



HOUSE OF LORDS

International Relations and Defence Committee

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

Wednesday 13 July 2022

Noon

Watch the meeting

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; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Sugg; Lord Teverson; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 17

Heard in Public

Questions 123 - 132

Witness

I: Lieutenant General (Retired) Ben Hodges, Commanding General, United States Army Europe (2014-17).

Examination of witness

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges.

Q123 **The Chair:** I welcome to the International Relations and Defence Committee our second witness for today. He is based in the United States, so there is a big timeslip and we have an even greater reason for thanking him for what for him will be a very early morning start to this session.

Lieutenant General Ben Hodges is the former commander of US Army Europe and is currently senior adviser at Human Rights First. Thank you for joining us today as we continue with our inquiry, "Defence concepts and capabilities: from aspiration to reality". At this stage, I always do the formality of reminding members and you, our guest witness, that the session is broadcast, transcribed and on the record. When my colleagues ask questions, if they have any relevant interests they should declare they should do that as they ask their question. I always ask the first question, which is very general in nature, and I then turn to my colleagues for more focused questions.

Throughout the day, I expect my colleagues will wish to ask a supplementary to their initial question. If there is time at the end, I will open the questions more widely to colleagues, and those questions may go more broadly than the initial run of questions on the issues that we have covered.

The first, rather general, question is this. Looking at matters from a United States perspective, what is your assessment of the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper? Do you consider that they adequately address the key global challenges and offer suitable responses?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: Thank you, and greetings from Washington DC this morning. Thank you for the privilege to participate today. Of course, the UK is our most important global ally in everything we do. I think this is appreciated and recognised. The Integrated Review was a very good, solid effort with not a lot to criticise, except that it does feel a little bit like it is designed to do the best you can within the available resources as opposed to addressing all the requirements.

I say this with the benefit of some hindsight after watching the last four-plus months of Russia's continued attack against Ukraine. We have been reminded of the enormous consumption of ammunition and other logistics in a high-intensity conflict, which is what we want to prevent. The Chinese, as well as Russia and other potential adversaries, are watching the logistics required, and certainly in my own country we do not have enough ammunition, of all types, for high-intensity conflict.

I also do not think that the air and missile defence capabilities they have required are adequately addressed in the review, given what we have seen over the last four months. I recognise that the review was done

before the last four months, but Russia's use of even precision munitions against civilian targets has significantly increased our requirement for integrated air and missile defence. The United States has just one Patriot battalion in all of Europe, and some Aegis air and missile defence systems. This is terribly inadequate. It is not enough to protect even US resources and our infrastructure in Europe, let alone millions of European citizens. So the Integrated Review probably does not adequately address that requirement either.

Finally, and this is always one of the most difficult challenges for any legislative body or government, is how much depth you can have, can afford. None of us has enough depth. Everybody's militaries—even ours, with the biggest defence budget in history—are stretched too thin. There are not enough ships to cover everything that is required. I saw President Biden's announcement the other day of two more ships coming to the European theatre and that it was a significant increase, and that is just two ships to help with all the requirements.

So there are three things that I would offer. One is depth, or, in another way, maybe resilience is the way to address and to deal with all the possibilities that are out there; air and missile defence requirements are way beyond what any of us had anticipated. Finally, there are the logistics. Again, nobody wants to spend money on ammunition that you hope will never be pulled out of a depot or a bunker, but that is exactly what we need for effective deterrence and defence.

Put that in the context of forward defence requirements. Our Baltic allies, for example, do not want to hear us talk about restoration of their sovereignty or, "We'll be there to liberate you from a Russian attack in Estonia", for example. You see what happened after just three days—**[Inaudible.]**. Conducting forward defence versus the current arrangement will increase. Again, these are things that happened after the Integrated Review was completed, but obviously that does not make them irrelevant.

The Chair: Thank you for setting the scene within the context of the political imperatives about cost. We are about to go on to a section on prioritisation. Can I reassure you, Lieutenant General, that we can see you, although the system sometimes freezes? The sound is not brilliant, but we can hear you, so if we start to look a bit anxious it is simply because we are focusing and listening carefully to you.

Q124 **Lord Wood of Anfield:** Thank you, Lieutenant General, for your time today. I want to ask you more about the point you just raised about finite resources and the relationship between the strategy of the review paper and the constraints of resources. The other issue is that no country in NATO wants to duplicate every capability when we are working in alliance with other members of NATO.

With those two considerations in mind, if the UK had to prioritise among the objectives in the Integrated Review, which ones from a US perspective would you suggest that the UK should focus on?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: I cannot believe I am going to say this as a retired army infantryman, but sea power is clearly a priority which the United States, for a variety of reasons, expects our British allies to contribute to. Part of it is the ability to keep open lines of communication between the United States and Europe, with growing challenges in the North Atlantic. I know that the United States also hopes that we can put maritime logistical support in the UK. I have learned a lot about maritime things over the last couple of years, and the impact of conducting naval operations in the North Atlantic puts a lot of stress on vessels, more than anywhere else. So the US is looking to strengthen its relationship with the Royal Navy in that regard as well.

I am also very worried that there is inadequate British land power. Technology can make up only so much of it, as we see daily in Ukraine. It is about having enough depth to replace systems that will inevitably be destroyed because of technology and long-range precision weapons. Clearly, with the Russian willingness and apparently endless amounts of conventional artillery and rocket ammunition, we are all going to suffer a lot of casualties. We need enough depth to be able to absorb some of that and still be able to conduct operations regardless of the technologies that are out there. We are learning a lot about Russia's electronic warfare capability. As poorly as they have done in many areas, many of our drones that have been provided to Ukraine are not turning out to be as effective as hoped, because the Russians are able to deny GPS for the Switchblades, for example, that brought so much hope initially. So depth of land forces will be very important.

The United States is counting on the UK to provide a core headquarters, which you do; the ARRC is an excellent headquarters. We are looking for an actual operational division, not just the flag. Then, of course, there are the enhanced forward presence battlegroups that you provide in Estonia. You also provide part of the US-led enhanced presence battlegroup in Poland. My sense is that the pressure to raise these to brigade size versus battlegroup size will increase, especially if this war in Ukraine goes on longer and longer—if we are not able to help Ukraine push Russia back to the 23 February line by the end of this year, which is possible. Lack of depth in land forces is a problem.

- Q125 **Lord Stirrup:** Good morning, General. It is very nice to see you. Thank you for being here. I would like to probe a little more deeply the issue you have just raised about technology versus size. As you will know, some of our previous witnesses have said that the command paper last year essentially made a bet, prioritising technology over size. It is a very difficult issue because, as we know, it is not a simple choice; it is not about soldiers without any technology or technology without any soldiers but the balance between the two. Do I sense from your answer to the previous question that you think the UK is making the wrong bet here and that it ought to be redressing the balance more towards size than technology? If you were in overall command, would you rather have a full-up, properly equipped, highly capable fighting division or a less capable division and a brigade on top?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: This is the eternal question. Thinking about the size, when you compare for example the number of artillery tubes that Russian forces have to what the West is providing Ukraine, clearly we do not have to match them tube for tube, because Ukraine, with a British or American HIMARS or rocket launcher, or even 155-millimetre howitzers with a precision round, is able with one artillery round to do what the Russians would require 18 rounds to do. A battery of six howitzers firing three rounds each—*[Inaudible.]*—because of the precision. So, in this case, technology compensates. You do not need as many tubes to accomplish the same effect. That is really what I am after: how to achieve the effect that needs to be achieved. Some things—a Mariupol, a Kharkiv or a Mykolaiv—will require lots of people. As I suspect many of you in the room know, it takes a battalion of soldiers to enter and clear very large buildings. If you are in this kind of fight—*[Inaudible.]*—

The Chair: General, I do not wish to interrupt, but we lost part of your answer altogether. It is the IT, which is playing up badly. I do apologise. We really want to hear what you are saying. Could you repeat the last part of your answer? It would be helpful, so that we can take a note.

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: We know that if you are talking about fighting in an urban area, a city the size of Mariupol, Mykolaiv or Kharkiv, it takes a battalion—600 or 700 soldiers—to enter and clear large apartment buildings or industrial complexes. This requires significant manpower with technology. If drones or other devices would help to reduce the manpower requirement, of course we would want to do that, and of course you would want to protect soldiers from being exposed to the danger of fighting inside built-up areas. I am reluctant to say that I would not want a division, because the number of troops required to do these missions is so much more significant than our experience over the last 20 years in Iraq and Afghanistan. We do not want to lose—*[Inaudible.]*—

The Chair: I wonder, General, whether you would be able to switch your video off and keep the sound on? We would very much appreciate that. We have lost your sound, and your video is now frozen. I hope you can still see is.

- Q126 **Lord Stirrup:** General, thank you very much for that answer. You talked earlier about depth and resilience, as you put it, but of course resilience is not just a matter of the number of armed forces that you have; it is also a matter of the number of systems and weapons that you have. You referred to the high rate of consumption that we have seen in Ukraine. Replacing that, particularly with modern complex systems and modern complex weapons, is not an easy task. How would you judge at the moment internationally our industrial resilience in being able to produce the systems and weapons that we would need at the appropriate rate for high-intensity warfare?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: Thank you for that question. I am in a hotel here in Washington that normally has better connectivity. I will turn off the video in hopes that we can maintain the volume.

I am very concerned about our industrial base here in the United States, and I would only imagine that the UK is the same. Even if the President or Secretary of Defence paid whatever money they could to significantly ramp up the number of weapons—Javelin, for example—or any of the other precision weapons that we need, it would probably be a year in actual production. [Inaudible.]—where you have one company that makes the one thing. We could—[Inaudible.]—

The Chair: General, thank you for trying to get through the IT problems. We do not want to lose the valuable evidence that you are giving today.

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: The fault is entirely on my end, which is quite embarrassing.

The Chair: We have problems with IT internationally, I can promise you.

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: I will close on that question by saying that I am very concerned, and it would take the US Congress to prioritise within budget. This is not cheap. There needs to be willingness to have excess capacity so that companies are willing to maintain the capacity to ramp up as required, and we do not have that right now.

Q127 **Baroness Rawlings:** Thank you, General. The last six months have seen the US recommitting resources to European defence as a counter to Russian aggression. Yet since the early days of the Obama Administration, Washington has been attempting a pivot to balance rising Chinese power in Asia. Can the US fulfil all its commitments in these two regions as well as others simultaneously? President Obama and President Biden have been very supportive of NATO, yet on their watch Russia and China have flexed their muscles. Why did this not happen during the Trump presidency? What are your thoughts on that in relation to what we are talking about?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: First, I would say that we—the US and our allies—have consistently exaggerated the risk of Russia's ability and willingness to escalate. We have not taken the steps that we should have taken after Russia's invasion of Georgia, Russia's support of the Assad regime, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Here, even over the last several months, we constantly worry that the Russians might escalate somehow. This is well intended but misguided. I do not think that the Russians can do much more other than go to a nuclear weapon, which I think is possible but very, very unlikely. The bigger risk comes if we continue to limit ourselves. That only keeps Russia in the war longer.

There are a lot of really smart, well-intentioned people here in Washington and in other capitals who somehow believe that we can deal with Russia and that to crush the current Russian regime is not something that we ought to be doing. I would of course disagree with

that. Right now, NATO has the best strategic advantage over Russia that we have had probably since the creation of NATO. With all the problems that the Russians have and the direction in which things are going, this is our best chance in a very long time to weaken them to the point where they can no longer threaten their neighbours.

I would respectfully disagree with your contention that Russia did not flex its muscles during the Trump Administration. It invaded Ukraine before the Trump Administration, and for the four years of the Trump Administration it continued fighting against and killing Ukrainians in the Donbass region. It continued to strengthen its dominance in the Black Sea region, and it did nothing to indicate any interest or willingness to be a responsible member of the international community. Candidly, it probably felt that it did not need to do certain things as long as President Trump was in office. I think with the new Administration Russia saw a variety of different issues in the United States, in the UK, in Germany, and that this was an opportune time for it to go ahead and launch this latest phase of its invasion of Ukraine. That is how I would see it.

Q128 Lord Alton of Liverpool: Good morning, General. How would you define threats in cyber and telecommunications, for instance, falling below the threshold of war? What defence and security capabilities will be required to respond effectively to those challenges? In NATO in general and the UK in particular, are we well placed to develop and deploy these capabilities?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: I have been a little surprised that the Russians have not done more from a cyber standpoint both directly against Ukraine but also against the rest of us. I believe—I cannot prove this—that it is in large part due to the fact that they know that the UK and US have overwhelming offensive cyber capability that would destroy so much of the Russian infrastructure and that our ability to understand where it is coming from and what it is dwarfs whatever they might have. I think this has been a deterrence. The Russians certainly have a significant cyber capability, but I think they have held off doing certain things because of the retaliation that would surely come.

Having said that, I am very concerned about the cyber protection of critical transportation infrastructure. For the majority of US and British forces to get to the continent in a crisis would require airports, seaports, transportation networks, and I do not have a good sense that these are adequately protected or that there is an overall responsible authority ensuring that this is happening. It is very decentralised, because most of that infrastructure is commercial; it is owned by private companies under some government regulation. This is my biggest concern when it comes to cyber.

I believe that the Russians think in terms of being at war all the time. I know what you mean about being below the threshold of war in terms of kinetic conflict, but I think that from a Russian perspective they are always at war. Based on whatever effect they are trying to achieve, they will employ cyber or, as we are watching now, gas supplies. I live in Frankfurt, Germany, and everyone there is very worried that when the

Russians finish this scheduled maintenance period of Nord Stream 1 here, it will not come back on 21 July when it is supposed to. That is in the mind of every German politician and government leader. It is the use of those kinds of resources. It is no accident now that grain from Ukraine has been stolen, destroyed or blocked, again to put pressure on all of us. I put these in the category of other weapons that they employ on the continuum on the Russian way of war.

We have demonstrated clearly that we do not have a strategy for the Black Sea region. Fortunately, yesterday, Senator Shaheen and Senator Romney proposed a Bill requiring the US Government to come up with a strategy for the Black Sea region. That is simple: a comprehensive strategy that addresses economic and diplomatic efforts, information, security and co-operation. If we had such a strategy, we would have a much better relationship with our Turkish ally and we would already have a better system in place for ensuring that the grain got out that is needed by millions of people in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. These are all tools that the Russians use and, with so many nations being dependent on Russia for energy as well, we are not prepared adequately for those threats.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you very much for what you have just said, particularly about the deliberate use of starvation as a weapon of war, which is of course a war crime. We see that happening with the burning of fields in the Ukraine and the blocking of ports.

Can I take you back to something you said earlier about the political will that is needed to replenish the munitions and the armaments that are being poured in, quite properly, to support President Zelensky and Ukraine? An earlier witness told the inquiry that Stalin greatly feared the industrial capacity of the United States and its ability to replenish its armaments far more than its ability to deploy a nuclear weapon. Do you agree with that, and could you describe to us the political will that is being used in Congress at the moment to try to ramp up the improvements in industrial capacity? Do you think that the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO and the combined budget of the European Union of some €14 trillion is now in a position not to duplicate and replicate but to work with the United States in ensuring that we have that capability?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: Our President, on the day he took office, emphasised that there was a lot of work to do to repair, rebuild or strengthen relationships with all our allies because of the threats that several of your colleagues have already brought up: China, Russia, Iran, North Korea. Hardly anybody talks about terrorism or Islamic extremism any more, but that is still there. The need for allies to work together on all things is so much more than 2% of defence investment; it is capabilities, presence, intelligence sharing, information sharing, access—we depend so much on European allies to allow us to do things in Africa, Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East, for example.

In Congress, even in the darkest, toughest days of partisan politics and huge disagreements over the last several years and even today, support for the alliance has been very strong and bipartisan. Even during the Trump Administration, the actual number of US troops in Europe, not just rotational but based there, increased. This reflects strong congressional support for defence spending in those kinds of priorities. It is not endless, of course, and we will see some of that played out here in the midterm elections coming up in November. I cannot predict that, but my sense is that most people realise that American prosperity depends on European prosperity, which depends on stability and security in Europe as well as in the Indo-Pacific region. I do not hear much or read much here in the States that would cause me to change my mind on that.

Sweden and Finland joining the alliance was the best news I have heard all year. Hopefully all the necessary legislative bodies will approve their joining the alliance, including Turkey. With Sweden and Finland, we get not only a dramatic change in the geometry of NATO's defence in northern Europe and eastern Europe because of the geography, but two nations with strong levels of liberal democratic institutions, tendencies and societies. Some of the work that I am doing right now looks at what Finland is doing to help educate young people on how to recognise disinformation. That is built into the education system, which is impressive.

Then, of course, there is Sweden's and Finland's militaries, Finland in particular. The impact of 64 F35s in the Finnish air force will be significant and will change our air and missile defence capabilities for the alliance, as well as potential for counteroffensive operations, if that was ever required. Sweden will significantly improve our ability to control the Baltic Sea, if that was ever required. I see no downside to this. They will be security contributors not consumers. I cannot wait to start seeing lots of Swedish and Finnish officers in the various NATO headquarters. They will make our alliance a lot better.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you, that was a terrific reply. I am very grateful.

Q129 **Baroness Fall:** I want to come back to the sub-threshold question. You have talked quite a lot already about NATO and how that is working and improving. In particular, how do you ensure that the threats remain sub-threshold and do not become kinetic? In relation specifically to Russia, you have implied that you do not think there is a difference between those—that they are always active, as it were. How do we contain Russia, going forward?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: There are two things. First, we have to have clear in our mind the strategic outcome that we want with Russia. We have deceived ourselves, or perhaps we were naive, in thinking that somehow it was reasonable and was interested in being a part of the international order. Almost everybody recognises now that that is the last thing it is interested in. I believed it too. I can remember having Russian soldiers with us in 1995 when the NATO Implementation

Force went into Bosnia to implement the Dayton peace accord. I thought, "Wow, this is actually going to work", but the last 20 years have disabused me of that notion.

Our strategy would have to be something that all the allies could embrace. The outcome of that would then guide the actions necessary to prevent this getting kinetic. But I would advise against ever saying what we will not do. The President said, for example, that we will not put boots on the ground. Why would we ever communicate what we will not to do? Instead, the Russians should be very concerned that if they ever did something like what they are doing now, they would pay a crushing price for that. They need to believe that, so we have to be determined in that regard.

On cyber, I do not know but I would expect that people in my Government, with others, have communicated to the Kremlin that if it does certain things, this is what the price will be. We need the sort of deterrence that we grew up with in the Cold War, when it was very obvious that the British Army, the US Army, Europe, the German Bundeswehr were prepared to do whatever was required. We practised all the time and it was very obvious. They were aware of that.

I believe in the notion of great power. If we make it clear that we are going to compete in the information space, to contest everything that it tries to do in the Black Sea region, Africa and the Middle East, and to demonstrate our interests and that we are prepared to invest and do what is required to do that, there is less chance of it making the terrible miscalculation that it made. I would say the same thing with the Chinese.

Q130 Baroness Fall: Thank you very much. That brings me very neatly to my supplementary on the Chinese. The Ukraine experience has made people turn to thinking "What if?" in relation to something like that happening in relation to Taiwan, for example. One of my questions is related to the sub-threshold version of that: in other words, coercion or blockade as opposed to kinetic and how the US and allies would respond to that.

I also want to come back to you on the issue of disinformation. You are absolutely right about cyber being the dog that did not bark, but we have seen a lot of disinformation, and China is particularly good at that.

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: On disinformation, I am old enough that there was no such thing as the internet or iPhones when I was in middle school or elementary school, but I can to this day remember Ms McKendry, my seventh grade teacher, telling us that we needed to have more than one source of information for news. You cannot just have one newspaper, one magazine or whatever. It seems quaint now to say it that way, but it is still true. Our education system in the United States, and I suspect in other countries, has to take this on at an early age—perhaps defence offers a model—so that people grow up being discerning, critical thinkers about what they are hearing and reading instead of just swallowing it from their one favourite station, whether that is on the left or the right or anywhere else. That is a real

problem for us that makes us vulnerable to disinformation. That is not news to any of you sitting there, but the education system, and the quality of education, is just as important as the arms industry, the exercises or the forward basing that we do.

I think China is watching very closely to see whether the United States, the UK, all our allies, with all our combined economic and military power, can stop Russia. If we cannot stop Russia right now, China will not be terribly impressed with anything that we say about Taiwan or the South China Sea. The complexity of the task to support Ukraine and defeat Russia is much less than it will be to support Taiwan, given the distances and the challenges associated with how we would get there and how we would mass capabilities. It is much less complicated to do that with Ukraine, yet the Chinese see that we are still not 100% committed to helping Ukraine win, that somehow we are keeping the door open. The Russians just have to make it to the wintertime and they are pretty sure that we will all lose interest, or our populations will lose interest.

On a practical standpoint, they are also paying attention to how effective anti-ship missiles are. Ukrainians gathering the harpoons that Denmark provided and pretty much putting them on a truck were able to sink Russian ships at a great distance. The Chinese will have taken note of those kinds of capabilities. If Russia makes the terrible miscalculation of employing a nuclear weapon of any sort, they will also watch very carefully how we respond. It does not have to be a nuclear response, but if we do not respond in a crushing way, that will be a clear signal to the Chinese about our ability and willingness to deter use of a nuclear weapon.

Finally, the Chinese are probably not happy with the Kremlin right now. The Chinese are probably four years away from being ready to actually invade Taiwan. They have a lot of ships, but we know that a lot of ships does not equal a great navy. I do not think they are prepared to do this yet, and they probably are not happy that the Kremlin woke us all up and has all of us now looking at our ammunition, our capabilities and getting serious on strategy. The NATO summit just completed in Madrid. China would probably have preferred this not to be happening right now.

The Chair: Thank you.

- Q131 **Lord Boateng:** Thank you for your service, General. President Bush, in establishing the US Africa Command in 2007, recognised the vital link between security and development and the growing strategic importance of Africa. Since then, we have seen al-Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates active on the continent. We have seen Russian surrogates at work in Mali and in central Africa, and China is now opening up a second base on the continent. France has indicated that it is withdrawing from Mali, at least partially. The UK is present in that country. What is your assessment of the threat there and of the United States' expectation of its allies in stepping up to the plate in Africa, where Europe has long-standing historical connections?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: Admittedly I am not an expert on this, so please take what I say with that in mind. Whenever I talk to my friends from US Africa Command in Stuttgart or from US Army Africa, the first thing they will do in the first five minutes is pull out their favourite map that shows Africa, which is three times the size of continental United States, to help me appreciate the challenge that they have based on distance, not to mention the hundreds of different languages and ethnicities and other things that make it a challenge—*[Inaudible]*—resource a proper strategy. Obviously the United States does not have the resources to address all the requirements in prioritising certain parts of Africa, but clearly all of us, particularly our European allies that are facing Africa across the Mediterranean, recognise that food shortages will drive people north. I think the Russians have calculated this. They know how destabilising the refugees were in 2015 coming out of Syria, where they in effect had weaponised refugees. Blocking the grain shipments is another tactic that will start millions of people moving, probably towards Europe where they anticipate that they would find food.

Africa is not an island, obviously. Let me say it that way. What happens in Europe and the Middle East will affect Africa, so it has to be part of a broader strategy. Candidly, I see no significant increases in US resources beyond what we have: special forces, the occasional exercise. Our efforts will have to be much more in terms of investment, education, helping with infrastructure. The challenge, which all of you know, is that we are competing against the Chinese in particular, who are unhindered by any concerns about legal issues, human rights issues, labour law. This is the competition that we are against when it comes to investment in Africa in ways that would help address those security issues.

Q132 **Lord Anderson of Swansea:** General, I am not inviting you to intrude into internal US politics, but could you help us to interpret and to understand any change of mood in the US in respect of NATO? I think, for example, of the more difficult period at the end of the Trump Administration and the fact that a new Atlanticist Administration now in the US was met with some relief in NATO. Now we are approaching the midterms, we are approaching a possible new Administration. How apprehensive should we in the UK and in NATO be about the policy of a new US Administration?

Lieutenant General (Retd.) Ben Hodges: I am apprehensive, of course. This why I recently transitioned from the Centre for European Policy Analysis, the think tank where I have worked for the last four and a half years, to join as a senior adviser to Human Rights First, which has asked me to help lead a defensive democracy effort. I believe that our American democracy is under attack not only externally but here inside the United States. I see it first-hand. Like many of you, I suspect, I watched the January 6 commission hearings and what is coming out of that. It has been very painful to watch. Even family members and very close friends have revealed certain beliefs that I would never in my life have expected or guessed. We have a long-term challenge with education and winning back the confidence of the population in our institutions.

But I see enough and hear enough from Congress to have confidence. I think Congress is the most important bellwether or barometer of what is going on in the country. We are starting to see and hear reports that although the House may go to the Republicans, the Senate is looking more and more competitive for Democrats to hang on to. It would be very important for a Democratic Administration to retain control of the Senate at least.

I feel better now than I did six months ago about the direction. The President has a real challenge, of course, in protecting his own left flank and trying to hold his party together. I am not a Democrat, but it does not look to me that the President is getting all the credit he deserves for a lot of the economic things that are going on, so they have some work to do in the Administration to make sure that voters understand why things are the way they are.

I would say that you can count on your American ally. Even during the time of the Trump Administration, as I said earlier, US troop commitment in Europe increased. Congressional support for increased spending in Europe increased. So I think that most Americans would recognise that even if they are frustrated or irritated that some allies may not be doing enough, we know that our security and our prosperity depend on the prosperity and security in Europe. At the end of the day, that is how it will play out.

The Chair: General, thank you very much indeed. You end on a note that resonates very well here: the importance of the alliance between the UK and the US. As a very old history teacher, I always have to remember that our oldest treaty of alliance was with Portugal, but our most enduring and detailed alliance has always been with the United States, after the initial hiccup of the revolution a little while ago. Thank you very much indeed also for overcoming the problem with IT to give such valuable evidence to our inquiry.