



International Relations and Defence Committee

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

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

Evidence Session No. 5

Heard in Public

Questions 32- 40

Witnesses

I: Professor Tracey German, Professor in Conflict and Security, King's College London; Meia Nouwens, Senior Fellow for Chinese Defence Policy and Military Modernisation, International Institute for Strategic Studies.

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Examination of witnesses

Professor Tracey German and Meia Nouwens.

Q32 **The Chair:** Good morning. Welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Committee in the House of Lords. I welcome our witnesses today, Professor Tracey German and Meia Nouwens. Thank you for joining us.

Today, we have a list of questions that first of all will cover matters relating specifically to China and those relating specifically to Russia. As I mentioned earlier in our private conversation, although I will call upon Meia Nouwens to start on the first tranche on China, Professor, if you wish to add anything, please do, and vice versa.

At this stage, in thanking you for giving evidence to our inquiry, "Defence Concepts and Capabilities: From Aspiration to Reality", I remind all of us that the session is broadcast, transcribed and on the record. I also remind my colleagues that, if they have any relevant interests, they should declare them before they ask any of their questions.

I shall begin, as ever, with the first question, which is rather general in scope, and then I will turn to my colleagues for more focused questions today. The first question is with regard to the integrated review, published a year ago, in which the Government identified that the most acute threat to the UK comes from Russia, and that China was a systemic competitor. That was a year ago. To what extent was that an accurate characterisation then, and is it still right now?

Meia Nouwens: Thank you to the committee for having me. Yes, the characterisation is still very much accurate today, as it was a year ago in the integrated review. The characterisation of China as both a partner and a systemic rival and competitor is one that encompasses, represents and reflects the longer-term trajectory of illiberalism that China is on, but also the challenge of China's rise as an economic, political and military power, leveraging all the various tools that the CCP¹ has at its disposal to pursue its interests within the international system.

Looking at the context of competition for new or changed norms within the rules-based international order, the specific description of systemic rivalry within the integrated review still very much applies when it comes to China. The formation of competing geopolitical and economic blocs of influence still applies. For example, we see China entering into economic blocs within the Indo-Pacific that the UK is not part of. Furthermore, the deliberate targeting of vulnerabilities within democratic systems by an authoritarian regime is still very much applicable. Lastly, the testing of the boundary between war and peace is still applicable as we see China operate within the grey zone, in the Indo-Pacific but also globally.

The Chair: Since the integrated review of course mentions Russia, may I turn to Professor German?

¹ Communist Party of China

Professor Tracey German: Like Meia, I think that is absolutely an accurate characterisation, both for last year and this year. Obviously, the characterisation of Russia as the most acute direct threat to the UK last year represented a very significant shift from 2015. We saw Russia being referenced so many times—14 times—in the 2021 Integrated Review (IR). Everything that has happened subsequently, including its invasion of Ukraine in February of this year, really validates that description of Russia as the most acute direct threat.

The focus in the 2021 integrated review on Russia was very much on the hybrid and potential non-military means. It seemed to underestimate, potentially, the conventional challenge that Russia posed. Russia has really focused on its conventional forces for many years, but our focus on hybrid and nuclear, and less on the conventional, meant that the characterisation pushed out some decisions that would have enabled us to be more prepared for the military challenge that we now face. The war, although it vindicates some of the assumption, also emphasises the need to highlight the means as well as the challenges within the IR.

The final point here is that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted and emphasised the complex interdependencies between national, regional and international security. In the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, we are seeing the impact on food and energy security and the longer-term impacts around the world, including on migration. All of these will play into UK national security. These issues were perhaps not explored as well as they could have been in the integrated review.

The Chair: Thank you very much for setting the scene for us for this session. As I turn to Lord Alton for the second question, I should explain that, after my colleagues have asked their initial question in the formal run, I would anticipate that they will wish to ask a supplementary.

Q33 **Lord Alton of Liverpool:** I should record my non-financial interests as vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hong Kong and as a patron of Hong Kong Watch. Thank you very much for the evidence that you have given us this morning. How does China assess its own security threats? What does it identify as existential threats? In that context, we will have the 25th anniversary of the handing over of Hong Kong to Beijing on 1 July. Does it see democracy, human rights and the rule of law as existential threats? How was the UK's tilt to the Indo-Pacific assessed? Has the war in Ukraine had any impact on China's security thinking, not least in the context of Taiwan? I note what you say in your paper about the slogan doing the rounds in Taiwan, "Ukraine today, Taiwan tomorrow".

Meia Nouwens: In terms of what the CCP views as its ultimate threat, the preservation of the party and regime survival and stability are its main goals. Any things that threaten those things are seen as the largest threats to China writ large. In order to address those concerns, there are threat perceptions in China that are founded on a belief that western countries and liberal democracies have an aim, led by the United States,

to overthrow the CCP, provoke regime change in China and geographically encircle and contain China.

National security, as it is termed under President Xi Jinping, under a concept of comprehensive national security, is very broad to understand. It is quite vague in the sense that it encompasses a whole range of different issues. It includes what we might consider traditional military, territorial and technological security. It also goes so far as to include ecological, societal, polar, cyberspace, cultural, political, economic, bio, deep-sea, resource, nuclear and overseas interest security. This shows that security in China as a concept can be leveraged by the CCP as an argument or reason to enact policies that pursue those goals of preservation of the party and regime stability.

China's view of its current security status needs to be considered both internally and externally. Internally, it is very much struggling with Covid at the moment under what is still ostensibly a zero-Covid policy. It is finding it difficult to move away from it, and in some ways, it will not move away from it this year, keeping in mind the important political milestone of the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party and President Xi Jinping's likely third term as President and party chair. There is an economic cost to that, which is a very significant security concern for the party's own legitimacy within China and its promise of continued prosperity for current and future generations of China.

Externally, we see a shift in how China views its current security environment compared with the way it did in 2015. In 2015, the national defence White Paper outlined that a global war was extremely unlikely at that moment and the international environment was favourable to Chinese interests. We saw a number of different policies being enacted, not least the first steps in military reform. Today, that reflection might be a little different, keeping in mind what is happening in Ukraine with Russia and what the CCP views very much as a containment strategy of Cold War mentality and zero-sum competition between the United States and its allies in China. China sees the more critical view of China internationally as one that is affecting both its external and internal security.

With regards to how it viewed the Indo-Pacific tilt by the United Kingdom, government-linked think tanks and academics viewed this in two ways. First, it was arguably a logical move by the United Kingdom, for prosperity reasons, to focus on the Indo-Pacific region due to its economic centre of gravity within the global economy in the future. It was one that made sense in a post-Brexit and global Britain world. In that sense, it was welcomed.

On the other hand, the term "Indo-Pacific" in China is very much linked to that view of a US-led, containment, Cold War mentality policy and initiative. In that sense, using the term "Indo-Pacific" was a signal to these think-tankers in China, and Beijing in particular, of the UK taking sides with the United States in this larger strategic competition.

There were also questions, for example, about specific elements of how the Indo-Pacific tilt has been operationalised since it was announced, not least the Carrier Strike Group's maiden voyage to the Indo-Pacific. There were questions from Chinese policymakers as to what the actual objective of that was and what reasons the UK had for deploying a ship to the Indo-Pacific.

On your last question on the impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on China's security thinking, we can point to three notable impacts. First, though Russia and China do not have an alliance as such, they have what they term a deep partnership that knows no bounds. Of course, there is also mutual mistrust between the two, but there is no denying that there was an attempt by the leadership of Russia and China to leverage this leadership to form a unified bloc in opposition to western liberal democracies and values in the international system and propose an alternative.

The repercussions of the war in Ukraine on Russia, both economically and politically, will now mean that the CCP's most significant partner in international relations is potentially much weaker as an actor on the international stage, and of course that the potentially combined strength of that partnership may have become weaker in our perception.

Secondly—this is something I focused on in my work—the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which is the party's military, will watch the performance of the Russian armed forces very closely in terms of how they perform in Ukraine and their successes and failures. It will attempt to learn from that, particularly when it comes to contingencies such as Taiwan and PLA future operations. At the moment, it is also really important for the PLA to look at and assess questions related to accurate intelligence-gathering and loyalty and assumptions within its own military.

Thirdly, Beijing will also watch the western and wider response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine very closely, not least the types of sanctions imposed on Russia and the role of the private sector in all of this, which will have come as a surprise to Beijing. Lastly, of course, it will watch the longevity of these sanctions.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you very much for that very thorough and comprehensive reply. Can I tempt you further, on the question of Taiwan, as to whether what has happened in Ukraine makes it more or less likely that we will see these regular military excursions in the air above Taiwan extend to a full military invasion? Given that territorial disputes were one of the factors that you listed in the list that you gave us, where do the depletion of Russia and its diminished status to that of a client state leave that "partnership that knows no bounds" that you referred to? Does it suit Beijing to see the United States distracted by Europe and the swallowing up of our stockpiles of weapons and military capability by Ukraine?

Meia Nouwens: Those are three large questions again. I will do my best to be brief. On the first one, the ADIZ incursions by the PLA air force and aviation units of the navy and the ground forces of the PLA serve a number of purposes. They serve the purpose of testing the Taiwanese, but also of testing capabilities within the PLA that will be necessary for a future contingency. They also, of course, send useful political signals and play a role in psychological warfare on Taiwan.

Those things aside, I do not see a change in the PLA's operation that would suggest that an invasion is imminent or likely. Whether that timeline has changed for CCP leadership with regards to resolving the Taiwan problem, as they call it, through forced unification really depends on what you think that timeline was in the first place. I subscribe to the thinking that that timeline is most likely much longer than we think that it is, for the reasons of the fact that PLA modernisation has not yet been completed and that, from the CCP's perspective, peaceful unification is still preferred to a highly risky and politically existential question that could fail through a forced unification. In that sense, there will be a period of drawing lessons out and really looking at the PLA, where it stands now and whether the successes viewed within PLA modernisation are in fact as successful as was once thought.

In terms of where a weakened Russia leaves the partnership between Russia and China, in some ways, Beijing has always been the stronger partner in recent years in that bilateral relationship but has diplomatically always asserted that it is a partnership of two equals. Economically, technologically, and in some ways in terms of influence, China has increased its strength within that relationship. In some ways, China is no longer dependent on Russia as much as it used to be, for example in areas of military technological imports.

In some ways, China has graduated to an older brother status within that relationship. There might be short-term benefits for China in terms of cheaper economic opportunities within Russia, but of course, those have longer-term impacts on Russia itself that China will need to keep in mind. As I said, China does not do alliances because it does not want to be responsible for any other country but China, and it does not operate for any other country but China's interests. In that sense, we will have to wait a little longer to see what the end status of Russia is. I am not a Russia expert, but, from my understanding, that is still a little bit in flux.

Lastly, the PLA or Chinese leadership do not assume that the United States is distracted by Europe at the moment. There has been careful balancing of commitments, and we see that the United States is focusing diplomatically on the Indo-Pacific as much as Europe at the moment with trips to the region planned for the summer as well. From my perspective, and from reading Chinese coverage at the moment, it does not seem that their assumption is that the United States has taken its eye off the ball.

Q34 **Baroness Fall:** You have already covered quite a lot of ground, for which thank you very much. I wanted to turn to the presence of China on the global stage as a security actor, and how you perceive it to operate within

some of the international organisations—the WTO, the WHO and the UN. How does it act as a security actor? One thing that I often find interesting watching China is that it is able to be systemic in its approach to global policy by leveraging its economy with belt and road. Does that make it a more powerful and impactful country on the global stage?

Meia Nouwens: If we take that holistic interpretation of security from China's perspective, China is indeed a varied and wide-ranging actor on the global stage in terms of security activities. You rightly state that it is able, to a certain extent, to leverage its bilateral relationships with other countries, whether those are based on trade or other forms of diplomacy, in order to push for its interests within international organisations. For example, China has been very successful in keeping Taiwan out of UN agencies and organisations, even as just an observer-status participant.

When it comes to more traditional forms of hard security, looking at the PLA's operations globally, we sometimes overestimate a little its ability to operate persistently or permanently at a global reach. With regards to the military, there is a global presence of the PLA, but these larger-range and more permanent power projection capabilities are still very much under development, and the command structures behind those deployments are still nascent as well. We do, of course, see the PLA play a larger foreign policy role as an instrument of foreign policy for the CCP, and it was instructed to do this by President Xi Jinping around 2016.

In that sense, we see the PLA play a role in terms of arms exports based in Djibouti; Covid diplomacy, and even military Covid diplomacy; peacekeeping operations; and exercises and drills with partner countries and militaries. This again contributes to that overall building of ties to pursue larger Chinese interests on the international stage but does not necessarily make the PLA a permanent or persistent military actor globally just yet.

Baroness Fall: I wanted to pick up on a comment you made to Lord Alton about Ukraine and the impact, unpredicted, of the private sector moving with its feet from Russia. What is your view as to whether that could or would happen in the event of an invasion of Taiwan, for example? Are the economies too interconnected, or are we looking at a low-risk, high-impact event?

Meia Nouwens: That is an excellent question. Maybe I will just start with whether the private sector will be mobilised in the same way. From Beijing's perspective, it will assume the worst-case scenario, which is that it will. For CCP policymakers, that now means that there is a new worst-case scenario for them to consider, and that is that the private sector in liberal democracies will be mobilised, and the Chinese market will no longer provide this guarantee that they had assumed it would with regards to policy questions that are of interest to China.

You are right to say that there is a difference between the integration of our economies with China and Russia. I would counter that, in some ways, our economies are not as dependent as we think they are. For

example, European Union countries trade more within the European Union than they do with China. That does not come up in our analysis very frequently, so there is a question of our own narrative and understanding of this trading relationship.

Secondly, it is important to remember that, if we are so dependent on the Chinese economy, the Chinese economy is also very dependent on ours. The economic relationship with China could still potentially play a deterrent role in the event of a Taiwan scenario.

Q35 Lord Teverson: Coming down to the nub of it, I want to ask if China is a military challenge for the UK, and, if so, what kind it is. Last week in our evidence session, we had the phrase of our enemy being able to “water its horse in the Thames”. I suspect we are not about to put pillboxes up on the channel as a deterrent to the PLA, but what is the real challenge there? Are our current and planned capabilities adequate to face that challenge, or do they need to be improved? How can the UK best contribute to meeting this systemic challenge of China’s rise alongside allies, are we looking at this through the wrong side of the telescope? Do we have a completely common agenda? For instance, we must surely be interested in the freedom of trade routes. For instance, we had Chinese vessels in operation at Atalanta that operated alongside NATO and EU forces. Do we not have a common agenda as well? Should we not perhaps make the most of that?

Meia Nouwens: We had ad hoc co-operation with Chinese PLA navy vessels in counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. We should also remember that, from the PLA’s perspective, those were very useful in upskilling. We need to take into consideration what we get in return as much as what we give away when we collaborate in those ways. I am not saying that collaboration is not possible; dialogue with the PLA at a very high level, politically speaking, is useful. In terms of practical co-operation, upskilling should be a concern.

Lord Teverson: Do we have that high-level co-operation?

Meia Nouwens: We no longer have the same co-operation that we did in the past. In terms of the military challenge for the UK, as you said, this is not about the PLA necessarily operating in the English Channel, though it has of course transferred through the English Channel on the way back from a joint exercise with the Russian armed forces in the Baltic, including live fire drills, in recent years. That particular instance showed the growing concern that we have on our side about the military relationship between Russia and China, so in that sense, that is a concern in our own neighbourhood. The respect for the international rule of law, and in particular UNCLOS, should be of concern for us. China’s interpretation of international law, with national law superseding international law, should be of concern for our military in how it operates globally.

In terms of more direct military threats within our own region and regions bordering the Euro-Atlantic, there is a follow-on consequence for China

changing the security landscapes through things like arms transfers and making more available advanced capabilities that parties would not otherwise have had access to. In terms of where UK forces may need to operate in the future, that operational landscape may have changed.

Secondly, the UK faces the same challenge that other countries in the Indo-Pacific region currently face from a large and increasingly assertive PLA. Of course, this is particularly true in the maritime domain, where China's large naval coastguard and maritime militia forces operate at high rotation and at a larger scale than our forces. The IISS has estimated that, from 2014 to 2018, China launched more submarines, warships, principal amphibious vessels and auxiliaries than the total number of ships serving at that time in the navies of Germany, India, Spain, Taiwan and the UK. It was quite a formidable output, and that was just for the PLA navy.

In that sense, Chinese forces have not, from my understanding, been directly hostile to UK forces or vessels transiting the region. Overall, assertiveness is growing and should be a concern for UK Armed Forces and capabilities in the future.

Lord Teverson: On the Ukrainian war, I was struck that there was concern from the United States that dialogue between the top military in the Russian Federation and the United States had stopped for a while, and that should have gone on anyway. I did not realise that there had been dialogue between ourselves and the senior PLA leadership. That has stopped, and I am not sure why. I am interested to understand that. Should that be there? Should we encourage it in order to at least understand what is going on better there?

Meia Nouwens: I do not think that has stopped. From my understanding, there is still a conversation between higher-level officials between the PLA and UK Armed Forces. Of greatest concern for the UK is the dialogue between the United States and China. Of course, higher-level communication had stopped between the Department of Defense and the PLA. This has only very recently resumed through a phone call between Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and General Wei Fenghe. That should be a concern for all of us.

I realised I did not address the last part of your question with regards to what the UK should be doing. The best way for the UK to meet the systemic challenge that China poses through its rise is to collaborate with partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific region. There is absolutely no way that the United Kingdom could or should do this alone. The systemic challenge is so broad that working with various partners and allies across different sectors is important, from defence to standards and technology.

Secondly, the UK should support partners and allies in the region in areas that they find useful and are best suited to their security needs where there is common interest with the UK. Thirdly, the China policy within the UK Government should encompass both that rightful need for prosperity and the security challenges that China poses. It should bring together not

just the various sectors of UK Government but also all levels of UK Government coherently.

The Chair: We now turn our focus to questions relating to Russia and relationships there.

Q36 **Baroness Blackstone:** I wonder if you could begin by setting out for us what you see as the priorities of the Russian national security strategy. I recognise from what you said earlier that this may be a bit premature, but I wonder if you could at least speculate on how this strategy might have changed or been re-evaluated since the invasion of Ukraine.

Professor Tracey German: I will start with the second part of the question of whether the strategy has been changed or re-evaluated. There are no signs that it has been. That has not been made public, but if there are any changes in its principal direction, we will see that in the updated foreign policy concept. The Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov suggested that that would be out later this year. The national security strategy in Russia is the foundation document from which things like the foreign policy concept flow, and it sits on top of that. If there is any significant shift, we will see that reflected in the foreign policy concept when that comes out.

The themes and general priorities that we saw published last year in the national security strategy hold true. Overall, this document provides a very useful snapshot of the mindset of the Russian leadership, what they are thinking about national security and their strategic priorities for the next five years. We really saw a hardening of a number of themes that we have heard for over a decade coming out of Russia: this hardening of anti-western rhetoric; the sense that the West, defined broadly, is posing a very significant challenge to Russia; and, very similar to China, this sense of an aggressive West seeking to encircle and contain Russia. This is very much the view that they share.

There is a sense that there is a shift happening in the international order and that we are seeing the emergence of a multipolar world order. Again, we have seen this in a number of Russian strategic documents over the last decade or so. There is this optimism that there is going to be a shift in the international system and that we will see more centres of power than just, from the Russian perspective, US dominance.

The national security strategy sets out nine strategic priority areas for Russia. The preservation of the people of Russia and the development of human potential is the first one. It takes top billing in this document. National defence is second, and that is a reversal of the order that we saw in the 2015 document. We then see state and public safety; information security; economic security; scientific and technological development; environmental issues; protection of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, which is an interesting one; and then, finally, strategic stability and international co-operation, defined as mutually beneficial.

There are some very interesting points there. The fact that the preservation of the people of Russia is at the top reflects some of the problems that Russia has faced in recent years with Covid, the loss of migrant workers and this sense that it really needs to invest domestically in increasing the country's population, but also being able to secure its future. It makes a very clear link between Russian national security and the country's socioeconomic situation, and these are continuing, important themes.

A shift that we have seen, which reflects the impact of sanctions, is that there was a focus on development and developing the Russian economy in the 2015 iteration. Now, it is very much about economic stability and security. That reflects the impact of the sanctions and that Russia faces some significant challenges and headwinds in that respect. Information security is not a surprise here, but it was interesting to note that the use of foreign IT and telecoms is a challenge for Russia's information infrastructure.

For the first time, climate change is identified as a very significant threat for Russia. There is a glimmer of optimism there in the fact that it recognises in the strategy that this is an area that is important for international co-operation. There is perhaps some potential for co-operation there. Obviously, this is likely to have changed in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine.

The final point is this issue of values. We have heard an increasing amount from Russia in recent years about this sense that Russian civilisation itself, traditional Russian values and identity, language and culture are under threat from westernisation and that Russia's cultural sovereignty is at risk of being degraded. We heard this theme in Putin's 9 May speech, talking about the moral degradation of the West and western attempts to undermine Russian values and culture. We see them making efforts to secure this by, for example, talking about patriotic education being a primary line of defence, which is an interesting area.

There are a number of enduring themes. China and India are key partners. In fact, India is placed on a similar ranking to China, which is again an interesting shift, but the West is really seen as hostile. The focus is on China, India and non-western partners, as well as those post-Soviet states that Russia has a good relationship with.

Baroness Blackstone: That is such a huge range of priorities that it is quite hard to see the wood for all of these trees. The fundamental question that people will ask, particularly in the West, is, "Is Ukraine just the beginning of a much more expansionist Russian foreign policy that could involve trying to move into other former Soviet states, or is it a one-off?" I just wonder whether you could tell us a bit about how you perceive that.

Professor Tracey German: Russian foreign policy has been increasingly assertive under Putin, and this is not the first time that Russia has invaded a neighbouring state. Think back to Georgia in 2008. It is still

occupying territories there. The challenge here is that Russia perceives this threat to its own security from the growing influence of western states and organisations such as NATO and the EU in what it perceives to be its sphere of influence, and it seeks to push back. It is not just about hard military power. It is not just looking at, for example, NATO as a challenge on the military front. It is also about values, as I said, and particularly liberal democratic values that the leadership in Russia sees as a challenge to its own regime's security.

What we are seeing in Ukraine is the continuation of what we have seen in Russian foreign policy for a number of years and the sense that Russia is seeking to push back. It clearly felt that it had an opportunity for whatever reason. Perhaps it felt that the West was distracted by dealing with the aftermath of Covid, the economic impact of that, this Indo-Pacific tilt and the focus on China. In the wake of Georgia, was there a sense that there would be no pushback? It perhaps felt that the West was less interested in pushing back against actions that it might take in what it sees as its neighbourhood and that western unity would not be as strong as it has been. It has been very surprised by the strength of unity that it has faced both within NATO and more broadly across the West.

Q37 Lord Stirrup: Could we turn to Russian military capabilities? Over recent years, we have seen a substantial modernisation programme. What, if anything, does the Ukraine war tell us about the effectiveness of that programme? Recognising that we do not yet know what the full extent of Russian losses will be, what sort of timescale are we looking at for the replacement of those capabilities within Russia? What effect will that have on Russia's own military export programme, not just in terms of diversion of effort to replace lost national capabilities, but also in reputational terms? For example, we have seen that international orders for NLAW² have gone through the roof. Might we see a contrary effect with Russian military equipment?

We touched on this a little earlier, but what sort of impact will those conclusions have on China's military thinking? To an extent, it has followed the Russian modernisation programme with its own. Will it get rather nervous about the direction that it has travelled?

Professor Tracey German: Those are very big questions. It has clearly raised questions with regards to military modernisation and effectiveness, but it has also raised questions about how we look at Russia. There has been a tendency for analysts outside of Russia to depict the Russian military as either all powerful and all conquering or completely useless; there needs to be much more of a middle assessment here. There is a lot of reassessment going on at the moment.

Clearly, Russia has focused on a lot of the high-tech equipment. Its military thought has very much been looking at the lessons that it can draw from western interventions, be that the two wars in Iraq or NATO's allied force in the former Yugoslavia, and it has drawn lessons about the

² Next-generation Light Anti-tank Weapon

use of precision strikes, for example. We can see that it had sought to integrate some of that thinking into its own military, and it has faced challenges on that front.

Some of the challenges that it has been facing in military modernisation are not about the equipment; they are about the people. Moving forwards, the people and manpower issues are going to be the biggest challenges that Russia faces in terms of whatever it does next to reconstitute the manpower losses that it has potentially faced in Ukraine, but also the prestige of military service and how it can attract people to serve. It is still a conscript force, to a certain extent. There is professionalisation but also conscription. Things that have been happening in Ukraine have really further undermined the sense of serving in the Russian armed forces and the pride in the military. There are some very big questions there moving forwards.

I am afraid I do not have specific timescales for replacement here. There has been some very interesting analysis coming out of Russia. With regards to timescales and information coming out of Russia, the information flows, particularly on this, are underplayed by the Russians and potentially exaggerated by adversaries. It is very hard to know where they are facing it. There will undoubtedly be an impact on the Russian ability to replenish and restock, particularly in the realm of components for some advanced systems and some of their more high-tech equipment.

I have seen some reports recently in the Russian media that progress on its next-generation airborne early warning and control system, the A-100 Premier, has stalled due to delays in getting microchips; the impact of sanctions can be seen there. We have obviously seen the US reports about the discovery of chips from dishwashers and fridges, et cetera, but that fog of war and the information sources are difficult. The effects are likely to be seen in the mid to long term.

The impact on exports is interesting. This is also partly related to the previous section of the question. The Russian defence industry is incredibly self-sufficient. It has been adapting to being cut off from a number of components and accessing a number of high-tech components since sanctions were imposed in 2014. It is increasingly self-sufficient, and it has started developing its own components in certain respects and focusing on the development of its own military technologies.

Yes, it might impact on arms exports, but if you look at the figures, Russia's overall arms exports have dropped since 2021 anyway, particularly those to south-east Asia. Vietnam, which was a very significant importer, has halted its military modernisation, and we have seen the number of military imports from Russia drop significantly. India has started trying to diversify, and we have seen its imports from Russia drop while it has been looking at others like France. In that respect, yes, there might be an impact, but countries were also looking elsewhere anyway.

My final point here, looking at the reputational impact as well, is that the defence industry is a key section for hard currency for Russia. It will do everything that it can to keep up with those exports that it can. There are a number of challenges, and, as I said, it is the people aspect that could be the biggest one, particularly the manpower within the military and the outflow of highly skilled and educated professionals. We have been seeing that over recent years, particularly within the IT sector, but that has really accelerated since February. That could be a big problem moving forwards.

Meia Nouwens: May I just qualify very quickly what exactly you would like to know about what China is learning from Russia's experience, just so that I do not take too much of Professor German's time?

Lord Stirrup: Is China now having second thoughts about the road that it has been following in its modernisation programme? Is it worrying that has been doing the wrong things?

Meia Nouwens: I very much agree with the parallel here with Russia that Professor German outlined. China has looked mainly towards the United States and its allies for examples of where and how the PLA should modernise, of course, within a system that has Chinese characteristics. It would keep, for example, the political commissar system within the PLA. In that sense, when it comes to the key areas of domains and services for future war-fighting in terms of airspace, cyber, electromagnetic and outer space, the PLA very much looks to the United States for lessons learned. The questions of where the PLA might learn from Russia's current experience translate more into the importance of logistics, maintenance, personnel, the question of professionalisation versus PLA loyalty to the party. How flexible do you allow decision-making to be before it becomes a risk to your own political or party loyalty? There are questions on the importance of air superiority and electronic warfare.

Lord Stirrup: Very quickly, can I just follow up on both of those? Are we paying too much attention to equipment and not enough to doctrine and training? Professor, you mentioned the personnel side in terms of numbers and retention. You can have the best equipment in the world, but if you cannot use it effectively and send a great trail of tanks unsupported by infantry down a single soggy road north of Kyiv, you are going to run into trouble. Given the emphasis in Russia's foreign security policy on Russian values that you mentioned and the point that you made about making sure that the commissars remain in charge in China, are there fundamental flaws here that go beyond the surface appearance of equipment capability?

Professor Tracey German: One of the lessons that we have potentially been learning from Ukraine is that these intangible human factors and human behaviour are much harder to quantify. When we are looking at countries like Russia, we tend to focus on the things that we can count and capabilities that we can see, but those intangible factors like morale, human behaviour and training are much harder to get a good handle on.

They are absolutely critical here. One of the things that has really come out of Russia's performance is that it has potentially neglected these intangible factors.

Meia Nouwens: The same is true for China. I would just remind everybody that the PLA has not fought a war since a border skirmish with Vietnam in 1979, so doctrine training and how to operationalise joint thinking within the PLA, taking into concern questions of morale, are things that the PLA finds hard to judge.

Q38 **Lord Wood of Anfield:** Good morning. Following on from Lord Stirrup's questions about Russia, I wanted to ask about the UK's response to this changing Russian defence and military posture. In what way is Russia a direct threat to the UK, and how much is that changing as a result of what we have seen in the last couple of months? Following on from that, what should we learn about the way we should recalibrate our defence positioning towards Russia from the changing trends that you have been talking about? Following on from that, the third element of this is how much NATO needs to rethink the particular balance of resources and competencies doctrine that it has in its engagement with Russia as a result of what we are seeing in Ukraine.

Professor Tracey German: How much of a threat is Russia directly to the UK? That was your first question. The threat stems in large part from our alliance with NATO, and any direct contact there: our contribution to the FP and the challenges that it may see up there, but also in the North Atlantic. That is where we have seen the greatest levels of contact; "confrontation" is perhaps the wrong word. This is not direct contact, but challenge posed by Russia. That has been going on for a number of years now. For the UK, this ability to maintain our sea lines of communication across the North Atlantic and protect those under-sea cables, but also freedom of navigation in that area, is absolutely critical. That is a principal area of focus as well as, as I said, within the NATO alliance.

The other factor here is our nuclear deterrent and the fact that we are the second nuclear guarantor within NATO for the NATO nuclear umbrella. From a Russian perspective, this makes us significant in that respect.

In terms of how it has changed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UK has positioned itself as one of the principal weapon suppliers for Ukraine. In that respect, some of the political rhetoric from the UK in terms of wanting to see Russia fail really puts us diplomatically on more of a back foot from Moscow's perspective. They see us increasingly as more of a challenge to them.

Lord Wood of Anfield: Can I pick you up on that? I am sorry to interrupt. If you see Russian state TV clips, there seems to be a demonisation of us. I know they would say we have been demonising them, but is that something that you see? Are we particularly singled out as posing a particular threat within the NATO family inside the Russian political and military elite?

Professor Tracey German: In recent weeks, we have become more so. There is a history here of relations between Russia and the UK. Either we look at each other as irrelevant or as a very significant challenge. For a number of years, the UK has been seen as a principal advocate for a harsher sanctions regime against Russia and seeking to take a harsher line within NATO and some of our other allies.

On the flip side of that, there were clearly questions from some allies within NATO about the credibility of the UK posture within NATO pre-invasion of Ukraine, and particularly our willingness or otherwise to provide capabilities to those in central and eastern Europe to bolster some of their capabilities. There were perhaps questions and concerns raised. That dynamic has completely changed since the invasion in February. In that respect, that feeds into the credibility of our nuclear deterrent as well. From a Russian perspective, this is something that they focus on very much. Nuclear weapons are seen as a key deterrent force.

Lord Wood of Anfield: I was going to ask you to expand upon what we need to learn about our defence posture with regard to Russia, and then NATO as well.

Professor Tracey German: With regards to NATO's defence posture, the key here is maintaining a unified response. The potential membership of Sweden and Finland would very much strengthen NATO's position up in the Arctic, the high north and the Baltic areas. It will be very interesting to see the Russian response in the coming days. Some of the media seems to have been less hostile than perhaps we could have expected, which is an interesting response.

Q39 **Lord Anderson of Swansea:** China will have noted that, following the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has become a more toxic brand. It is so much on its own and a pariah state. Has this affected the "eternal friendship"? Has China been more ready to consider distancing itself from Russia?

Meia Nouwens: We do not see any evidence of that just yet. We see a careful approach by the CCP and Chinese leadership at the moment to balance the need to uphold China's own proclaimed policies of non-interference, respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity with its relationship with Russia. China is currently in a very difficult position, but, from Beijing's perspective, this is all seen through the lens of US-China competition. There is no way for China to move away from Russia at the moment and move towards a group of countries that it currently sees itself as competing with.

Q40 **Lord Campbell of Pittenweem:** What are the long-term prospects of the Russian economy? The economy is based on gas and oil. It has a poor manufacturing base. It has also suffered from sanctions. As the world turns to environmentalism, the sale of gas and oil may be rather difficult to sustain. What is Russia going to do in those circumstances?

Professor Tracey German: It is an interesting question that it has been grappling with for a number of years. There have been a number of times that the Russian leadership has talked about the necessity to modernise the economy and to potentially move away from this dependence on oil and gas; it is not just oil and gas exports but the exports of all kinds of raw materials, be it wood, minerals or phosphates. At the moment, this is where it is going to provide a very good source of income.

There has been some work done by some academics looking at the prospects for the Russian economy potentially staying where it is for the moment, because of the high oil and gas prices. What alternative does it have? It cannot modernise at the moment. It will continue in the direction it has been going. It has been increasingly becoming self-reliant. We must not forget that the impact of sanctions has been ongoing since 2014. It has been really seeking to adapt its economy since then. The new rounds of sanctions will impact further, but these are medium-term effects. It is certainly unlikely to modernise and join the modern economies that it would like to have seen. If you had asked the Russian leadership 10 years ago, "Where would you like to be in 10 years?" I am not sure it is where it is now.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: They are importing semiconductors but not making them.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for helping us today to focus on issues relating to both Russia and China. It is most helpful.