

Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

Oral evidence: Ukraine and the Integrated Review

Monday 25 April 2022

4.35 pm

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Members present: Margaret Beckett MP (The Chair); Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Lord Butler of Brockwell; Sarah Champion MP; Baroness Crawley; Lord Dannatt; Richard Graham; Baroness Hodgson of Abinger; Darren Jones MP; Alicia Kearns MP; Baroness Neville-Jones; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Lord Snape; Viscount Stansgate; Lord Strasburger.

Evidence Session No. 1

Hybrid Proceeding

Questions 1 - 13

Witnesses

I: Dr Ruth Deyermond, Senior Lecturer in Post-Soviet Security, King's College London; Sophia Gaston, Director, British Foreign Policy Group; Hans Kundnani, Senior Research Fellow and Head of Europe Programme, Chatham House; General (Retd) Sir Nick Parker, Former Commander Land Forces.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Ruth Deyermond, Sophia Gaston, Hans Kundnani and General Sir Nick Parker.

Q1 **The Chair:** Welcome, all four of you, and thank you very much for being prepared to give evidence to us today. I know you have had discussions with our staff, but can I just say before we begin that the intention of this session is not to go into any great detail about specific capabilities or funding priorities but to explore some of the potential medium to long-term implications of the conflict that is happening, recognising how uncertain it is and how fast-moving it is? The whole idea is that this will inform what will come later, which is our scrutiny of the Government's implementation of the integrated review.

I will begin with you, Ms Gaston. To what extent have events in Ukraine

since February been a surprise in the sense of diverging from the UK's previous assumptions about and plans for engaging with the rest of the world?

Sophia Gaston: Thank you very much for having me here. It is a great pleasure. It is quite clear that the invasion should not have come as a surprise. The question for the UK is whether the integrated review being published just one year prior provided an appropriate framework through which to anticipate and respond to this. I have recently published a paper on this, and my conclusion is that overall the fundamental assumptions that the review made about the world order and the UK's role in this are sound and continue to be relevant, particularly that the choice to prioritise flexibility as a doctrine in and of itself within the review builds a sense of elasticity and adaptability that will become increasingly important.

It is clear that, in this year since the publication of the review, the geopolitical and security environment has obviously and self-evidently intensified, and the resources that the UK has at its disposal to respond to this have become more constrained. It is also clear that the review was, in and of itself, not enough to give teeth to the radical zeal that is required to cut through complacency and inertia. In some ways, we are assessing a conceptual framework rather than the implementation of that framework, and that is a very different question.

There are two areas which the Government now need to interrogate. The first is how we address the structural factors that contributed to shaping Putin's decision-making and opportunism about the invasion. Secondly, how do we prioritise the implementation of the review's objectives over the coming year, understanding that constrained-resource environment and making sure that we are making the most targeted and effective investments? These are both interlinked and should be interrogated in symbiosis.

Just to give a tiny sense of some of these structural factors, some of which were addressed head-on in the review and others, perhaps, in its softer underbelly, they include: Putin's perception of fragile domestic political environments in advanced democracies caused by longer-term structural social trends; deteriorating fiscal environments in these democracies making it more difficult for Governments to respond to these environments and to absorb the risks associated with an active foreign policy posture; economic and national resilience exposure to supply chains, markets and commodities likely to be vulnerable to any such invasion; the assumption that this would encourage asymmetrical investment within the western alliance as to the best responses; the assessment that the western alliance is already strained, and that it demonstrated in Afghanistan its vulnerability to weak geopolitical mandates and its incapacity to function without the United States as its central strategic leadership; and a growing consciousness of the western interest in the Indo-Pacific and concerns about the rise of China as a systemic competitor.

All these are areas that we need to ensure that the review can fundamentally answer and respond to, along with other areas of its assessments of capabilities.

Q2 Lord Reid of Cardowan: Thank you to our guests for giving us the benefit of their advice. My question is best directed to General Sir Nick and Dr Deyermond. In a general sense, the Kremlin has quite a few options for escalating the war within Ukraine and beyond Ukraine, including in ways that might directly affect the United Kingdom. As a general question, which of these options would be strategically significant?

I have a more limited question, territorially at least. If it is now President Putin's gameplan—and who knows?—to concentrate on the Donbas region in the east and the southern flank of Ukraine, giving him access directly to the Crimea, if he goes further beyond, to the west of Odesa, it brings him almost to Transnistria, which is the eastern part of Moldova. Although that is a limited territorial aspect, it would have a huge effect, would it not, if a second sovereign country was invaded? I would appreciate the views of our guests on whether that is a possibility or whether it is another of these false flags that have been raised. If it was accurate, what would the implications be if a second sovereign state was effectively invaded?

General Sir Nick Parker: Just so you are aware, my background experience is at senior level on operations in Sierra Leone, Iraq, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland. I was the adviser to Minister Poltorak, the Minister of Defence in Ukraine, from 2016 to 2019, so I have both connections.

In response to your question, one has to look at it at two levels. At the grand strategic, highest level, Russia has a number of options. They involve the relationship with China and these broad dynamics that, in themselves, could generate escalation.

The critical thing we have to do is recognise that the international order has been challenged and that the institutions that we hold so dear—the UN, NATO, the international judicial system—have failed to deliver. We need to work now to make them credible in order to be able to match that grand strategic confrontation.

At the lower level, as you say, Russia has options. It has options in the Black Sea. It has options to Transnistria. It has options, presumably, for the Baltics, for Finland. These are all very specific. They are options. How likely they are I would leave entirely to the intelligence staff who know about it, but the fundamental thing to stop that is that NATO puts itself in a position where it is credible in defence of the line that represents the 2004 expansion. NATO has to be able to provide credible defence on that line so that we have a firm foundation from which then to adapt to whatever Russia chooses to do if we cannot seize the initiative.

Lord Reid of Cardowan: That line does not include within it, of course, Moldova.

General Sir Nick Parker: That is correct.

Dr Ruth Deyermund: Without wanting to get into the detail too much and without wanting to be too firm in predictions, nothing we have seen in the last two months suggests that Russia is likely to achieve its objectives in southern Ukraine or in the Donbas. Its capacity to do that is declining as it suffers very significant losses of personnel and equipment, and, of course, its ability to replace both men and equipment is severely diminished.

The ability to replace equipment is diminished because of sanctions—the financial effects but also the effects of military and technology sanctions—and Russia does not have limitless supplies of trained military personnel, so the capacity for Russia to achieve its now-reduced aims in the south and the east is questionable. Its ability to extend the conflict further west is extremely questionable.

Of course, Russia has occupied part of Moldova for the entire period since the collapse of the Soviet Union. There has never been a period where Moldova has had territorial integrity. In order to maintain its offensive in Ukraine, Russia has been pulling troops out of many of the post-Soviet states where it has troops. It has pulled troops out of Georgia. It is pulling troops out of various districts within Russia, and out of Armenia. The capacity for Russia to extend the conflict outside Ukraine's borders is significantly weaker than it was before the start of the war, because so much, and an increasing amount, of Russia's military capacity is taken up with trying to fight a war that it is not doing a good job of winning.

If I can just come back to the strategic significance question, clearly were Russia able to take control of and maintain control of the whole of Ukraine's coast, that would be hugely significant for NATO, because one of the things that Russia has consistently wanted to do since the collapse of the Soviet Union is to assert its strategic dominance in relation to the Black Sea. Many of its military actions in the 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union have been directed towards that aim, partly including the war in Georgia in 2008 and certainly including the annexation of Crimea in 2014. That has to be regarded as the strategic priority for Russia, but that would have huge implications for the security of NATO as well. Preventing Russia from getting control over that southern band of Ukraine will be critical for NATO's security.

Q3 **Baroness Neville-Jones:** Those are some very interesting answers. I would like to turn to the question of the UK's objectives and our strategy. The UK has been quite notably active among NATO allies. What is less clear to me is exactly what the strategic analysis and objective lying behind the level of activity that one has seen from the Government is. You might have some thoughts on that.

Indeed, to what extent are we linking what we think about our immediate objectives to what we think should be long-term goals? This comes, to some extent, to what has just been said. The Russians can cause us a lot of trouble by just sitting in Ukraine and refusing to move and refusing to

leave, even if they cannot get all these further objectives.

I would be interested to know what you think our current thinking is about our strategic approach, what we are doing at the weapons level and where we should be trying to go in the longer term, and indeed how far we and others in NATO should be prepared to escalate, which seems to me to be one of the really difficult issues.

Hans Kundnani: Thank you for having me. It is a really good question and it is one of the ones that has been on my mind as well. I am not sure I can particularly explain the thinking of the current Government. I have the same impression that I think you do, which is that there is a slight lack of clarity about what our objectives are here and how the long term and the short term are connected.

Perhaps it is useful to go back to the strategy in the run-up to the war, in other words before the end of February. We were essentially, as far as I can see, pursuing a deterrence strategy to prevent Russia from taking further action in Ukraine and then, on top of that, to deter it from taking any action against NATO countries or other countries in the region, such as Moldova.

Baroness Neville-Jones: That failed and that is a lesson we should learn.

Hans Kundnani: Yes, absolutely. It is quite important to say that: our deterrence strategy failed. The way I think of it is that Putin essentially called our bluff. We can go back and analyse why that was. It seems to me that it was partly because the deterrence strategy, which had a military component and an economic component, was half-hearted in both cases. That, in turn, has to do with the way we were trying to maintain European and transatlantic unity. That resulted in having to try to reconcile these different interests and perspectives of different countries in Europe and North America, and that led to this half-hearted deterrence approach.

That failed, as you say. After that, we essentially ramped up all the things we were already doing, both in military assistance and the economic sanctions, but with a completely different rationale. There was still an element of deterrence when it comes to NATO countries in particular and other countries in the region, but as far as Ukraine was concerned, that could no longer be the objective.

In the last two months, all kinds of different explanations have been provided from different parts of the alliance about the purpose of those sanctions. Sometimes it seems that it is about deterring Russia from further advances on the ground. Sometimes it seems as if the rationale is more about a long-term attrition of the Russian economy, in particular. Sometimes, and increasingly, it seems to be about regime change, so there is a certain amount of confusion about what our long-term objectives are in relation to Ukraine and Russia.

We then have to add on top of that something that has come up in passing already but which perhaps we should think about a little bit more, which is how our objectives in relation to Russia and the European security order connect to our other and wider objectives in the world. I am thinking here particularly of China. You used the phrase, General Sir Nick, “grand strategic confrontation”. In the end, it is China that looms somewhat larger than Russia. This is also part of why some other countries in the world outside of the West, particularly democracies outside of the West such as India, look at this in a slightly different way than we do, because they prioritise the threats from China and Russia in slightly different ways.

This is very complicated, even in the case of European security and Russia, but we also need to connect it to these broader questions about our other objectives, and particularly in relation to the China challenge.

Baroness Neville-Jones: It sounds to me, though, from what you are saying that you do not think we have an agreed objective.

Hans Kundnani: Yes. That is right. We are slightly papering over some of the differences within the alliance.

Sophia Gaston: One of the most central medium-term objectives that we should be putting serious thought to at the moment is the reconstruction of Ukraine and what that looks like, appreciating the enormous caveats about the unknowns of how long this conflict will last and what the end point, if there is one, looks like. The UK has quite a legitimate claim to be playing a role in that question. In some ways, it will be a real litmus test for the strategic framework of the integrated review itself and it will require us to lean into that framework in a whole-of-government sense and a whole-of-society sense.

To come back to the point that Hans made about China, one of the most central challenges for the UK in geopolitical terms, and for all our western partners, is the question of how we can be a competitive tender partner on infrastructure, technology and governance around the world. We need to be aware that the question of the reconstruction, the aftermath and recovery for Ukraine, taking it into whatever its new normal will look like, will be watched closely by partners, existing and potential, around the world.

We have an opportunity there to be playing a very significant role in supporting Ukraine’s sovereignty but also in the functioning of its society, economy and governance. We need to ensure that all these things come out into a position of good health in the aftermath, because President Putin’s primary aim has always been to have Ukraine declared a failed state. We need to understand the different levels of that. That is not just a military confection. That is about all these different layers, and the UK has had some historical interest in several of these dimensions. Therefore, we would be quite well placed to do so.

We also need to be incredibly attuned to the fact that we may see China coming to the table in that question of Ukraine's reconstruction and saying, "Here is £500 billion towards the reconstruction". We have to be ready to say, "We have got ahead of this and we have already made a more compelling offer". That is the sort of thing that we need to start putting our mind to, at the same time as we are dealing with this very present, short-term, extremely shocking military situation.

Baroness Neville-Jones: I entirely agree with what you just said about reconstruction, political reform, sovereignty and so on. It seems to me, however, that although one needs to plan for it, there is the issue of where the military side of this is going. It will be very hard to do that if Russia is in substantial occupation of large chunks of the country.

The thing that neither of you has said, and I would be interested in your reaction, is whether our objective should be Russian defeat. I would like to know whether you just think that is impossible. Do you think that NATO is not up to it? That is the question that is staring us in the face.

Dr Ruth Deyermond: Russia has, for a very long time, for the whole of the post-Soviet period, had a policy of occupying sections of countries over which it wished to maintain control in the post-Soviet space and leaving other areas untouched. It has done this in Georgia. There are questions about its role in Belarus and Armenia. It has occupied territory in Moldova and Ukraine. It would be extremely difficult for NATO to facilitate a comprehensive military victory in the sense that that would involve pushing Russia out of Crimea, for instance.

Baroness Neville-Jones: That is a very hard case.

Dr Ruth Deyermond: Yes, precisely.

Baroness Neville-Jones: There are a lot of places short of that, are there not?

Dr Ruth Deyermond: Yes, precisely. Russia being pushed back to the position it was in before 24 February is clearly a much more viable prospect than pushing Russia out of Crimea. A lot of that will depend on the capacity of the Russian armed forces not only to continue to advance but to hold the territory that they have already taken. There are no obvious reasons why we should assume that they can do that.

Just to expand very briefly, the West—western analysts and politicians—over the last 30 years has swung between making two major mistakes about Russia and Russian military capacity. One is to assume that Russia is totally insignificant and then, when it manages to achieve a military objective, there is an assumption that it is undefeatable or is a great military power, and neither is true; it is somewhere in between. Among other things, this war has exposed the limits of Russian military power and exposed the extent to which Russian military reform, which in theory had been under way since 2008, has simply not happened. We are seeing in Ukraine a disturbing number of the same mistakes and the same

problems for the Russian armed forces that we saw in the first Chechen war in the mid-1990s. It is really as if very little has changed since then.

Is there a capacity to defeat Russia militarily? Yes, there is. That does not involve NATO going in and nor should it involve NATO physically going into Ukraine, but, yes, it is entirely feasible to support Ukraine to push Russia back.

General Sir Nick Parker: There must be an objective that defines the status quo ante, and I believe that it should include Crimea. Now, it is a huge stretch target. Our credibility has been completely undermined by what has happened. A country has stepped into another sovereign nation's territory. We watched it from 2014 onwards, and then it grew to a crescendo where we now face the most serious security challenges of our time.

We have to have, with our international colleagues, a common objective that is very clearly defined. If you say anything less than the status quo ante, we will be in an environment where we start to compromise, and when we start to compromise, we will be left with exactly the same fragility that we had because of our ambivalence and our obfuscation during the last six years.

There has to be a very clear objective, shared with as many of our partners as possible. The way to defeat, if that language is appropriate, and deal with this is through economic, judicial, information and military combined activity. This should be done in a way where you move over a period of time to achieve your objective against Russia, not in a way that ends up with an impoverished Russia whose people are completely spent. It should be done in a way where we clearly and carefully, as an international community, move a plan, using sanctions and the judicial mechanisms, to a point where we can return Ukraine, or Ukraine can return itself, to the status quo ante.

Baroness Neville-Jones: Is NATO anywhere near that?

General Sir Nick Parker: I do not think it is NATO's business. NATO's business is to hold the line. NATO is not properly structured to do that sort of thing. It does not have economic interests. It has never done judicial activity. Therefore, we have to form other mechanisms around NATO, as it holds the line, to achieve our objectives.

Q4 **Viscount Stansgate:** You referred to Russia wanting Ukraine to be a failed state. If Russia succeeded in occupying all the way across the southern coast, you would be left with a landlocked Ukraine, which would, almost by definition, be a failed state, would it not?

Sophia Gaston: I do not think that is necessarily congruent with the idea of a failed state, but it would obviously be a disastrous outcome and would be hugely problematic and unstable in terms of the security environment moving forward. It would also have extremely profound economic and social consequences. You would be pushing all the buttons, but it would not necessarily lead to a conclusion of being a failed state. In

many ways, Ukraine's governance has held up pretty robustly and effectively even during this crisis, which gives me some optimism about its resilience moving forward.

We cannot be complacent about that, which is why we need to start thinking about some of those instruments now. We have tried to forge ahead with things that are the kind of creative ideas that we should be looking at, such as removing tariffs on trade. We need to think about what serious investments and other support mechanisms look like and be game-planning for all sorts of scenarios. What if Ukraine's economy is not viable in the short to medium term? What does that look like? Which are the bodies, the alliances and so on that will support us collectively addressing that situation, which we can all assess would not be in our collective interests, as well as not being in the interests of the Ukrainian people?

Hans Kundnani: I was going to come back to this question of defeat, because it links with what I said earlier. There are multiple dimensions to this. The terms "defeat" and "victory" are quite elastic. We can be talking here in military terms, which I think was largely what you were talking about, or we can be talking in economic or political terms. In each case, there are maximalist and minimalist versions of it.

This discussion is already illustrating that we have these multiple objectives. We may have to think about whether they are mutually incompatible. There are at least tensions and trade-offs between these four or five different things that we want to achieve. For example, your maximalist idea of what we have to do to maintain the integrity of Ukraine in territorial terms is a strategy that one could pursue, but it has certain consequences for the other objectives that we might want to achieve, one of which is bringing the war to an end quite quickly. You were arguing, and one can make the argument, that that would be a disastrous thing to do, because we would end up facing the same problems further down the line. Nevertheless, there is a tension there between these competing war aims.

Q5 The Chair: That brings me to exactly the question that I was about to ask you. Would it be helpful if we tried to develop a kind of hierarchy of western objectives?

Hans Kundnani: That would be great, yes. What makes it even more complicated, though, is that different countries will look at this in different ways, both how we reconcile these different objectives in relation to Russia, Ukraine and European security, and the point I mentioned earlier about China. If you think about Germany, Germany has moved quite quickly in relation to Russia in the last two months, but it is a very long way away from taking a more confrontational approach to China.

It would be a great idea to try to think in a more structured way about what the hierarchy of objectives is, but it becomes a little multidimensional. One has to reconcile the different hierarchies that

different members of the alliance have and then think about some kind of compromise between them.

The Chair: That is helpful. I notice, General, that you were nodding as well. Can I give the committee a bit of reported information? I stress that it is reports, but it may be germane to our conversation. Explosions have been reported in Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria, near to the Ministry of State Security there.

Q6 Lord Butler of Brockwell: That is the first step into Moldova. The conversation so far suggests that, in one way or another, Russia and President Putin will not achieve their objectives. They might fail very spectacularly. Is the implication of that that, for a long time ahead, we are in for a hostile Russia, whether Putin survives or not? Should we be prepared for that?

Should our policy on the best way of defending ourselves, because this committee is interested in national security, be one where our strategy should be mainly defensive? Sir Nick was talking about a hostile non-military strategy towards Russia. Is that the best thing, or should we aim, in due course, at a reconciliation, either with Putin there or not with Putin there? It is very unlikely if Putin survives. Should that be the long-term aim of our strategy? Would that be the best way of defending the interests of the UK?

Dr Ruth Deyermond: Russia's political objectives for this war have already failed. I would slightly disagree with my colleague Sophia here. The Russian Government's aim in starting this war, from everything we can see, was not to turn Ukraine into a failed state. It was to turn Ukraine into a client state initially, to remove the Government and install a puppet Government. That is something that we have seen it attempt to do elsewhere in the post-Soviet space.

When that failed, the objective is now to turn Ukraine into a failed state, because it cannot turn Ukraine into a client state. That obviously has significant security implications. I do not see that changing and I do not see Russia's posture towards the West changing, even if Putin is no longer President. I say that, because if Putin ceases to be President, as he inevitably will at some stage, certainly in the short to medium term if he is replaced he is very unlikely to be replaced by a popular revolution or any kind of change of government that comes from a pro-democracy movement or civil society.

The mostly likely change would be that he is simply replaced by somebody from roughly the same background as him, so somebody from the intelligence services or somebody connected to the current Russian Government. It is unlikely that we will see a significant change in Russia's approach to the West, including the UK, even if Putin goes, so the UK needs to think about how it addresses that.

We need to think about the long-term solutions to the challenges posed by a hostile Russian Government, a Russian Government who, if it is anything like the current Russian Government, will see NATO incursions,

as they see it, into the post-Soviet space not just as a threat to their authority but almost as an existential threat. It touches on this fundamental idea of Russia as a great power, which is central to Russian national identity as it is conceived of by the Russian Government. That will not change either.

We need to think seriously of course, as the UK and other states are now doing, about long-term solutions to the challenges posed by energy security and dirty Russian money, which is not going to get any cleaner in the near future. We also need to think about how we engage with a Russia that will continue to interfere in the other states of the former Soviet Union and what the implications of that will be for our relationship with Russia.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Are the interests of the UK in that scenario to maintain what, if I may, I will describe as Sir Nick's policy, which was an aggressive policy in a cold war with Russia but non-militaristic? Should we be considering more a defensive policy, relying on holding our western allies together, but not escalating our approach to Russia?

General Sir Nick Parker: It is both. I hope this is happening now, but we have to make sure that our country is as secure as possible, its air defences are working, its sea lines of communication are being protected, we have food and energy security or we are growing towards that. That has to become an absolute priority so that we are operating from a firm base. At the same time, I cannot accept the term "reconciliation". If we try to reconcile with Russia, we will leave ourselves in just as vulnerable a position as we were in 2014. With our allies, we have to have a strategy—the language is dangerous and I apologise for it—that manoeuvres into a position where we can contain and dominate Russia until its intentions become more benign.

Hans Kundnani: We need to differentiate. You were drawing two contrasts, which I want to slightly separate out. One is between an aggressive approach and a more defensive approach. The other was between military tools and non-military tools. Those are two different distinctions. That is relevant here, particularly because it is not clear to me that, by pursuing what you called a hostile non-military strategy, that somehow excludes the possibility that Russia then responds using military tools.

In fact, if we look at the history of this whole conflict, the catalyst or trigger for the 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine was an association agreement between the EU and Ukraine. In other words, it was a political step. It was not a military step at all and Russia responded in a military way.

The question you are asking is a really good and important one. Should we be thinking about something that is very aggressive or something that is more defensive? One has to include all three elements of this—military, economic and political—in both strategies. It is not a choice between doing something aggressive that is military or something defensive that is

economic. Economic and political tools can be quite aggressive too, or at least they can be perceived in that way by Russia.

Q7 Alicia Kearns: In terms of how we look ahead to our relationship with Russia, General, you mentioned there the need to focus on containing Russia. Until now, essentially our approach to deterrence has failed. I have spoken since my election about the importance of moving to an era of deterrence diplomacy, because we have not been at all focused on the deterrence aspect of it. How does what has happened in the last few months help us to rethink our understanding and practice of deterrence? What does a UK-Russia relationship look like in the future, where deterrence is key or at the heart of it, or containing them is at its heart? Where do we go as the UK?

General Sir Nick Parker: I was musing the other day that a large, well-equipped independent country without a nuclear deterrent might have been far more effective in acting in Ukraine's interests than we have. Taking that logic further, we need to re-establish our position as a credible alliance. As far as NATO is concerned, it has to make it absolutely clear that the Article 5 terms will not be contradicted. We have to demonstrate very visibly that we are prepared to hold that line with non-nuclear forces. From that, I would hope that one can start to build back the credibility of our position.

My understanding is that the Russians respect power. They have exploited our ambiguity and we need to stop that. That is why words such as "reconciliation" and having no clear long-term objective worry me, because they do not provide the conditions for us to start to re-establish deterrence. Deterrence is a scale. It is not just the nuclear piece. It is that ladder that goes from credible diplomatic behaviour all the way down to a nuclear attack. We have to rebuild that.

Alicia Kearns: It is made more difficult when you have vague concepts such as "Putin must lose", which does not mean anything tangibly or help in any way.

General Sir Nick Parker: No, which is why the status quo ante is a target. I absolutely take the Chair's point about the hierarchy. Either over time or over objectives, it has to be scaled so that we achieve this sensibly and over time.

Hans Kundnani: It is clearly true that, as I said earlier, we failed to deter Russia from taking further military action in Ukraine. As far as deterrence in relation to NATO countries goes, it is not clear to me that that is weaker than it was before the war began. In fact, one could argue that actually it is stronger. It seems to me that, in the run-up to the war, the distinction between NATO countries and non-NATO countries was being blurred. That is the position that Ukraine found itself in. It was in a grey area in relation to NATO.

I defer to Dr Deyermond here, but it may be that Russia saw its time running out to act in relation to Ukraine, precisely because it was coming

closer to NATO. That has now been somewhat clarified in some ways since the war began. We will wait to see what happens next. I do not know. It could be that Russia takes some action against a NATO country, but it is too soon so far to say that deterrence in relation to NATO has failed.

Alicia Kearns: When I talk about deterrence, I mean the full spectrum of deterrence rather than just the nuclear, but yes, how does that manifest itself?

Dr Ruth Deyermond: I entirely agree that there was a deterrence failure in respect of the war in Ukraine, because there was a lack of clarity. There was a failure of signalling. A clear statement of intention and the consequences that follow if certain steps are taken is a central pillar of deterrence. Deterrence only works if adversaries understand that action A is likely to result in consequence B. That was profoundly missing in the run-up to February this year.

There are two reasons for that. There is a very specific reason, which has already been alluded to. In 2014, the response was very limited. In 2008, when Russia provoked the Georgian Government into starting a war in South Ossetia, which was also designed to prevent Georgia ever being able to join NATO, again the response by NATO states was very weak. There was an expectation that this would be more of the same.

That also speaks to a broader issue, which is that, from everything that we have seen in the last decade, the Russian Government and the political and intellectual elites around it have regarded the West as weak, divided, in decline and doomed to fail, for all sorts of reasons. That division between western states has been understood as one of the key weaknesses of the West. It is a set of divisions that Russia has sought to exploit in various ways, trying to widen splits on security, economic and cultural issues.

With that background of weakness and a lack of clear action in response to 2008 and 2014, every indication is that the Russian Government did not expect anything like the kind of response that they have seen. Had they known in advance that NATO was going to respond as it did, economically and in military aid to Ukraine, it seems unlikely that Russia would have staged this war. It is not a sustainable, winnable war with the scale of support that NATO has provided and given the economic implications for Russia.

This is where I absolutely agree with what you were saying. What has happened has strengthened deterrence, because it has shown Russia finally that the West is prepared to take credible, meaningful steps. That may be significant in the future. Even if Russia was able to engage in significant acts of military aggression beyond Ukraine—I am not sure that it can now—it will have very good reason to think twice about doing so. Reinforcing that in the longer term will be absolutely key.

Sophia Gaston: Can I add two quick points on deterrence? In terms of this European security architecture, you have two existing blocks through which we are thinking about deterrence. You have the EU and then you have NATO. We have been thinking about this framework in terms of membership, but that is only one of the prongs. There is membership, thematic areas of progress and capabilities and competencies, and they are not always falling in the same space.

There is quite a lot that is falling in between the EU and NATO bloc. We will have to get serious about working out what that third space looks like. There will probably be some kind of Venn diagram where they come together with overlapping areas. For the UK, particularly given our status as a primary security partner, with a recent departure from one and a very strong role in the other, we need to be very clued up on that. We are in a good place to start leading some of those conversations.

The other thing I would flag, building off what Ruth has mentioned and what I was talking about earlier, is that we need to think about resilience—domestic resilience and resilience within our alliances—as an essential foundation of our deterrence strategy. That will involve us really understanding what is going on in our own country, in our allies and in our strategic rivals. Our strategic rivals have been watching all this very closely.

I was in Ukraine just before the pandemic, after Zelensky won the election, and we were doing a lot of social research there. There were fascinating findings from that about the social and political landscape and the country's trajectory, but we were not looking at that with a hardnosed geopolitical lens. If we had, it strikes me that there were some very clear signals about Putin's narrowing window to drive a regional and generational schism in the country in a way that would diminish national identity and a sense of national community. We need to get much more sophisticated in understanding that social research is a tool of strategic foresight and that having really strong and resilient democracies at home is the only foundation on which we can build our foreign policy.

Alicia Kearns: I agree. I will just add on the resilience point that it is not just about democracy. It is about our culture, our information systems and every aspect of our society in every way.

Going back to the point about failure of signalling on our side—because the signalling failure was on our side, not on his; he was very clear—it was also a diplomacy failure. Back in the autumn, the UK and the US went around Europe telling every country, "Putin will invade at the start of next year", and every country told them they were wrong, because Germany said the intelligence was different or France said, "We have Macron, who has a personal relationship". There is clearly a big question to be asked there about why the UK and the US were not listened to and believed when they were being very open in sharing their intelligence.

Going back to the question of deterrence, containment and the future relationship, what can we learn from the Cold War in terms of what we

should not be repeating, what we should be learning and what we should be adapting? How does that apply to the modern day? We need a new relationship and we do not want to just copycat, but there are also many who, like me, did not live through the Cold War. I was born just before the wall fell. We do not have that experienced intelligence. What should we be learning? What should we be not repeating? What can we repeat?

Hans Kundnani: In the immediate couple of weeks after the war began, part of the reason I was quite troubled by some of the steps we were taking on these three fronts—military, economic and political—was the speed with which they were happening. To answer your question, in a way, one of the things that I would learn from the Cold War is not to do these things quickly, to think them through and to think through the consequences of them.

In particular, there is the way these three dimensions—the military, the economic and the political—interact with each other. Here, we do not even have a precedent. During the Cold War, there was not the same kind of economic interdependence that there is now. If you take the way Germany, and Europe more broadly, is still dependent on Russian energy, particularly gas, even as the war escalates, and will continue to be so, that was not the case during the Cold War.

With the way in which these three different dimensions—the military, the economic and the political—interact, we are in a completely unprecedented situation here. As I hinted at earlier, it seems to me that steps in one area can lead to a Russian response in other areas. We are only just beginning to understand all this. When things were happening with such rapidity, my basic instinct was to say, "Hang on. Can we slow down a bit here and think some of these things through?" We are now in a slightly more stable moment, but my basic answer to your question would be, "Let's be very careful".

General Sir Nick Parker: The issue in the Cold War was that there was a very clear threat. The threat drives people's behaviour; it drives alliances and unity. We need to have very serious conversations with our allies about the threat, agree to it and make that focus our attention on a credible response. We need to be careful of some of the things we are saying. If we underplay the extraordinary behaviour of a country in the global order at all, we will fail to define the threat as vigorously as we should in order to safeguard ourselves with strong deterrence and resilience at home.

Q8 **Baroness Hodgson of Abinger:** We have touched on some of this before, but I would like to circle back to think about NATO in this context. Has NATO itself, rather than individual member states or small groupings, responded effectively to this war in Ukraine? What are the risks of NATO member states deciding as individuals and smaller groups what military equipment to give to Ukraine, acting not as a whole?

General Sir Nick Parker: I do not want to take issue with members of the panel, but NATO has not performed well. We now say that NATO is

doing well; it is not. It is these bilaterals' or individual countries' activities. NATO has one priority at the moment, which is to show a credible line of defence. It needs to look at itself very closely. The organisation that I knew between 2016 and 2019 was overrun by process. It spent more time worrying about how many nations were represented in a headquarters than it did about the threat that it was supposed to be facing.

It sent extraordinarily ambiguous signals to Ukraine. It refused to sit in the NATO-Ukraine format because one of its member states was objecting to discussing Ukraine at that level. I would make exactly the point that you have just made: that there is a pragmatic approach beyond the line of relationships that can take more proactive action, without the constraints of an organisation that needs to transform itself. That is the way for us to progress our military activity, but NATO is a military alliance and so much of this is about the economic, judicial and political. We need to look at how that is better integrated into whatever we are doing.

Hans Kundnani: I am not sure if NATO has responded effectively in this war so far, partly because I am not sure what the standard is or what we would be comparing it to.

Let me say two other things. The first is that I very much agree with you. I mentioned earlier that I was a little troubled, during those first couple of weeks after the war began, because of the rapidity with which things were happening, but also because they seemed to be happening in quite a chaotic way. In particular, this is one of the things that struck me. I found it very puzzling and I still do not fully understand—maybe someone else can explain it to me—why decisions about, for example, sending Polish MiG-29s to Ukraine were apparently being taken on an individual country basis, with the US and Poland going back and forth and saying, "You can do it if you want to", and the other side saying, "You can do it if you want to".

These are decisions that we ought to take collectively within NATO, precisely because they have the risk of escalating us to a direct conflict between NATO and Russia. That is really puzzling to me and it is one of the things that still worries me. We do not have enough of a joined-up approach here. Countries are doing their own thing.

Secondly, there are some deeper problems with NATO that, before the war began, were already apparent. One was the divergence in threat perceptions between the east and the south. In that sense, this has been a clarifying moment, because it has refocused NATO on its core and its historic mission. There is broad agreement now in NATO about that.

That tension has gone away, but there is another tension that has not gone away, which has to do with the way we now have authoritarian states within NATO, again, as we did in the early Cold War. If you put that together, the way I think of this is that, during the Cold War, the glue that held NATO together was a shared threat perception in relation

to the Soviet Union. It was not an alliance of democracies at all. As I say, there were authoritarian states within it.

Then, after the end of the Cold War, NATO tried to reinvent itself precisely because that shared threat perception went away. This is where you got this divergence on the East and the West and all kinds of other challenges, most recently China. Should China somehow be part of NATO's remit? Meanwhile, as I say, you had these problems with democracy again in some of these NATO countries. Now we are slightly in a situation where we may now have more of a sense of shared threat perception post Ukraine, but we still have that problem in relation to authoritarian states or illiberal democracies—however you want to term them—within NATO.

Dr Ruth Deyermond: I will very briefly add a couple of things. One of the complicating factors is also that there are some states in NATO that have slightly different security relationships with or challenges in respect of Russia. Turkey is the obvious case here, not just because Turkey and Russia have had an interesting relationship over the last few years. Turkey's approach to Russia is also informed by its interests in the South Caucasus and particularly its relationship with Azerbaijan. That, in turn, has an effect on the relationship with Russia, because of Russia's support for Armenia and the fact that Armenia and Azerbaijan are in conflict. Even if you can get all NATO members singing from the same hymn sheet on Ukraine, there will be other regions where states have interactions with Russia that complicate that relationship.

To come back very quickly on the issue of the risk of escalation and whether weapons supply is likely to do that, the Russian Government have talked a lot about regarding the supply of weapons and military aid to Ukraine as escalation and reserving the right to respond to that. We have not really seen that in reality. This is language we have seen the Russian Government use to try to frighten NATO states into backing off from support of Ukraine. I really do not think that Russia is intending to pick a fight deliberately with NATO. It has been extremely careful to avoid that in various situations, including in relation to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Otherwise, I entirely agree with my colleagues.

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger: General Philip Breedlove, the former top US general commander in Europe and NATO, said yesterday that NATO should consider putting troops into western Ukraine to carry out humanitarian missions and to set up a forward arms supply base. I know that some of you have already said that you do not think NATO forces should be directly involved in the fight. How do you regard a statement like that?

General Sir Nick Parker: The first point I should have made earlier is that NATO is entirely dependent on its US backbone. That needs to be addressed. Our reliance on it to be able to do anything meaningful means that we are very reliant on the view over the Atlantic.

My personal view is that it should be concentrating on its priorities, which is to re-establish a credible line of defence that is more than just a multinational battlegroup in Estonia. I am being deliberately provocative, but NATO's job is to demonstrate to Russia that nobody will cross the Article 5 line. There are other people who are perfectly capable of doing the humanitarian work rather more effectively than they do. Indeed, there are some excellent bilateral relationships. The UK and Poland are working very closely at the moment, as I understand it. More attention should be placed on the United Nations and the United Nations agencies, which are designed to do this sort of thing, and encourage them to get rather more actively involved.

Sophia Gaston: There is one slightly different angle to throw in the mix on NATO, to bring it back to the UK story. I do a lot of public opinion polling about foreign policy. NATO is one of the areas that commands the greatest degree of British support. The British people are very strongly behind the NATO alliance. It seems to be very resilient.

The very interesting thing is that I often survey this with a question about Article 5 and the support for that. When you ask a question about NATO and then Article 5, you get very high levels of support for Article 5. In the same survey, when you ask the question about the scenario of Article 5 without the context of NATO or any reference to Article 5, you get extremely poor levels of support.

The branding of NATO has been an extraordinary success story, but the principle of those kinds of alliances itself is fundamentally less stable. We have probably been a little bit complacent about that, because we just look at those top-line findings for NATO. The reality is that we will have to think much more radically and creatively about our alliances across the whole world and well beyond the European security theatre.

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger: My last point on this was how NATO's reputation might be affected by its response to the Ukraine war, among both member and non-member states, including Ukraine, and the credibility, ultimately, of Article 5.

Dr Ruth Deyermund: In many ways it has so far reinforced the credibility of Article 5, because one thing that has been made extremely clear to Russia is that that line is being maintained. Nothing we have seen in Russian actions suggests that they disbelieve that. This is why sending NATO troops into western Ukraine to provide humanitarian assistance would blur that boundary and be extremely dangerous, in my opinion.

In terms of NATO's international credibility, arguably it is looking perhaps more credible now than it was a couple of years ago. That credibility will depend on a number of things that are the product not just of its competence as an institution but of what goes on inside its member states. There are things over which the UK does not have any control that may affect it in the longer term. One of them is what happens in the next US presidential elections. Were the US to elect, again, a President who

was openly sceptical of the value of NATO, and of course openly sceptical of the importance of Ukrainian sovereignty, that would have serious implications for NATO's credibility, but this is not something that we can do anything about.

The Chair: When you say that it has restored NATO's credibility, do you mean that it has clarified that there is still a purpose for NATO, as opposed to reinforcing its reputation and capacity?

Dr Ruth Deyermund: I meant really that it has restored the credibility, or clarified or reinforced—

The Chair: There is the idea that you need a NATO.

Dr Ruth Deyermund: Yes, absolutely, but it is also about the credibility of Article 5. One thing that has concerned me for a number of years is what happens if states such as Poland and the Baltic states start to feel that Article 5 will be enforced. At that point, you create the conditions under which states such as that may seek to provide alternative means of security through alliances that are outside of or only with some other members of NATO. At that point, you create strategic uncertainty, which is extremely dangerous. That is the precondition for conflict, as we have seen in relation to Ukraine this year.

Now, in the last two or three months, that line around Article 5 has been reinforced. Given that NATO is a defensive alliance, that has strengthened the credibility of NATO. NATO has not performed perfectly and I would not suggest that it is regarded as unproblematic, but in that regard there has been a significant improvement.

Q9 **Baroness Neville-Jones:** It was said by members of the panel that NATO is a military alliance and there are certain things that it cannot do, in effect. With great respect, I do not think that is right. It is a politico-military alliance and it has values to defend. This was shown in the Cold War with all the things such as Helsinki Basket III. They were all part of a NATO strategy. That is what I understood NATO was going to do: formulate a broader strategy. It seems to me that it is the right place.

It is the only body that incorporates and has all the members that are relevant to this whole thing as participants that have actively signed up. It will have to be central, with other bodies, no doubt. I am slightly uneasy that, with respect, we are getting the impression that NATO has not a niche role but is not really central to this whole thing. How NATO does will be absolutely crucial. What has just been said about US leadership is also vital, frankly.

Hans Kundnani: I certainly was not saying that it was not central.

General Sir Nick Parker: It has a bit of work to do. We have to be really careful. It has not done very well.

Baroness Neville-Jones: I know, and it has to do a lot better.

General Sir Nick Parker: It has to do a heck of a lot better. I am not suggesting that it cannot be there. It has to be there. It has to start from defending the Article 5 line and then work out how best to do all the other things that need to be done in order to achieve the status quo ante.

Baroness Neville-Jones: Let us not forget that it is a values alliance.

Q10 **Baroness Crawley:** Sophia, is NATO support in public polling as strong in other European countries and in the US as it is in the UK?

Sophia Gaston: It commands pretty high levels of support across most of Europe, but it is especially high, resilient and not as volatile in the UK as it is in some other parts of Europe. It is obviously a very different question. We are talking about Europe. We are talking about countries in western Europe, where it is perhaps more conceptual, and countries in central and eastern Europe, where it is existential. Those distinctions are to be expected. When we have done comparative studies internationally and with the US, the support in the UK is particularly resilient and high.

We also do a lot of focus groups to try to go a bit deeper and to understand. What I find very encouraging about the support for NATO in the UK—again, this can be distinct in different environments—is that it is balanced between a feeling that this means that we are better protected, but also a sense of responsibility to our allies. That is something that we see again and again, in lots of different aspects of social research on foreign policy in this country. The British people have a very strong sense that we are a good global citizen and a good friend, ally and partner. That sense of respecting one another and being in the middle of something is very important to the British people.

Hans Kundnani: I am glad you asked that question about perceptions in different countries, particularly European countries, because I was thinking about the same thing during the previous discussion about NATO's credibility. It seems to me that it is different depending on where in Europe you go. In the Baltic states and Poland, NATO has a huge amount of credibility and is very popular.

In southern Europe, it is different. Again, that comes back to the questions about NATO's focus. To the extent that it seems to be dealing with a problem that feels important in those countries, which is slightly different than in the Baltic states, I think that the perception of NATO will change.

It strikes me that particularly in France, but also to some extent in Germany, in the context of debates about spending money on defence and deploying military force, it is often a harder sell to do that in the context of NATO than it is in the context of the EU. That is certainly the case in France. In Germany, there is a bit of a right/left split on that. The right tends to be more Atlanticist. Nevertheless, that perception is shared in a lot of western European countries. In that sense, NATO is part of the problem there.

That brings me to what I was going to say in response to Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, which is that I completely agree about the centrality of NATO. NATO's inclusiveness, which you mentioned—it is the only organisation that includes all these countries—is both its strength and its weakness. It is its strength precisely because it brings together all those countries. It is its weakness in the sense that it makes getting consensus about threat perceptions, strategy and all the things I said at the beginning much harder.

Baroness Crawley: There are no other bodies that are more united.

Q11 **Sarah Champion:** This is a fascinating debate. Thank you all. I will ask a very specific question. Chancellor Scholz has hailed a new era in German foreign and security policy. How can the UK Government capitalise on this moment?

Hans Kundnani: That is a very good question. We have to be quite precise about what has changed in Germany. There were lots of very breathless reactions when Scholz made that speech nearly a month ago. Some people were suggesting that everything has changed in German foreign policy or that it had done a 180-degree turn, which is a little simplistic.

There have been certain promises in relation to defence spending and the development of certain military capabilities and a shift in Russia policy, although even that, as I suggested earlier, is limited by the impossibility, at least in the short term, of Germany reducing its dependence on Russian gas. Even in relation to Russia, it is not as if everything has changed overnight. That will be a long process.

As I also mentioned, in a way the even bigger challenge for Germany will be China. Germany is much more dependent on China economically, particularly as an export market, than it is on Russia. That will be an even bigger challenge for Germany.

To answer your question about what the UK can do, it strikes me that there is, potentially, quite an interesting division of labour. By the way, this brings us back to the integrated review. As I understood the logic of the integrated review, the UK sees European security as its priority, but it also aspires to making a contribution to security in the Indo-Pacific, the so-called tilt. Since the war in Ukraine began, lots of people have suggested that should be the end of the tilt and that it was always an illusion to think that we could make some contribution in the Indo-Pacific.

This is potentially where Germany comes in, in the sense that, if the German commitments and promises actually become a reality and transform German military capabilities, there is a possibility at least that Germany would revert to something like the role that West Germany played during the Cold War, which is as the backbone of European conventional collective defence in Europe. That then potentially takes some of the burden off the UK and France to then also continue to play some kind of role in the Indo-Pacific.

I am arguing that Britain can help Germany by trying to work closely with France and Germany to think about what the division of labour might be that reconciles European security with Indo-Pacific security and, in particular, to slightly nudge Germany to take on more of the burden in European security, which then would allow France and the UK, permanent members of the Security Council and so on, to continue to play some kind of role in providing security at a global level.

Sophia Gaston: Germany's structural reset on defence is meaningful. It has ring-fenced funding in a separate budgetary process. It has put a few safeguards in place for it to have some consistency and stability over time. It is very early days. The big question is when the cultural reset happens. It will be a huge transition for them to move into a space where they are thinking in a really proactive way about defence.

On a practical level, nobody who is working in the Bundestag at the moment has ever been there at a time when Germany has played that role and fought in that kind of a way. There are a whole bunch of people who have been pushing for this outside of Parliament for a long time in Germany, and I hope that some of them can come into the engine room to start to see this move forward. That cultural aspect will be essential.

Hans has just mentioned France and the UK. This feels like a huge opportunity to resurrect the E3 concept, which I know has a lot of obstacles in the way of it. It starts to become more interesting when you think about that being able for the first time to be recast as the three largest European security partners. That could be an opportunity to bring it back to the table. That is certainly something that the UK Government would welcome.

Q12 Baroness Anelay of St Johns: My question will be directed at Sophia and take us into some of the wider implications that the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia is causing. As parliamentarians, we received a lot of briefings on the UN World Food Programme and Plan International about the implications for food and security across the Middle East and east Africa—Ethiopia and Yemen—perhaps with consequent problems about escalation of conflicts there.

Do the Government have to think again about the focus they had in the integrated review, published a year ago, on reducing their approach to the work they did in the Middle East and Africa, particularly east Africa? Certainly, the International Relations and Defence Committee that I chair is very concerned about the way in which the Government appear to be downgrading their attention to security issues in those areas. Do the Government need to make a reassessment now?

Sophia Gaston: The integrated review signalled the prioritisation of two security theatres: Europe and the Indo-Pacific. I do not think that they believe that other areas are not important, but, necessarily, in an environment of constrained resources, the implication is that these might be less central or less prominent in the deployment of these constrained

resources. We are entering a period in which no single nation, even the United States, can be everywhere all the time, doing everything.

The reality is that we will have to make some pretty tough choices about where we are focusing our energies. We already have extreme problems practically within the machinery of government, of bandwidth, crisis lurch, et cetera. The reality is that, in other areas, we will have to shift to a burden-sharing kind of approach, where we are working much more closely and collaboratively with allies. That will have to be a reality moving forward.

That is not to say that we should not understand the interdependencies between different regions, themes and areas. We have to understand the tensions at the margin points there, because you cannot draw a hard line around Europe, and when you have mass migration due to things like climate impacts, you cannot just say, "We are only looking at this and not looking at the other". The practical reality is that we have to prioritise. That means that we have to be extremely effective and persuasive in our diplomacy with partners old and new, so that we can share the load of making sure that we uphold our interests and values in these other areas.

Hans Kundnani: Can I add two sentences on that to slightly link that question back to some of what we discussed earlier? Again, this illustrates how we have competing objectives and that there are tensions and trade-offs between them. It strikes me that some of the things that we are now doing in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine are undermining some of our objectives in other parts of the world, in particular the way this is leading to a massive increase in food and commodity prices, which will likely have political consequences. The Arab spring in 2011 came out of precisely one of these kinds of moments.

It may be that, because of the overwhelming imperative to take the approach that we are taking in relation to Russia, we decide that we have to take that in our stride. Coming back to your question about thinking in terms of a hierarchy of objectives, we need at least to think about the consequences of these things in other parts of the world, such as Africa, and how we might manage those.

Q13 **The Chair:** There are other questions we did not reach. If we may, we will perhaps write to you. Please feel free to write back to us if there is something you want to follow up on. We are almost out of time, but I wonder whether there is anything any of you would like to say in response to something where you have been thinking, "Maybe I will say this before we close".

General Sir Nick Parker: The Ukrainians are at the heart of this. From my perspective, they have been leading the way, despite the way the international order has broken down. They have huge credibility and they should be at the forefront of any response. We can use that credibility to our own advantage.

Dr Ruth Deyermund: We need to recognise, if we do not already, that this is the most significant shift in the European security environment since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. We have not faced anything like this for 30 years. It is not going to go away when the fighting stops in Ukraine, although I do not expect that to happen any time soon.

It is about how the UK thinks about its relationship with its European partners and with those states who are not NATO allies but clearly have a desire to come closer to NATO, so Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. We need to think seriously about how we signal our relationship with them. Everything that we do from now on needs to take place in that framework of understanding that we are in a world that is fundamentally different from where we were a year ago.

The Chair: I utterly agree, and it strikes me forcefully that, if the events in Ukraine had gone the way most people expected in the early days, we might be having a very different conversation about the credibility of NATO. Thank you very much indeed for your time and your observations.