



International Relations and Defence Committee

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

Wednesday 11 May 2022

11.40 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. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 16 - 21

Witnesses

I: Professor Jamie Gaskarth, Professor of Foreign Policy and International Relations, Open University; Dr Ben Wilkinson, Deputy Director (Defence), RAND Europe.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Jamie Gaskarth and Dr Ben Wilkinson.

Q16 The Chair: Good morning. I welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Committee Professor Jamie Gaskarth, professor of foreign policy and international relations at the Open University, and Dr Ben Wilkinson, deputy director, defence, at RAND Europe. Welcome and thank you very much for joining us for our second day taking evidence for our inquiry, "Defence concepts and capabilities: from aspiration to reality".

At this stage, I always remind both our guest witnesses and committee members that the session is on the record, broadcast and transcribed. I also remind members, as ever, that, before they ask their question, they should declare any relevant interest. I always begin by asking a rather wide question and then turn to my colleagues for more detailed questions thereafter, and I do anticipate that, during our one-hour session, when my colleagues ask their question, they may wish to follow that up immediately with a supplementary. If there is time at the end, I will invite colleagues who have not had a chance to ask questions to put a question if necessary.

The first question is a more general one. To what extent does the Defence Command Paper respond to the goals set by the Integrated Review? What is your opinion of those goals and the response of the Defence Command Paper in fulfilling them?

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: Thank you for the invitation to speak today. I really appreciate it. One of the things I wanted to talk about was how the Defence Command Paper and Integrated Review (IR) marry up, which is the third question you put to me there. There is some effort in the document to explicitly refer to some of the goals set out in the IR and then to apply them in the Defence Command Paper, but there is a series of problems. Unfortunately, as an academic, you have to highlight the problems first.

First, it makes this commitment. It says, "Previous reviews have been over-ambitious and underfunded leaving forces that were overstretched", but then it does not drop any ambitions in the Defence Command Paper. It drops only capabilities. Secondly, it does not explicitly prioritise. It talks about the Euro-Atlantic area being of primary importance. When you think about your list of priorities, home defence would logically come first, but it often comes last in most of the discussions and the lists that are put forward.

Thirdly, it does not really make any fundamental changes. It is saying that the world is very different, but what is new in the Defence Command Paper that you would not have put in in 2015? There is a bit more on technology than in the past. There is a bit more on information warfare, but most of it could have been written in 2015, so it is not really a radical assessment of our defence. It is moving the chairs and just saying that things are slightly different. Most of it, actually, could have been written

previously. It could have undertaken a far more rigorous rethink of defence, including areas that, maybe, you would want to move to civilian control rather than keep in the purview of the military.

Fourthly, there is a bit of an uneven understanding of what the missions are of the services. The Royal Navy comes out of it with a pretty clear sense of itself. It will be the vanguard of global Britain, and we can appreciate what it is going to do and what it will contribute to NATO and the wider world. With the RAF, similarly, there is a logic to what it is doing in terms of the capabilities. You can understand that it is investing in high technology and prioritising defence of the homeland, but then, also, it is able to make a contribution abroad.¹

The Army is much more confused, really. What is the Army for? It is rather confusing about what it is supposed to do. In the previous session Patrick talked about us being pentathletes, but we are almost decathletes there, because it talks about nine things: disaster relief, civil contingencies, defence diplomacy, training of forces abroad, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, expeditionary warfare, counterinsurgency and peer-to-peer warfighting. There is no way you can do that with 72,500 full-time troops.

Last year, the British Army was involved in 39 operations in 46 countries. Even those who have been previously advocating this drawdown of troop numbers are now supposedly publicly saying that it is a bad idea, so there is a disconnect really between the suggestion that this is a fully funded review for the first time and that we will be able to do what we say we are going to do, and then a whole series of aspirations that the capabilities do not necessarily match up with. There are other things I want to talk about in terms of durability and things, but I have waffled on a little bit in my first answer.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: The precise answer to the question is how well it responds to the IR, and it does a reasonable job, actually. It takes the four objectives from the Integrated Review and has a plan for following through, although I take Jamie's points about some of the inconsistencies there. One thing to think about is how the premises of the IR, the DCP, the integrated operating concept, all these documents taken together, fit the current situation we are in.

Patrick covered this in the previous session, but a close reading of it says that deterrents will work for anything that is kinetic and for anything that is conventional warfare. Beneath that, we need to do more on all these sub-threshold arrangements and challenges. That is where the problem comes. The focus is on sub-threshold to far too great a degree, and the deterrent concept at the top of it feels, to me, a bit weak. The problem is

¹ Additional note from Professor Gaskarth: The decision to cut the RAF's strategic lift capacity is one area that didn't make sense. It sets the UK apart in terms of capabilities and allows us to be a niche provider to a whole set of operations from humanitarian ones such as aid and disaster relief to traditional hard security ones like arms supply and rapid deployment.

how these premises, the core pillars, of the IR stand up in today's world. There is time to review that, but that is where the issue lies.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for that introduction. I turn first, for the more detailed questions, to Baroness Blackstone.

Q17 **Baroness Blackstone:** You have already identified the fact that the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper have a very ambitious agenda. In that context, if it is as ambitious as it is, it will cost a lot of money. There is a huge amount of expenditure involved. I wonder whether, a year in, given that resources are certainly not infinite, there are some things that we should not be doing and other things that we should be giving great priority to. It would be helpful to the committee if you could set out what you think you should be stopped, how and why.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: This is the core of this in many ways. When you go through the capability requirements, I do not see what you can easily drop. Maybe there are some tweaks, such as the purchase of F-35s. We have committed to getting 138; we currently have 74 or plan to get 74. I do not know whether anybody ever considered that we would get the remainder, but perhaps a reduction there is one possibility, along with maybe some of these land systems, but, as discussed previously, the Army is in desperate need of these joined-up systems. I do not know whether there is wriggle room over Ajax, for instance. That is something to look into. For me, although resources are not infinite, I cannot see what you can easily drop, and it is not necessarily affordable at the moment, so it is about finding more resource, not about reduction in capability. That applies to personnel as well.

An area that is really interesting to look into, and one of the core thrusts of the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper, is strategic advantage through science and tech. A big deal is made about R&D expenditure of £15 billion across the piece and then £6.6 billion for defence. I had a quick look at what companies spend on R&D, and that puts us behind Samsung alone for general R&D. One of the areas that defence needs to look at again is this defence R&D bit. We are quite low down, and more investment there would enable us to have that S&T strategic advantage. I find it difficult to see where we can make cuts. Indeed, I think we should be going in the opposite direction.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: There are four areas where you could, if you wanted to, change things, but it is whether you want to or not. I would not necessarily advocate it. I am playing devil's advocate here. One of them is the Special Forces' role as a backstop for domestic terrorist incidents and whether you hand that over completely to the police and civilian control, and just say that they are not going to do that anymore. Another is to create a civil defence force that responds to contingencies and not have the Army do that anymore but have a civilian force. The reserves are the ones who are being allocated to step up to this anyway as part of Future Soldier, so maybe you have a separate force that deals with floods, pandemics and things and you do not involve the Army anymore.

Another option is whether you just forget the idea of the UK taking part in UN peacekeeping. Personally, I think it is really sad that we do not take more of a part in UN peacekeeping, but it warranted one paragraph in the Defence Command Paper. The idea that the UK would commit substantial troop numbers to UN peacekeeping is never taken seriously. We deployed 300 to Mali, but there is no way we are going to give thousands—3,000 or so—in the way the Chinese, for instance, have been contributing recently. Maybe that is something that we have to accept we are not doing really and, therefore, drop it.

The most controversial idea is heavy armour. There is a lot of commentary, some of it misinformed, about the Ukraine crisis saying that heavy armour is now like the horse and is over. There is a big debate about that. Anthony King, a very excellent scholar, has been arguing that heavy armour is hugely important, that you need it in urban warfare and that there will come a phase in any conflict where you will need heavy armour to take and hold places. Is the UK going to do that? Do we have a credible heavy armour force? The aspiration is to have 148 Challenger 3 tanks. Russia lost more than that in the first three weeks of the Ukraine conflict, so, if you are actually going to fight a peer-to-peer conflict, you would probably lose that force very quickly and it would just be over. Then, that force is a tripwire really.

When we are thinking about defence, we are almost harking back to some of those debates in the 1950s and 1960s: if you have such small troop numbers and very small capabilities, very quickly all you have to escalate to are nuclear forces. Then the question mark is whether you start moving towards tactical nuclear forces and that kind of thing, rather than relying on conventional. There are some things they could drop. I would not necessarily advocate any of them individually.

In terms of what they should focus on, we knew this already, but the Ukraine crisis has underpinned the huge importance of drones, airpower and electronic warfare, including countermeasures. The Defence Command Paper does not talk too much about anti-access area denial capacities countering unmanned aerial systems. Those kinds of things are going to be very important in the future.

Missile defence is underplayed. There is a section very briefly in the Defence Command Paper where it talks about hypersonic glide vehicles as a threat that we would find very difficult to counter. There is no countermeasure or plan for dealing with that in the paper itself. In March this year, it was revealed in the US that the UK is investing in missile defence radar, which may come online in 2029 or so. Do we need to start thinking about missile defence and countermeasures much more seriously than we have been?

Baroness Blackstone: Our economy is under a huge amount of pressure and the revenue that the Treasury has to spend will be very taxed, given the huge amounts of domestic expenditure required in relation to levelling up and the climate change agenda. There are a lot of other areas of expenditure where you are going to find that public

expectation will influence politicians in what they have to do. In this context, would you both accept that it is therefore unwise, in the defence world, not to have some kind of fallback position, were the MoD to find that it is not going to get further increases in expenditure?

Dr Wilkinson, you suggest that nothing should be cut and that we are going to go on needing all this money, citing areas where we need more expenditure. I just want to push you a bit from a political point of view.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: There are probably three elements to that. First, I do not particularly advocate an increase in expenditure over the next couple of years. There are domestic pressures and, according to the MoD, it is comfortable with the budget for the next two years, which gives us a little bit of breathing room.

Secondly, it strikes me that an opportunity of the Ukraine crisis is to show that defence issues are not divorced from domestic issues. This is something we see time and time again. Ukraine shows that there are direct links back to the UK, not only in energy costs but in the cost of wheat, et cetera. There is a piece of messaging to be done here to the UK population that these foreign wars overseas matter back at home and contribute to the cost of living crisis in their own right. By not funding defence, you are not keeping money for domestic issues. These are at-home issues anyway.

Thirdly, it is not so much that I am advocating for a massive increase in defence expenditure because nothing is cuttable. Quite a lot of the money is already allocated, and then you have these problems of inflation at the moment and so on. We are storing up problems further down the road if we do not look at it.

Then there is a tweak in the middle of that. I advocate for defence R&D expenditure partly because it has knock-on effects in the economy anyway. There is the prosperity agenda. It is worth thinking about how defence can contribute to an increase in economic prosperity at home as well. There are different dimensions of it. It is not a simple trade-off between spending and the cost of living or levelling up at home and defence overseas. They are one and the same issue bound up in different ways.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: You are absolutely right, but, in a way, the force posture we have at the moment is a huge compromise between not wanting to spend too much on defence and wanting to still have full-spectrum capability. A lot of this is really bare. The Navy has invested very wisely in recent years and seems very capable, but still, if you think back to the Falklands, some 20 ships or so were damaged in 1982. Six of them were sunk. Four frigates were lost. We have 19 escort ships now. If you were actually involved in a peer-to-peer warfighting situation, you would have very little capability there to endure beyond a very short period. You are talking about very short periods of conflict.

Your argument can go either way. We could say, actually, that some of these capabilities are just paper tigers and maybe the argument there is about heavy armour. "This is not a real capability, so let's drop it and concentrate on what we really can do". On the other hand, I have some sympathy with Patrick and Ben, in that we are now living in a very dangerous world and facing a costly foe. A peer-to-peer conflict is more expensive than trying to counter terrorists, because both they and you have very high-end kit, so it does cost more money. There is a strong argument for at least 3% of GDP on defence now, on the basis of the environment we are living in rather than the one we would like.

Q18 Lord Teverson: One of the areas that you did not say we might cut back on is our global aspirations and tilt to the Indo-Pacific, which figures quite strongly in both the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper. In fact, it is one of the ones that are highlighted there. Should we perhaps dump that one and save ourselves a bit of a potential problem in that part of the world?

What should our defence priorities actually be in Asia, and how should they be balanced against the defence priorities in Europe, which is supposed to be where we are most concerned with territorial defence, with our planned cuts? Are we really opening out something that is all potential risk in the future for little effect? Should this be something that we get rid of, or is it really an important part of making sure that Britain contributes to global security, which will focus more and more on Asia?

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: With the exception of the carrier strike force, a lot of our presence in the Indo-Pacific is quite cheap. It is a river-class boat visiting Singapore or popping over to Australia and that kind of stuff. That is not going to break the bank. The freedom navigation tasks are very important because we are so reliant on trade and seaways remaining open, so the Gulf and the South China Sea are strategically important to us.

There is an argument as to whether we can burden-share even more. Can we share some of this capacity and the costs? Would France be interested in an arrangement with one of our aircraft carriers? That might be a bit controversial, but do we need two where they only have one? If that is not available on a regular basis, can we pool our resources much more closely with some key partners and try to repair some of the damage from the AUKUS announcement and that kind of thing.

There could be an argument about some of the global hubs. Do we need them? We have a significant presence in Kenya, but the trouble is that an awful lot of conflict and the issues we deal with politically domestically such as migration emerge from sub-Saharan Africa, so there is a logic to having a presence in these countries and being able to project influence. The cost of the Indo-Pacific tilt is quite small really and reasonably affordable, I would suggest.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: I broadly agree. The carrier strike group occasionally looks like a luxury. I am not saying that it is a luxury we cannot afford,

but it does look a bit like a luxury. For me, the Indo-Pacific tilt works at its best when it creates partnerships in the Indo-Pacific that we can then utilise. AUKUS is a very good example of this, but I know there are deepening ties with Japan too, and that plays back to this defence R&D bit. One way we will get S&T and strategic advantage, and then capability advantage, in the future will be from those partnerships. They are not costly, so it would be silly to lose those in an attempt to save costs or effort when they are reasonably low on both fronts and yet yield quite high and beneficial results.

The carrier strike group occasionally looks like a bit of a luxury, but then it went all the way through the Euro-Atlantic on the way. It went in that way, came back and did lots of stuff along the way. I do not know. As was said in the previous session, with the Indo-Pacific tilt the UK does the best it can there when it partners with the US, and when it covers the European theatre and allows the US to get on with the Indo-Pacific bit. For me, there could be a bit of recalibration here that effectively says, "We'll handle the European theatre while you deal with that and, if you need us, we'll go there", but I am not sure we save that much by reducing it, to be honest. It is not a happy phrase in carrier strike group terms, but they are sunk costs anyway. They are there, so it would make sense to use them.

Lord Teverson: Perhaps I could come back on the partnership area. One of the areas of the defence review that particularly interested me was part 5.23, on page 32, which is about India. It says, "Our partnership with India is a key pillar of the UK's tilt to the Indo-Pacific. We will establish a maritime partnership with India in support of mutual security", et cetera. I wondered how you see that India relationship. India is a member of the Quad. The Quad does not directly involve us, but it is a member. As we have seen from the Ukrainian issue, although it has all its border issues with China, which is the motivator, it is very jealous of its geopolitical independence in many ways. I wonder how you see the future and whether you think that is realistic as being useful in the future for that tilt.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: There are two parts to it. I take a historical view, and there are two aspects of the history that are still influencing our relationship to India. One of them is our colonial past and India's historical attachment to non-alignment, so it has always been slightly resistant to being a consistent reliable partner with the West because it wants to hedge its bets all the time.

Part of the reason why it wants to hedge its bets all the time is decisions that we made in the 1960s about defence sharing. In the 1960s, India wanted Phantom aircraft, and submarines. They asked the Royal Navy if we would lend them a submarine so that they could train on it, and then they were going to order British submarines. We refused. The Navy said, "No, we're not sharing our technology", so they went to the Soviets and got Soviet submarines. The US would not share Phantom technology, so they went to the Soviets and got Soviet fighter aircraft, so these things

do not come from nowhere in some ways. There is a reason why India is so closely reliant on some of this Russian equipment. These are decade-long decisions that we made.

The question is whether you are willing to change that relationship, because you may face the same issue that they faced in the 1960s. Do you think India is a reliable enough partner that you would share sensitive technology with it in the defence realm? If the answer is no, it creates a barrier there and a problem about how far you would be able to work with it, particularly on naval assets but also on others.

India buys some western kit anyway. It is buying fighter aircraft and these kinds of things now, so it is not as marked as it was in the 1960s, but there is still that question mark. Presumably, you would want a closer relationship because you want the UK to have more influence on the Quad and to leverage that network. Also, you are trying to bring India within your orbit. As soon as you start to do that, you start to push Pakistan away slightly, but then it is about whether you see it as a reliable partner long term and whether that is sustainable. The history of it creates problems there.

Logically, you would think that Britain would have a very strong relationship with India. It is the largest diaspora in the UK, and the UK has really strong links with India on a person-to-person basis, so you would think there is potential there, but history keeps getting in the way.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: I defer to Jamie on this. I am not a huge India expert, so I will pass.

Q19 **Lord Stirrup:** Morning, gentlemen. The Defence Command Paper places a great deal of emphasis on challenges below the threshold of open warfare and the use of non-lethal means to influence and secure objectives. At the same time, of course, we are now seeing in the Ukraine large-scale high-intensity warfare with the open threat of nuclear escalation, although, even in that region, we saw sub-threshold activity below the start of large-scale open warfare. Are we getting the balance right in our emphasis in both defensive and offensive terms on the so-called grey zone versus conventional capabilities? Are we doing too little, too much, or are we Goldilocks? Are we even defining what the balance should be?

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: I was a bit bemused when the Army went into this in a big way, because I was thinking, "Are they the best people to be conducting information warfare, really?" On the other hand, I will hold my hands up. They have been very good in the early stages in the Ukraine crisis. Some of those Defence Intelligence updates were very effective at putting across the Ukrainian and the UK position on this, so it paid off in that sense. Maybe it pays off when you are specifically talking about military affairs, because they have the technical knowhow and the intelligence to work out what is going on on a battlefield, communicate it and rebut false information.

On a bigger scale, if information warfare is something that you want to do as a whole-of-government approach, the more logical place for that would be an outcrop of GCHQ, the National Cyber Security Centre or these sorts of places—a civilianised effort to change the information, narratives and that kind of thing. I was wrong in the sense that I underestimated what 77th Brigade and Defence Intelligence could do in the Ukraine crisis. They have been quite effective.

In a more long-term way, again, if you think defence budgets need to be reoriented to priorities, that could be civilianised without too much complication. This is not having a gross effect on the national budget, but it is changing what the Army and the Armed Forces do so that they can prioritise the most important areas. Your vulnerability in information terms is about the strength of your society, how much public trust there is and how much social capital you have. I keep boring people with the William Gladstone quote that the first priority of foreign policy is good government at home, and that is your best defence in the information war really: having strong institutions and public trust.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: It is an interesting question about balance as the core bit of it. Do we have the balance right? Perhaps, in the papers, the emphasis on the sub-threshold grey zone is, as we have seen, perhaps a bit too heavy, but not a great deal. You can understand why. The reason for that emphasis was that the premise of the Integrated Review and of British defence policy for the last 30 years is that our deterrent effects will work and will prevent close-to-home conventional warfare.

For me, the question is not so much about balance, which is probably a little too far down the sub-threshold road, but more about what deterrence looks like in the world now. The MoD started some work on modern deterrence seven or eight years ago. That petered out a little. One thing to be done, if one were looking at refreshing some of these things, would be to reinvigorate that. What does modern deterrence mean? The US has just done its integrated deterrence concept, which is very neat but seems to imply deterrence of all things at all times in all places. I am not quite sure how you implement that. There is a spot for the UK to think a little bit about how it deters rather than about the balance between sub-threshold and above threshold, which is slightly a dodge to your question.

Lord Stirrup: Yes. Could I come back on that? Professor Gaskarth mentioned, not just in this context but in the contexts of other capabilities, moving some of them out of the military into the civilian domain. As an aside, I would challenge whether that actually saves any money because the capabilities still have to be paid for wherever they are situated. If they are things you are not doing now, there will have to be some investment made in them.

A more important question, for me, since it is inevitable that some of these issues, particularly on the sub-threshold capabilities, will be delivered by many bodies and agencies across society, is how well and how effectively these things are co-ordinated. Wherever they are

situated, how good at the moment are the UK Government and their subsidiary bodies at delivering coherent, strategically directed effort in all these various areas across a range of government bodies and departments?

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: The difficulty of answering that question is that any response sounds political.

Lord Stirrup: It is a political question.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: I know; it is. Going back to the previous evidence session, you can criticise confusion among the MoD or military planners about what we are supposed to do, but ultimately that confusion comes from politicians and maybe even, indirectly, from the general public. They just do not have a clear idea about what they want the Army to do, which therefore feeds into politicians and down into our planning.

There are obvious contradictions in how government behaves abroad and how it has responded to the Ukraine crisis in military terms versus how it has responded on visas, displacement refugee schemes and that kind of thing. That has a negative effect on information warfare. You are getting a lot of great publicity because you have supplied all these NLAWs, but you are getting a lot of negative publicity because you are not doing proper diligence checks for refugees' families going into the UK and you are not actually letting enough in at speed when other countries are. That is just a function of government. All Governments will have contradictory policies on some level, because they have competing priorities quite often. That is not a good answer, I am afraid, but that is the reality.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: It is the Integrated Review, and it talks about cross-government. That is a very laudable concept and one that is extremely difficult to pull off in practice. That said, in the circumstances, the government have done about as well as I could have imagined them doing. The Government have many different departments with many different emphases. Take China, for example. DCMS views China differently from Her Majesty's Treasury, the MoD and the FCDO, and that will always be the case. You cannot unpick that, so there will never quite be a perfectly joined-up, pan-government approach that does not have slightly self-refuting bits or bits where this gives you bad publicity and that gives you good publicity.

A completely cross-government, pan-government, whole-of-government approach is an ambition, but I do not see how it can ever be perfectly pulled off. Maybe I am pessimistic.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: I would want a huge amount of challenge when it comes to the defence discussion, with some people arguing one thing and some people arguing another, and much greater freedom within the Armed Forces to challenge prevailing opinion and come up with new solutions. That is why the US system is very good in some ways and why they are very good at learning. They will make the mistake, but they will learn very quickly because there is a huge amount of challenge, but

you have to accept that if there are lots of voices criticising or contradicting government policy, that can be used by your enemies as part of information warfare. Sometimes, you have to accept a vulnerability and say it is worth it to have the challenge even if other people can say, "Look, you're not united on this point", "Look, you haven't got this", or whatever.

Q20 Baroness Rawlings: To go back to deterrence, do you think that European defence and deterrence should be redefined now in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine? What do you expect to see in NATO's next strategic concept? I was thinking that perhaps you might also address widening the impact of the discussion now with Finland and Sweden's possible new position.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: I am happy to start with the NATO bit. I am not sure what is coming in the strategic concept, but I would like to see three things in it. One is NATO getting much more involved in the thorny issue of societal resilience, which does play to the deterrent part. Traditionally, NATO has not seen it as a thing for it to worry about but for national Governments to worry about, but something needs to be joined up across NATO members on societal resilience. I would like to see that in the next strategic concept.

There is an important piece on crisis management, rapid response and how NATO responds to crises. I am reasonably certain that we will see lots on that, but I would definitely like to see much more on a set of human security issues and the impact of climate change, et cetera, on security. I imagine those will be core elements of it, because it will look ahead for the next 20-odd years. Can I check what the precise question was on Finland?

Baroness Rawlings: How do you see Finland and Sweden evolving and their new possible position? What is your view on the effect it might have on Russia, and will it make a difference to our position in NATO? They are big numbers.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: There are probably two ways of looking at this. In the very short term, once we hear for definite that they are both applying, it has been agreed and has been ratified, there is probably a six to 10-week period there where I expect to see reasonably significant Russian activity, particularly against Finland. There might be some cyber activity against Sweden, but they are pretty good at handling that type of thing, so there will be a period where it is choppy.

In the longer term, both are not aligned, but their foreign policy sort of says where they are. This is not going to be a sudden change from Russia. I do not think it will dramatically affect its calculations. That said, Finland provides another 1,200 miles of border with Russia, so it will double, effectively. I am sure there will be plenty of bolstering in Kaliningrad, so it will be choppy in the short term, but I do not think it will necessarily be quite so much in the long term.

One thing I keep reflecting on is that when Finland joins, if Finland joins, it might rapidly become one of the most important powers in NATO because of the size of its armed forces. It has a series of capabilities that NATO will find extremely useful. There is a question for NATO about how it utilises that and how it deals with Finland suddenly becoming the second most important member of NATO. It needs to be planned out a bit. That period of trying to get the ratification done will be the weak bit, so trying to get that done as quickly as possible and preparing ourselves for chopiness is key to it.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: Depending on how the Ukraine war plays out, it is making us rethink the Russian conventional threat. There are two directions this can go. You can look at it and think that we completely overestimated their capabilities and, therefore, they are not as much of a threat anymore, so we can downgrade our defence a little, take it easy, make some cuts and depreciate this and that.

On the other hand, if Russia's threat has been downgraded and it is having significant losses in Ukraine, it will learn from that and, therefore, it will be a more serious threat in a decade's time. The slight danger there is a little bit of complacency about the idea that they are nowhere near as much of a threat to continental Europe as we thought and that, therefore, we can downgrade an awful lot of this. They will be going in the completely opposite direction. Because of the lead times of defence procurement, it takes seven to 10 years. By the time they are increasing in their threat, you already have to have made the decision in the next few years to invest in capabilities that you think are going to be really important.

When it comes to deterrence, what happened in Ukraine was not an entire failure of deterrence because there are two parts to deterrence. You are saying to somebody, "If you do this, you will get punished severely". If they do that, one part of deterrence has failed because they have done what you did not want them to do, but then, if you punish them severely, the second part of deterrence has held. You have made clear that, if they do stuff that you do not like, they suffer severely, and so, next time, they might rethink that or take your threat much more seriously.

It is a 50% failure of deterrence. If you were really seriously thinking that you could deter Russia from invading Ukraine if it wanted to, that was always going to be a stretch. Actually, there is still an important element of deterrence that has held there. Having the most sophisticated weapons and being able to deploy them, and having a defence industrial base that is able to feed conflict at that level, is an element of deterrence. Famously, Stalin used to say that he was more worried about the sheer scale of the US industrial capacity than he was American nuclear weapons. He looked at the Second World War, and they were able to supply three different theatres of operations and all their allies. That kind of capacity, rather than just necessarily nuclear weapons, is in itself hugely impressive.

The question mark is what you do with European defence and deterrence now. In particular, NATO's capacity to deter has held strong, and it has been demonstrated that, so far, Russia has not really wanted to attack any NATO forces. He has held a very clear line, and NATO has maintained that line and been able to do that, so that is very important. That is a success and needs to be reinforced, but it would be a question of not underestimating Russia and making sure that you are still taking it seriously as a foe. It is really the only serious state threat that the UK faces. You can talk about China as a systemic competitor, but the facts of geography mean that it is really Russia that is a serious state competitor rather than China. Acknowledging the success of deterrence as it is functioning at the moment and still taking Russia seriously as a threat would be the two key lessons for me.

Baroness Rawlings: Could I just delve a bit further into the deterrence? We had a very good paper by somebody called Siegfried Hecker regarding deterrence, and I would like to know what you think. He says we have no more co-operation with the Russians. In essence, the Russians say, "Now nuclear weapons are no longer just for strategic use. They are weapons to make sure that there is no major threat to Russia, and they are no longer just used to counter weapons of mass destruction, but they may now be used to counter threats to our country". Even if it is not true, they say so. We do not seem to be using the deterrence argument as strongly. Biden has even said, "If they used nuclear weapons, we would find alternative routes". We do not seem to be using that deterrence argument.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: We have stronger faith in our conventional forces, maybe. That is what it comes down to. In the 1950s and 1960s, the western defence establishment had a real worry that the Red Army would just sweep across Europe, so we were very reliant on nuclear forces to counterbalance the conventional threat. We were investing in them. There is an ironic reversal now in some ways. Maybe, if Russia does not have faith in being able to act conventionally effectively, it has to resort to nuclear weapons or at least nuclear threats in order to do so.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: It is an interesting point. This is what I said earlier. There is something to be done on what deterrence in the modern world looks like for the UK and perhaps more widely for NATO. One of the things about the Ukraine conflict is that it has brought to the fore a sense of defence dilemmas that have been around since the end of the Second World War about balance in forces and whether you go for disruptive technology. None of these are new questions. Every time we go through these defence dilemmas, we have to revisit deterrence because it sits at the heart of it. I keep on saying "dusted off". It implies that it is a book on a shelf, but it needs to be revisited to see what it looks like in the modern world.

I had a quick look, as I do for fun and games, at the new chapter, which is the 2002 addition to the 1998 review. As the world seems quite radically different from the premises when the IR started, which was

obviously pre pandemic and then it was published during the pandemic, it might be worth looking at what happened in 1998 when Lord Robertson led the review. The 1998 review does not mention Islamic terrorism a great deal, but in 2001 obviously 9/11 happened, and they did the extra subsequent chapter.

I wonder whether, in a few months' time, bearing in mind that the world has changed, we may want to do a supplementary chapter—I know there is resistance to this in the Ministry of Defence—just to tweak things a little bit and recalibrate. That would seem to me to be quite a neat way of keeping the broad premises of what is a good review, very ambitious with possibly some economic implications to that, and a command paper that follows it and says quite specifically what defence wants to do. Again, maybe there is some recalibration there. By then, you will have the future operating concept too, and you could have a White Paper that acts as a wrapper and slightly repurposes things.

I had a quick look at the 2002 review, and I strongly recommend reading page 3. I will dig it out in a second. It has a set of questions. If you take out maybe two of them, which are about terrorism, all the questions they asked in 2002 are just as relevant now in 2022. It is fascinating. You can just have a quick look at it, and it shows you that all these dilemmas have come back. The deterrence and what it means to the world we live in is just another one of those dilemmas, which is a long answer to a way of dodging what should be in that review of modern deterrence, but it is just one of those things.

- Q21 **Baroness Fall:** Thank you for a fascinating discussion. I want to turn to alliances. We had the Trump Administration turning away from multinationalism and then what felt like a return to that but disappointment in Afghanistan. Do you feel that Ukraine has brought those alliances back? Are we going to survive what will be an increasingly pressurised environment, especially in Europe, as these sanctions really begin to bite? We have America, the rest of NATO, the European wing, France under Macron and Germany. Do you see as the positive side of this terrible situation that that alliance is healthy again? I am interested in your views, especially as oil and gas really begin to bite coming into the winter.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: There are a few things that this current crisis points to and some broader trends. One of them is that we have to sort out our relationship with the European Union. It has been a lot of fun annoying the French over the last couple of years, but it has come to the point where we need to sit down a little bit and think about how we are seriously going to co-operate with the European Union on foreign policy. It was a bit of a surprise to everybody how distanced we have become on the foreign and defence angle. There was a lot of good will and expectation on all sides that the UK would probably be an associate member of the CFSP² and the CSDP³, and a constructive defence

² The Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union

³ The Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union

contributor to some of the operations the EU is doing. That has all gone by the wayside, but it needs to be resurrected now.

When you have those meetings and the EU is discussing the Ukraine crisis with Biden, the UK should be in the room there because we are an important player in these crises, so we should be trying to pursue an associate relationship with the CFSP, as well as greater co-ordination with France. I know it is very difficult, and personalities have stood in the way of this on both sides, but there are so few differences in security and defence priorities between France and Britain. Maybe there is a slightly greater emphasis on the Sahel in France than in the UK, but other than that our defence priorities are exactly the same. It is absurd. It is the narcissism of small differences. We are creating separate roles for each other all over the place.

There is some co-operation. We have the Joint Expeditionary Force and, on the future combat air system, there will be some collaborations, but we could make a much bolder invitation to France and take seriously working much more closely with each other. That will involve things such as language training, societal links and student exchanges.

We could develop relations with South Korea—we already are on cyber—as well as Japan. I am very pleased about the recent announcements on that. It is notable that South Korea and Japan both voted to introduce sanctions against Russia. These are important regional powers with which we have very close alignment in values. They are high-tech states and could really contribute to our defence.

Dr Ben Wilkinson: The UK has quite an important role here, probably on three fronts. First, whether it is NATO members or the US, the Ukraine crisis has spurred everybody to do more. Obviously, the German announcement of €100 billion in its defence budget is an important bit. The UK's role there is to support everybody to maintain that effort.

The second bit is for the UK to make sure that these promises are followed through. I do not mean to pick on the Germans, but Jamie did it for the French, so I suppose it is balance. There are now media reports that the German €100 billion is disappearing; that it is being used for non-military things or possibly will not appear at all. That would be bad for European security, having promised it and then possibly reneging on it. That is something to follow through. I have real concerns about that. There are difficulties over whether it is 2% plus the €100 billion or 2% through the €100 billion, and then how you follow through on that €100 billion after three years. These are all complicated things that have not been fixed, and the deadline for doing so is June, which is not far away. I have worries there. I will leave my German rant to one side.

To underpin those things, the UK's role in this is to reforge quite a lot of these relationships. The IR has an EU-shaped hole in it, although the Defence Command Paper patches some of that up. I completely agree with Jamie that it beggars belief that the UK's role with France is where it is and not in great shape. I always find it astounding that the UK's role

with Germany is so thin. There is lots of noise but not actually a lot underpinning it. It is not like you have the equivalent of Lancaster House. You do not have all these different agreements, so there are areas where the UK could really pick up pace and show what it wants to try to do through these bilaterals.

There are roles there for Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and all these other things too, but we are kidding ourselves if we do not think that the UK, France and Germany are the cornerstone of European security. That the relationship between at least two of those is pretty thin is worrying. Rant aside, the partnerships are vital. There are lots of positive noises, but very quickly the echoes of those positive noises are getting quieter and quieter. We need to make sure that they do not disappear.

Baroness Fall: We will see whether the defence budgets actually increase. Can I turn to the China response? We touched on earlier how, anywhere else in Asia, they are not that interested in this crisis and this war. There is a real sense that it is Europe's war with a bit of America. I wondered what you thought about China watching this situation quite closely. What do you think they are learning from this?

Dr Ben Wilkinson: Lawrie picked up on some of this beforehand. As his last PhD student, I should not counter him; I drove him into retirement.

I think that China will be watching it. The lessons that China will take from it are that military conflict might seem a nice easy way to achieve things, but it is actually much more difficult, and that your level of preparation and your assessment of your opposition are critical. If we have a look at our assessment of Russia, we did not get it right, and, if we look at Russia's assessment of Ukraine, it did not get it right. Assessment of opposition will be critical, and China will be watching to see what we do.

It puts it in a slightly awkward position. Patrick described the China-Russia relationship as being lopsided. If China was planning or even thinking of military action, does it now think it is better to do that or less good? I cannot see any way that you look at the current crisis and think, "Do you know what? Military action is definitely now the way forward". But what other options does it have? It keeps building artificial islands and militarising them, so it finds itself caught, in that it is clearly on a path towards something, but that path now looks much more challenging. It is probably in a bit of a bind.

Professor Jamie Gaskarth: Another aspect to this that goes back to the big picture stuff is how climate change will change our sense of geography, who we are going to work with, the closeness of some regions and others, our priorities and that kind of thing. If you think about equatorial parts of the world being unliveable any more, there will be significant migration there.

The high north is opening up now, and there is a lot of defence and security competition going on at the moment in the Arctic, so that creates

a connection there. China is suddenly very interested in what is going on in Iceland and Greenland. Even though they seem very far geographically, and I have already said that they are, climate change might start to change these calculations. If we are going to start to think about Russia and China as competitors in the high north, that is when our partnerships in east Asia and south Asia become really important.

The Chair: It is my pleasure to thank you for your assistance today. Earlier, you were very much showing to us the importance of challenge to ideas and how difficult it can be within government. Several members of the committee have served in different Governments, have taken part in those deep dives and challenges, and have sometimes been frustrated at not being able to make that more public. Here, we can be public as members of a Select Committee, but we can do that and challenge ideas only with your assistance. Everything we do, when we have our reports published, is based on the evidence we have received. Thank you very much indeed.