



International Relations and Defence Committee

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

Tuesday 1 November 2022

2.30 pm

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; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 22

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Questions 173 - 187

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Mr Ben Wallace MP, Secretary of State for Defence; Major General David Eastman MBE, Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff—Capability and Force Design, Ministry of Defence; Damian Parmenter CBE, DG Strategy and International, Ministry of Defence.

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Examination of witnesses

Ben Wallace, Major General David Eastman and Damian Parmenter

Q173 **The Chair:** Good afternoon. I welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Committee in the House of Lords the Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP, who is Secretary of State for Defence. Indeed, it is really welcome back; it is almost exactly one year since you joined us for a couple of hours to answer questions on a very wide range of your responsibilities. Thank you for joining us as we come to the very last evidence-taking session in our inquiry, "Defence concepts and capabilities: from aspirations to reality".

Secretary of State, I note that you are accompanied by two senior officials from the MoD: Major General David Eastman MBE, who is assistant chief of defence staff for capability and force design, and Damian Parmenter CBE, director-general for delivery and strategy. Welcome to you too.

At this stage, I always remind witnesses and members that the session is broadcast, on the record and transcribed. I also remind my colleagues that, when they ask their questions, if they have a relevant interest to declare, they should do that straightaway.

As ever, I will start with what is always a rather wide-ranging question, and I will then turn to my colleagues for more focused questions. Throughout, I anticipate that colleagues will wish to follow up with supplementary questions. As you have been generous and given us two hours of your time, Secretary of State, I anticipate that, once we have reached the end of the formal questions, colleagues who have not had a chance yet to ask questions, and others, may wish to come in. The questions may range a little more widely than those in the initial paper.

If I can begin the questioning, as you will be aware, we launched the inquiry way back in early spring. It looks again at the impact of the Integrated Review that was published last year, which covered a wide range from defence to security and foreign policy development. That was accompanied by your own Defence Command Paper. We are looking at the Government's estimate of the progress they have made over that period. We have been taking evidence not only from officials but very widely as to how the Government have made progress.

Now that we have you in front of us, Secretary of State, can I ask you the same question? Can you please provide the committee with an update on the Government's progress in delivering on those aspirations set out in those two papers?

Ben Wallace: When we set out our Defence Command Paper, people recognised that this was a 10-year programme. Modernising the Army is a long-term plan. It was 15 years out of date compared to its peer group. Modernising all our capabilities is not something we can do in a few months. It is the beginning of a journey. In many areas we are on track, such as in our equipment programme.

Fundamentally, some of what we have seen in Ukraine has proved that we were on the right track, insofar as we identified the threat. We identified in both the IR and our Command Paper that Russia was the acute threat to the United Kingdom, or certainly the main threat, while China was a competitor strategically and ideologically—and, indeed, around the world—that we needed to prepare for and plan for. Those two main headlines have not changed.

We are in the middle of an IR refresh. Professor John Bew, who helped author the original one, will produce that, and contributions from my department and others will be made towards it. That will, I hope, be published some time towards the end of this year, but we are having to take account of the economic challenges at the moment. We will wait to see what the Chancellor's Budget produces. I will have a meeting with the Chancellor this week about what that means for my department.

Here are some highlights of the progress. SONAC—the Secretary of State's Office for Net Assessment and Challenge—has rolled out. We have appointed a director. Indeed, we have already started doing a number of studies. It has helped drive some challenge already within the organisation.

We have committed to a number of equipment programmes that are important. We have started the process of updating the Challenger tanks, with Challenger 3. I have always promised that I am going to grip Ajax and get on top of that troubled programme. Lord Campbell might laugh, but you will find that we are getting to a better place. Before I get run over by the political bus, I hope that one way or the other we have eventually resolved the 2010 programme; that is how long it has been.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: I look forward to it.

Ben Wallace: That is one of the big land capabilities. The investments and all the things that are deeply important to modernising the Army are on track.

Some of the sticking points still exist in the Air Force with pilot training, which no doubt you have seen and covered. We are determined to get to grips with those. There is a head office reform that I will announce the details of. I was determined to reform the department of state to make it ready for the 21st century and the challenges to how we do business. That will be published imminently in full detail. That was my second determination.

The reorganisation of the Army, including the creation of the Ranger battalions, has started to develop. It was the Rangers who went to Ukraine two or three weeks before the invasion to train Ukrainians on NLAW. That was exactly what we felt part of their role was—to help countries help themselves and build their own resilience. The further development and selection of them and investment in them is going in the right direction.

We now have two Batch 2 OPV ships based in the Pacific, one currently in Japan and one heading to Japan. They have spent the last few months permanently based in the Pacific. We have started that Pacific tilt that we have talked about.

Q174 **The Chair:** Can I pick up on your final comment about the tilt to the Pacific? The Integrated Review, as you said, correctly predicted just what a threat Russia could be about a year ahead of it launching its illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, but the papers in 2021 very much looked at the tilt towards the Pacific. How have the onset of a major war in Europe and the change in our spending ability—regardless of the percentage, but the way the pound has gone and our buying facility—affected our approach to the tilt to the Pacific?

In among all that there is a vital area, the Middle East, which was barely referenced in the MoD paper and the Integrated Review. Members of this committee, including me, went to both Bahrain and Qatar recently. Thank you to the MoD and the ambassadors, particularly, for arranging our visits to the UK bases there. We are certainly very much aware of the importance of the Middle East. We wonder why that was just glossed over.

Ben Wallace: With all due respect, I do not think it was. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cooperation Council, Oman, Qatar, Iraq and Syria are mentioned in equal balance to Germany, Italy and Greece. It is here. Our commitments have not changed. In fact, in some areas they may have increased.

Our standing commitment to mine clearing in the Gulf, which is a permanent commitment, still exists. In fact, we have gone upwards in the Middle East with a joint squadron with the Qataris, which will start to come online during the World Cup and which has the potential to remain, depending on what the Qatari Government wish to do. Our investment in Iraq continues at the invitation of the Iraqis. I have effectively increased the commitment to Oman by demanding that we have at least two four-month exercises a year in Oman in Ras Madrasah training area. That compares, pre IR, to about six weeks' periodic training.

We have not neglected the Middle East at all. In fact, I have a phone call with my Saudi counterpart after this session. The Middle East is incredibly important to me. The number of trips I have made to Oman as Defence Secretary is significant, and I will continue to make those trips. We have continued the investment in that space.

As for the Pacific tilt and the question of what impact there is from Russia's invasion, it is inevitable that at one level insecurity in Europe will force us to make some new choices. It does not change the generic investment and modernisation of our Armed Forces, because ultimately we need 21st century capability in our Army, which includes deployability. The lesson we are learning in Ukraine is that, unless you are effectively formed with a 360-degree ability to protect yourself, or indeed to plug into somebody else, you will be very vulnerable.

The Russians have demonstrated their failures by having lots of numbers—they could boast about how many BMPs and tanks they had—but no proper integrated air defence, no proper communications, no proper protective armour on their armoured vehicles, which meant that NLAWs and Javelins took them apart. For all their mass, they could not proceed. Those lessons are pertinent, whether we would use that in the Pacific or on the European continent.

What will be very welcome for all of us, especially those of us who remember the Cold War, is that NATO will move to a position of developing regional plans in much more detail. That is scheduled to report some time in spring next year. In the Cold War, we each had locations assigned. We all knew which part of the German border we would be deployed to. In fact, it went down to the detail that pilots even knew targets on a sort of D-day.

I do not expect us to have that much granularity, but it means that NATO will be very clear in indicating how its overall military plan is constructed and what role we have in it. In some areas, that will put pressure on NATO partners and what they put forward on their bits of paper about how much availability they have. It will be a very interesting test. It will test us as much as any other ally. We definitely have gone back to that.

We may find that NATO itself is telling the UK that it wants more on the European continent. We will see. That is up for discussion. General Cavoli is the new Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and he is busy writing and authoring those plans as we speak. By then we will probably have two new members, Sweden and Finland. Having that elongated Russian border, which we have not been used to, will potentially change how Britain sits in NATO and our role in the high north. Suddenly that might become our main access, rather than the German plains, as was traditional. We will see what he does in his plans.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that tour d'horizon of the most crucial issues that face us today.

Q175 **Lord Wood of Anfield:** Secretary of State, thank you for coming today. We appreciate it very much. I wanted to ask you about defence spending. Maybe it is the special adviser from the Treasury coming out in me. The last Prime Minister's Government pledged that they would increase defence spending to 3% of GDP by 2030. The current Prime Minister and Chancellor are recalibrating expectations of what is happening in the short term.

First, how confident are you that the Government will be able to maintain this commitment to the 3% target? Secondly, within that scope for possible increase, what would be the main areas of defence that you would prioritise for increased funding and why?

Ben Wallace: I am confident that there is a recognition that defence is moving up the funding priority ladder. I get that from your party as well when I talk to it. How fixed the new Prime Minister and Chancellor are

going to be on 3% we will find out at the Budget. For the OBR, you will have to indicate your spending profiles.

From my point of view, what matters for me is the next three or four years. I have my spending envelope that currently finishes in 2024, and our previous calculations were based on that. These next two years will really be seeking insulation from foreign exchange, for example, and inflation. If I can manage to get that, I am still on track to deliver the Defence Command Paper.

Then we have the discussion about what an increase in defence spending looks like and how far it goes. What is important, as you will understand from your time in the Treasury, is that you cannot build a warship in one year. You have to get the profiling of your defence spending correct. That is important. Treasury tricks involving big lots of upfront capital to spend magically in a year will not work. If you stay flat until 2029 and then go up, no one will be able to spend significant amounts of money. We are going to have to work very hard to get a manageable profile.

The big thing here is the culture. It is a really big cultural change for defence spending to increase at whatever level that is. If you really focus on our defence spending going back to 1991, you will see that it has been on a downward trajectory since then both as a percentage of GDP and in cash terms. Efficiencies have been allowed to accrue, but fundamentally, when I deal with my two officials on my left and right, we face an institutional culture that for 40 years has expected every Budget to be a cut. It has been a very difficult department to be in sometimes. I have had to get them, and wider Government, to understand that we have to think about investment.

We are all used to the NHS, bobbies on the beat and education. Those were the three big things and maybe they still are. That is a debate for a general election, but I am confident that the argument has been made that defence needs to come back up the priority in investment.

The next argument is about how much it comes up by. As Defence Secretary I would like it to be by significant amounts, but I also live in the real world. In the next two years, there is a spending challenge that we have to meet. I have my envelope. Inflation is my biggest enemy, with a capital budget that ranges from £15 billion to £18 billion a year. That level of capital, unlike other departments, means that I am particularly vulnerable to inflation and exchange rate pressures. I would like to get through that and then plan into the longer term.

Lord Wood of Anfield: By "get through that" you mean making sure that there is at least a flat line in real terms.

Ben Wallace: Yes, or more. Part of the implementation of the Defence Command Paper involves big capital projects: Type 26 frigates, Type 31 frigates. We have the first Type 31 being made. The first Type 26 is sort of completed. The second Type 26 is on the stocks. We also have the Challenger 3 upgrade and Ajax. These are all big capital programmes and

big investments, which amount to £80 billion over the next 10 years. You can imagine how much inflation can affect that.

Q176 **Lord Stirrup:** Secretary of State, good afternoon. One of the lessons from Ukraine—it is not a new lesson, but one that we seem to have to keep relearning—is the appalling rate of expenditure on equipment, particularly munitions, in high-intensity conflict. It seems clear that, having taken a risk on our weapons stockpiles for a great many years, they were inadequate in the first place. Of course, they are lower now, because we have, quite rightly, given so much to Ukraine.

What assessment do you make of the current UK force structure's ability to fight effectively and enduringly in high-intensity peer-on-peer conflict? Are there significant implications not just for restoring weapon stocks but for increasing them to where they should have been? Are there implications for the types of weapons?

Bear in mind that in Ukraine we have only seen a part of the Russian force structure. Russian submarines, for example, have not been to the fore in the Ukraine conflict. There are many bits of the Russian military capability that are not being engaged in Ukraine. What lessons will emerge from this?

Ben Wallace: Some of the lessons are only just being found out. You very politely talked about taking risks in your ammunition stocks, which is a polite departmental excuse, to be brutally honest, for having hollowed out our ammunition stocks for 40 years to pay for upfront platforms.

This war has exposed our whole pitch of "night one, day one", which is the mantra of the department and of NATO. You might translate it as saying, "When the balloon goes up, you take out the air defence of your adversary and then you can pick and choose at will and do your targeting". What if you do not manage to do that on day one, night one, and it takes three weeks, as the Russians found out? On their day one, night one, the Ukrainians rather cleverly drove out of their barracks or used deception in their air defence capabilities. Knowing that this was going to happen, the Ukrainians, from what we can see, used false trails for where their air defence was so that Russia hit all the wrong places. Suddenly, day one, night one becomes three weeks, four weeks. You run out of your complex weapons and you are now where the Russians are.

It throws up a number of challenges. The first is that that hollowing out is finding us out. We are also finding that out in the maintenance of our ships and submarines. I have talked about that before. We did not invest in the cranes, the dry docks and all the things that are unglamorous but super-key to the availability of our platforms.

One of our priorities is restocking. We make certain assumptions about our ammunition stocks. We understand that our highly complex aircraft and ships are bespoke. Of course, when you finish buying them, people do not just hang around on the production lines. It turns out that, for

even the most basic munitions, the just-in-time or made-to-order supply chain, including for the NLAWS, finishes when you stop buying them. Sure enough, when you try to reheat the NLAW supply chain, you discover there is a shortage of the optics or the explosives, and you have to start that all over again. That may take 18 months or whatever. One of the pieces of work we are doing is about investment in supply chain security. How do we get to a position where that does not become a problem and we have enduring stocks?

This is also a question about export. Take our Typhoon capability. If I want to order another 30 Typhoons tomorrow morning, we still have a production line because we are still selling around the world. We are selling to the Qataris. I went to hand over some Typhoons to Qatar. It is incredibly good. Their variant is unbelievably good. All those considerations are coming to the fore. That is part of it.

On the ability for us to fight on land, I am worried. In the cycle of our three front-line commands, we should worry about the British Army's current capabilities. That is why the modernisation programme is so important. It is £23 billion in the next 10 years. In parts of it, it is way behind its peer group, never mind its adversary, in its physical capabilities. We need to work on that, very much so.

As you will know from your own time, the little things matter. Take the pilot pipeline. I have more F35s than I have pilots at the moment. Part of that is a Catch-22. You do not have enough instructors to train the pilots, so you do not have enough pilots to grow the instructors. Nevertheless, those things are quite a challenge. Our pilot pipeline is not in the place I would like it to be. We are currently out of sync between the aircraft carrier regeneration and the pilots regeneration. We have to fix that.

Overall, we could do it. Could we do it enduringly? Not with the stocks we have, no, but we are not alone. I should think every NATO member will be in that position.

Lord Stirrup: That just exacerbates the problem. Could I just focus for a moment on the issue of industrial capacity? You said that you cannot build a warship in a year. As you also said, you cannot fire up production lines overnight either. If the industrial capacity is not there, you do not have the resilience. The industrial capacity will be there only if the people who are investing in those industries are seeing a return on their investment and the prospect of a return in the long term.

That begs the question about the volatility of defence expenditure, particularly on munitions. There has to be some reasonable prospect for industry that the UK and other partner nations will continue buying those things over the long term. As we have seen, all sorts of things happen in the management of the defence budget in the short term, such as cutting back on orders, which bounce back down that industrial chain. You said that there is a lot of work going on in this area. How would you address that particular problem?

Ben Wallace: First of all, there is the defence industrial strategy, on which I am happy to bring in Damian Parmenter. From my point of view, it goes back to my earlier comment about the culture. The culture that is felt inside the department of 40 years of either managing decline or clinging on is also felt by industry. It knows that it is unlikely that you will have lots and lots of something.

They have become very good at adapting their supply chain. One minute they are making anti-air missiles, but they are quite clever at using those same skills to suddenly do anti-tank. You cannot do it concurrently, so that is their challenge. You are right; we need to indicate a 10-year programme of defence spending, and be very clear about what we want to be sovereign and what we are prepared to do in a different way.

We also need to be really proactive in finding international partners, first, for value for money and, secondly, when we are in the same cycle. The amazing thing about FCAS, the Tempest programme, is that we are in exactly the same cycle as the Japanese and the Italians. If we can harness their future requirements at the same time as our own, and we are all prepared not to want everything beautifully bespoke just for us, we can get into a place where we start to build volume. Volume is key for the defence industry.

The great thing about the Type 31 and Type 26 frigate campaigns is that we have sold the design to the Canadians and the Australians. The Type 31 is originally Danish. It was adapted by us and now the Indonesians have bought it. I was recently with the Poles, who have signed an intent on that design. It is definitely about that conversation, but the underpinning thing is a deep sense that there is a rising budget and we indicate how we are going to spend that. If it is feast and famine, we all suffer from that.

Damian Parmenter: At the same time we released the Defence Command Paper and the IR, we had the defence and security industrial strategy. That was aimed very much at these issues. We need to start treating the defence industry and some of the newer industries as strategic assets in their own right, in the same way that we treat the Army, Navy, Air Force and other things.

By treating it as a strategic capability, you start to set out what you need inside the United Kingdom and what you need to be sovereign, as the Secretary of State was saying. Then you work out how you are going to support it over a sustained period so that it is not feast or famine and it is not constant competition in a very straightforward value-for-money sense. Value for money is about having the weapon systems at the time you need them. That is being proven by what we are seeing in Ukraine. You do need to have that industrial base that can support you as you go forward.

On complex weapons, MBDA is a great example. The department said, "We're going to need to sustain this enterprise over decades". We have made long-term commitments with the company to ensure that we get

those weapon systems on an enduring basis. The DSIS allows us to do that across the piece. You saw that the land industrial strategy recently came out. That was recalibrating how the Army seeks relationships with industrial partners to ensure a stronger portfolio across a long time, so the Army understands what it is getting from industry partners over that time. It gets it at the right pace and you have the people with the skills and expertise across the piece to look at a range of capabilities, not just individual programmes but a portfolio approach. That is what we are trying to do with the DSIS to support that.

Lord Stirrup: I have seen a lot of defence industrial strategies over the years, and they have all foundered because the sustained orders were not there in the long term.

Ben Wallace: That goes to one difficult contradiction that you have to balance. An Armed Forces our size will not be able to sustain the volume that some of our competitors have. When the United States places orders, it places orders for thousands. What is a few hundred to sell from their production line? They are always more likely to have a production whirring away somewhere, whereas many of us do not.

Having a consortium with international partners means that you may not make 100% of everything, but you are probably making enough volume to sustain it. Typhoon is the best example of that. MBDA is a consortium of German, French, British and Italian companies. We are all making missiles for each other. If you go to their factory in Britain, you will find that they are making parts for a French missile; if you go to France, you will see that they are making a part for us.

As you will hear from our colleagues in this House, "Buy British" is often a slightly lazy phrase that is just thrown out there. Most things are now made by an international supply chain, not because it is all cheap but because we have to get the volume. Car manufacturers are no different from ship manufacturers. We may make the Type 26 and Type 31 in Glasgow and Fife, but those ships are not 100% British, because I am also trying to balance what I can find that is best for our people and where we can keep the skills up. The radar might have to come from somewhere else, or whatever.

We have to be honest about that. There is very rarely 100% British-made defence equipment. That also gives us access to their markets. You cannot shut yourself off and pull up the drawbridge. Even the United States could not do that at the moment. Take the F22 Raptor, the most amazing plane of its era. The United States could not afford its total buy and it was not allowed to export it to anyone, hence no one is making it any more. It is just what happened.

Q177 **Lord Boateng:** Secretary of State, it is good to see you in place. Your continuing presence amid recent changes is a source of some comfort for those of us who care about the defence of the realm. The Government announced in the Defence Command Paper that they would be reducing the size of the Army to 72,500 personnel, down from the previous target

of 82,000. What was the strategic logic for this particular figure of 72,500?

Will the size of the Army be revisited again as the Integrated Review is updated and if defence spending increases? To what extent are headline troop numbers a useful metric at all for judging army capabilities? Likewise, how far do ship and aircraft numbers capture the capabilities of the Navy and the RAF?

Ben Wallace: On the size of the Army, we have pushed it back up to 73,000; we went up an extra 500, which is approximately the size of a light role infantry battalion. In one sense we have pushed the Army back up. It is currently lurking—I would use that word—at 76,000 or 77,000 in strength. It was 79,000 about two months ago. We have not got down there. I have always said that, as the threat changes, so must the size of everything or so must what we spend. I stick to that. In my negotiations with the Treasury, I will be looking at whether we should go down to 73,000 or whether we can maintain it.

To your second point about whether it is a good metric, it is not at all. It has often been a metric handed out from the Treasury and No. 10 over the years. Any other business would seek to be given the challenge: "How do you reduce your salary envelope?" That should be the challenge to both the Army and the department.

The Treasury has always favoured reducing its RDEL on defence spend. Capital is one thing, but salaries are liabilities, in Treasury speak. The fairer challenge to the Army over the years would have been whether it can reduce its salary bill, rather than how many people it has. That is what the Treasury is really after anyhow. I managed an agreement with the Treasury about six months ago that we would push that challenge back to the Army on a salary scale and ask the Army whether it can produce a different number based on looking at how it structures itself.

I am pretty struck—General Eastman may be able to update you—that the infantry regiment I was part of probably has not changed its structure since 1930. It is exactly the same, I would guess: the same number of lieutenants, captains, sergeants and whatever. It will be interesting to see what the Army comes up with. On one level, their salvation is in their own hands. If they could come up with a salary package that looks slightly different, they might be able to have more junior ranks and therefore more people.

There is another bit about managing the size of anything. When making contracts and buying new equipment, we have not thought enough about reducing crews and reflecting autonomy or indeed modernisation. The future solid support ship is due to be announced pretty soon. The current crew of a future solid support ship is 115 people, if my memory serves me right. Given that the last time we built them was 25 or 30 years ago, I gave them the challenge: "Could we do it with 10% less crew?" Funnily enough, you can. It is not that hard. Times that by three ships; that is 30 or 35 fewer people.

The modern 155 artillery pieces that are currently out in the market or being developed have a crew of two people. Our 155 AS90s have a crew of five. That is not about a deliberate attempt to reduce the size of the Armed Forces. That is saying, "Look at modernisation". It then gives you the options of either having twice as many guns for the same number of people or the same number of guns for half the people. That is a sustainable way to manage the size of the Armed Forces based on the outcomes you can deliver rather than an arbitrary finger-in-the-air number, which seems to have always been there.

Even within the professional ranks of the Armed Forces, they all have theories about how big the Armed Forces should be. I did not make up 72,000 off the top of my head. The advice did not come from another service. Some parts of the Army decided that was the size they thought was right; other parts of the Army would disagree.

Lord Boateng: I have your quote in front of me: "As the threat changes we must change with it, remaining clear-eyed about what capabilities we retire, why we are doing things, and how they will be replaced".

If we struggled to take and hold a city such as Basra with an army of 100,000, bearing in mind what we are learning from Ukraine, and with Russia deploying surrogates, the Wagner Group, in Mali and the DRC, and China opening up a base on the west coast of Africa so that it has the west coast of Africa and Djibouti, are you satisfied that retiring 130 Hercules aircraft next year, and nine Chinook and 120 Puma helicopters, which do what you describe as the unglamorous but super-key work of actually deploying those troops, is in the best interests of the UK and its security and defence today?

Ben Wallace: You have sort of answered your own question. First of all, we are retiring 14 C130s and 16 Pumas,¹ if my memory serves me right. We are replacing the Pumas with a medium-lift helicopter and the C130 is being migrated over to the A400M, a more capable aircraft, which took time to come in. It had teething problems. Lord Stirrup will remember the difficulties. Its availability is now growing. It performed unbelievably well in the Afghanistan Op Pitting. You always have to retire and replace. That is just the way of things.

Lord Boateng: What about the Hercules?

Ben Wallace: The Hercules is the C130J. We are retiring 14 of them.

Lord Boateng: The original figure given was 130.

Ben Wallace: That is the name of the Hercules: C130.

Lord Boateng: What is happening to them?

Ben Wallace: They are being retired, and the work they were doing is being taken up by the A400M, of which we have 22 in total on order and

¹ [The correct figure is 12 Pumas.](#)

a potential to grow. That is the Airbus plane. It is assembled in Toulouse, but part of it is made in the UK. That is an air transport plane.

Lord Boateng: Knowing all you do now about what is happening in Ukraine, the deployment of Russian surrogates and the opening up of Chinese bases, are you still satisfied that that is enough?

Ben Wallace: If I list the things you talked about, the Wagner Group preys on vulnerable countries that do not have the resilience to see off the corruption they offer and, indeed, the military capability, which is why the Ranger battalion and security force assistance are so important. How do you stop Wagner preying on a west African country? You help the Government of the day to be more resilient so that Wagner cannot get in there.

Lord Boateng: Our people are doing a great job. You have done a great job. But the French are withdrawing from Mali.

Ben Wallace: We can go into the Algeria agreement and the failures of what led to Mali, but that is a whole different foreign policy discussion. Fundamentally, that is why I wanted to be more forward and present in the region, spending eight months a year in Oman. If you are absent from the region and sitting in Tidworth, you are not going to have much effect.

On the scale from war fighting all the way down to very soft power, defence has a big role in soft power in helping the resilience of those other countries, whether that is Rangers or others. It has a role by just being there. We have invested more in Kenya; we are doing more exercising there. It is very important that we help and support Kenya in its role against al-Shabaab. We are in Somalia.

I am comfortable that we currently have the forces to deliver that and effectively see off some of our adversaries where they would seek to destabilise. The threat does change. That is why it is important that we review. At some point in the spring I will issue a Command Paper review based on the new IR and on whatever the Budget indicates that I am going to get. That is very important, as you say.

On the bit about disinvesting and investing, this is an area that we need to reflect on since Russia. When we rolled out the Command Paper, we were very honest that there would be some capability gaps in the middle of the decade that we were prepared to tolerate because the threat was not as severe as it really is now. You could retire from the Army in the middle of the decade its long-range artillery and replace it with newer artillery, with much better range than its peers have. I am not comfortable with that now because of the threat Russia poses. Therefore, bringing that forward, even if by a year, helps reduce those gaps.

Threat has an effect on a number of things. First, do we need more or less funding? Do we look at our scale and our different priorities within defence? Secondly, where are we vulnerable that we should not be?

Ammunition stocks is another example. If Russia had not invaded Ukraine, we probably would have lived with the stocks we had towards 2028. Now we are not really comfortable with that, so we are investing. We have already started placing orders to replace those stocks.

Q178 **Baroness Blackstone:** My question follows on from Lord Boateng's question in a way. We have had a lot of witnesses at this committee, quite a few of whom characterised the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper as taking a bet on innovation, science and technology against force size as the best way of delivering military power. I do not know whether you would accept that characterisation. If you do, what was the rationale behind it?

Perhaps in answering the question you could tell us a bit about how the Government are going to manage the transition between what are called legacy technologies and the development of new ones in order to minimise the gaps in our capabilities.

Ben Wallace: I will ask General Eastman to come in on the last question. The best example is Russia. Russia has probably put nearly all its land forces into Ukraine. It committed about 65% of its forces. It hugely outnumbered the Ukrainians. Based on open-source references, it has lost 7,000 armoured vehicles and 2,000 tanks.

It had all the size of the world, but it did not have the innovation advantage, the integration capability or the protection. It did not have the basics for its soldiers to be able to communicate with each other and protect themselves. It did not have, effectively, a 360 capability.

This goes to this question: "Would you rather be medium or small but perfectly formed, or would you rather be very large and just get flattened on the road to Kyiv?" The answer on force size, to some extent, is demonstrated here. The Russians took the bet on force size and hollowed out their capability to do other stuff. Add to that very appalling leadership, and you end up where they were.

The second honest answer is that our force size has always been generated, over the last 50, 60, 70 or maybe 100 years, through coalitions. We are in NATO. That is how we generate our force size. We can debate whether we should have an extra division or an extra brigade, but fundamentally that is still not big enough to do what we need to do globally in a unilateral way. We have to belong to alliances. That is part of the values we hold, but it is also part of the initiative. There is only really one country on earth that can deploy anywhere in the world at massive scale. That is the United States.

We must make sure that we design to be integrated; we must make sure that we design to talk to each other and play a role in the kill chain, the sensor or the manoeuvrability, but fundamentally the last time the British Army was of the scale to do it unilaterally must have been in the 1920s. We often seek mass by alliances, but the challenge is to ask whether we are the right size for today's threat.

The direction of travel on our defence budget was to increase—we will see what happens in the Budget—because the threat is growing and so should we. We should reverse that direction. Then, the big challenge is that you will never please anyone with this challenge—the balance of investment. If we get a lot more money over the next 10 years, do I put more in the Air Force or the Navy and less in the Army? Do I put more in submarines or in surface ships? It is an interesting question that never pleases many people, and it is important that we get that in the right place.

Unless you can afford mass properly, the question has to be this: “Would you not rather have a perfectly formed and properly defended capable unit size than a huge number of people that we can play Top Trumps with?” A lot of my colleagues want to play Top Trumps. What is the point in having hundreds of tanks if you cannot protect them?

Major General David Eastman: In terms of that transition process and minimising the risk of any potential gaps, we are looking at a number of mechanisms. The first aspect is that we are constantly looking at force development and force design over time. That looks over a whole period from now right out to 30 years. There is a constant force development mechanism that is taking into account innovation and new technologies as they develop.

Then we do force variation testing to understand how that might that impact the force design. That enables us to figure out how that fits into the construct we are developing over time, and how we can bring that forward and take advantage of that effect. That is in terms of developing future capabilities.

In terms of reducing or mitigating any potential gaps, it is a balance of investment between extending legacy capabilities to meet the in-service dates of incoming new technologies, which is the traditional way of doing it, and a novel approach that is being adopted or examined, which has much more in the way of experimentation, fielding capabilities, spirally developing in those and then attempting to scale the capabilities that are successful, while being quick to decide when a capability is not going to be successful, removing that from the planning process and moving on to other areas.

That requires us to look again at how we procure, so there are a number of developing mechanisms looking at how we might improve our spiral development and procurement processes.

Baroness Blackstone: It is pretty hard to disagree with your quality over quantity priorities, but I wonder whether I could push you a bit on what you were describing earlier about co-operation with our NATO allies in relation to the question of innovation and supply chains. Where do we have the comparative advantage?

Can you give any examples of projects that we have been developing with our NATO allies, particularly in Europe rather than in the US, where

you can see the advantages of sharing and dividing labour in a way that produces more effective weaponry?

Ben Wallace: Our stable of complex weapon systems, such as Meteor and Storm Shadow, is produced through MBDA, which is a French, German, British and Italian consortium of companies. Not all but most of our platforms use those weapon systems. That has been a success. I do not know how old MBDA is; it has probably been in existence for 20 years.

It has been a success. Some of our brightest people are there, developing weapons systems, some of which have significant advantages over United States systems or at least different characteristics. That works very well. The likes of DSTL, our science research organisation, and Defence Intelligence will feed in their knowledge of the adversary, as will all the European nations in there, to make sure those weapon systems are able to defeat countermeasures or the adversary.

That is the best example. I would urge you to have a look at that organisation or company. It has a significant amount of jobs in the United Kingdom. As I said earlier, you are finding that you are making equipment for other countries and they are making it for you. It works very well.

Another standing consortium would be the Typhoon consortium of Italy, Spain, Britain and Germany. It has made Typhoon fighters. Off the top of my head, there must be 500 to 600 fighter aircraft in existence. There are significant jobs in Lancashire and a supply chain right through the United Kingdom for that.

They do work. We are spending £6.6 billion on R&D at the moment. That is at different levels. Damian will probably be able to talk about that as well. Going back to my earlier point, even the big United States programmes have British components or unique British systems in them. That is because of the investment we have put into R&D.

The other point is the effect on export customers of Britain being the first customer. If the British Army or Air Force is using it, it must be good. To some extent, people are keen to be part of it. Our investments are in lots of areas. Our latest investments are in areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum. We are also investing in FCAS—the Tempest. The next generation of fighter will be important for us as well.

Damian Parmenter: A key part of the industrial strategy and our defence strategy is collaboration, particularly in science and technology. It has given us access to unique capabilities working with both the US and our NATO allies and partners. The F35 is a great example of where the contribution the UK was able to make through its science and technology programmes got us to be part of that programme.

Again, the investment in science and technology helps you to fight today, but, most importantly, it is about future conflict. If we do not invest in

science and technology, we will be caught out by other nations that are investing. You have to keep the upgrades constant. As the Secretary of State was outlining, we have real areas of UK expertise in artificial intelligence, quantum, biosciences and things like that. We are a really influential nation, so other nations come to us and want to collaborate with us, which gives us that access to wider technologies.

Critically for us, it is about making sure that the science and technology is properly developed and then put into UK and international equipment at a speed that remains relevant to the threats we are seeing. That is a large part of what we are trying to do with the defence industrial strategy. It is not just a case of exciting science and technology not leading anywhere. It is about tagging everything we do so that it ends up in UK equipment and weapon systems and those of our allies and partners.

Baroness Blackstone: Have we done this sufficiently well with tanks?

Damian Parmenter: That is an obvious area where we have not done as well. The Challenger 3 is a great example of where we are catching up in that area. The comparison with a Leopard tank is in the public domain to see. The idea of keeping up across the piece is critical. As has already been mentioned, we are part of NATO, so we decide where is best to invest within an overall alliance structure.

The most important thing for us at the moment is sensors and lethality across the force structure to give you the advantages you need on the modern-day battlefield. If you look at what the Russians are doing in Ukraine at the moment, they are crying out for those capabilities. Luckily, we are the ones leading the way there.

Q179 **Lord Alton of Liverpool:** Secretary of State, before we start, thank you. You made a reference just a moment ago, in answer to Lady Blackstone's question, to the county of Lancashire. In the north-west of England, which we both know well, you are held in very high regard and respect for the role you have played in withstanding the invasion of Ukraine by Putin and the illegal war there.

Let us stay with Ukraine for a moment, if we may. You said earlier that we had learned lessons as the conflict has continued. How would you characterise the current balance between nuclear, conventional and subthreshold threats to the United Kingdom? How prepared is the UK to respond to each type of threat?

Some of our witnesses who have appeared before the inquiry have argued, perhaps with the encouragement of Captain Hindsight, that the defence White Paper placed too much emphasis on subthreshold threats compared to threshold warfare. Would you agree with that assessment?

Perhaps building again on the reply you just gave to Lady Blackstone, we have heard evidence about Ajax. It has cost £5.5 billion and the Public Accounts Committee has said that it was flawed from the outset. What can we learn from that?

On nuclear capability, members of the committee went to Faslane and were enormously impressed by our submariners. We have seen what you have had to say about the importance of submarine warfare and our capability in that area. The Integrated Review announced what was previously a downward trajectory in the UK's own nuclear warhead capability and ceiling. What was the rationale for that?

Ben Wallace: Thank you, Lord Alton. I thought we went up. In the IR, we declared an increase in our warhead numbers.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: I mean the stockpile ceiling.

Mr Ben Wallace: Yes, we increased the amount of warheads. I can get the exact figures for the committee. I will go nuclear, conventional and then subthreshold. On subthreshold, the United Kingdom is quite ahead of its peer group in many areas. The National Cyber Security Centre, which was founded about four or five years ago, has been a real success. It is an arm of GCHQ. It has been incredibly good at building defences against cyberattacks and investigating everything from the charities it advises all the way through to major corporations and government.

It manages very secret information and intelligence. It manages to take from that the key warnings and the key countermeasures, and to communicate those in an open way to a whole lot of important industries and sectors. It is often at the very heart of our response. Many other countries do not even have that.

Subthreshold is often cyber. It can be organised crime. Cyber, organised crime, political corruption and disinformation are the big four in subthreshold. We are quite strong in cyber, although it often depends how much the adversary wants it to be known they are doing it, how deniable they want to be or how reckless. We saw WannaCry, which came out of North Korea. That was a completely reckless use of cybercrime. I do not even think the North Koreans were trying to inflict what they did. That is an example. We are ahead in that space.

In disinformation, we benefit from having a mainstream media. We are not fragmented in the same way other countries are. I am a big supporter of the BBC and our mainstream news. Ultimately, we need a reference point in the storm. If you go to countries where it is completely all over the place, they are much more vulnerable to disinformation campaigns or a manipulation of the media. We recognise the importance of that, but we should be on our guard. Disinformation and media manipulation are very dangerous things that can happen subthreshold.

I have seen examples of information being selectively leaked by hostile states to media outlets in this country, which has ended up with people using it in a way that the adversary wanted without their knowledge. That is particularly dangerous.

In corruption, I have always believed that transparency is one of the best ways to protect us in our political culture. Transparency in Parliament is

important. I am sitting in the House of Lords, so I should say this. If I was an adversary thinking about where I could target to influence without it being found out, it would be the House of Lords. It does not have the same levels of transparency in its interests that the House of Commons does. That opens up some questions about manipulation. We have seen Peers from all parties be victims of that manipulation, and we have to be alert to it.

On subthreshold, the United Kingdom is in a good space. It is not 100%; it is never going to be, but we are recognised as being quite a strong leader in that space. The use of the National Crime Agency, the National Cyber Security Centre and GCHQ are helping us in that.

In the nuclear space, we do not really have this absurd concept in our doctrine of tactical nuclear weapons that the Russians refer to. I should remind the committee that a tactical nuclear weapon, in the Russian mindset, is roughly one kiloton all the way through to 10 times the size of Hiroshima, so I am not quite sure that, in anyone's real life, that could be considered anything other than a big nuclear weapon. I do not differentiate.

I am pleased we have a nuclear deterrent. I am pro-deterrent. Our deterrent has kept us safe for decades, and right now, with President Putin invoking nuclear one way or the other—whether that be dirty bombs, a tactical nuclear weapon or, indeed, strategic comments—I am pleased that we sit here with a deterrent that has a quality and capability that, in my belief, will deter our adversaries.

It is important that we continue to invest in it. The Government's investment in Dreadnought, the replacement of Trident, is important, and I spend a lot of time making sure it is on track and on time. Unlike France, for example, or the United States, our deterrent is delivered through one method, the at-sea deterrent. Other countries have two or three legs of the stool for their deterrence. The French have submarine and airborne nuclear delivery. The United States have three, with silos as well, which gives them their own resilience, as do the Russians.

But our nuclear capability speaks for itself, and we are determined to be a leader in that with the other P3 countries. The P3, again, is not a grouping of countries that is often talked about these days but is becoming more important. It is incredibly important that France, Britain and the United States, as the P3 nuclear powers of NATO, work together in upholding the nuclear taboo that has been in existence since 1945. In conventional forces, that is why the Defence Command Paper is determined to invest in modernisation in order to keep us ahead of the game. I have always been honest that we have not been ahead in quite a lot of areas and we need to play catch-up, which is why the investment is being made the way it is. It is vital for the security of the country that we continue that modernisation.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: My assumption was that there had previously been a downward trajectory, but you have given a very good answer as

to why that would not be desirable in the present circumstances. I mentioned Ajax as well, and perhaps you could touch on that. Before you do, let me add one other thing. We have learned in the last 24 hours about another 200 vessels being holed up in the Black Sea as a result of the blockade by Putin, with all the implications for the movement of grain to very poor countries, not least in the Horn of Africa, and the narrative that Putin tries to sell that this is all somehow the fault of the West. What can we do? One of the minesweepers that you referred to earlier has been moved from the Gulf to the Black Sea. What if that was fired on? What are the implications for us? What are we going to do about that situation?

Mr Ben Wallace: We do not have any warships in the Black Sea.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: No, but we have moved a minesweeper that we have given to the Ukrainians.

Mr Ben Wallace: Yes, those are two Sandown-class minesweepers. They are currently in Portsmouth. We are training them on it but it is up to the Turkish and the Montreux convention as to whether they are allowed through. That was a planned thing pre-war. We have not reduced our offering in the Gulf; we have replaced other parts of how we do things. It is not like we are doing less at the moment in the Strait of Hormuz with our minesweepers.

On the grain thing, so far, since Russia and Turkey brokered the deal, they have taken out 9 million tonnes. An annual cycle from Ukraine produces 23 million tonnes, so everyone was short already. This is just an example of Putin using food as a weapon, like he has used energy. It shows the depths he will go to. There is the worry of destabilisation in Africa as a result. I need to get the statistics but Yemen and Libya are very dependent on Ukrainian grain. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world, so what does that mean? As you say, the narrative is that it is all our fault. It is not.

It is difficult because we cannot sail warships into the Black Sea to protect them. The Turkish have been very good in brokering the deal, and I will speak to my Turkish colleague—I was in Turkey last week—to make sure we maintain that going forward. It is important that we communicate with our friends around the world that this is the doing of President Putin. He did not manage to successfully change that narrative last time, apart from for a few countries, and I am hoping that he will not again, but we need to work on that.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: On our visit to the Gulf, we heard about the joint exercises between China, Russia and Iran. We were very impressed by the alliances, which you referred to earlier on, between the United Kingdom and others. Clearly, there is the threat further east to the 23 million people of Taiwan, and under the cover of Ukraine. What is your assessment of the dangers there and what would be the implications for the United Kingdom?

Mr Ben Wallace: It is in China's plan to reunify Taiwan to mainland China. That has been in its 50-year plan, or whatever the plan is called, so it is not a secret. Britain wants a peaceful process towards that. In 1971, the United Kingdom, alongside large parts of the international community, recognised the sovereignty of mainland China over Taiwan. A vote was taken in the UN and we took that view alongside many other countries. But the use of violence by a state that currently directly challenges our values of democracy and freedom is something that everyone is working to avoid and discourage.

Taiwan is incredibly important, but the island chain politics is historically the big issue in the Pacific. There have been disputes around waters and fishing grounds for hundreds of years. The tensions between many of these countries are around freedom of navigation of the sea, and fishing grounds. Taiwan is a problem because, if China were to violently invade Taiwan, it would indicate a Chinese determination to break all the international laws about freedom of navigation and control of the Pacific. It is not for any one nation to control, and that is why these artificial sort of islands, or whatever they are called, that have popped up are an area of concern, because what follows is an attempt to coerce shipping away from it or, indeed, to strike through the international law of the sea, which is one of the most ratified UN treaties of all. About 100 countries have signed it, way more than have signed any other, so that is a concern.

The Chair: Secretary of State, you referred to the law of the sea, and our previous inquiry was indeed on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which in fact led us very neatly into the current inquiry.

Q180 **Baroness Rawlings:** Secretary of State, thank you very much for coming today to our last evidence session. I would like to return to the Integrated Review, which highlighted the need to create a culture that supports, naturally, integration, adaptation and innovation. Several of our witnesses so far have spoken of the need for cultural change in defence, such as improved business engagement and a higher risk tolerance. I would like to probe further. What kinds of cultural change do you foresee and think are needed in the Ministry of Defence? What are the Government doing to generate it?

Conversely, what do you feel the Ministry of Defence already does well? Are there areas where further reliance on private suppliers and tolerance for programme risk may be appropriate in your view?

Mr Ben Wallace: I am going to ask Damian Parmenter to answer some of that, if I may. From my point of view, it is more about a pan-government culture on defence. We have had decades of Prime Ministers wanting more and Chancellors wanting less. We have had Defence Secretaries finding ways to reheat or, indeed, repackage efficiencies into spending, or cuts into whatever. We have had some military leadership that has always had to try to shoehorn the impossible into something, and that has been difficult for our military as well.

Culturally, it is about transparency and being much more honest. I was determined with the White Paper to say, "Look, I want to produce an Armed Forces that says what it does on the side of a tin". We have had lots of decades of distractions—"Look at this new platform; isn't this brilliant?"—when all along, underneath, we have not had the stocks, the maintenance and the key enablers that are so important. That is a cultural change that I have said earlier is also required across the Government. The threat is going up. There is a war in Europe. That means that all those historical positions about what the priorities of a Government are, which we have all got so used to in every general election—and it will be very interesting at the next general election to see how each of the parties plays what it thinks is a priority—should change. I was the Security Minister for three and a half years before this job. I have spent nearly seven years looking at threat on a daily basis, and it has grown. We need to recognise that in how we divide up the public spending cake.

Damian Parmenter: On culture, there is an awful lot going on inside the Ministry of Defence. You asked about what we do really well, and I look to our colleagues in uniform. They are absolutely incredible. I had the pleasure of being at a Royal Marines birthday dinner the other night, and there is a group of people who are actually at the cutting edge of military thought. They are outstanding individuals and the envy of the world. They bring thought, leadership and innovation to everything in military affairs because of their desire to win, and ultimately that is what we are good at in defence. It is that desire to win when given an operational context and a real mission to get after; we must never forget that. That is the rationale for being here, and we are very good in the Armed Forces at doing that.

There is lots to get after in the defence culture sense, and it starts with the idea of the Integrated Review. That is about integration, as the Secretary of State says, not just inside defence, but with the rest of government and across all the levers of power. One of the things to emphasise is economics. You have seen the power of sanctions in the Ukraine conflict. It is really important that we factor that into the overall response to Ukraine and how we think about that collectively in an integrated way with other activity in government.

Talking about what is happening inside defence, we need to make sure that we are integrated. It is not about three individual services, a strategic command, DE&S and a head office. It is about how we have one defence mindset so that every single part of defence gets after the things that are really important to the nation. First and foremost, you need to understand the defence strategy. What is it that we are trying to achieve in the world? How are we going to achieve that? How do we collaborate to ensure that we are all delivering across defence to achieve those outcomes? Ukraine has been a fantastic example of how defence comes together with a very clear mission to get after it.

All our levers, whether that is working with industry, working with allies and partners in NATO, or getting on and doing things with the Armed Forces such as the support we have shown to Estonia and other nations, are hugely important. A cultural change of one defence mindset is crucial to ensuring that we become properly integrated and that we deliver more than the current sum of our parts.

Empowerment is another big area of activity that we are getting after, making sure that we move beyond the hierarchical. One of the real strengths of the Armed Forces on a battlefield is having a clear hierarchy and being able to get after decisive action on the battlefield. Inside defence, particularly in the business space but also as we think about innovation and making the best use of science and technology, we need to empower everybody to come up with the ideas and the solutions that we need. I am fairly confident that many people my own age and slightly younger in defence do not have all the answers when it comes to being tech savvy and innovative. Our younger folk are much better at it and they will bring ideas to us that we could not imagine, so we really have to empower everybody. That is one of the key things we are doing.

Diversity and inclusion is hugely important. We have to make sure that we are not all clones of each other. It is so important to have a diverse workforce that recognises opportunity and brings in ideas that you would not necessarily spot if you all came from a similar background. That is one of the great lessons from Chilcot. We need that diversity and inclusion across the department.

Finally, it is about making sure that everyone upholds the really strong values and behaviours that the Secretary of State and everyone else expects of our Armed Forces. We are taking action to ensure that people are held to account and, if necessary, dismissed, as in some of the cases we have seen recently.

Baroness Rawlings: Thank you very much. You explained that very clearly, but I would like to probe a bit further the examples of improved business engagement and risk tolerance, on which you have not really answered.

Damian Parmenter: I will return to an area I know, which is the industrial strategy. The relationship I have had with industry over the last couple of years has been about very frank discussions, each understanding where the other is coming from, and understanding how we can be better by working together. It is about moving away from looking at industry as a series of competitions—where I want to get the cheapest aircraft or the cheapest missile—towards partnership in order to change that business relationship, partly by bringing business expertise into the department. One of my director-general colleagues has just come into the department from industry, bringing with her all the experience of working with industry, so we have that insider knowledge and that makes us better as an organisation.

A lot of parts of the organisation are working very closely on innovation, working with new small and medium-sized enterprises, to understand the art of the possible. Again, that is where we are working in a more business savvy sense. A range of reforms is taking place in project management and in DE&S, our procurement agency, to make sure everyone is properly upskilled to be more business savvy and to understand project management. There is a major change transformation going on there. Again, that gets to some of the risk taking, understanding what is a responsible risk to take. From my perspective, and I am sure from the Secretary of State's, a bigger risk is to be stuck in very slow programmes that are not going anywhere or that take a number of years to deliver. Running with a slightly riskier innovative programme up front, and being able to accept that it has not quite worked and then moving on to something else, is better than running with a programme that takes seven years, particularly when we have technological advances coming at us at a rate of knots.

Mr Ben Wallace: We have some rapid acceleration interfaces with small and medium-sized businesses deliberately for innovation. The Royal Navy has something called NavyX, which is about rapidly bringing in capability. There is quite a lot of risk in there and a lot of experimentation. In each service—I was just trying to ask what the name of the Army's version of that is—it is very important. We have been using some of those lessons in how we supply Ukraine. It is in stark contrast but it seems that, when I buy stuff for Ukraine, I manage to do it in days and very few weeks, but, when I want to buy a similar thing for myself, it can take months or years. That is remarkable. We are again learning but we are also taking risk. We sometimes buy things that promise to do amazing things for Ukraine but, when we get to test them, it turns out that they do not—or some of them do.

We have these accelerators. There is the defence and security accelerator, which is very important at that interface. Of course, they mainly play to the medium-sized or small businesses rather than the big primes, which are locked into some big programmes for us. You will see more of that, not less, and we now have an experimental battalion in the Army where we can adapt things pretty quickly. We try it out through this battalion, and then the next decision for the Army is whether to adopt that fully.

The best example I can use is the Brimstone missile, which was originally designed as a helicopter missile but has been most recently carried on our Reaper drones. I am not sure whether it is on the Typhoon, but it is certainly a very capable weapon system.² We have gifted some of those to Ukraine. When we were doing that, it occurred to us to look at using them in a similar way to how the Ukrainians might use them. We have mounted them on a land vehicle—a vehicle that can fire them—which

² [Brimstone entered UK service in 2005 as an air-launched missile used on RAF Tornado GR-4 strike aircraft. It has been selected to equip Typhoon and F-35 multi-role aircraft from the mid-2020s. The missile has also been test-fired from Attack Helicopters.](#)

suddenly gives the Army a 12-kilometre range, approximately, of very smart missile capability. We are generating that. It has been put together with MBDA and Supacat, and it will be in the experimental battalion in a couple of months.³ I suspect that, if I had a blank sheet of paper and designed it from scratch, my successor's successor's successor would come along and talk to you about it, but we managed to do it in about three months, so we are definitely getting there.⁴

I often find that the big question, and it has gone on for years, is then asking the front-line services if they have a requirement. We have a lot of experimentation that then goes nowhere, and that is the challenge. It goes nowhere because, when you ask, "Okay, so how many do you want of them?" the Army, Navy or Air Force goes, "We don't really know yet", and sometimes they get lost or nothing happens. What I have tried to do with our R&D is envisage that, if this is successful, we will, at the end of it, buy some and pull it through, and that is how you then get traction for exports and everything else.

Q181 **Baroness Fall:** Thank you, Secretary of State, for all you have done in fighting Putin in the last period. I want to come back to the question of our support to Ukraine, where you see that going in the future and how you see our contribution in and against the NATO work. Midterms are coming up next week. I am curious as to whether you think that is going to have any sort of effect on the American commitment to NATO, defence spending and that sort of thing.

To a point you made to one of my colleagues earlier, Putin is fighting this war in lots of different ways. You mentioned grain and energy but we also saw the pipeline blown up, although no one knows exactly who did that. What can we do about that sort of sidelining?

Mr Ben Wallace: On Ukraine, if you stop the clock now, Putin is losing. Ukraine maintains the momentum. It is continuing to take land back from Russian occupation. It is inflicting significant harm on the Russian army and air force. The likely direction of travel is that, by the end of this month, the northern part of Kherson will be depleted of Russians, or the Russians will have left that part, which brings into range parts of Crimea from long-range artillery that the Ukrainians held, or HIMARS-type systems. In the east, Ukraine made significant advances a few weeks ago, and they continue to push and press on the Russian forces, who are suffering poor resupply, are running out of complex weapons, significantly, and have very low morale. There are desertions. People are being mobilised and, within days, being sent to the front line, many of whom are dying. They have no food, no socks, no basic equipment and rusty guns. It is, in a sense, criminal that their generals have sent them to war that way. So the momentum is with Ukraine.

³ [The Proof of Concept Demonstrator \(mounting a Brimstone launcher on a Supacat 6x6 platform\) is known as Project WOLFRAM. This will allow the Army's Experimentation Battalion to test the tactics, techniques and procedures for the capability.](#)

⁴ [The initial Project WOLFRAM demonstrator took less than three months to deliver. A live fire demonstration is planned within the next year.](#)

We have always said that we wish to support and help Ukrainians to defend their sovereign nation, and that Putin should fail in Ukraine. It is for Ukraine to decide from a position of strength when and what it wishes to negotiate. It is important that it is Ukraine's choice, not ours. We should not be pulling strings on Ukraine. They are in a current position of strength. How far they wish to push that is entirely up to them, and we will stand by them, as does the international community.

As for the future, we obviously have the winter coming up. I do not expect the Ukrainians to stop in the winter. We all say it is winter and everyone is going to stop. These are hardy soldiers and, for both the Russians and the Ukrainians, that is their part of the world. I do not think they will just stop. They will continue to press. The Ukrainians are now better equipped than the Russians in many areas, so I think the war will go on.

The question then becomes about the race for resupply. The international community, through the International Donor Coordination Centre, which includes Britain, the United States, Canada, the EU and lots of other countries, is still in the business of finding supplies for us to gift in kind. We are now getting to a position where we will also be placing orders in production lines for Ukraine from around the world to make sure they can continue in their resupply and, indeed, hold their equipment levels in the right place.

Russia will be doing the same. Russia will be out combing the world, trying to buy capability to see itself through to the spring because President Putin's ambition to occupy the whole of Ukraine has not depleted. It is just spectacularly unsuccessful. That has not gone away and no doubt he will continue to push his people into continued offences that, at the moment, fail. He will be looking to resupply. One of the challenges for him is that a lot of his component parts seem to have come from the West. That is going to be a challenge to the refurbishment of the Russian army, which could take decades if he cannot get hold of that equipment. That is why he has resorted to Iran and buying these drones. There are echoes of the V-1 rocket, with these drones being fired in significant numbers into civilian areas of Ukraine and into critical infrastructure.

We have to help Ukraine defend itself from these indiscriminate Iranian drones. We have to help Ukraine continue with its momentum and remain strong. But we also have to make sure that Russia understands that the international community is not buckling or fragmenting. It does not agree with what it is doing. China has abstained. It is quite interesting: all the way through this, China, which Russia would take for granted as a friend, has not voted with it in the UN, has not supplied military aid to it and has effectively sat back. The only thing that China has done is successfully realise that it can probably buy gas at a discount, as has India. Therein lies Russia's challenge. If you look at the people who do vote with it at the UN, it is hardly a cast of the friends you would like to have round

your house. That is the direction of travel. As long as we all stay together, that is good.

I am not going to speculate on the United States elections. It is probably even more unpredictable than the United Kingdom these days. I was in Washington two weeks ago. They are all completely in the same position of supporting Ukraine. Their foreign international aid dwarfs ours. We need to turn our mind to international aid for rebuilding the country because, when Ukraine makes its decision, the President of that country will need to tell its people that he has the resource and the assistance to rebuild that country, which ultimately, in my view, is the real message you send to Russia: "An open liberal democracy that engages and respects the rights of individuals gets to look like this. You get to look like that". That is a really important message for them all, and so we have to think about a Marshall plan or something in the international community to help rebuild Ukraine.

Baroness Fall: With that in mind, you mentioned before that Putin uses the narrative that one of the reasons for the invasion is the expansion of NATO. Many people think it had more to do with Ukraine turning towards the European Union. As a result, we have these applications from Finland and Sweden. You mentioned this in your earlier remarks. What do you see in terms of the future for that application and the huge new border and large army that that would bring?

Mr Ben Wallace: NATO did not go recruiting, which is the narrative that Putin always liked. I was in Finland this February and had been there in December. I met the President and the Foreign Minister, and no one was talking about joining NATO. In fact, none of us really thought that Finland and Sweden would join NATO, which is why Britain developed a security pact with Finland and Sweden, because I always felt it would be inconceivable that we would not come to the assistance of Sweden, for example, if it got invaded by Russia one day. That is why we did it. We did not think they would go to NATO. But it shows the blundering Putin has had in his strategic concepts. If you threaten someone, funnily enough, you often push them the wrong way, as he would see it, and they joined.

They have incredibly capable armed forces. We have a lot to learn from them in some areas. They are very important to protecting the North Atlantic and that sort of region. Putin has set up a chokepoint coming out of the Baltic where you now have Sweden and Denmark on that strait—both NATO countries—which is a real strategic dilemma for Russia in the future. They have very professional armed forces. They are not saying, "We want thousands of British troops", but they do want to exercise and train together. We had already started that process through the Joint Expeditionary Force, which is the 10 Nordic nations and Scandinavians, including Iceland and Holland. We had already done a good few years of training together, even when Sweden and Finland were not in that patch.

I am meeting them all next week in Edinburgh. The JEF Ministers will assemble. It was going to be in Denmark but they have had an election,

so we are going to host them in Edinburgh. We had them in February this year up in Leicestershire. Overall, for Britain, it puts us in a really good geographic cockpit with like-minded nations, and it can only strengthen NATO's capability, not weaken it.

It gives a new dilemma to Russia, in that he now has a very long border with NATO, something he was always terrified of. He has now delivered that entirely through his own actions. The key for the Russians to understand is that it is entirely his actions that have delivered this. No one else has done it. He has done it.

Q182 Lord Anderson of Swansea: In reply to Lady Blackstone, you have already touched on the dynamic relationship between unilateral contributions and those from alliances, particularly NATO, where we were founding fathers and have contributed massively over the years. How do you see our relationship with NATO evolving, both generally and in the light of Ukraine? You mentioned Finland and Sweden—a massive miscalculation, as you have said, by Putin—and they would be major contributors. Do you see greater specialisation within NATO? Do you see us, for example, continuing to seek excellence across the spectrum or will we now be more ready to, if not subcontract, at least release some of our energies to other leading allies or groups of allies?

Mr Ben Wallace: NATO has woken up. I started my military career in West Germany, or Germany as it was, near Hanover. It is quite interesting that people are blowing the dust off—mind you, they are in our own department as well—all those things we used to think about. The question for NATO is how it is going to get its members to play to strength now. Are we all going to have generic contributions or are we going to say, "Look, this is what we think we can do"? When I saw General Cavoli last week, he said, "You would say that. They all say that. They all want to ask us to accept exactly what you already have on the shelf".

The question for NATO will be how to defend Europe from Russia and what part we all have to play in it. That is quite important for it. I would say, "Look, we're very good at this. Isn't it for this country or that country to do that part of it?" That will be the negotiations that we all have as the plans come out.

Fundamentally, we will all have to invest. I think 17 countries of NATO have increased their defence budget since the invasion. That is quite telling. The Poles are going to go over to 3%. The French, I saw last week, are pledging to increase their defence budget by 26%. That challenge about the cultural change is real, and Britain should not think that it should be exempt from that. But we will have to see how the plans fight a 21st-century, rather than a 20th-century, war. That is going to be interesting.

Q183 Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: I am genuinely pleased to hear what you say about progress in relation to Ajax. Warrior could not go on for ever. I will make an offer to you. As soon as Ajax is ready, if you invite

me to come and have a ride in one, I will accept it.

The question I wanted to ask you about was something that we have had in evidence, which I have no doubt was fastened on by those who have been helping you prepare for this event. We have had evidence that the armoured division, fully manned and fully equipped, which the Americans expect of us, is not available and might not be for some time. We cannot overemphasise the importance of our relationship with the United States for all manner of reasons. How soon do you think we will be able to fulfil that commitment?

Mr Ben Wallace: We have not had an armoured division that could really deploy since 1991. Even when we went to the first Gulf War, we did not deploy a full armoured division. We had two armoured brigades and an air assault brigade. For many decades, we have not really delivered what we said on the tin. That has been an issue.

If I look on paper at the current armoured division we have, it is lacking in all sorts of areas. It is lacking in deep fires, in medium-range air defence, in its electronic warfare and signals intelligence capability, in its modern digital and sensor-to-shooter capability. On top of that, it is probably lacking in weapons stocks. I am not sitting here thinking that I can waffle away and pretend it is fine; it is not. But, in exchange for my honesty to the United States and NATO, I need to see how we are going to fight a modern war, necessarily, and whether a modern armoured division looks like the division I was in. That is not me trying to get out of commitment. It is about what is essential for a modern armoured division.

A lot of our air defence is delivered by aircraft in our system. That is less so in other organisations. We would say that our long-range air defence is delivered by the Royal Air Force, not by ground-based S400s and S300s that the Russians have or the Patriots that the United States have. We do not do that. That is not how we have done it historically, but things are changing. If you look at the damage that HIMARS has inflicted on the Russian army, those are weapons systems with a 70 to 80-kilometre range. Getting the ISR in place is the real key of lethality these days: can you find someone, or can you hide? If you can be found, the proliferation of precision is such that you are very vulnerable.

What I would ask in exchange is this. Does a modern armoured division have more longer-range artillery and fewer tanks? Does it have more tanks with missiles accompanying them? Does it have more air defence? At the moment, we are all very vulnerable to drones. People are firing very expensive missiles from really basic drones that cost a few hundred dollars. Yes, we are lacking in lots of places and we have been carrying that myth for decades, if you want my honest opinion, but, in exchange for that and the £23 billion of investment to get back to a well-formed land capability, I would like to see some doctrine and modernisation of how we are going to fight.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: Is a different doctrine actively under

consideration to reflect the different components of conflict?

Mr Ben Wallace: The reason SONAC is so important is that it imports, to some extent, what the United States does, which is wargaming and testing to understand our vulnerabilities. We have already started stepping up our wargaming capability, which the Americans are far better at wholeheartedly incorporating into their structure and modernisation of their doctrines as they go. We have not been as systematic in that space. We have set up a wargaming school at Shrivenham but the key is to get it into the whole of the front-line services and to change how they think. That is why that is quite important. We have already seen that in Ukraine. As we look at what happens to Russia next, wargaming will play a central role in that for us.

Major General David Eastman: The other aspect of this is to think about the effects we are trying to achieve, rather than specific capabilities and specific units of action. The whole point of modern warfare is about being as integrated as possible and having as much connection as you can between the sensors and understanding of what is going on, and those who can have effect. It is about bringing all the domains together. We need to think about our capabilities in a slightly different way, and try to get away from some of the old terminology that we have been using.

Q184 **Lord Stirrup:** I would be grateful for your response to two questions that lie at the heart of this inquiry. The first is about prioritisation. The Independent Review and the Defence Command Paper had long lists of challenges and aspirations but were less clear about priorities. You could argue that that is appropriate because priorities can change with changing circumstances, but it gave rise to the impression that our ambitions were outstripping our likely capabilities and resources. Would you agree, in the light of the review's identification of Russia as the acute threat and of the experiences of the past year, that for the UK, in defence terms, the main effort remains the defence and security of Europe, and that the Indo-Pacific tilt is more of a diplomatic, economic and technological endeavour? That is not to say that there is no military involvement, but the very word "tilt" gave the impression that we were tilting away from Europe, which clearly does not seem appropriate at the moment.

The second question is on the so-called bet on technology to provide us with an operational edge and to act as a force multiplier. That gives rise to two questions. First, is that right in principle? You and others have given us some very powerful evidence in support of that. Secondly, is it deliverable in practice? In this country we have a very good track record of having good ideas but a very poor track record of turning them into commercial successes, which, as we agreed earlier, is necessary if you are going to translate that through into capability in the field. Does that require a whole new culture and model of engagement with industry and the financing of these projects and, if so, would that survive first contact with the Treasury?

Mr Ben Wallace: Well, I am still there but we have had a few Chancellors. To be fair, I do not really like the term “bet”. I do not think we are betting. What we do not have is the luxury of trying in one part of our Armed Forces and holding on to old in case it does not work. The United States can do that. It can take whole brigades and invest them in doing something differently. Effectively, there is a risk there: what if it does not work, and that is one of the brigades they need to do their day job? We do sometimes have to take a leap. I would not say it is a leap of faith, but we definitely have to take a judgment and take a call that there is a downside. Say we continue to invest in Boxer and the modularity—a fantastic piece of equipment—and we grow from our current target of 750 to 1,000-plus, buying lots of variants for mortars and 155s. If that was our choice, which I have not said it is going to be, it would mean giving up the Warrior and going into wheeled. We do not have the capability to just buy a whole load of both, so there is always going to be that challenge for us in Britain. There is a risk. That is just the honesty of it.

You are right about the tilt. I used to come here and to other committees and say, “Look, the Pacific tilt is as much about culture and science”. Defence was actually the lower part of the tilt. It is driven by the recognition that the biggest growth in GDP in the world in the next 20-odd years is in the Pacific, and we need to be there. We need to be there with our businesses, culture, science, innovation and education. We need to be part of that. Alongside that comes defence but I do not think it is either/or. Our White Paper said that the cornerstone of our security is NATO and Europe, and that will remain so.

The question in the United States is this: “Are we here to backfill if you choose to withdraw or do less in Europe? Is it for Britain, France, Italy and the other big military powers in Europe to effectively step up to that plate or do you want us to go with you to some extent?” We have not yet had that strategic direction from the United States. There is the point about different Presidents. It is not necessarily in a position of a long-term predictor. I could not predict what America will indicate, depending on who is the next President.

Fundamentally, we are key partners in NATO. It is our duty. Our home beat is the North Atlantic, and it shall remain so. Of course we will want to invest in the Pacific. We will also want to design our forces so that, if we do go to the Pacific, they are interoperable with Australia and the United States, which is why AUKUS is so important in the submarine capabilities. I am confident that part of our force could do that. We have just had some Typhoons practising in Australia. The key is options but, ultimately, taking a lead in NATO and being one of the key framework countries in NATO is our home beat and is our day job.

Lord Stirrup: What about the question of an innovative financial model with industry to match the innovation in science and technology?

Mr Ben Wallace: Yes, but I have heard this for years. I used to work in QinetiQ for a few years. Ultimately, it requires a customer to indicate that they want to buy it. I remember the UCAV—unmanned combat air

vehicle—which is an extraordinary capability that was developed, called Taranis. The MoD funded it in 2006 or something. I remember it being wheeled out. It was quite a remarkable piece of kit, made with British industry and stealth. There was a launch. You were not really allowed to touch it but you could take a photograph of it. Then nothing happened because the Air Force did not say, “Actually we should have that”. That is fine, and I understand that, but, unless you ultimately lead into a requirement, industry will only go so far with you. One of our real challenges is to decide what we want; indicate that that is the direction of travel, and, on the balance of investments, that is our priority; then make it as easy as possible for industry to come with you, but also make sure that one company does not shut out all the others. There is dominance by the primes. They would say they take the risk, but they can be very selective about who they choose to bring with you. That is the real direction.

I would love a long-term budget that goes beyond me, beyond my successors and beyond our Governments, and then we can make those decisions—in UAVs we are still there; I do not know how many autonomous projects are across the three services, but I suspect they will be in the double figures—instead of someone saying, “Stop: let’s just put it in one place”.

Q185 Lord Alton of Liverpool: Can I take you back to the answer you gave to Baroness Fall earlier about the rebuilding of Ukraine and the enormity of what has happened there? You said that there needed to be a new Marshall aid programme, and I think we would all agree with you. Given that some \$300 billion of assets have been frozen, why can we not confiscate those assets and utilise them for the rebuilding and equipping of Ukraine in the months and years that lie ahead?

In terms of holding people to account, Putin in particular, you will have seen the recent report from the New Lines Institute and Raoul Wallenberg Centre on the potential for a case of genocide to be brought against Putin for his pronounced aim of eradicating Ukrainian identity and people. Even if that is not provable, the Geneva convention guards against the targeting of civilian populations, and we have seen mass graves at Mariupol, Bucha and elsewhere. What are we doing to ensure that there is proper accountability for these terrible crimes against humanity?

Mr Ben Wallace: On that point, we have been assisting the ICC in evidence collecting wherever we can, as have the Canadians. Our previous Attorney-General, now the Home Secretary, went to Lviv a few months ago to visit the Ukrainian Attorney-General. We are in the process of collecting evidence, alongside many of our international partners, and we will do anything we can to support the ICC.

You tempt me on sanctions, which are thankfully outwith my brief. I do not know the legality of how you confiscate to spend sanctions, and I would urge you to write to the Treasury, which I think is the lead department on sanctions. There is a price that Russia should pay for what it has done to Ukraine. How that price is extracted I will leave to the

financial and sanctions authorities. From defence's point of view, at one level he has paid his price, in that he has decimated and ruined the reputation of his own army, which everyone thought was invincible. It turns out that it is not very invincible and that his equipment is not very good either. If I was in the business of trying to buy new aerospace equipment around the world, I would not be buying Russian. We should make sure everyone knows that.

On the sanctions thing, I certainly think there is a price to be paid, both in accountability and in rebuilding the country of Ukraine.

Q186 Lord Boateng: Secretary of State, you have identified the threat and the challenge presented by Russia and China. The Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst has, for many years, been a means of projecting not just Britain's global power but also our values globally through the provision of scholarships. I was at a Trooping of the Colour ceremony in Barbados on holiday over the summer, where it was put to me that scholarships are no longer provided by the British Government for members of the Caribbean armed forces, who play such an important part, not just in disaster relief but in drug interdiction, as I remember from my own time at the Home Office and the Treasury.

What can we do to address that? Joint work with the FCDO is, after all, part and parcel of what you are encouraged by the Treasury to do. Is there not a case for restoring those scholarships? If we do not provide scholarships—and we do not—we know who is providing them and they are being taken up.

Mr Ben Wallace: If it is okay, I will write to the committee about that. They should be: it is that simple. I wish, when I was a young cadet, that someone had said to me, "This is called soft power and you be nice to all your guests because, fundamentally, they will remember it". When I see my counterpart from the Qatari air force, he trained at RAF Valley flying Jaguars. When I see my counterpart from Oman, he was at Dartmouth doing his navy education. The Emir of Qatar and his brothers were at Sandhurst. All of that is something we should do more of. "Soft power" is not a dirty word. You will know from your own time that it is very important. When we talk about competing in the world, we should embrace it and not be frightened of doing it.

I do not know why we do not do it well enough, if you want my honest opinion. I think some people have lost the skill, but it is really important. It is why, in this Command Paper, we have increased our defence attaché network significantly, with another 30 defence attachés. We are professionalising that career structure, investing in their skills and their capabilities. It is a fundamental part of influence and support around the world. Soft power must go hand in hand with the hard. I can do my bit in defence. I just think we could do so much more.

Q187 Lord Anderson of Swansea: At the beginning, you said that Russia was an adversary, China a competitor. Given China's recent conduct, can we continue to have such a hard and fast differentiation? Are you happy with

the degree of knowledge and experience of China in your own department, particularly in relation to language? How many Mandarin speakers do you have?

Mr Ben Wallace: Perhaps I could link back to the last question. Soft power is about understanding cultures and having relationships, whether they are with your rivals or with your friends. It is the sort of thing we are not remotely high enough up on. Our knowledge of China—our SWEP, as we call it—needs to improve, whether that is basic language speakers or long-experienced people who have spent time in that country, et cetera. That is important. We are not good enough and we need to invest in that. It is the rising power and, by 2030, we will only have ourselves to blame if we have not invested in that knowledge, in terms of both intelligence and effective engagement with that country. I would join you in putting the marker down. It is 2022. We have eight years. We had better get on with it, and that is a strong message.

Sorry, I have forgotten the other part of the question.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: Can we continue to label China merely as a competitor?

Mr Ben Wallace: That is a matter for the new IR. Let us see what they do. Ultimately, whatever you label someone, it might be how it triggers the whole system. Fundamentally, our competition is pretty obvious. We stand for democracy, human rights, freedom of expression, and open liberal democracies and economies. I do remember those old days when we used to think communism was wrong. The Soviet Union was as much about ideology as it was about other things, and we somehow seem to have forgotten the ideological debate when it comes to China. China has been very open that it does not believe in the democratic model. It is not hiding that. So we are competing around the world for ideology. There is no harm in that—it just seems that we forgot about it in 1991. Ultimately, that is really what is at stake here.

The Chair: Secretary of State, thank you very much indeed. You mentioned in your responses the power of soft power. When I and other members of the committee visited Bahrain and Qatar, we were put in no doubt about the respect there for the UK Armed Forces, because they are seen as trustworthy trainers and highly expert. Indeed, often our interlocutors were keen to go around the room testing out their officials as to whether they had been to Dartmouth or Sandhurst. The serious point is that that trust has to be maintained. You can hear from the strength of view of my colleagues that they wish you and your department well in maintaining its high reputation, because that is an essential part and component of the defence of the United Kingdom. Thank you for your contribution today.