



HOUSE OF LORDS

International Relations and Defence Committee

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

Wednesday 11 May 2022

10.30 am

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

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 10 - 15

Witnesses

I: Professor Patrick Porter, Professor of International Security and Strategy, The University of Birmingham; Sir Lawrence Freedman, Emeritus Professor of War Studies, King's College London.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Patrick Porter and Sir Lawrence Freedman.

Q10 The Chair: Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Committee in the House of Lords. It is my pleasure to welcome our witnesses today: Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman, emeritus professor of war studies, King's College London; and Professor Patrick Porter, professor of international security and strategy, University of Birmingham. Thank you very much indeed for joining us for our second session in our new inquiry, "Defence concepts and capabilities: from aspiration to reality".

I remind our witnesses and committee members that the session is on the record. It is transcribed and broadcast. I also remind members that, if they have any relevant interests to declare, they should do so before asking their questions.

As ever, I will start with a rather general question and then turn to my colleagues for more focused questions. I anticipate that, as we go through our session today, after my colleagues have asked their question, they may wish to ask a supplementary. If there is any time left at the end of our hour's period, I will open it to other members of the committee for further questions.

What do you consider to be the main messages of the Defence Command Paper, and were any of these unexpected? To what extent does the Defence Command Paper respond to the goals set by the Integrated Review? What is your assessment of both documents and their priorities?

Sir Lawrence Freedman: It is a pleasure to be here. By and large, the two documents read differently, but they did fit. They were based, as all forward looks are, on a gamble about the future that you are not going to be surprised by events, although that almost always happens. A year after any major defence review something happens that contradicts some of its main messages, although what has happened in Ukraine to some extent reinforces the messages. No doubt we will get on to that.

There is not very much there that was a surprise. The two key things were, on the one hand, what it meant to talk about a global perspective, especially on defence. How do you reconcile what was recognised to be the main security concern, which was close to home, with a desire to influence events further away? That inevitably confirms the ascendance of the Royal Navy as the service that is benefiting the most from current investment.

Certainly, there is an emphasis on being modern, new technologies, cyber, space and this sort of thing. Again, that was not a surprise, but one of the things people will be looking at, as a result of what has been happening recently, is whether some of that is quite as important as we thought it was going to be.

The third, and inevitably the most controversial, thing is the question of taking out capability with the hope that you will replace it with something

better in the future. The extra money that did come in was a bit of a surprise. More money was provided, but there is some time to go before all these capabilities will be there, and in particular there will be a question about manpower. No doubt we will talk a bit more about that, but that will always be a question of your ability to recruit as well as the targets you set.

It fitted in with trends that one could already see. You will never have enough money and you will never satisfy the services that they have exactly what they want. Their view was that it could have been worse, but the big questions are always delivery not just in the short term but into the next decade, and we will wait and see.

Professor Patrick Porter: It is a great privilege to be with you today. The Command Paper is designed to give a military shape to the broader vision of the Integrated Review, and it broadly does that conceptually. It has a number of themes, primarily to give a global footprint and profile to post-Brexit Britain, with a spread across a number of different theatres, trouble spots and hemispheres.

It is also designed to give shape to the Armed Forces to make them leaner, agile, increasingly high-tech and intelligence-led, with great reach, while accelerating an equipment replacement and modernisation programme. As Professor Freedman says, there is a bet that mass can be substituted by essentially two things—technological transformation and a reliance upon, or an assumption of, alliances and coalitions. There is also the bolstering of the nuclear deterrent, both the increase in the overall stockpile and a shift back to secrecy.

Some unfair things have been said about the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper. It is not the absolute all-out Indo-Pacific tilt manifesto that some have said. It is more measured than that, and some credit is due. I welcome the attempt to bolster the nuclear deterrent in an age of blood and iron. It is admirable that they are moving to try to give the Ministry of Defence greater intellectual firepower with SONAC, testing and red teaming. There is an emphasis on intelligence and Five Eyes. You can expect only so much from a document that is published and can be downloaded in Pyongyang, Moscow, Tehran and Beijing. In a sense, a lot of trade-offs and dilemmas have to be kept off the table.

If I have one major worry, it is the perennial problem in British defence reviews that ambitions exceed capabilities. There is a means-ends gap, which you can handle well or less well. The risk it runs is that in pursuing an exquisite, agile armed force that is globally distributed, it becomes too thinly spread and, effectively, you end up trying to be a major power at middle power rates.

There are some problems where it bet too much upon a vision of future warfare that Ukraine is throwing into question. Sometimes war is not this subtle, sub-threshold, manipulative thing in the fog. Sometimes it is blatant, in your face and out in the open. There is a coming shock that I am happy to talk about later, which is the question mark about the

extent to which the UK can afford to rely upon a large-scale US presence in Europe over the next generation. Asia has a gravitational pull. Those are things we can flesh out.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. My colleagues will examine some of the very points you have raised throughout that, such as whether the priorities set a year ago still match the way in which we need to progress now, particularly against the background of Ukraine, but more widely, because, as you have set out, ambitions are not necessarily matched by resources. At this stage I will not ask a supplementary. I may come back at the end, because my colleagues will probe all the major points you have raised.

Q11 **Lord Stirrup:** Morning, gentlemen. Can I turn to the point that Professor Porter has already trailed? We will come later to the question of whether recent events have thrown any doubt upon the assumptions made and the priorities set in the Integrated Review. Taking as a starting point what the review said, what would you identify as the key gaps between those aspirations and defence's current and planned capability to deliver them? You talked, Professor Porter, about the issue of scale, which is important, but there are some ambitious plans and programmes within defence. Do you see any significant gaps between what they are likely to deliver in the future and the aspirations set out in the Defence Command Paper?

Professor Patrick Porter: There are some gaps. Professor Freedman mentioned one of them, which is the almost inevitable gap in the transition from legacy to sunrise equipment. One of the difficulties here is that crises can be brought forward earlier than is convenient. We tend to have these reviews, but then you usually need to have a follow-up refresh about a year later when Libya, Ukraine or ISIL breaks out afterwards. That is an inherent problem.

There is a problem with the gap in the surface fleet and the intended commitments. The Indo-Pacific tilt is not intended to be a primarily militarily intensive thing. It is primarily economic and diplomatic. Nevertheless, if it is being prized as a critical region in which Britain wishes to be engaged—or, if you like, embroiled—Britain could easily be drawn into a crisis there while facing the deterioration of its own region. You end up having a two-hemisphere strategy with a one-hemisphere navy. That is a problem.

Something else that has not been mentioned enough is the relative invisibility of the Middle East in a lot of the discussion. I would not advise this; I am a sceptic about the value of Middle Eastern embroilment, but there is a sense in which, because the Middle East has temporarily gone quiet in the era of the Abraham accords, the stalemate over Iran's nuclear programme, the suppression of ISIL for the time being and Syria being terribly won, rather than having to reassess and think about it, we can quietly draw back and hope for the best. That makes us hostage to fortune. The next time there is a crisis in that region we get drawn back

in, so it could be even more than a two-theatre problem. It could become a three-theatre problem.

Sir Lawrence Freedman: I do not disagree with that. Part of the difficulty, which Patrick has alluded to, is that the contingencies that arise are rarely those that you expected, and they do not arise in the form in which you expected them. It is a sort of law of defence reviews. Going back to the Nott review in 1981, it was followed by exactly the war that it was not prepared for in the Falklands 40 years ago. The Options for Change exercise in 1990 was immediately followed by the Gulf War.

We know that this sort of thing happens. After all, we have just seen this country draining down its reserves of anti-tank weapons, artillery shells and whatever for a good cause, and it will take a while just to get that back up to the required numbers. You will always be caught out. You are always trying to guess what the things are that you will need.

There is the sub-threshold stuff, and you can always do something sub-threshold, but the question is where we are likely to fight, how we are likely to fight and what we need. If you accept that it is unlikely, and probably more unlikely now after what has happened, that we will get embroiled in a big war on the continent, and you look at where western powers have made their interventions in recent years more or less effectively, you are looking at airpower. The carriers play a role in that, but how many F-35s we are going to get will be a major issue. As Typhoons go out, how long will it be before you get a replacement?

The major way in which major powers have intervened in conflicts recently is by and large through airpower. Ukraine is a separate question here. The carriers clearly play an important role in that, because you can get airpower into different positions, but I would certainly be looking at the numbers there. I am not mentioning airpower just because I am looking to Lord Stirrup.

The second question is manpower. A lot of the role that armies have played in recent years has nothing to do with fighting enemies, whether it is in pandemic responses or firefighting in Australia. Every time there is a major question that requires a large and disciplined organisation that understand logistics, you are looking at the Armed Forces, because that is what they can do and they are often available because they are not fighting a war at a particular time. You need people and you need the skills.

Trying to imagine the Armed Forces to fit that sort of role, particularly the Army, makes you think a bit more about the numbers. I find it hard to believe that we will be sending a division into battle because Russia is now a diminished power, but you will still need the numbers because there are always lots of demands on them. That would be my other major concern.

Lord Stirrup: Could I ask you about a different kind of capability gap? In Ukraine, we have seen the old lesson of the horrendous rates of weapon

consumption from high-intensity warfare. We have had, as you already alluded to, Professor Freedman, some of our own stocks drawn down. They will at least have to be replaced and we have taken far too much risk on weapon stockpiles in the first place, so they will have to be revisited.

These are not bullets. These are complex weapons, which are quite difficult to manufacture, and demand is high both in this country and in others that have been supplying Ukraine. As we see from the success of NLAW, any weapon that has a good track record in a combat arena attracts a lot of customers from around the world. The demand for all these things is extraordinarily high and will remain high for some time to come. Where is the industrial capacity going to come from that will provide the weapon stockpiles to satisfy the demands of all the nations, including the UK and its aspirations in the Command Paper?

Sir Lawrence Freedman: That is an enormous question, because it is not there at the moment and it is surprising how everybody gets surprised when they see the rates of consumption that you go through in a war. There is a sense that it will end up as a limiting factor for both sides in Ukraine. If you have just-in-time supply chains, you just do not have enough. You need the stocks and you need the capacity to generate the stocks.

For the reasons you have just given, you may think that, as a result of the success of the weapons produced in this country in this war, the demand will be there and, anyway, the stocks need to be built up. The issue over the longer term is giving a commitment to industry that it is worth keeping the production lines going. That is a problem in an age where these are complex systems, they take time to produce and they are expensive to produce, but that is the challenge. We all know just how many shipbuilders and aircraft manufacturers there used to be. There are one or two now. Somehow we have to be able to make the commitment and recognise that we probably do just have to keep on producing, because we can be pretty sure that, if a conflict comes, we will need it all.

Professor Patrick Porter: The creation of the National Shipbuilding Office and the commitment in the documents to move to more of an onshore industrial build were very welcome, but this takes co-ordination and resource. This is where the Command Paper can do only so much.

This is the way the table is set: "How do you commit to all these very ambitious goals with very limited resource?" It is very difficult to talk about, for example, servicing and supplying an industrial regeneration capability without talking about taxation and the whole country's economic settlement. It is not the MoD's fault at all; it is the fault of a country demanding a lot of very limited resource with an existing set of assumptions, for example about what should be taxed and what should not.

Intellectually, there is a need to move, to some extent, back away from the emphasis upon full-spectrum capability, flexibility and agility, and

towards mass, depth and materiel. As Lord Stirrup said, Ukraine has demonstrated just how quickly and voraciously modern war consumes ammunition, fuel, food and people. The need to have some ability to respond to that sustainably will take a long time and some upfront pain.

- Q12 **Baroness Blackstone:** Good morning. In discussing, as we are today, how far UK defence is configured to deliver the objectives in the Defence Command Paper, can I refer you back to the Levene model? Some of our earlier witnesses have referred to this. Is what it felt still appropriate and right for today? To what extent does the MoD need to change in order to respond to the threats and meet the ambitions outlined in the Defence Command Paper? We are discussing that, but I am wondering if you can elaborate a little more on what the MoD needs to do.

Sir Lawrence Freedman: A problem of being in this game for a long time is that I have seen so many reorganisations of the MoD, in which Lord Levene often seems to have been involved. The challenge for MoD is that it is both a normal ministry, with its budgets, plans, personnel issues and so on, and an operational ministry. The balance between the two can be difficult to sustain. It always comes into its own when it is operational, and you have to make sure it does not lose that.

I have been in conversations over the last few days with people in MoD marvelling at how quickly you can get things done when there is an emergency on. I recall exactly the same conversations from 40 years ago at the time of the Falklands: "Things that were taking us six months we're getting done in three days", and so on. "I hope we can carry this through into peacetime". The question is why you cannot, and we know why: because there are regulations, protocols and things that have to be respected.

There is always that challenge of being able to move the system quickly, because it is inevitably bureaucratic. We have been discussing all my career problems of procurement and how you never manage to find a system that people can stop fiddling with until you have put down what you want and it arrives, because every time you have a change of personnel somebody starts to change it. Levene and so on have worked on all these issues and know the problems, but it is still an issue.

In the end, it comes back to the budgetary framework within which MoD has to operate. If the way that you manage your regular budgetary crises is just by shifting stuff to the right, it helps the accounting problem, but it is not an efficient way in the end of spending resources. It is a while since I have looked at this carefully, but in the end the budgetary frameworks will still be critical. It is finding ways to commit resources and keep them committed without being diverted along the way, plus looking at what happens when it is an emergency and really asking the questions about whether all the bureaucratic procedures are as necessary as they are on paper.

Professor Patrick Porter: I cannot say a lot about the internal mechanisms or working of the MoD, but I would like to give some praise

for the movement towards the MoD intellectually testing its own concepts, particularly with the creation of the Office of Net Assessment. More broadly, one thing they are doing a lot better and productively is being able to challenge existing assumptions.

These things are difficult to do, because to do them well you have to be willing to imagine policy failure and the things happening you really wish would not happen. What if it does blow up in the Middle East again? What if suddenly Putin is out of office tomorrow and a hyper-demagogue nationalist comes to power who thinks Putin was too casual? What if there is another emergency in continental Europe that we have not even thought of? What if America under the next Trump Administration pulls back?

The true, shocking and uncomfortable scenarios are worth thinking about. It is hard to do, but it can be done well. There is a real effort to match greater institutional efficiency with greater intellectual rigour, and that is a good thing.

Baroness Blackstone: Can I follow that up by asking how you get this greater intellectual rigour? Earlier you referred to intellectual firepower. What needs to be done as far as the Ministry of Defence is concerned to improve this? Would it be easier for them were the overall ambitions not quite as big as they are? If you are going to try to be global, you are pushing the system very hard to cover a huge number of possible conflicts, security issues and so on. I wonder, coming back to the problem of the middle-ranking power rather than the great power, whether we are trying to dance around on a world stage when the size of our stage should be somewhat reduced and perhaps a bit more focused on Europe, particularly if the Americans will be less committed to Europe.

Professor Patrick Porter: Part of the answer is that, ideally, in order to encourage a rethinking of both means and ends, the FCDO is involved in that as well, in putting defence decisions in a wider policy context, so that it does not revert to the silos where they are only talking about operational agility, but it is put in the global context.

As you say, you are absolutely right that the difficulty with a global posture with limited means is that you end up hoping in certain key regions that things stay quiet, so that you can deploy elsewhere. You also end up, which I am sure we will talk about, hoping that relatively small efforts in different places will make a huge difference in preventing problems coming from up stream. You end up in a wishfulness. I do not just say, however, that we should reduce or downsize ambitions. There is also a whole question of expanding means, and increasing capability and the ability to sustain it.

Sir Lawrence Freedman: Patrick mentioned the FCDO. A lot of the intellectual firepower has to come from outside the Ministry of Defence, because you are really challenging the assumptions about the nature of the international system, where the pressure points may arise and so on.

I have a concern that a lot of the specialists we used to have, the people who really knew, say, Russia in detail, were put aside because the way to get ahead was by being a generalist and being able to put your hand to anything. We really do need the specialists. It is always good to have people who think outside the box, but sometimes you have to have people who know the box very well and can be relied upon to provide you with the detailed assessment.

That intellectual firepower is there. A lot is in the agencies, but we certainly saw, at the moment the world changed, which I would put at 2014 rather than now, that the FCDO found itself with an awkward lack of Russian specialists, for example. It is not expensive, in the end, to keep that quality of knowledge around, and that is what you will need to bring to bear as the crises develop.

Q13 Lord Wood of Anfield: Hello. I would like to ask you about the nuclear warheads dimension of the review. As you know, the review proposed an increase of over 40% in the ceiling of nuclear warhead stockpiles from 180 to 260. First, I want to ask you whether you agree with the logic behind that as an interpretation of a minimal credible deterrent and a rational thing for us to be advancing as a priority.

Secondly, I would like to ask you about the implications of this. I am interested in implications within the MoD, as well as for our posture and our credibility internationally on things like NPT in the months ahead. NPT may seem like a distant priority, given what has happened in Ukraine. Do you think this impacts our ability to be credible leaders on the non-proliferation agenda?

Sir Lawrence Freedman: The NPT Review Conference is coming up, so it is relevant. More has been made of this than it deserves. Until the Labour Government's defence review in 1998, we never released any numbers about our stockpile. They were guesses and wildly out when one looks back. We were exaggerating the numbers we had. The Labour Government committed themselves to the minimum of minimum deterrents and were looking at how far the numbers could go down, but the number that was published was always an aspiration. It was never reached. We never got down to those sorts of numbers.

The increase in stockpile that we are talking about is not that great. You can work out whether this is a response to Russian anti-ballistic missile capabilities or different targeting priorities. The most important number is the number of missiles you can launch from the submarine. Our new submarines will have potentially fewer missiles—half of them—than the old ones, and that is the key number. It was notable and possibly one of the more surprising aspects of the Integrated Review that you had this discussion about it and it drew people's attention.

I did a bit of work on it and looked at what the attitude was when the Government in 1998 first published the numbers and showed how they were going down. A lot of the people who are complaining now were then dismissing this as a gesture. "It's not important. It's beside the point."

You've still got a nuclear capability", they said, which is true. I would not put too much stress on that.

The first lesson, which Patrick has already mentioned, that you would draw from recent events is that the Russians seem absolutely preoccupied with the UK. It is extraordinary how often we get mentioned in their propaganda. They are the biggest boosters of our capability around at the moment. Secondly, there was quite a telling conversation on Russian media a couple of weeks ago, where one of these characters they have was describing all the terrible things they can do to people and to the UK through creating a tsunami or something. Somebody in the studio did point out that Britain had a nuclear weapon as well. What has happened in recent times does not change the case for a UK nuclear deterrent.

The review conference is important and it will be difficult, because recent years have seen the decline of arms control and disarmament. It is very hard in current circumstances to see how you recreate all of that. The non-nuclear powers will certainly have grounds for concern that not a lot is being done to meet the so-called obligations to show that the nuclear powers are disarming as well. It does not look like that at the moment. There will be a difficult review conference, but the UK stockpile is quite a minor part of that.

Professor Patrick Porter: I cannot speak exactly to the logic of why the Government have done this. They have been quite opaque about it. I can only conjecture. One of the reasons might be a technical thing—that it is a maintenance technical issue with the warheads with the Atomic Weapons Establishment. It could be a hedge against future feared improvements in, for example, Russia's ballistic missile defences. It could be designed to provide scope for the so-called sub-strategic strike capability to adjust the yield of the warheads and give a greater ladder of escalation. There are a whole lot of possible reasons why they are doing it.

I would personally defend it, at a time when adversaries are breaching arms control treaties quite openly and proliferating, including China now accelerating nuclear build-up as well as its massive shipbuilding and bending iron. We are living in a world of increased proliferation by hostile actors, and in that world what matters more than a commitment to the non-proliferation agenda is making western nuclear deterrents work.

Part of that is reversing what has unintentionally happened over a number of decades of looking increasingly like a reluctant nuclear power, having a nuclear arsenal that you would probably never use in any circumstances or at least giving that impression, and making the arsenal effectively a dormant one. If we are going to have one, it needs to be taken seriously that, if you push these guys enough, they might just well use it. That is a very unpleasant thing, but it is a very unpleasant set of conditions out there. An addition now will not make much difference to whether Russia, China or North Korea are proliferating, but it at least bolsters the credibility of our own threat to retaliate.

Lord Wood of Anfield: You think there is a linear relationship between the number of warheads we have and the credibility of our deterrent.

Professor Patrick Porter: I would not say "linear", but rather reversing a holistic set of trends over the last few decades with an emphasis upon non-proliferation, build down, disarmament and discussion, as is right in a democracy, about building down further. That sends the inadvertent signal that this is a country that is averse to using them at all in any circumstances. That can be the policy if a country decides to have that as a policy, but, in that case, scrap them. If we will have them, a nuclear deterrent needs to work.

Q14 **Lord Anderson of Swansea:** Gentlemen, the Defence Command Paper gives strong emphasis to what is a fairly new concept of persistent engagement, but it does not define this concept at all clearly. What in your judgment does it mean in practice? Is there a danger of spreading our defence effort too widely? What do you think it means?

Sir Lawrence Freedman: I have no idea. I can go back to something I was involved with, which was Blair's Chicago speech in 1999. One of the tests for intervention mentioned there was this: "Are we in it for the long haul?" I always thought that was quite an important test.

I am not sure that is exactly what "persistent engagement" is meant to mean, but it is about this idea, which was influential in the end in both Iraq and Afghanistan, that if you get involved in these things you cannot be appearing to dabble. These are serious commitments, so if you engage you should do it properly. If you cannot do it properly, do not give the impression that you are committed for the long term when you are not. That is one way I would interpret it. That does come back to the question we keep on coming back to of how much you can do, and how many countries and regions you can get involved with.

Let us just go back to the current crisis. One phrase that has irritated me a lot during this crisis is how we are prepared to fight to the last Ukrainian. The Ukrainians are fighting and it is their war, but we have said we will support them. As we have discovered, once you have made that commitment, it is very demanding to sustain. We certainly could not do it by ourselves. One of the more impressive things the UK has done has been to work with other donors to make sure the materiel keeps on moving and arriving in Ukraine.

Armed force is not something you can dabble with. If you are going to commit to it, you have to commit to producing the result, even if you are working with allies. Whether that is what it meant, I would not care to say, but that is what I understand by it.

Professor Patrick Porter: I agree, and it strikes me that commitment to a persistent engagement posture partly flows from a rather unexamined assumption that a global posture is almost good in itself, that it is its own reward and that it is intrinsically valuable, but also a not enough examined assumption that forward-leaning active behaviour

abroad is always benign and stabilising. I would question both of those. It runs a number of risks.

First, you end up becoming so much of a pentathlete, being slightly competent at a whole gamut of things, that it becomes very difficult to be an event specialist when you need an event specialist. It gets very difficult if you are thinning out capabilities, resources and people to apply enough weight in the right theatre at the right time, because these things involve not just the dispersal of resources. They involve time stretching and the ability to redeploy and reorganise.

Secondly, I would be sceptical about the assumption that it always works. Sometimes, for example, arming and training missions works very well when one's political interests align with the trainee, like in Ukraine. A big part of the war in Ukraine has been the effectiveness of British training and assistance with Ukrainian fighting effectiveness, but Iraq suggests it does not always go that way.

Arming and training missions with forces that do not share one's political interests or have opposite political interests can have the reverse effect. There is an impressive body of academic literature showing that arming and training foreign forces makes coups more likely by creating highly effective officer corps abroad, who can then seize power, which is the opposite of the liberal rules-based order that this Integrated Review is supposed to be promoting.

There are unintended consequences here. I am not, therefore, advocating that we all come back home and hide under the bed, but one needs at some point to make a decision. Do you want to be optimised for war fighting and the most intense first-order emergencies of war, acting as armourer, as the country is in Ukraine, or spreading resources very thinly on the bet that it generally has benign outcomes and, in any case, is politically necessary? It comes back to the issue of what kind of country it wants to be. Does it want to be a global Britain or an international one? Those are two slightly different things.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: Rather like the Oracle of Delphi, know thyself to define what you can do and who you are. This new concept appears to sit alongside the traditional war-fighting priority. Do you believe, however ill defined, that we will have the resources available for this? Particularly, could you apply that to the new emphasis on the Indo-Pacific?

Sir Lawrence Freedman: On the Indo-Pacific, it is less of a problem in some ways, because there are obvious limits on what we can do and we are not going to be in the lead. We will be working largely with the Americans, but also with others.

In the Middle East, you can see an issue, because we still have good links with the Gulf states. They expect us to be training, supporting and equipping them and we are very pleased to do that. "What does that expectation lead to?"—that would be one way of thinking about the

problem. If, say, there is an issue with Iran in the future, would they be looking at us to build on a commitment that appears at one level and to do something at a much higher level?

We would probably feel under a lot of pressure anyway to do so. It used to be called getting your fingers in the mangle. Once you are a bit in, you can suddenly find that you are a lot in and end up having to make provisions that you were not fully prepared for. These are the judgments that are part and parcel of any foreign policy and, in many cases, they will come off and you will be fine, but you always have to be aware that at some point people will expect you to act far more than you thought you had committed yourself to.

Professor Patrick Porter: In talking about the relationship between the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific theatres, there is a relationship, but it does not have to be one that dictates that Britain sends relatively small forces out there to look relevant, present and useful. You can also contribute much more effectively by taking much more of the burden in the Euro-Atlantic, precisely at the time when the pressure on the United States to shift its relative full focus is very likely to increase. It may be increased more quickly than we think, especially if there is an emergency in and around Taiwan.

As Professor Mike Clarke puts it, Britain is better served inserting forces and applying force where it can make a significant difference rather than more notionally at a further theatre, where there would be just enough, as Sir Lawrence says, to get us into trouble and to create an expectation, but not enough to be able to tip the balance. At the same time, it would be thinning out forces that are badly needed closer to home.

Q15 Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you, gentlemen. You made the comment during your evidence that crises can be brought forward earlier than is convenient, and you have both reminded us of the lack of preparedness in the Falklands, Iraq and other situations as they emerged.

Building on the answers you have just given us about Ukraine, I would like to ask you to drill deeper into that question, if you would. Has the Russian invasion of Ukraine posed challenges that were already anticipated or new ones? Over two months now into Putin's war, looking at the way the conflict has evolved—maybe it is too early to say—do you think that the UK needs to start to rethink its strategy and its defence policy, or are our priorities and our capabilities to defend them basically sound ones?

Sir Lawrence Freedman: It is too early in some respects, because we are very influenced by certain images. We have seen, as happens with most wars, small, very cheap things knocking out large, very expensive things. It happens and it will happen in future wars. In an age of drones, highly precise anti-tank weapons and so on, why do you need tanks? It is a real issue, but, if you need mobility, what you are moving in has to be protected, it has to take its firepower with it, and you end up looking

rather like a tank. There will be too many lessons drawn from limited information and images.

A lot of people have been trying to point out that, although the anti-tank weapons really did make a difference and were terribly important, artillery is still critical on this battlefield. Artillery is always critical on any battlefield. There are certain lessons that will be learned of that sort.

The basic lessons are broadly strategic. First, the lesson we hope others learn is that this was really a stupid idea and military force does not solve your problems for you easily. You can get yourself into a lot of trouble if you convince yourself that you are going to have a decisive win in a few days. It is a lesson we hope other countries will learn. We have had our own difficult lessons to learn as well on those grounds.

Secondly, logistics are always important. Most wars of any length are logistics wars and this is no exception. The Russians prioritised elite units, armour and paras, did not put enough into logistics, and suffered accordingly. It is a big drag on them.

Third is command. Arguably, the Ukrainian experience validates western concepts of mission command, delegated authority and so on. The Russian system has been too rigid and cumbersome. There are all these stories about the forces doing the same thing over and over again and getting battered each time because they did not get new orders. There are lessons to be learned about command.

For the UK, there are a lot of things that we have talked about already, especially the consumption of materiel. What happened is in line with the Integrated Review. You cannot say that the Integrated Review did not prepare us potentially for something like this and, to be fair, the UK response has been pretty good, but it was a political commitment, made before the invasion began, that made the difference. It was the use of intelligence to warn of what could happen. It was the readiness to send systems to Ukraine before the battle began. These were the things that really made the difference, and these are political-strategic judgments that you cannot plan for in advance. They are things that you need to think about.

The hardest thing for us to get our heads around is the implications of a Russian loss, and it is too early to start talking about that perhaps. They are not going to win, but we are not sure yet if they will lose. It may be a bit of a draw, but they could lose. A lot of what we have been thinking and talking about throughout the West in terms of defence has been these two great powers challenging us, Russia and China. What happens if one of them looks a much-diminished power and in the future looks inward? It could go a variety of ways. That is why it is too early to start drawing conclusions from that.

This will have an enormous impact over the long term, because our sense of where the real challenges of European security may change may be as substantial as those that took place in the decade from the late 1980s to

the late 1990s. We started off seeing the evaporation of one great threat and then ended up fighting in places where we never expected to fight. We are waiting, in some ways, to see what sort of new security order emerges out of all this.

Professor Patrick Porter: On a note of congratulation to the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper, what has happened in Ukraine has vindicated some of what it said. The emphasis on intelligence, reconnaissance and Five Eyes has been lethal to Russia's invading force. The ability to fix, find and destroy or disable Russia's advancing capabilities in time with the co-operation of allies has been a very impressive co-ordinated effort.

In other respects, there are some gaps here. I remember something was said at the time to support the Integrated Review not so long ago. To quote from the MoD, "Capability will be less defined by numbers of people and platforms than by information-centric technologies, automation and a culture of innovation and experimentation". That is not untrue; it is a half-truth. Scale counts. Firepower, logistics and materiel count. Numbers of people and platforms count. Who thought we would be living in a time when Russia is running out of trained personnel who can carry on a conflict?

There are some other dangers here. It is a deeply political thing to ask defences and defence intellectuals to interpret the lessons of a recent war, because they tend to try to find the things that suit their arguments. People like me will tell you about the huge importance of artillery and firepower, and others about the huge importance of combat teams. It is trying to work out the optimal effectiveness of what combined arms system has worked between small teams and large teams, and between light weaponry, heavy weaponry and intelligence. The jury is still out to a certain extent, because we do not know everything that has happened.

It has posed a challenge, though, to what was becoming an over-fashionable idea that the future of warfare, in a sense, is almost emptied of the battle space, and it is about information, narrative, sub-threshold mischief and that sort of thing. Those are things that happen when your deterrence system is working, but this was a case where deterrence did not work and this is another problem with the Integrated Review. There was an assumption that involvement in and support for Ukraine would help deter an invasion. It did not.

You can argue that we should have done more earlier, but that may well have drawn an earlier invasion. Russia has taken that risk not just because it has miscalculated, although it has, but because it has calculated that Ukraine matters intensely and it is willing to run certain risks. We have to think again about what we are trying to deter, where we are trying to deter it and on what basis we are making those gambles.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: You said earlier that we have a two-hemisphere strategy with a one-hemisphere navy. You have both referred to the position of China and the gravitational pull of Asia. Indeed, in your

excellent paper that you circulated to us in advance, *Escalators and Quagmires*, Sir Lawrence, you said that President Xi must already be wondering if he backed the wrong horse. I wonder whether you could explore that a little more for us. Given what you said to us, Professor Porter, just before about Taiwan, do you think the situation is more dangerous or less dangerous? You talked about engagement or embroilment, the danger of being sucked in, and the international alliances we have. You have not mentioned AUKUS as such. Where does Ukraine leave us in that context?

Sir Lawrence Freedman: It follows from my previous answer, which is to see how this ends, but if it ends as it seems to be going at the moment, it is a big deal for China. They bet on Putin. Xi met him in Beijing a couple of weeks before the invasion took place. Did he tell them what he was planning to do? Well, it is bad if he did and, in some ways, bad if he did not.

What has happened will appear pretty alarming, because it is a reminder, which is a good reminder, as I said before, of the pitfalls of military operations and how they do not always turn out as you expect. I think it will produce tension between Russia and China. If this does leave Russia as a diminished power, China is a very big presence on its border. It was not that long ago that one of the dominant features of international politics was tension between Russia and China. Russia had numerous divisions in its far east. That issue could well re-emerge.

The other question is what it says about American leadership. We have not talked much about the Americans. That was damaged first by President Trump's indifference to alliances and then, although President Biden was more in favour of them, he did not really handle the withdrawal from Afghanistan particularly well. That was a factor that encouraged a view of western decline. President Biden has stepped up with this crisis, has shown leadership, is organising allies and is saying the right things, so it is a positive after some negatives about the role generally of the western alliance.

When we think about Indo-Pacific, I do not see much point in us thinking about it other than with the Americans. There are things we can do. AUKUS is a good example. We are demonstrating that we are good allies of the Americans and can work closely with them. If the Americans are not interested in something, whether in America or Europe, there is not a lot that we can do.

As this crisis subsides, the China issue will come back into focus, but it will be a different world in which this happens, and you can already see signs of pressure on Xi, which is not helped by his Covid response, within the Chinese system as to whether this autocracy is producing all the right answers to the problems that China faces. A lot of people will be looking for not necessarily great or massive change in Beijing, but a certain reappraisal of how they have comported themselves internationally in recent years and whether they can be quite as confident that the future is theirs, as they seemed to be not so long ago.

Professor Patrick Porter: I have some darker thoughts on this one. On the one hand, it is true that Russia, as a diminished, depleted power, is less dangerous in a direct sense. It has less ability to menace NATO, et cetera. On the other hand, the increasing lop-sidedness of the Beijing-Moscow axis, that tightening relationship of co-operation and convergence against a common enemy, means that in other respects the problem gets worse. Russia is almost forced to become a subordinate client state, supplier and source of raw materials to China. While China is still growing and is still launching a bid for hegemony in Asia, and while there is a potential crisis in Asia, at the same time Russia still has enough legacy ability not to overrun countries or water its horses in the Thames, but to cause a crisis on NATO's eastern flank.

It will be very hard, in practice, to have multiple crises at the same time on NATO's eastern flank and across the Taiwan strait. I do not need to tell this audience about bandwidth and the difficulty of dealing with more than one thing at a time in a crisis. At the same time, of course, we have this economic cost-of-living crisis at home. Russia still has the ability to act as spoiler in that sense, and, at the same time, it strengthens China's position.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Time, as ever, has beaten us, but I propose, if our witnesses would agree, to ask Baroness Rawlings and Lord Campbell to provide their questions to our clerk, Dr Amy Creese, and then invite you to give a written answer so that we do not miss out on that contribution.

Thank you very much indeed for our session this morning. You have provided us with some thoughts, some of which, as you say, we may have asked you questions on too early, but you have still been able to divine some of the paths we will need to tread down when we are taking further evidence. We do not expect to complete our evidence taking until the autumn. When politicians say that, it is flexible; it may be nearer the winter, but it will be an in-depth inquiry. Thank you very much indeed.