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Witnesses: Julian Brazier MP, Nick Gurr, Jane Rumble and Henry Burgess

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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Members present

Lord Teverson (Chairman)
 Lord Addington
 Baroness Browning
 Viscount Hanworth
 Lord Hannay of Chiswick
 Lord Hunt of Chesterton
 Lord Moynihan
 Baroness Neville-Jones
 Lord Oxburgh
 Lord Soley
 Lord Tugendhat

Examination of Witnesses

Julian Brazier MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, MoD, **Nick Gurr**, Director for International Security Policy, MoD, **Jane Rumble**, Head of Polar Regions Department, FCO, and **Henry Burgess**, Deputy Head of Polar Regions Department, FCO

Q319 The Chairman: Minister and colleagues, I welcome you to this last session of the House of Lords Arctic Select Committee. We have been in process since June and this is our last session going through and getting clarity on government policy on the Arctic. You should have had a copy of all our Members' interests, and you will have some idea of the sorts of questions we are going to ask. Just to make it clear again, it is very much up to you who, or which combination of you, answers which questions. We are certainly not expecting everybody to answer all the questions, or we might be here for quite a long time. I will ask each of you to introduce yourselves very briefly and then we will start the questions.

Julian Brazier MP: I am Julian Brazier, Parliamentary Under-Secretary and Minister for the Reserves in the Ministry of Defence.

Jane Rumble: Jane Rumble, head of the Polar Regions Department in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Nick Gurr: I am Nick Gurr, Director of International Security Policy in the Ministry of Defence.

Henry Burgess: Good morning. I am Henry Burgess, deputy head of the Polar Regions Department in the Foreign Office.

The Chairman: Thank you. Minister, we are particularly pleased to have you here this morning.

Julian Brazier MP: Thank you. James Duddridge MP, Minister for the Polar Regions, sends his apologies. You all know, I think, why he cannot be here today. With Jane here to answer the difficult questions, we hope we will be able to do what you need.

The Chairman: Good. I am sure it will work out fine. We offer Mr Duddridge our wishes for a swift recovery. Starting off more generally, one of the questions that we have particularly looked at as this Committee has undertaken its work is whether the UK's position is sufficiently upfront. Maybe it does not have to be too robust, but it should be firm in articulating our interests in the Arctic. Could our approach be considered overly cautious when compared to the extensive and rapid engagement undertaken by states such as Singapore? One of the things that we particularly noted with new observer states to the Arctic Council is the gusto, one could say, with which they throw themselves into Arctic issues. Maybe in comparison, although we have been in the region and been involved in it for a long time, the United Kingdom does not seem quite so engaged in and focused on what we wish to do.

Julian Brazier MP: I will start on that and then hand over to Jane for the detailed answer to what is obviously an FCO question. You said that we have been there a long time, and the fact is that as a non-Arctic country but one that is close to the Arctic, we have been involved in the council from the very beginning, since 1996. We have taken part at every stage in the proceedings. We were the first country outside the region to produce its own Arctic vision. We have participated in almost all the conferences—we will come on to the security support side of it later on in the questions. We are not an Arctic country but are very much engaged, with some clearly defined objectives, which I will leave to Jane to spell out.

Jane Rumble: Thank you. That sets the framework. The UK has been involved in Arctic affairs for hundreds of years and was involved in the exploration of the Arctic. Ever since the inception of the Arctic Council, the UK has been a state observer, so in that sense we have demonstrated our broad spectrum of interests to the Arctic states over a long period of time. That said, it is fair to say that the new and increased enthusiasm from other state observers led us to feel that we needed to be much clearer about what the UK's interests are. That is why we published the Arctic policy framework in 2013: in order to set it out in a much more structured way, to reinforce the support that we give to the governance arrangements of the Arctic and to recognise the sovereign jurisdiction of the Arctic states and how we can best work with them, while also recognising the increasing UK interest in

things such as shipping, commerce, hydrocarbon extraction and energy security et cetera. We hope that we have been pretty upfront in the Arctic policy framework. We have said that it will be subject to review. It is a cross-government document, so we engage with different departments. We will continue to keep it updated.

You mentioned the new observer states and said that they look a bit more enthusiastic. To our minds, they are sort of playing catch-up to an extent in that the UK has been there for a very long time and we have been able to identify what our key priorities and objectives are. We have built up those stable networks, whereas some of the activities that Singapore has been involved in have been about building up those networks, starting from a different position. I can understand that it looks, optically, like they are doing more than we are, but actually we have had a long period of activity. If we suddenly started to compete with these other non-Arctic states, it could jeopardise the policy issues that we want to be involved in just for PR purposes.

The Chairman: But is not perception pretty important in this area? I understand that those states are having to catch up to some degree, but does that not risk us being perceived by other Arctic Council states as being perhaps on the way down while they are on the way up? I say this seriously, because that is one of the themes that has come up, maybe not from all our witnesses by any means but from some of them, that the UK maybe needs to up its game again a little in an area that is subject to increasing international interest.

Jane Rumble: Yes, we have heard the same kind of comments, but when we look across the board at our relationships with Arctic states, they are pretty solid; they are not saying that the UK should do things differently. We often test them by saying, “We know that you have pressure from other state observers; how do you see the role of the UK?”. Without exception, they say, “The UK is the nearest neighbour, we have overlapping concerns”. Some of these new observer states have a more limited range of issues which they are interested in in the Arctic, whereas the UK has a broader spectrum, on which we are engaging across the board. Although the media will get enthusiastic to some extent about some of these new initiatives, we are not hearing from the Arctic states themselves that they want the UK to suddenly come up with big initiatives. For example, when the Foreign Secretary recorded a video message for the Arctic Circle event that we attended in Reykjavik quite recently, in order to give a high-level ministerial message—hopefully the Committee has seen that, and if not we can give you the video recording of it—we had chatter on social media and from

other people saying that the UK was pushing itself forward too much. We are always treading that fine line between engaging with the Arctic states on matters of mutual interest while not saying suddenly that we are more Arctic than one of the Arctic states.

Lord Addington: I was at the Arctic Circle conference event as a Member of the Committee. There was a perception that we had arrived for that conference trying to catch up for lost time, with interest. This was said to me over and over again: “Oh, you’re here in numbers this time, you’re doing something”. There was a distinct tone that we were rather late to the table. A bit of noise about what we are doing might be very appropriate. We have this broad range of interests, and although it is fine having something that is going along nicely and quietly below the surface, people need to know we are there. Particularly with all this talk about commercial activity and interests, we were being seen as coming late to things, even if we have had diplomatic arrangements. Those shall we say coffee-station discussions were definitely all of that tone.

Jane Rumble: It was only the second Arctic Circle meeting. The first one had been met with some resistance from some of the Arctic states, so we played the first one low-key to see how it would go. Some of the Arctic states did not attend at all, whereas for the second, the President of Iceland specifically invited us. I hear what you are saying—that we need to make sure that we are not perceived as not doing enough—but that was only the second Arctic Circle meeting.

Lord Addington: I am just saying that that was definitely the feeling. The commercial interests were probably saying this more than the Governments. Clearly some of this was about commercial and business opportunities. The perception that we were interested came as a surprise, so clearly the preparatory work beforehand had not got the message through.

Jane Rumble: That is helpful feedback. On the Arctic policy framework, we are hearing that a lot of the other Arctic observer states intend to do something similar. In fact, Japan told us that it is doing something similar. In that sense, we are leading the pack.

Q320 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: I am sure you recognise, as the Committee does, the importance of the Arctic to many international organisations and UK organisations, one or two of which have observer status. In our discussions, we have been particularly interested in the many UN agencies such as the IMO, the meteorological office, UNEP and so on. We just wonder how the FCO is monitoring the engagement by these UN bodies in the Arctic and whether there could be an agenda item on some of these UN agencies and Arctic issues.

That would be a way of perhaps ensuring that these wider UN bodies understood these Arctic issues without everybody having to join the Arctic Council.

Julian Brazier MP: I will just make an overall point and then leave Jane to make the detailed one. I think it is very important when you talk about these international bodies to emphasise what Jane has already said about the extent to which we are already dug in. I will give a couple of examples. You mentioned the IMO. Its headquarters, as you know, is a few hundred yards from here. On the hydrographic set-up, which Britain has 80% of, we are not just the world's leaders; we effectively are the world's hydrography. The IMO's headquarters is not very far from Baroness Browning's old constituency, and it obviously has a critical role in that part of the world, too. So we are already very heavily embedded in some of the areas that you mentioned before we start.

We touched a little on conferences. We have had two heavily Arctic-related conferences in this country just this year: the Arctic seminar at the International Festival for Business in Liverpool and the UKTI Arctic mining conference in March.

Jane, over to you.

Jane Rumble: Thank you. Starting with whether or not we have sufficient oversight, that is the purpose of the cross-Whitehall Arctic network, which the FCO established and chairs: to make sure that we are bringing together all the different departments that have some element of Arctic activity and that we have a consistent approach. We have a cross-Whitehall network because of the way the UK departments are structured, and because we are not an Arctic state and do not link all our Arctic policies into a negotiating framework. The experts for shipping, for example, sit within the Department for Transport, within which they will develop Arctic and polar expertise to input into the Polar Shipping Code, and we rely to an extent on those departments to flag up Arctic interests to us. Equally, if we spot Arctic interests or hear things at the Arctic Council, we will go back to the departments. It is a two-way process.

You mentioned some of the bodies that are interested in the Arctic. UNCLOS—the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—is topical today. Yesterday, Denmark put its latest submission in. The International Maritime Organization has just agreed the safety elements of the Polar Code, and its sub-committee on marine environment protection will look at the environmental elements of the Polar Code early next year. We will come on later

to the OSPAR convention, which looks at the protection of the north-east Atlantic and is discussing marine protection in the Arctic area.

On the United Nations and its framework on climate change, its decision-making arguably has almost the biggest impact on the Arctic in terms of future climate change. The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species looks at polar bears, the international whaling convention is looking at whales in the Arctic, and there are others that we have listed to the Committee that have interests in the Arctic. The UN bodies that you mentioned have very specific policy issues, and their having an Arctic component has been very much welcomed, but there is nervousness among the Arctic states about the Arctic per se being a UN agenda item, because of the impact that that would have on the Arctic Council and the arrangements that it has developed itself, and because the state observers have an interest in the Arctic and are engaging in that process, rather than it getting swamped in the UN—

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: The WMO has regional areas. They all have regional areas. All these regional areas—zoom—connect to the parties; there is the Asia, the America, the Europe. That is why the whole UN traditional regional breakdown breaks down in the Arctic, which is why it seemed to me that the Arctic Council has a very valuable role in, as it were, helping the UN bodies to have a sensible allocation of responsibilities in the Arctic. I just wonder whether the Arctic Council has a global role in that respect, because the UN system gets into a muddle when all these regional areas converge because of geography.

Jane Rumble: Sorry, I misunderstood your question. Yes, I agree: the Arctic Council does have a role to play. There is a process going on at the moment with the Convention on Biological Diversity doing ecosystem assessments around the world. It is called IPBES—and I cannot remember what that stands for. At the moment they are looking at the Arctic from Asia, America and Europe, so there is a recognition that they need to engage with the Arctic Council to look at the Arctic as a region.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: Okay. Thank you.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Just following up this point, I am sure you are well aware that the UN cannot be relied upon to co-ordinate itself. All these disparate bodies, which are agencies or bits of the UN, are well known to be badly co-ordinated. Indeed, quite a lot of them spend their lives resisting co-ordination by anyone else—the usual turf-fight thing. These are the questions that we have come up against. First, does the UK co-ordinate, not

just monitor, its policies on Arctic issues in all these bodies that it sends representatives to? Secondly, is the UK trying to press the UN to be a bit better co-ordinated than it naturally is?

Julian Brazier MP: I think I will let Jane answer that, but I would just make one overarching point; the fact that last year we set out such a clear vision, which cut across quite a number of departments, partially answers your question. I will just make one other point, if I may, as a House of Commons Minister addressing a House of Lords Committee. One of the advantages of your slightly less formal Committee structure in the House of Lords is that it provides a very positive forum in which you can discuss these cross-cutting issues much more easily than our Committees at the other end of the House can.

Over to you, Jane, for a detailed answer.

Jane Rumble: Thank you. On your first question about co-ordinating the policies, that is the live challenge, basically; that is what we have been trying to do. I guess you could argue that we have had some hits and some misses. To go back through some of the ones that I just mentioned, on the Polar Shipping Code, for example, we facilitated contact between the Maritime Coastguard Agency, which led on this process, and the British Antarctic Survey so that we could make sure that we had the science on the ice changes in the Polar Regions to inform the discussion that was going on with shipping while also engaging with the Department for Transport. So we have worked with departments. They are very much in the lead on the technicality of the policy issues, but they have used the cross-Whitehall network as a means of reaching out to others just to check that there is no overlap. Just last week we had a meeting—this is prompted partly by your final question about OSPAR—with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, alongside Foreign Office legal advisers and those who are dealing with the UN on issues relating to marine resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction, which is relevant to the marine protection debate. So, yes, that is definitely the live challenge.

The much broader question about what we are doing to improve the UN is a general question to the international organisations department in the Foreign Office, which spends a lot of time talking about improving, streamlining and making the UN more efficient. Again, that is a very live issue.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: But you make an input into that from your Polar Regions Department. If you thought that one bit of the UN was acting in a way that was

contradictory to another bit of the UN in the impact of its policies in the Arctic, you would speak up.

Jane Rumble: We would, yes. I cannot think of an example where we have needed to, but yes, we would.

Lord Moynihan: Following on from Lord Hannay's question, I do not think it would be unreasonable to summarise your answer just now as one of impressive engagement, although Members of the Committee would probably feel that a lot more could be done in that context, but of somewhat opaque co-ordination. Is there not a case for a UK ambassador to the Arctic to become a focal point for UK interests?

Julian Brazier MP: Again, I am going to let Jane answer that fully. One thought that I just put to you is that this arrangement is working rather well. Lord Hannay obviously has absolutely enormous experience of the United Nations, but if you look around the world this is one of the regions that is working quite well. It has a council with the eight Arctic countries engaged, and of the many countries engaged as observers we were one of the first. Obviously we are going to start to come to some of the defence questions later. I must not anticipate those, except to say that while there are tensions there are noticeably fewer tensions than there are in some of the other areas, with Russia and so on. This does appear to work quite well at the moment. Jane, would you like to give more detail?

Jane Rumble: On the question of whether the UK should have an Arctic ambassador, that is something that we have considered over many years. We have come to the conclusion "probably not", in the sense that at the moment I, as head of the Polar Regions Department, have ambassador rank technically, so I can engage with senior Arctic officials and the Arctic ambassadors across the Arctic states. Each of the Arctic states has quite recently generated special envoys, or Special Representatives, the US being the most recent to do so. These act like Sherpas in engaging in Arctic issues between the Arctic states. Among the non-Arctic states that have done this, France appointed a former Prime Minister as a Special Representative, and Singapore has a Special Representative. Our assessment is that that has not necessarily had the impact that the Governments of those countries might want to have.

Lord Moynihan: In what sense?

Jane Rumble: In the sense that the Special Representatives have not necessarily been across all the detail—detail which the French Government, for example, have been trying to engage with the Arctic states on—and they do not have an 'in' to deal with the Arctic state

ambassadors; they are just sort of separate representatives. So we have not necessarily seen that as the most successful way of engaging at this stage, but it is under constant review. If there was a forum where the non-Arctic state Special Representatives were dealing with the Arctic state Special Representatives, we would need to have an ambassador, but at this stage we do not think it would take us any further forward.

Q321 Lord Oxburgh: This is mostly for the FCO, and really comes down to Arctic Council nitty-gritty. I take it that among this plethora of Arctic organisations the FCO regards the Arctic Council as the central one with which we engage. *[Jane Rumble nodded.]* It has six working groups and four taskforces, and we are clear that this is where the basic work is done on Arctic matters rather than in the council itself. I really have four specific questions on these. The first is who decides which taskforces or working groups are going to be involved. The second is who decides who goes. The third is: who do they report to when they come back, and how are those reports co-ordinated? Finally, do we involve the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, because nearly all these taskforces have a very important scientific import?

Jane Rumble: Thank you. In terms of who decides which ones we are involved in, to an extent it is a role for the Foreign Office, because—

Lord Oxburgh: So you decide?

Jane Rumble: To an extent. The Polar Regions Department represents the UK at the Arctic Council, so quite often we are the first to hear about the new proposals for the establishment of taskforces, to see the agendas and the working plans of the working groups, so we will do kind of a scan. But then we present that to the cross-government Arctic network to test whether people agree. Occasionally some views will differ from our initial assessment, so there will be a discussion about which ones we will be involved in.

On the question of who goes, sometimes it is quite obvious in that we will task a bit of the UK Government. If it very obviously relates to shipping, we will ring up the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and say, “You need to field this one”. If it is scientific input, we engage with the Arctic office of the Natural Environment Research Council, which has facilitated individual scientists or people with particular interests out of its base in the British Antarctic Survey. So it has determined which scientist is best placed to go, but we will have a discussion about whether it is a science matter and therefore should be an independent

scientist, or whether it is a government matter and therefore should be a department, an agency or a non-departmental public body of government.

Lord Oxburgh: Sorry, but just to interrupt for a second before we move on, there will be a line to take at these meetings. Are these individuals, who may be somewhat remote from your desk, given a line to take? Are they told explicitly what the UK's interests are?

Jane Rumble: If it is science, then no, because we feel that that would prejudice their scientific input. If it is just pure science, we say, "The Arctic Council wants to look at black carbon", or methane or UV, and they will go and engage and report back to us. If it relates particularly to government policy and a government representative is going, it is sort of them setting the line to take. As you know, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is responsible for global shipping, in which the Arctic will be one element, so we will discuss that if necessary but largely farm it out. We obviously make sure that they understand the Arctic Council, the overview and the UK's position within the Arctic. The Arctic policy framework has helped us to provide that necessary briefing, but we do not lead on all policy from the FCO.

On the question of who they report to, that depends on who they are. To be honest, if they are scientists we do not necessarily see the reports in the Foreign Office. I think we would be a bit overwhelmed if we saw all the discussions about co-ordinating science across the board on the ozone, on UV or whatever. We obviously get a sense that they went and came back okay, and whether they thought it was a good thing, but it is not the kind of detail that we would look at. The Arctic office would keep an overview of that and disseminate it to other interested scientists. The science network will engage itself. If it is a government-related issue then, again, if they are going from an agency or a part of government they will report into that agency or part of government. We will likely get copied in on that so that we can keep an overview of the UK's engagement and whether it has triggered any issues that others need to look at. Certainly in recent years, attendance at some of the taskforces and working groups have quite often been through the Foreign Office's Science and Innovation Network, which feeds up into the chief scientist's office. They will do a report, which will go equally to us and to the Government Office for Science, on where things have got to.

Lord Oxburgh: Sorry to interrupt again, but what you are describing seems to be a pretty reactive system rather than a proactive system. Would that be a fair description?

Jane Rumble: I suppose the proactive bit comes at the start when we decide who is going to attend.

Lord Oxburgh: Sure, but then what happens? Do they just go and see what happens?

Jane Rumble: I suppose it depends on whether there is something that we particularly want to change. Again, with the science meetings, it is quite often an assessment with a meeting of scientists to determine what we know and do not know, and what needs to happen next. From that they will grow into collaborations and potentially submit for more science grants. If it is a policy discussion, yes, we will have had a discussion about what exactly this is about and what you therefore want to go and achieve. At the heart of all these things is the question: what would be the point of the UK going? We just cannot attend every single meeting.

Lord Oxburgh: So the interface between science and policy happens where, in your office?

Jane Rumble: Again, it depends on the subject matter. If it is generally speaking then it can come through us, or it may specifically relate to an issue that feeds into a policy department. If it is to do with methane and black carbon, for example, that would feed directly into Defra.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Does the issue of resources ever come up in this discussion of whether we should be represented? Do you ever have agencies that say simply, "Well, we can't afford it and don't think it is a very high priority for us, so if you want to do it you had better send somebody."?

Jane Rumble: Yes, all the time. The balance of resources and priority is there all the time.

The Chairman: I want to be clear on these things. We will let Lord Oxburgh come back.

Lord Oxburgh: The answer would be relevant to this. Do you involve the Government Chief Scientific Adviser? I see a great lack of co-ordination on the science side here, which the CSA's office could do something about, so does that happen?

Jane Rumble: It is beginning to. Having involved the Science and Innovation Network across the posts in some emerging taskforces and so on, that is feeding into that process. For example, the chief scientist is in a meeting tomorrow at the Japanese embassy to discuss what we might do on Arctic collaboration as part of a broader agenda. So yes, feeding up into the science is an area of development.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Can we go back to the resources issue, because we just scratched the surface of it? I suspect it is fairly prominent in all this allocation of who goes where. In each case, you surely end up having to decide whose budget the cost of going there falls on.

Presumably some of these more outlying specialist people and agencies, who are not flush with cash, simply say, “This is not a very high priority for us, but if the Foreign Office thinks that it is, you had better send somebody”. You will appreciate that if you confirm that is the case, it is not a very satisfactory way of determining British government priorities.

Julian Brazier MP: Can I break in for a second? We set out the vision last year. Would you forgive me, Lord Chairman, if I just read out the three limbs of the policy framework against which these decisions are made, whether on the resourcing line to take or whatever? They are very brief. The first is to have, “an Arctic that is safe and secure; well governed in conjunction with indigenous peoples and in line with international law”; secondly, and specifically relevant to the questions here, to have an Arctic, “where policies are developed on the basis of sound science with full regard to the environment”; thirdly, to have a region, “where only responsible development takes place”. By clearly setting out last autumn exactly what our priorities were within what are inevitably extremely finite resources, particularly at the moment, there is a framework by which the FCO in the centre can determine how much can be committed to it and so on. Jane, I do not know whether you want to develop that further, but I thought that it would be helpful.

Lord Oxburgh: But are there government departments that might not have signed up to that framework? This is the question that Lord Hannay was pursuing.

Julian Brazier MP: Jane has given you a fairly frank answer already. Departments do say from time to time that they are pressed for resources in providing places. It is the job of her team within FCO to make sure that at these various conferences—and we have a very good record of attending them and playing a part in them—we field the appropriate people.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: What you say is very helpful, but we are probing to find out whether we really are attending all the taskforces and working groups which it is in Britain’s interests to attend, or whether you have to have a triage imposed on you by the resources of the department or agency that has to send somebody and the Foreign Office, if they turn to you and say, “We are not sending them at our expense, but if you would like to pay for it, of course we will send somebody”. We are trying to find out whether the resources being devoted to staffing all these activities are sufficient or not.

The Chairman: The heart of it is exactly that, Ms Rumble, but given that there is an issue about resources—and clearly as parliamentarians we understand the resource issues in the United Kingdom at the minute—does it mean that every time we come up to a thing that has

to be attended, a long negotiation takes up huge amounts of time and probably lands up with a suboptimal solution, so that the right person may not always go to the right meetings or we do not manage to attend some of the meetings we want to? We are trying to find out a practical indication of this in the hope that we can be helpful in trying to push for a solution to it.

Jane Rumble: Yes. We are treading a fine line on resource issues. I think it fair to say that in any discussion about what we are going to contribute to we always weigh up the value for money—what we would expect to achieve and how important it is for the UK. I cannot think of an example where we felt that we ought to go and have not managed to resolve that. But we have increasingly been using the Science and Innovation Network as a creative way of reducing the resource burden, bearing in mind that quite a lot of these meetings are in remote places in the Arctic. Attending them from Foreign Office posts has actually been quite useful, as has having a science and innovation expert who already comes from a science background and is connected into other government departments. That is not to say that I do not foresee this being a constant challenge and it simply getting harder to attend some of these meetings. At the moment, I could not honestly say that there was a point where we have not been to a meeting but ought to have been. Some of the Arctic states say, “You should come along more often”, but you do not necessarily have to be there at every meeting to make sure that your interests are not prejudiced. In some ways, you might argue that that is being a bit reactive because we are simply checking that there is no problem. If we had endless amounts of money, I am sure that lots of scientists across university sectors in the UK would love to go and engage in doing more science in the Arctic. But we have not identified that as being prejudicial to UK interests—

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: It is not so much being reactive as being very defensive, because you are defining attendance at these meetings as ones that you have to go to in order to protect our interests. What about the ones we ought to be at to promote our interests?

Jane Rumble: I would say that protection and promotion are similar thinking processes. Do we have something particular that we want to pursue? Is there something that we can add? Is there something that we need to keep an eye on? Those are the three questions that we would think about when determining whether we should be attending.

Julian Brazier MP: If I could make two overarching points, the first is that it would be very helpful to us—and I am not trying to play the politician at all, but a number of Members of

the Committee are obviously very well networked on this—if you could give some examples of conferences where you felt that we were underrepresented or had missed tricks.

The Chairman: Perhaps I could come on to that. I want to close this down because we need to move on. Lord Oxburgh has asked some excellent questions—

Lord Oxburgh: Could I just ask one more excellent question?

The Chairman: How could I resist, as long as it is brief? I need to follow up on this issue.

Lord Oxburgh: Committee dynamics are very important; it is also important to know what other countries are doing. But if we are the only country that is there from time to time at a particular committee, our position is weak. Do you know whether other countries are represented by different individuals at different times, and only represented occasionally? That makes a great deal of difference, and in deciding how we implement our strategy you need to have that information.

The Chairman: Can I follow that up with a supplementary myself? You will know that we have had from the Arctic Council the attendances of UK representatives over an 18-month period, from June 2013 to the end of last month. In that time, it is interesting to note that we have attended only two meetings of the working groups but seven meetings of the various taskforces. If I were looking at this, and you will know more about this than I do, that would slightly look like a random attendance. With the taskforces, if we were interested in an ongoing issue—there is certainly one of those where we have attended three out of four times—should we not concentrate on particular areas and make sure that we always attended those taskforces? Surely there is a momentum in them or an important corporate history to them, so that to be effective you cannot dip in and out of them. To follow on from Lord Oxburgh's question, we are concerned about that pattern of attendance.

Jane Rumble: In the sense of how the other state observers attend, we are in a similar pattern. There is a lot of attendance from the local embassies, which is similar to the way we have been doing it, but we have increasingly been doing it through the Science and Innovation Network—again, that is to build that kind of established network as opposed to having the latest second secretary, or whoever. We are acting in a similar way. The role of this is to see where our interests lie or where we have particular contributions to make. The working groups have an ongoing role in disseminating assessments, looking at the science and then identifying what should be advised to the senior Arctic officials. We have not necessarily found the working groups to be the best places for UK expertise to engage. There

is a level below that with the scientific assessments, where we have been engaging much more: recent examples have been on ocean acidification, methane and black carbon. Those then feed into the working group, which disseminates them into what will then be given to the senior Arctic officials.

One of the ways in which we keep abreast of that is that I will speak to the senior Arctic officials, who will identify what might be coming up on the agenda. We will go to the senior Arctic officials' meeting, so the working groups have not necessarily always been the priority unless there is a very long-standing agenda item that we are interested in. With the PAME and CAFF working groups we have seen much longer-term interests, whereas emergency preparedness and response is very much about the specific responses of the Arctic states. We have not necessarily seen where we could add value into that working group.

In the taskforces, as you have seen, we have definitely been involved in each of them because they are a slightly newer breed of Arctic Council group. They have been looking at where they might move to new binding agreements, so we would have gone to all the taskforces on the scientific discussions, but with the first one we were only invited three days before it happened. We did not have much time to sort that out, but we have definitely been attending and that will continue under the US chairmanship, which will keep abreast of the black carbon and methane working group. We have been going to the Task Forces at the point where they look at meaty activities rather than the first meetings, which tend to be about agreeing the terms of reference and posturing. Again, we have been identifying where the priorities are and where we can best feed into that process.

Q322 Lord Soley: This is for Miss Rumble again, I am afraid. All the questions so far come together in this one in a sense. Everybody I have talked to and who we have talked to as a Committee conclude that the Arctic Council is a very important organisation and is evolving. I am sure that the FCO agrees with that assessment—do tell me if it does not, but I think it does. I suppose what troubles me, which comes out of some of the previous answers, is whether we have a strategy towards the Arctic Council. Do we see what this organisation is likely to look like and in what form it is likely to be organised in five, 10 or 20 years' time? In other words: are we thinking ahead of it? Your answer to Lord Moynihan on this was quite interesting when he asked about the ambassador. You said, "We have been thinking about this for many years and we have decided probably not". That made me think that maybe in a year or two's time we could ask the same question and hear, "We have been thinking about

this for many years and we have decided probably yes". I wonder about the strategy here. What is our idea of our involvement in the Arctic Council and how it is going to develop? It is a big question but a rather important one if we are not just to react to events as they happen, which is what some of the questions have been picking up.

Jane Rumble: We agree that it is evolving, both in the sense of the breadth of the issues that it is looking at and in the way it structures and organises itself. It has quite a new secretariat, it is increasingly using task forces and it has agreed in recent years to legally binding agreements under its auspices between the Arctic states. We definitely think it is evolving, which is partly why I am trying to give the impression that we want to evolve with it. However, I do not want to give a definitive answer to some of these things, because it will depend. We obviously need to keep a watching brief and to be able to react.

In terms of where we would like to see it go, we very much welcome the establishment of the secretariat, which we think will be very helpful. We have struggled in the past with knowing exactly what is going on; the secretariat is very useful as a one-stop shop for where the meetings are taking place, what the agenda is et cetera. In the past, each of the working groups had a separate website that you needed to check on, and not everything was necessarily as co-ordinated as it is now, so we very much welcome that.

In terms of the UK's involvement, we have consistently stated that we do not want to impose any changes on the Arctic Council. The body has been very carefully established to take into account the Permanent Participants and their unique role, and we have been very conscious of not overwhelming that relationship by having lots and lots of state observers recognised. We absolutely do not foresee the UK diminishing its interests. We see the UK continuing to be involved and having extremely strong bilateral relations with each of the Arctic states but also engaging with them multilaterally.

Lord Soley: I accept that the secretariat is an important step forward that will be critical to this, and that there are areas—science is obviously one—where we have a big contribution, but there are other areas too. A lot of the developments are likely to be legal, such as for example legal agreements of various types, and one of the strengths of the United Kingdom is in legal structures, including international ones. Are you thinking in advance about that? What sort of legal structures will the Arctic Council be looking at in five years' time? Could we offer a lead on that? I am sure you are right that we cannot tell the Arctic Council what to do—it would be a terrible mistake and would not work—but we have skills that we could

bring to the table. We could start talking about aspects of international law, for example, which are terribly important in the development of the Arctic Council.

Jane Rumble: Yes, absolutely, and that is part of what we do, not necessarily in the formal, structured Arctic Council meetings but more relating to the different policies on which we feel there need to be further embellished rules and policies. The legal framework of the Arctic is enshrined in the UN law of the sea convention, but we foresee that there will need to be new agreements relating to fisheries—for example a new regional fisheries management organisation or a regional seas agreement—so we have been talking to the different states. But when you look at the Arctic states, we have natural affinity with and are more likely to agree with some of those states than others. The Arctic Council by definition is a consensus-making body, so it will talk about things where it feels that it has a reasonable chance of consensus. A whole range of activity happens before that, bilaterally or within other international agreements, to identify what needs to happen in the Arctic before it will necessarily get picked up publicly by the Arctic Council.

Lord Soley: A final quick question, if I can, although a fairly big one in implication. What would you say if I were to ask you whether you think we have a strategy towards the Arctic Council that thinks ahead or that we are just reactive?

Jane Rumble: I cannot use the word “strategy” because the Arctic states would be nervous about us saying that we have a strategy: hence, we have an Arctic policy framework. We have strategies in different policy areas. For example, we have a very clear strategy for climate change, which has a strong Arctic element, and a clear strategy for the safety of shipping, which also has a clear Arctic element. You can argue that the Government look at things in silos, but because the UK is not an Arctic state we are looking at policy areas with an Arctic element rather than having an overarching Arctic “strategy”. However, we do bring them altogether into the policy framework.

Lord Soley: A small strategy could be just as disturbing to the Arctic states as a big strategy.

The Chairman: Let us move on to defence issues. Viscount Hanworth.

Q323 Viscount Hanworth: I come to the loss of Britain’s capacity for aerial maritime surveillance and aerial support of sea rescue operations, which has been a consequence of the demise of the Nimrod aircraft. I would like to ask for your views on this situation. Do we need to restore this capacity in view of the increase in maritime traffic in the region and in

view of the military aspects that also seem to be of increasing importance? I am thinking of the increasing activity of the Russians in this area.

Julian Brazier MP: I think it is absolutely clear that this is something that the SDSR will look at next year very carefully. Despite losing the Nimrod, we have quite a number of other assets involved in search and rescue, including vessels, satellite capacity and, albeit not so much up in the Arctic, helicopters of a variety of different kinds. But this is certainly something that SDSR 2015 will look at.

Viscount Hanworth: We had to depend on the good will of our allies who were flying the missions from Lossiemouth when searching for a Russian submarine recently, I believe. Those were the US, the Canadians and the French. Can we realistically depend on their assistance in future or should we put something in place of our own?

Julian Brazier MP: So far that alliance has worked. We bring a lot of other things to the table within the alliance in a whole variety of different theatres and circumstances, but I am certain that the question you put will be looked at very carefully next year in the SDSR by whatever Government are in place then. That will clearly be one of the questions that will be looked at very centrally.

Viscount Hanworth: Does anyone else on the panel want to contribute a view on that?

Nick Gurr: I have just a few points in addition to those of the Minister. Nimrod's primary role was anti-submarine warfare rather than search and rescue, and it was actually quite unusual for Nimrod aircraft to be deployed outside the UK region for search and rescue purposes. The loss of Nimrod has not opened up a problem in search and rescue capability in the Arctic or near-Arctic. As the Minister has said, we have other assets that are capable of operating in the region, such as ships like HMS "Scott", the survey ship. C-130 aircraft have a limited surveillance capability. They are not as sophisticated as Nimrod in that regard but they do provide a capability. As you yourself have said, we have been able to depend on allies. Canada, Norway and the US in particular have been very helpful in helping to fill the gap, if you like, that has arisen as a result of the loss of the surveillance capability that the Nimrod had.

Lord Soley: There are, as has been indicated, two areas of concern. One is anti-submarine warfare and the other search and rescue. One of the things that we have heard from a number of witnesses has been that Britain could do more on the search and rescue side. We are a maritime nation and have a good record on it. Other countries that would normally

rely on us—Denmark, for example—cannot really rely on us in the way they used to be able to when we had a greater capacity. How high in your list of priorities is this for the strategic defence review?

Julian Brazier MP: Well, it is above my pay grade to set out the priorities for next year's SDSR. On the search and rescue point, as far as covering our own coastline is concerned, the new arrangements that come in in about a year's time will continue to provide very full coverage by helicopters. The occasional—it was only occasional—use of fixed-wing aircraft at much longer distances has been handicapped, but the main issue in relation to whether we get back to maritime reconnaissance or not is anti-submarine rather than search and rescue. That is overwhelmingly the central issue. It is no secret that it was one of the two or three most controversial aspects of the last SDSR. The then Secretary of State for Defence said on the record at one point that it was the single most difficult decision that he made in the process, but given the economic situation, some very difficult decision had to be taken. I am certain that this issue will be looked at very closely again, but as Nick Gurr has just said, the main focus for that decision will be on the anti-submarine side.

Lord Soley: While we understand that it must be on that, tourism is opening up in the Arctic. If you have a major incident with a tourist ship in the Arctic which would have been in range of British aircraft and we do not have any, what do you say?

Julian Brazier MP: There are eight Arctic countries. We are the closest of those who are not among the eight, but we are not an Arctic country. I accept, though, that our capability is less than it would have been five years ago, Lord Soley.

The Chairman: A number of those tourists would be British citizens. We are probably a more adventurous nation than some others may be in our holidaymaking, and I suspect there will be quite a large contingent of British citizens on those vessels that Lord Soley refers to.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Would it make any difference to your decision-making if there were an agreement that tourist ships using the Arctic should pay some kind of levy to part-fund the possible need to rescue them?

Julian Brazier MP: That is an interesting thought, which I shall take away. I do not think I can give you an answer on that now. It was one of the most expensive programmes in government, and I would be exaggerating if I was to suggest that levies on tourists could pay a significant chunk of a planned maritime patrol, but there is an interesting underlying question there. Some countries do charge tourists for rescue. Kenya, for example, charges

for mountaineering accidents. There is a long tradition there, but as far as I know we have never made a charge of any sort in this area, and I think it would be departing from standard practice

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: This is an area where, above all, the tourists are extremely well off. Poor tourists are not going to the Arctic very much, I imagine.

Julian Brazier MP: I understand that, but I do not think it would be a Ministry of Defence decision whether or not we would charge.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I accept that.

Nick Gurr: I would just add one point. I do not think that would change the fundamental principle that it is the closest state that is responsible for the lead on search and rescue in a particular area, so in a search and rescue incident in the Arctic it would be the closest Arctic state. Our role would be to act in support of that state. We are able to do that now with the C-130 Hercules, which has a surveillance capability, as does the E-3 Sentry. We can make some contribution, albeit perhaps not as much as we were.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: So you presumably hope that a British vessel or a vessel with a lot of British tourists on it does not get into trouble near Iceland.

Viscount Hanworth: Is there a likelihood of that?

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: It has no resources at all.

The Chairman: I would like Lord Tugendhat to come in first.

Lord Tugendhat: I was just going to follow up on the point that Lord Hannay made. It is surely not a question only of revenue raising and whether the revenue would be a significant amount to government. It is also that such a levy would be an encouragement to good behaviour on the part of those who might otherwise get involved in trouble.

Jane Rumble: Just briefly on the shipping question, I wanted to ensure that the Committee was aware of the work that we are doing to improve the safety of shipping in the Arctic. First, that is through the Polar Code, to make sure that ships operating there are better capable and have been ice-strengthened, and where necessary that they have ice pilots on board and are better navigating in those waters. We have also lobbied quite hard on the question of vessel planning to make sure that vessels are not operating in complete isolation. That is not necessarily agreed by all parties, but if a ship were going to the Antarctic, where you require a British permit to be there it is a requirement from the FCO in authorising the permit that this operation has been planned and that you would not be

completely on your own. You would have ideas as to who would respond, rather than just phoning for government search and rescue services, which are as remote in the south as they are in the north. We are having that discussion with the Arctic states. The ships pay landing fees when they visit different countries and arguably, therefore, they would say that they are already contributing in some way. But we will put the point that you raise on whether there should be a specific levy to the Department for Transport, and I am sure that it will explain whether or not that would be workable.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I thought you were going to say, “They will explain why it is not workable”.

Jane Rumble: Sorry, I did not mean to say that. They will explain whether it is workable.

Julian Brazier MP: Just to come back to Lord Soley’s comments about legal structures, if you look at the way in which the civil law works in terms of people’s capacity to sue when things go wrong, in a previous world as a Back-Bencher I was quite heavily involved in investigating lobbying in that area. In fact, I had some support from the last Labour Government in making a modest change to the law. The fact is that it is a lot easier when things go wrong for organisations to get sued in this country, surprisingly, than it is in America or in a number of other jurisdictions where the more adventurous activities enjoy legal protections that they do not in this country. I do not think that British tourists would be the first to be causing problems in this area. That is not a prediction, just an observation on the framework.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Q324 Lord Addington: This is fairly straightforward and, I think, solely on the MoD's ground. What interest does the UK have in Arctic security and, following on from that, what is the value of UK engagement in such groups as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable and the Northern Group? Then, how does that engagement help the UK to achieve its objectives in the Arctic, and is this distinct from NATO-related activity?

Julian Brazier MP: We have been engaged from the beginning with the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, which you just mentioned. I certainly do not want to sound complacent on the many issues and tensions that there are at the moment between the West and Russia—there is the situation in Ukraine and so on—but it is fair to say that although there are one or two concerning developments, which I will come to in a second, the background is that the Arctic is pretty stable compared to some other areas we are looking at. If I could give you a couple of quotes, the Norwegian Admiral Bruun-Hanssen said that it is, “probably the most

stable area in the world”, while in a recent article the *Economist* commented, “All countries play by the rules. Legal norms are well established”. So it is important that we do not get to a position where we are trying to fix something that ain’t broke. The fact remains, though, that the Russians have now set up their new Northern command. As in so many other areas, they have become much more active but are still very much participants, both in the council and in the security forces roundtable. So far, proper notices have been given and the various protocols are being observed, and so on. This does seem to be a forum that is really working. You asked about NATO. Through NATO we continue to take a very considerable interest in the Arctic. We have regular exercises every year involving the Royal Marines in supporting elements in the far north, so we continue to have an Arctic-trained component there. That is reflected in the other two services, too. Mr Gurr mentioned that one of our hydrographic ships, HMS “Scott”, is ice-enabled, which gives us the capability to investigate there. We do regular missions through the Air Force and the Navy. Just south of the Arctic Circle, for example, we were one of the first to get involved with the aerial patrolling in the Baltic states during the period of tension there. I do not know whether there is a particular part of your question that you want to develop, but I hope that that gives you a flavour for the way in which we are engaged there.

Lord Addington: The main thrust of this is the difference between that activity and NATO, which is very interesting. On the Arctic Council et cetera, would it be fair to say for instance that not having a NATO element to some of the defence activity makes it more stable, because you are dealing with the Russians and they do not feel as threatened? I wonder if you could expand on that point.

Julian Brazier MP: Just for a moment, then I will hand over to Nick Gurr. Let us be clear that we are engaged in the forum and in the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, as well as being in the original council as observers. NATO takes a close interest in this area. I am not sure what you mean. Was your suggestion that we are somehow less threatening to Russia there?

Lord Addington: Yes, basically.

Julian Brazier MP: If you look at some other areas where there are very considerable issues with Russia, it would be hard to argue that they are all areas where Russia feels threatened. Clearly, this is an area where we feel that there is a positive relationship and that things are going well with—

Lord Addington: You mean there is less paranoia?

Julian Brazier MP: I am not going to use the word paranoia, but it is a forum where the relationship is going well between Russia and the other countries, the majority of which—not all of them, of course—are in NATO.

The Chairman: Can I just clarify whether we are saying that that forum still works as well as it did two years ago, or whenever, so that nothing has changed there and the participation of the Russian Federation is just as good?

Julian Brazier MP: Sorry, but it depends what you mean by “nothing has changed”. Things have certainly changed on the ground to the extent that Russia has set up a separate Arctic command, but, yes, the forum is still working as it did before. I think I ought to bring Mr Gurr in, because he is the expert on this.

Nick Gurr: There is quite a lot here, so perhaps I will start a bit further back. The defence interests in the Arctic are in pursuit of the national interests, so they are to do with trying to foster the maintenance of peace and security and co-operation between Arctic states, ensuring freedom of legal navigation in the Arctic, and having the capacity to deal with the management of the environment there. As the Minister said, and as the question alluded to, there is also a specific defence obligation under Article 5 and other NATO articles for us to support NATO members that are Arctic states.

There are different views, even within NATO, on the extent to which individual countries want NATO to be involved in Arctic issues. Some countries are more enthusiastic than others about that. The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable has the advantage of bringing together all the Arctic states, not just those that are NATO members but those that are not. Clearly that includes Russia, but it also includes those that are neutral or non-aligned, such as Sweden and Finland. We have found that it has been possible to have constructive discussions about security issues within that forum. From a UK perspective, as an observer at that forum we are able both to develop a better understanding of the issues affecting Arctic security and to ensure that our voice is heard around that table. The forum has been working well. I think I am right in saying that the Russians were not invited to the last forum meeting, as a consequence of their actions in Ukraine and the response to them. But certainly up to that point it had all been working extremely constructively, as the Minister said. We will have to see how it moves forward from here.

Q325 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Have any of the incursions identified by the European Leadership Network, which I am sure you are familiar with, been within the Arctic Circle?

Julian Brazier MP: Norway has seen a significant increase in incursions, but I do not know how many of them were above and below the Arctic line.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: So it does cast a slight shadow of doubt on whether the forum is working that well if, first, the Russians did not come to the last meeting and, secondly, they are carrying out flights where they should not be.

Nick Gurr: There has been an increase in Russian incursions into air defence regions around NATO countries across the board.

The Chairman: We are going to come on to that in a bit. I want to bring in Lord Soley.

Lord Soley: My question has just been answered.

The Chairman: Okay, fine. So in terms of the ASFR are we saying that the fact that the Russian Federation was not there last time does not necessarily mean that it will not be in future, or does this look like a direction in which it is travelling?

Nick Gurr: I do not think we actually know that at the moment, Lord Chairman.

The Chairman: But is there a wish among the other participants to continue that co-operation despite what else is happening?

Nick Gurr: Yes.

Q326 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: We have been struck, looking at it in a purely theoretical way, by the fact that all the members of the Arctic Council are signatories of the Paris charter of 1990 and members of the OSCE. The question that we have been putting to various people and would now like to put to you is: does this common membership among the eight members of the Arctic Council, which includes the non-NATO members, have any relevance now, or could it have any relevance in future for the handling of security issues in the Arctic?

Julian Brazier MP: The short answer is that if you look at some other things that have happened—Georgia, Ukraine and so on—I am not sure I can give you a terribly hopeful response. Would the officials like to add anything?

Nick Gurr: The OSCE is about dispute resolution.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: It is about rules. It is about laying down rules, which all the signatories have said they will abide by. Dispute resolution is a very small part of it, although it is very prominent in eastern Ukraine because the OSCE is mounting a monitoring mission there—without any help from the Russians incidentally. My question relates to the wider fact that you do not create the strains you would create if you say that NATO should be

more active in the Arctic, which obviously immediately produces a negative Russian reaction. My question is about the fact that they are all members and have all signed the Paris charter. Some people ought to try to read the Paris charter.

Jane Rumble: From my perspective, I think we agree that theoretically it could have a role in the Arctic if that becomes necessary. The issue at the moment is that there is no requirement or obvious reason for it to step in right now. If it was going to step in, as I understand it, all the members of the OSCE would have to agree to that, so all the Arctic states would have to agree. So never say never, but there is no reason now why it would need to engage; nor do we see one in the immediate short term.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: That is a very helpful and clear response.

The Chairman: Lord Oxburgh, then I want to move on.

Lord Oxburgh: This is a quick point, going back to something that you mentioned briefly earlier. One of the principal hazards of navigation in the Arctic areas is that the maps are not very good. However, nearly all the Arctic Ocean is territorial waters of one country or another. Does the Royal Navy see itself as having any hydrographic mission in the Arctic?

Julian Brazier MP: I was at the Hydrographic Office a few weeks ago. This really is something that we lead the world in, and it is a much undervalued centre of excellence. As a tiny bit of background, the Hydrographic Office works from a combination of the certain amount of stuff that we get through our own hydrographic vessels and a much larger data feed from other people. The fact that one of our hydrographic vessels is ice-enabled gives us some capability up there. The short answer is that I do not think you can say it is a Navy mission—I really rely on Mr Gurr for a more detailed answer on this—but the UK Hydrographic Office is the leading authority.

Lord Oxburgh: We collect data and make excellent charts, but the question was really whether our vessels operate in Arctic waters to collect primary information.

Julian Brazier MP: Only to a very small extent.

Nick Gurr: The worldwide charts that are produced do cover the Arctic regions, and from time to time naval vessels operate in the northern waters in support of that charting. But I do not think it is a very frequent activity. The MoD requirement for those products has been relatively limited.

The Chairman: Lord Hunt, very briefly please.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: Are we on question 7?

The Chairman: No we are not.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: Some people having been jumping in on 7 already.

Q327 Baroness Browning: I wondered whether I could bring Mr Brazier back to the question that Lord Hannay raised about the European Leadership Network. What is the MoD take on this? The network reported 39 incidents in the last eight months, including near misses, “violations of national airspace, emergency scrambles, narrowly avoided mid-air collisions, close encounters at sea, simulated bombing attacks” stretching from the North Sea to the Baltic and Arctic regions as well as along the US coast. Surely, this is a testing of the responses of NATO and of Arctic countries. It is not just something that can be seen in isolation, can it, from what goes on in the Arctic Council? What is the MoD take on this?

Julian Brazier MP: I will let Mr Gurr follow up on some of the detail, but the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for Defence have all been absolutely clear that we take these issues very seriously indeed. We have made the strongest possible comments. It is not just the violations that you mentioned but the invasion of Ukraine. I think we were one of the first three countries to get aircraft up into the Baltic States to take part in missions in response to violations of our NATO allies’ airspace there. It is a very serious problem right across the board.

To come back to the question that started earlier with Lord Addington about where our principal problems with the Russians lie, they have not principally lain inside the Arctic Circle. If you look at the various dealings we have with Russia at the moment, there are areas where we are able to deal more easily with them. For example, they have been quite helpful with the negotiations on Iran, and there are areas where their interests are still seen to be engaged in broadly the same direction as ours. So far, against the frankly appalling background that you describe, the implications are that the polar region is an area where Russia still sees its interests as lying in a stable, rules-based structure of the sort that it is flagrantly ignoring in other places.

Baroness Browning: Thank you. Having heard that, can I move to Miss Rumble? When you came to the Committee last time, I think you were asked a similar question. How long can the Arctic be insulated from these geopolitical issues? While people are pressing on, is this the elephant in the room?

Jane Rumble: I suppose you could describe it like that. In any kind of multilateral forum there are underlying issues between countries on a range of different issues. This is

obviously an extremely big one, but at this time, as the Minister said, Russia sees the Arctic as an area where it wants to continue engaging with its Arctic Council partners on areas of mutual co-operation where consensus can be built. It has not at this point led to a breakdown in the council or its work or structures, but as has just been described, it is obviously quite a live issue and it is being assessed very regularly.

The Chairman: This is a really naive question, but given that there are all these incursions going on, some of them within the territories of Arctic Council states if not actually in the Arctic, has the reason why this is all going on and how the harm from all these potential incursions that were outlined by Baroness Browning can be minimised been discussed at all at the Arctic Security Forces Round Table? Is it part of an agenda there or is it completely separate?

Julian Brazier MP: I am afraid that I cannot answer that question.

Jane Rumble: On the Round Table, I might defer to Nick. It is certainly not discussed in the Arctic Council.

The Chairman: Forget that I said Arctic Council. I understand that, but Arctic nations are involved because of the work that the Russian air force is doing at the minute and the other potential incursions. Is that an agenda item on the forum if the Russians are there?

Nick Gurr: I understand that it was not at the last meeting, but there has been considerable bilateral discussion about this between us and allies. I wonder whether it is worth presenting a little context to the Russian activity. There is absolutely no doubt that there has been an increase in Russian military activity over the last year or so. The number of Russian incursions into air defence regions of NATO member states has increased about threefold during that period. As the Minister said earlier on, there has been an increase in the Norwegian air defence region—not as big as three times, but there has been an increase. The Norwegians in particular have seen a change in the nature of some of the flights, so that rather than it being, if you like, routine training or reconnaissance flights going through, you have tended to see more instances of a number of aircraft conducting tactical types of manoeuvre. There has been a difference both in number and type. The area where we have seen the biggest increase in Russian activity has been the Baltic area, not the Arctic. A number of the incidents that Baroness Browning referred to were in that area. That is where the mock attacks and incursions of air space have occurred.

Julian Brazier MP: Just to emphasise, that is why Britain got aircraft up to the Baltic so early and why we have just been participating in a very long series of exercises stretching through Poland and up into the edge of the Baltic states. That is where the secondary focus of activity after Ukraine has been.

Q328 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: The Minister mentioned, when we were talking about aircraft, the role of submarines, which is very important. My question is really associated with the fact that there has been a lot of submarine activity both in the present and in the past. In the past, this led to a large amount of nuclear waste and old, rotting nuclear submarines. The MoD and others in the UK had a very extensive programme of collaboration to clean this up, because it leads to contamination of the whole of the Arctic area. I just wondered whether, first, this programme is continuing within MoD as part of its Arctic work. Is it funded into the future? Is it done in collaboration with the Arctic Council? I understand that this could be talked about in the Arctic Council, as it is a huge environment problem for the Arctic, or is it discussed solely in bilateral military circles?

Julian Brazier MP: On your first point, we certainly continue to take our responsibilities on nuclear waste very seriously. Does anybody know about the Arctic Council's involvement?

Nick Gurr: No, I was aware of the programme that you referred to some years ago. I think the work is complete, but perhaps we could let you know.

Julian Brazier MP: We will write to you.

The Chairman: That would be very useful, thank you.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: Quite a lot of Members of the House felt that one of the big issues for the Committee would be to understand what is happening about this stuff, because it has caused a lot of concern. But I understand it is a touchy issue in Arctic Council affairs.

Julian Brazier MP: It is worth remembering that the bulk of the submarines that we are talking about are Russian, but nevertheless we will give you a written answer.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: Their waste goes everywhere.

Lord Soley: I have a brief question, which goes back to what I was talking about on our strategy towards the Arctic Council. It seems to me that if President Putin's activities continue on their present course it is almost inconceivable that that will not impact on the Arctic Council over the coming years. I just wonder whether we are thinking ahead in that way in both the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. It will be affected if President Putin goes on doing what he is doing.

Julian Brazier MP: You may well be right, my Lord, but it is not for us to speculate. As to your question whether we are thinking about it, the short answer is that, yes, we are. In SDSR 2015, I am certain that we will look at it hard. We have already discussed the issue around maritime patrol aircraft. The fact that we have a programme of exercises in Norway and so on shows that we are committed there. Are there any detailed points that you would like to make, Nick?

Nick Gurr: No, other than that we talk all the time to our allies and partners about both Russian intentions and Russian capabilities in the military sphere. It is fair to say that the whole manner of our relationship with Russia across the board, not just in defence and security but in engagement, was relatively limited. But that is something that we are now considering across government and thinking about what the implications are likely to be over the next several years. As you hinted in your question, this does not feel to anybody like a blip in relations; it feels like an issue that we will have to manage for several years. Russia and the Arctic will be one aspect in our consideration of all that.

Q329 Lord Tugendhat: You will have seen the report in today's newspapers about Denmark claiming the North Pole. I wondered whether HMG have a view on the future of the central Arctic Ocean. What involvement in discussions regarding the regulatory framework for the high seas in the Arctic Ocean have we had?

Julian Brazier MP: It comes back to science to some extent—the examination of continental shelves and so on. Jane, do you want to run with this?

Jane Rumble: The Danish submission is under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Each coastal state is invited to submit information to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, which is a UN-established body, to identify whether it has a claim to an extended continental shelf. Every state gets a 200-nautical mile jurisdiction over the water column and the seabed and you can extend your rights to the seabed out to a complicated formula—I think that it is 350 nautical miles or 60 miles from the foot of the geological slope. That is what all the states have been involved in. Russia, Canada and Denmark have done it, as will the US, if it ratifies UNCLOS in future. The UK has done it for metropolitan UK and some of the overseas territories. It is an ongoing process. Because of the timeline under UNCLOS as to when you should do this—it says that you should do it within 10 years of ratification—Russia is on a much earlier timescale, so it submitted originally, including for the Arctic area, in 2004. It was then asked by the Commission on the Limits of the

Continental Shelf to do further work, so it is doing that at the moment. Canada has recently submitted and so has Denmark; both ratified UNCLOS a bit later. Our view is that the United Nations process should be followed and that this expert committee should look at the submissions and determine whether the area under the North Pole is indeed continental shelf. The process that the UN has set up is not in fact to arbitrate over disputed regions; the aim is to identify the outer limits of the continental shelf. Once that can be mapped, it will be up to relevant states who has jurisdiction over different bits of it. There is a long process to be gone through at this stage to identify whether the UN agrees with the submissions of Denmark and Russia and whether they can map the outer limits of the continental shelf. Subsequently, the negotiation will take place about who, therefore, will have jurisdiction over which bit.

Lord Tugendhat: So if I understand it correctly—I am not at all sure that I do—this is a move in a prolonged chess game rather than the striking *démarche* that it appeared when I read my *FT* at breakfast.

Jane Rumble: Yes. The information that Denmark has submitted will sit in New York in the United Nations for quite some time. The Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf has a phenomenal workload, so it will be quite some time before it determines whether it agrees with the Danish submission.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: If I have understood your answers rightly, which seem to me to make entirely good sense, these submissions by Canada, Denmark and Russia will go into a slow, lengthy process while the law of the sea committee decides where the continental shelf ends. That decision on where the continental shelf ends crucially affects the size of the high seas element that remains if the sea ice melts. Is that not the case? It will eat up large amounts of that if these claims are sustained. My point is this: are we in a situation where the claims of these three countries will prevent any sensible handling of the high seas area in the middle, because nobody will agree how big it is or where it is?

Jane Rumble: There are two elements. The continental shelf element is over the rights to the seabed, so it is predominantly talking about mineral resources under the continental shelf.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: And nothing to do with fisheries.

Jane Rumble: No. The high seas area is the water column and that is fixed. As a coastal state, you have out to 200 nautical miles; thereafter it is the high seas. The continental shelf discussion will not impact on shipping and fishing.

Lord Oxburgh: Can I just pursue that? The continental shelf is not necessarily fixed. You can define it purely in terms of water depth or you can look at changes in slope. You can make a good geological case for either of those. Is that accepted or clear, or will this be part of the area of disputation?

The Chairman: I do not want to spend too much time on this, as we have gone through it previously.

Jane Rumble: Okay. I hesitate to try to explain it to a geologist, but as I understand it the criteria by which the UN will make its decisions are very clear.

Q330 The Chairman: I would like to ask one question on the water column, which comes back to fisheries. We have had evidence from various nation states and organisations around the fisheries issue and I wonder whether the UK Government have a specific policy on this. As that area becomes more open to economic activities, particularly around fisheries and related ecosystems, what should happen there? Should we have a very precautionary approach? Should we have a sanctuary? Should we have no-take zones? Do the FCO and the Government have a view on that?

Jane Rumble: Yes, I suppose that there is a series of views. The first main view would be that the fisheries should only take place where there is a structured framework for the governance of fishing. We do not wish there to be no regulatory regime and for it to be just the high seas; we would want there to be some sort of regime, whether that should be a fisheries regime to enable fisheries or a prohibition of fisheries activities. The high seas area of the Arctic at the moment comes under two different areas. One area, north of Europe, is covered by the OSPAR convention—"OSPAR" is just a linkage of Oslo and Paris and does not stand for anything—and the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission. OSPAR is considering whether there should be a marine protected area up in that triangle, if you like, from the North Pole downwards. The UK is actively working with other member states and various organisations to look at the scientific justification for that. In the area that is outside that triangle, at the moment it is just high seas and there is no regime. The UK's preference for declaring marine protected areas would be under an Implementing Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. That is under negotiation at the moment under the UN framework, but we recognise that that will take quite a long time, so there is a further discussion among the five coastal states around the Arctic as to whether there should be a moratorium on fishing activity in this region. We understand that the suggestion

would be that they would agree that their boats would not fish this region but that they would all co-operate on science. We believe that they will come and discuss that with other major fishing nations. In that debate, the UK would feed in information on the marine protection element and, on the fisheries element, would be working with the EU. Our general view is that, where the science suggests that it would be useful and there is a scientific basis for it, protection should be given. The science for the Arctic is not yet there, so we very much support the idea that there should be more science activity. I think that we would be sympathetic towards a moratorium, but we have yet to see the exact detail, which we understand the five Arctic states are working up between themselves. We will look at that once it comes to us.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Am I right in saying that we do not accept that the five Arctic states can tell us what should happen in the high seas portion? It has to be agreed and we would be one of the parties that would need to agree with that, if it was to be regulated by some kind of international arrangement. Is that right?

Jane Rumble: That is right. We have made those representations to the Arctic littorals—the coastal states—and I think they well understand that they could not control this area on their own. The idea is that they want to show leadership. There are eight states in the Arctic Council and we are conscious that they may not share the same views; they may not yet be persuaded that this moratorium is the right way to go. So, yes, we are waiting to see the detail of it to consider.

The Chairman: Minister, Mr Gurr, Ms Rumble and Mr Burgess, thank you very much indeed for a very useful and excellent completion to our evidence sessions. We look forward to those extra bits of written evidence. I hereby bring the public part of the meeting to an end.