that must now be a bit diluted.

I am going to come back to the point that, in the circumstances in which the Russian military gets stuck, resorting to chemical weapons is likely to come at a domestic and international people price that on any rational level would be unsupportable. I use the word “rational” carefully, because he clearly does not have the same rationality as you and I have. There is a danger of there being an extraordinary moment, but it is less likely now than it was even a fortnight ago.

**Q91 Mr Francois:** You use the word “rational”; I understand what you are saying but, when the Committee was briefly in Berlin and then Warsaw, we were struck by the fact that the German political establishment, from left to right, simply could not believe that Putin had done this, because in their calculation what he had done was already irrational.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes.



Q92 **Mr Francois:** So what may be rational to us may not be rational to him. Following on—the Committee is listening very carefully to you—what signals can we practically send to Putin as an alliance, maybe very soon, to say that to cross that chemical threshold above white phos and to start gassing Ukrainian soldiers and civilians in Mariupol and elsewhere would be utterly unacceptable? What additional signals do we need to send now or very quickly? You understand the question.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** I absolutely do. The rationality is completely different. Putin is not irrational; he just has a different way of reasoning and a different set of information. He has his own truths. The common ground here is the survival of Putin and his regime, and he must understand that the price of stepping into chemical weapons or nuclear weapons will be the end of his regime and the mobilisation of the West to that end, as a result both of what we do as a combination of nation states and of what he has done to manipulate his population.

If you think about the price that his supporters have paid, it is not just the oligarchs who have lost their yachts: there are members of the FSB and others who no longer have their villas in Tuscany. Given the price that they know they are paying and the lack of success—they are simply not achieving what they thought they would achieve—it is far more likely that, when this grinds to a halt, there will be a triumphal grasping at straws to call enough of a victory but then live with the stalemate that everyone will hope to unpick on another day.

Q93 **John Spellar:** Let me go back to what you said about emptying our armouries to provide to Ukraine. Do we have any indication of whether the MoD is managing those munition stocks effectively now? In your understanding, how quickly could production be ramped up, should we need to continue the deliveries of NLAW and Starstreak in the medium-to-long term?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** I do not know the figures for the MoD stockpiles—it is privileged information, and I am sure the MoD could tell you. I do know that, if you track the trajectory of the UK Armed Forces since 1990 in a progressive iterative process of reductions in size, in investment and in the numbers of key platforms, and the hollowing out of stockpiles, engineering, reserves and infrastructure—all of which are decisions entirely explicable in circumstances where you face no existential threat—we should absolutely assume there are enough munitions “on the shelf” to sustain the conflict we thought we were going to have or that was more likely, which would be a short-term modest intervention. This applies mostly to the complex weapons pipeline—precision bombs, expensive precision missiles and things like that.

I hesitate to give you a yardstick but, as a rule of thumb, I would be surprised if we had munitions that would sustain high-intensity conflict for more than about a week. We already know, because many nations confronted this even in the limited air campaign over Libya, that our ability to consume these munitions is considerably greater than the ability



of industry to replace them without a long lead time. If you look at the Ukrainian rate of consumption of NLAWs and Starstreaks, it is consuming missiles at a rate that would entirely deplete our stockpiles if we were able to do that, which we are not, and a rate that industry cannot keep up with.

We are about to have a very difficult debate about, in the world in which we find ourselves, how we reset investment in the things that do not sit in the shop window, which are largely complex weapons, ammunition, fuel, spare parts, main assemblies and training. How do we reinvest in that in order to have not just troops at readiness but troops who can endure? When we do that, it is likely that we will have to do that for our own purposes and, as we talked about earlier, set aside some of the production to sustain our ally Ukraine in the war that it is busy fighting.

Q94 **John Spellar:** Are there any indications that the Department is coming to conclusions on that?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Honestly, I can only say that I think this debate will not be a shock in the Ministry of Defence, that it would condition judgments about what NATO can and cannot do across NATO, and that this is a really important part of the debate about the revitalisation of military hard power for the world we actually find ourselves in.

Q95 **Dave Doogan:** We have talked at some length about capability gaps and a combination of budgetary constraints, which is code for cuts; institutional complacency, not just in the UK but shared among NATO perhaps over the last 30 years; and burning down our own stocks. A commitment has been given recently to provide anti-ship missiles to Ukraine. You would imagine that the sovereign Navy of an island nation would be fairly well equipped with anti-ship missiles, but it is my understanding that we have only 16 and that they are entirely located on HMS Kent and HMS Montrose. If we are going to give the anti-ship missiles in the UK stock and there are only 16, that will be the entire stock.

You made a very valid point a moment ago about the difference in the burndown rate of hot operations and the ability of industry to keep up. What type of conversations will the Ministry of Defence be having about that fairly significant conflict between stocks and ambition?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** I do not know any of these numbers that you've quoted, but the Ministry of Defence will be wrestling with the reality that we now live in this very different world where we are locked in a confrontation with Russia that could become a conflict. It will also recognise, because its own words in the integrated review said so, that this conversation about Russia is a step towards the harder conversation about how the West—liberal democracy—finds its voice in a world that is dominated by the rise of China, the effects of population growth and climate change, and the dislocation of the digital age, in combinations



that will cause us to think about existential peril once more, having had 30 years off having to do that.

In those circumstances, it will not be enough to be able to field singleton platforms such as a Type 45, a submarine, a carrier or a foreship of F-35s, with one set of missiles apiece. We will have to look at the implications of great-power conflict, which we keep talking about, and resource our Armed Forces so that they can endure longer than our opponents. If you look at Russia so far, it has fired about 1,500 precision munitions. We do not know the size of its stockpiles, but it is probably not much more than twice that number, so everyone is faced with this problem.

This is the difference between creating Armed Forces that you have to hand for small-scale, limited, discretionary interventions abroad, where you decide when to do it, for how long to do it and how hard to do it, and when there is no risk to the homeland, and the world we now live in, where we need Armed Forces to protect the homeland and advance our interests abroad with our allies. In those circumstances, the hollowing out of readiness, including stockpiles, that has proceeded for 30 years will need to be reversed. It will take some time to do that.

Q96 **Mr Francois:** General, as you will remember, after the First World War and the horror of the trenches, the British Government adopted a formal policy, known as the 10-year rule, that there would be no major war for 10 years. That was only rescinded—from memory—in about 1935 or 1936. In 2010, the National Security Council, recently created by the coalition Government, produced a national security strategy—I think going into 2011—that concluded, as you will remember, that there was “no existential threat” to the United Kingdom. Yet here we are 11 or 12 years later with all the things we have just been talking about. Is one of the problems in British defence foreign policy not that, for many years, our planners have simply assumed that major war is never going to happen, or certainly not in the near term?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** It is fair to say that, for about 10 years, people who think about these problems have warned that we were entering a new era of great-power confrontation and conflict, that conflict would become existential again, and that the homeland would be as much on the pitch as a deployed force. In fact, the Government’s integrated review, in its early pages, essentially makes this point. It then does not do a whole lot about it. We should recognise why doing a whole lot about it is difficult.

First, there is almost no adult experience in Government of existential conflict among politicians, officials or Armed Forces officers, so the intuitive sense of what this means is pretty thin. Secondly, putting this right is unpleasant and very expensive, and appeasement and denial are always cheaper in the short term. That course of action has largely evaporated.



We should recognise that, just in terms of deterrence, at the end of the Cold War—and I am not suggesting the Cold War is being refashioned in its original image—we understood deterrence by denial. You had a balance of nuclear and conventional forces that denied your opponent the room to think that they could be aggressive towards you. We then went through a phase of thinking we would get on really well with Russia, and that has now been reversed, but the post-Cold War era led us to think about Europe perhaps being post-conflict, which was naive and stupid based on the experience of the rest of the world, but we have shifted from deterrence by denial to deterrent by punishment, which is just the nuclear deterrent. Now we are resetting. This is not unique in British history.

Of course, given the passage of our national life, certainly since the 2008 financial crisis, for people like me to argue we needed to put more money into defence was greatly at odds with what the man in the street felt was actually touching his life. Today, we have post-pandemic bills, the cost of living crisis and all this stuff, so it has never been harder than in the last 10 years to argue that we needed to gird ourselves up for this harder world. This shock of Ukraine has, I hope, created the impetus to have that conversation, but we are a very long way as a nation, and as a group of nations in NATO, from coming to terms with that conversation.

We essentially have a choice on the back of what we have seen now and what we have told ourselves about China in the future. We can rely on our enemies and our allies not to do terrible things or, that being a poor strategy, we can invest in our own security again. It is not as if we cannot afford it. It is just that we choose not to afford it.

**Q97 Mr Francois:** If it is any consolation, you have not been entirely alone. You could argue that this Committee has been a canary down the mine for some years, because we could show you a whole host of documents where, for years, we have argued that the United Kingdom should spend at least 3% of GDP on defence. We are not late to this debate. We have been saying it literally for years, as a Committee.

We will come on to the integrated review in a little while, so I will not pre-empt that, but one of the points you have made very clearly is the very high rate of the consumption of munitions. For many years, one of the assumptions was that we would only have to fight what you might call a “come as you are” war. You just fight with what you have and that will be enough. Again, if contact becomes protracted, do we not need to start looking at these sorts of things in respect of mobility to fight a war at scale over months and perhaps even years rather than, as you were saying, critically, maybe for one or two weeks?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** I think what you are talking about there is the requirement to rediscover resilience and mobilisation. None of that has been necessary in an era of discretionary conflict where wars were away matches in far-flung places that were not existential, and we are now back into a different place. In the world we actually live in now, we have





to deter our enemies, and that means being credible—resilient at home and having the ability to field forces that can endure in the field. That requires not just numbers, which are woefully small, and investment in recapitalisation for the digital age, which is talked about but not much has happened, but investment in the boring things—logistics, spares, assemblies, engineering and reserves—most of which we have cast aside over the last 25 years or so.

If we are to make our way safely in the world that we are describing to ourselves, we are going to have to reset our defence and security. The size of the Armed Forces is important, but just as important is the ability to be resilient at home and to endure in the field so that you are not a paper tiger.

Q98 **Mr Francois:** Lastly, in one of his lesser-known quotes but, to me, one of the most powerful, Churchill once said, “The first step in overcoming any challenge, no matter how daunting, is to admit that the challenge exists.” Do we now, in the United Kingdom and, indeed, in NATO, have to change not just the way we spend and the way we procure but also the way we think?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The thought leadership, at a strategic level, had started, in my view, to appear. The front pages of the integrated review articulate the problem and then do not really articulate or enact the solution. The new NATO strategic concept and the NATO reflection group report of November last year point the alliance in the right direction. Even in the European Union’s strategic autonomy and strategic compass debates—which, of course, we are not part of—they are saying the right thing, but they are not matched by action and resources. That is where the peril lies. We are good enough to articulate the problem but not good enough to do the hard things necessary to conceive, design, implement and resource the solutions that we have just told ourselves that we need. Until we do that, we are riding our luck.

Q99 **Mr Francois:** We are starting to will the ends but not the means.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Honestly, we have not got any further than articulating the intellectual argument about why this century could really harm us. We have not got anywhere near a national discussion involving politics, Government, civil society, industry and the Armed Forces about what this reset really means.

Q100 **Chair:** Maybe I can explore that a bit further as we turn to what might be discussed at the Madrid summit. Stepping back from this, I am keen to learn what you think Putin is up to long term and his relationship with President Xi, because it would seem logical that China is keen to exploit this war in Ukraine to hasten America’s inevitable decline. President Xi and President Putin are quietly strengthening an alliance. Both have a disdain for the West. Both dislike Western scrutiny into their domestic affairs, not least on human rights, and both feel threatened by the international rules-based order that calls for more democracy,



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transparency and accountability. That goes, of course, against the very elites that run these countries.

Given the fact that they reject Western standards and want to see America and the West weakened, would you agree that, actually, China sees Russia as a strategic partner in dismantling the current liberal world order and that what we are seeing in the Ukraine is the beginning of this? Perhaps we are seeing the start of the Thucydides trap take place.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** I absolutely agree that we need to look at the world we live in now and are going to live in for the foreseeable future as an emerging split between liberal democracies—actually a declining number, some of which are questioning their own democratic credentials—and autocratic capitalism led by China, but with Russia and possibly India in support, and parts of Africa and the Middle East are not voting with our camp.

In that context, the relationship between Russia and China really matters because the combination of those two just in terms of geography is an enormous challenge. I think China will now have mixed views of the Russian action in Ukraine, because I imagine they were promised the same swift victory as Russia promised itself and what they have actually seen is that it has shocked the West into greater unity, that it is likely to cause NATO to get stronger and remobilise, and that it may impose some jeopardy on the Chinese economy, which has its own challenges right now with Covid.

We should be in no doubt that China sees itself as the ascendent power and will be thrilled with a sense of the relative decline of the leadership of the US in respect of Ukraine, because the US is more focused on China. We ought to be through denying that world exists, and we absolutely should see that the conclusions we are reaching about Russia as a result of what we are seeing in Ukraine are the same conclusions we are going to reach about how we reset resilience, hybrid campaigning and military hard power with a view to China.

Q101 **Chair:** Thank you. That is very comprehensive. We will turn to Britain in a minute as Mark has suggested, but, of course, this big question hangs over Sweden and Finland. If Finland joins, looking at the map, that will almost double the length of border that Russia shares with NATO. Again, this is probably not a consequence that Putin was expecting or anticipating. Do you think it is now time for Sweden and Finland to jump into the club?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes. I absolutely support Finland and Sweden joining the alliance for a number of reasons. The first is that we have seen President Putin's ambition to pick off countries on the Russian year abroad that he regards as naturally falling under their sphere of influence. Given that Ukraine was not in NATO—and Ukraine, because of its size, is a different prospect—it was relatively easy to pick off, so having Finland and Sweden in NATO covered by article 5 will strengthen



the alliance as a whole. We should recognise that Finland and Sweden, unlike many other recent joiners of NATO, bring real military capability. Essentially, our flank will be more secure because they are there and in the alliance.

Q102 **Chair:** What do you think should be the absolute priority—agenda bullet point No. 1—at the Madrid summit?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The first requirement of the Madrid summit is to revitalise NATO to reset the balance of power with Russia in the realm of military hard power. That ought not to be difficult given our latent relative strength. It is about mobilising a relatively small proportion of our wealth so that Russia no longer thinks that it can set the terms of debate with NATO.

Q103 **Chair:** Would you agree that the overall environment is to recognise that the 30 years of relative peace we have enjoyed since the last Cold War is now over?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Absolutely, and we have been telling ourselves that it was passing for about a decade.

Q104 **Chair:** But we did not act.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** We did not do anything about it.

Q105 **Mr Francois:** That brings us on to the integrated review. You have made a good summary, General, in that, in a sense, the integrated review defines the problem but then does not really provide an answer. Could you say a little more about why you use those words? We know you are a man who chooses his words with care.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** It does quite an elegant job of describing this harder world we are going to live in, and great credit goes to the Government for saying that this era is passing. It then does two things that are incompatible with the logic of the opening argument. First of all, it imposes reductions on the current Armed Forces. Some of those reductions are in the things you see—numbers and equipment platform—and some are in things you cannot see, which will be stockpiles, engineering, training and administration. If you dip into the Armed Forces now and see how threadbare they are, it is astonishing that they have reached some of the levels of parsimony at which they now exist.

Q106 **Mr Francois:** Can you expand on that with some practical examples?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes: investment in training, infrastructure, both living and working accommodation, equipment maintenance, stockpiles of ammunition, parts and key assemblies, and travel and subsistence. We have first-class people, in many cases, in the Armed Forces who, financially, are currently stuck in a regime that I recognise from Iraq in the way they have to manage their money. This is not terribly new. There is a certain amount of boiling-frog syndrome about it.



The greater peril in the integrated review is that it did a pretty good job of beginning to articulate that the digital age has transformed how we live, work and play, and that it will transform how we confront and conflict. There is some pretty good thinking about how you can apply combinations of digital-age technology to recognise how it has already shaped how war is fought. The transparent battlespace, the primacy of precision over platforms and the ubiquity of data are all echoed now in Ukraine. It declares, and it is right to declare, that the path to transformation is to get on with this. Then it does not do anything for years because there is no money.

Q107 **Mr Francois:** On that point, one thing that has concerned the Committee is that, under the integrated review, it takes a lot of risk in the early years. We withdraw a number of what we would consider to be very important capabilities early on in order to generate funds in the latter part of the decade. Now, that is fine, provided you do not expect to fight a major conflict until the latter part of the decade. Again, that is almost a return to the 10-year rule. Do you agree with that analysis? Is the Committee right to be concerned in that regard?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The Committee is absolutely right to be concerned that the Armed Forces, for the period of the current programme—let us say that is three years—at best are marking time and, in some cases, are being hollowed out in terms of some people, equipment and sustainability. Some of that is well below the public eye. The money that would provide this uplift is at least five to six years away and then some years away from becoming capability.

The services are not all in the same position. The Royal Navy has been well capitalised in the last decade but is just too small and threadbare to exploit it, and is handicapped in the way that it moves with the speed needed to go from its current construct into greater investment in, particularly, unmanned and autonomous surface, sub-surface and flying capability. The thinking is there, but the means to do it is simply not there.

The Air Force has the advantage of JSF and recent recapitalisation, but is currently in a place where it has tiny numbers of these really first-class platforms and is not moving at pace into where it goes, which is unmanned wingman and stand-off capabilities like that. It is too small, and it is moving too slowly into the shape that it knows it needs to get to, in order to be competitive against Russia, with an eye on China in the future.

The Army, last recapitalised in the 1990s, is far behind the other services. To some degree, it is its own fault for not being able to articulate very clearly what it wants. Also, it has had some problems acquiring what it has said it has wanted, but the fact is that the Army has the longest journey to travel, and, as Ukraine has proven, in great-power conflict, the Army is the central piece of the joint trilogy.



Q108 **Mr Francois:** This Committee has been pretty excoriating about the delays in recapitalising and re-equipping the Army, particularly in terms of its armoured fighting vehicles. Again, we have been pretty hard over on that, so it is good to hear that we were not completely wrong. Should we review the review?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The spirit of the review is right. The technical direction of travel is right. This is the application of combinations of digital-age technology to create new competitive edge at a sustainably affordable price—which is the thing people often forget—for the challenges we now face in the 21st century. That direction is broadly there. What is not right is the speed and volume of that transformation because, until we get on with this and reset this balance with our opponents and enemies, we remain vulnerable, and we remain vulnerable in very stark ways.

Q109 **Mr Francois:** The review was signed off by the National Security Council so, even if you took the view that the MoD was quite—for want of a better word—hawkish and, post the invasion, wanted to change some of these assumptions, it would require, in the British system, cross-Whitehall agreement and the NSC to recommission new work and then to sign that off. That could take months, even if they tried to hurry it up. Nevertheless, is it worth trying to start that process now?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** The NATO alliance will drag us in that direction. There is no path to the transformation of defence and security that is not led by politics. That will require politics to set the pace for civil society, not the other way round, and for politics to drive a process that wraps in politics, officials, civil society, the Armed Forces and allies in something as comprehensive as the Esher report of 1904, because we are at this inflection moment in our history. We have ended up with cheap words and resourcing decisions that were subordinated to all the other things that matter to us as a nation and that we saw as more imperative. That is not sustainable any longer.

Q110 **Mr Francois:** If Russia invaded Estonia tomorrow morning at 5 am—please God, they will not, but if they did—and then article 5 was incontestably triggered and NATO, as it should, elected to fight, as the Ukrainians have done, for how long could the United Kingdom's Armed Forces sustain a major war with Russia at scale?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** If Russia used the combat power that it has competently, which it has not done in Ukraine, British forces in Estonia would last about a week because they would be destroyed from the air—not all of them, but they would be rendered combat ineffective. If Russia used its anti-access aerial denial capability in the way that the equipment is designed to be used, we would not be able to reinforce it because nothing would fly or sail there and survive the journey, until and unless the US had arrived to provide the right environmental support. None of this should really be a surprise.



We should also recognise that, if that war were to occur in Estonia, in the world we live in now, the UK homeland is on the pitch as well, and I do not think many people in the UK have given any thought to the consequences of Russian cruise missiles arriving in London, when they exist and we simply do not have the means to deal with them in anything above tiny numbers. This is all a mark of the world that we have lived in very comfortably for 30 years, which is now passing.

**Mr Francois:** Si vis pacem, para bellum.

Q111 **Chair:** I will wrap up on a couple of points, firstly just to do with defence spending itself. The 3% is a crude earmark, but would you advocate moving towards 3% defence spending, given what you were saying about this being an inflection point and strategic change taking place?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** It will be necessary to follow the German model now, which is to recognise that a surge is required to fill in the things that you can fill in quickly. Get the complex weapon pipeline churning at volume again. Buy more spares. Buy more platforms that you can do quickly in order to make your forces bigger. Revitalise training. Strengthen the reserve. All this can be done very quickly, and it requires money, because you can convert the money into outcomes very quickly. Then this process of transformation requires a more thoughtful process involving allies and industry, and about 3% of GDP a year for at least five years gets you well in that game.

Q112 **Chair:** Looking back at the integrated review, we recognise the threats coming over the horizon but perhaps not the pace at which they are going to arrive on our doorstep, which is why it might now be worth revisiting the integrated review. Would you agree with that?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes. The integrated review says, "It is all going to be much harder but, because we cannot afford it, not now." Where we are now is that it is terrible now and we need to get on with it, so what we are revisiting is not the direction of travel in the review, which is pretty good. It is the pace and volume of it.

Q113 **Chair:** There are a number of your former colleagues—ex-Generals—who lamented the loss of the Hercules aircraft, reduction in F-35, 10,000 troops cut, Warrior being dropped, reduction in Challenger 3 tanks, E-3, AWACS and ISTAR capabilities, and a delay in shipbuilding capability. The list is quite detailed, but it was clearly the answer to a surge in spending in cyber-capabilities and space but to the detriment of the conventional. These are easy things, but many of them have not actually been implemented yet. Is it worth revisiting that, and particularly the troop cuts?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** If you take that list, they are not all equal, so there are some things where there was no point in keeping obsolescent equipment because it did not have any military utility, but you could have done a lot more to make better use of the people. You had trained soldiers, and we should recognise that the Army in particular is in



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transition now from the Army that has existed since the end of the Cold War, which is in graduated readiness. We are talking about a tiny Army of 73,000, but there is probably only equipment for about 40,000, because we have only used them in a cycle.

Buying the equipment for the number of people we have and the sustainability seem to me relatively easy things to do because part of what we are seeing now is not just having enough stuff; it is having it in the right place. If you take tanks, for example, they do not make much sense if they are parked in the UK because they may be ready, but they are not readily useful. If you park them in useful bits of NATO, that is fine, until you have worked out what their successor is.

Q114 **Richard Drax:** Everyone talks about 2.5%, 3% or whatever it is. In my day—and I left in 1987—if I am right, it was about 5% or thereabouts. That was not enough, and divisional exercises were a joke when other assets had to be brought in to make the tanks run and all the rest of it. As we found in the Iraq war, we had to bastardise a lot of other equipment to make sure we had the fighting ability. So 3% is not enough. We have cyber, space and these very expensive items we have to pay for to maintain and keep our Armed Forces. Why do we not say 5% or 6%? Why do we always go on about 3% when, clearly, that is not going to be enough money to surge in the way you so rightly say we should?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** These are different equations. There is a requirement for a lump sum now. Germany has delivered €100 billion in year, so there is a requirement for a lump sum investment now to fill in the sorts of holes you have just described where you can get industry to make things or you can hire people relatively quickly. Then there is a rise in the sustainable cost of the Armed Forces. Here, there is a limit to what you can absorb quickly because of the requirement for industry to ramp up and for people to train, and 3% of GDP seems, to me, a reasonable place on top of the surge that I have described.

We need to get into this argument about the future Armed Forces, which will switch, the MoD says, from what we have now, which is largely a platform-centric Armed Forces—people manning ships, tanks and aircraft—into the world we will be in, where we will still have manned platforms, but we will have more unmanned that fly, drive, walk, sail and go under the water, and much more autonomous kit. The more quickly we move into that, the more we restore mass and resilience.

These unmanned and autonomous platforms are cheaper to acquire, cheaper to own because they do not need to train, and cheaper to dispose of, and they do not have pensions. Somewhere in the sustainable price of UK defence, there is an argument that digital age transformation will increase your capability at a lower sustainable price because your people and equipment costs will fall, but you have to get there. You need a surge to get there.



Q115 **Richard Drax:** What about the need to hold ground?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** In the case of the land forces, we are not arguing that you no longer need armoured vehicles. If you take a troop of four tanks, currently each tank has three or four soldiers in it. In the future, one tank will have people in it, and as many as the other three will have nobody in them; they will essentially be loyal wingmen, or there will be a mix. In there, you get bigger numbers with lower people cost, greater resilience and greater tolerance of losses, effectively. This is simply about applying the internet of things and the data era into the art and science of defence and security.

Q116 **Chair:** That does then make our space capability very vulnerable, because you only need to take out GPS satellites.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Yes.

**Richard Drax:** And we are back to the stone age.

Q117 **Mr Francois:** General, I sense we are moving towards a conclusion. You have mentioned several times the need to have some kind of new national conversation about the threat to our security against what I think you called autocratic capitalism—mainly China and Russia, but not exclusively them. If we are to have this national conversation—and I suspect the Committee would have a lot of sympathy with that—who leads it? Presumably, politicians would have quite an important role to play in leading and instigating that conversation, although not exclusively. The military and the media would, too. How would you see that conversation actually taking place? What sort of timeframe are you talking about, bearing in mind that there are Russian missiles landing in Kyiv, or have been over the last 24 hours?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** This only works if it is a conversation led by the Prime Minister, Chancellor, Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary. It is their conversation, without which it has no political traction and either politicians or officials will see it off. It needs to be led by a distinguished figure with the clout to navigate that conversation, and it needs to be driven to bring together all the parties that we have talked about that have a voice in this, and they all have something to offer. It does not need to take longer than six months, and the terms of reference for this conversation need to be set so that it is not about whether we need to do this stuff, but about what we need to do, and we come back with recommendations and a price tag.

Q118 **John Spellar:** Should that conversation not surely also include the Opposition?

**Sir Richard Barrons:** Absolutely, and a broad swathe of civil society, because it is going to pay for it.

Q119 **Mr Francois:** Are you talking about something like a royal commission but at pace?





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**Sir Richard Barrons:** I am not an expert in the constitutional means of it, but it needs to have the effect of a politically led, legally constituted process that gets us to get a move on.

Q120 **Chair:** Thank you for that. If this Committee was a radio station, I think the lines would be going red hot, concerned that there may be incoming Russian missiles hitting London. I just wonder whether you can put our many listeners and viewers to rest by saying that we do have the necessary defence systems to protect ourselves at this time.

**Sir Richard Barrons:** We absolutely do not.

**Chair:** On that bright note, can I say, General, that it has been a real education having you here once again before the Committee? Thank you for allowing us to explore this very important issue. I am sure we will be inviting you back. Thank you on behalf of the Committee. That brings this session to a conclusion.