

Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

Oral evidence: The work of the National Security Adviser

Monday 30 January 2023

4.30 pm

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Members present: Margaret Beckett MP (The Chair); Lord Butler of Brockwell; Sarah Champion MP; Baroness Crawley; Lord Dannatt; Tobias Ellwood MP; Baroness Fall; Richard Graham MP; Darren Jones MP; Alicia Kearns MP; Stephen McPartland MP; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Lord Robathan; Lord Snape; Viscount Stansgate; Bob Stewart MP.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 26

Witnesses

I: Sir Tim Barrow, National Security Adviser, Cabinet Office; Matt Collins, Deputy National Security Adviser (Intelligence, Defence and Security), Cabinet Office

Examination of witnesses

Sir Tim Barrow and Matt Collins.

Q1 The Chair: Welcome, Sir Tim and Mr Collins. Thank you very much for giving evidence to us today. We are particularly grateful to you, Sir Tim, for maintaining the commitment despite a recent illness, which is why you are joining remotely. You might be aware that some members of the committee are also joining remotely. I hope you will be able to see them, as well as those of us in the room.

I will begin by asking some questions about the pattern of the National Security Council, with which, you will appreciate, this committee has been familiar for some years. In the past six months, that council was more or less disbanded under one Prime Minister and then reinstated, I am pleased to say, by the next. There was a National Security Ministers group, for a fairly brief period. That has been set aside. Now there seems to be a major Whitehall reorganisation, a new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, which in itself I certainly welcome, and the

Investment Security Unit, I understand, is moving to the Cabinet Office, although only a year ago it began operations in BEIS. These upheavals must have had a considerable impact on policy development and delivery. How much damage have they done?

Sir Tim Barrow: Thank you very much for welcoming me. I thank the committee for its forbearance in seeing me remotely. As you said, I have recently had Covid. Indeed, I still have some of the after-effects, so I thank you for doing this in a hybrid way. I would say to anyone who is listening in: please keep following the guidance and be aware of the symptoms of Covid.

On the machinery of government, you are of course right that there was some change under a previous Prime Minister, who created the FPSC, bringing Europe into the NSC as was. We have now reinstated the NSC. During all that time, we continued to have regular meetings and to deal with the important issues. Of course, much of the immediate priority has been Ukraine, but there are other issues as well. We have maintained the regularity of the meetings of the NSC and its supporting structures, including NSCO, which I or, if I am travelling, one of my deputies—perhaps Matt or others—chair every week to make sure that issues that are going up to the NSC are discussed fully among officials beforehand, and to allow for other issues to be raised at that level.

One of the things stated by the community when I first took over was the importance of science. The creation of DSIT, which you welcomed, is very important for that high-profile science, innovation and technology drive, which is part of the IR and part of national identity.

I believe that the work has continued apace and has not been interrupted. There are many pressing issues that we deal with.

The Chair: Could I press you on what might be, for some, a minor detail? Does the Prime Minister continue to chair the NSC, as the Prime Minister did from the outset?

Sir Tim Barrow: Yes.

The Chair: Every meeting?

Sir Tim Barrow: I think I am under the rule that we do not go into particulars about meetings, but yes, the Prime Minister chairs the meetings, and it meets on a regular basis.

The Chair: I ask, because it was the precedent that the Prime Minister chaired every meeting, because that was an indication of the status and role of the NSC.

Sir Tim Barrow: That is right and that is the case. The Prime Minister is the chair, and we engage through the NSC and other formats, as you know; you are extremely experienced, and you know better than me. The national security issues—both domestic and international, if I might say

so—are fully intertwined, and it continues to have that priority from the Prime Minister.

The Chair: Indeed. I recognise that. That is very helpful.

Q2 **Stephen McPartland:** Sir Tim, as a relative newcomer, would you characterise the NSC as a forum more for longer-term, strategic decision-making, or is it focused more on shorter-term operational and policy demands?

Sir Tim Barrow: Thank you. I am indeed a relative newcomer in this role, but I have been on the NSC since its inception in one way or another.

The Chair: I think you will find that has meant himself as a relative newcomer.

Sir Tim Barrow: I apologise. I never consider anyone on the committee a relative newcomer; there is too much experience in the room.

We have the NSC and COBR, as members of the committee know very well. Very often, COBR can be for the acute and immediate issues that we need to address, and the NSC is for setting strategy. On something like Ukraine, there has obviously been a regular set of meetings because it is such a pressing issue.

The strategic direction comes from the NSC, but it is also able to take a regularity of particularly important issues. As I said, that includes domestic as well as international.

Stephen McPartland: For my benefit, would you be able to quickly summarise what you think the strengths and weaknesses of the NSC are?

Sir Tim Barrow: I believe the strengths are allowing for the key Ministers, led by the Prime Minister and informed by those who have the relevant expertise—the agencies, the Chief of the Defence Staff, people like that—to have a proper strategic debate about issues that require it and to set the definitive course of action. It is a proper forum for discussion. That is what its strengths are. I do not immediately identify its weaknesses, but maybe that lies with me as the secretary of the committee.

Q3 **Lord Dannatt:** Could we turn to the Integrated Review, which is obviously very much one of the topics of the moment? Could you comment on the relationship between the forthcoming Budget, the IR refresh and the revised defence Command Paper, and, if you are able, update us on the sequencing of the forthcoming announcements and publications, and indeed how they are feeding into each other?

Sir Tim Barrow: I expect that the Integrated Review refresh will be out in the spring. It is fair to say that there is a connection with the Spring Statement. I would expect the defence Command Paper to come after that. I cannot give you more precision on the precise choreography other than that I expect the defence Command Paper to follow the first two.

Lord Dannatt: The original Integrated Review was a very comprehensive piece of work carried out by quite a large team of people. The refresh is being carried out by a team of people. To what extent is the team of people looking at the refresh different from the people who did the original work?

Sir Tim Barrow: There are some new and some old, to be frank, as you would expect. The team of people involved are my folk here and No. 10, but they are also across all the relevant departments. As you would expect, some people are involved because they are still in situ, highly experienced and relevant to it, but some people have changed. I am not sure I can put a metric on it. There is certainly some continuity, but there might be even more fresh eyes.

This is not just about Whitehall, of course; we have been taking soundings from broader fora. You will find in the review a sense that there is a lot to be taken from the initial IR. We think we largely got it right on the big strategic decisions. I suspect we feel that some of the concerns that we identified have accelerated.

It is very much a refresh and it is informed by the initial Integrated Review. That continuity, and some fresh eyes, is about the right sort of length.

Lord Dannatt: I know that colleagues will want to talk a little later about the impact of the war in Ukraine on the IR refresh. What impact of the reduction in the Government's development budget, the ODA spending, does the IR refresh take account of—if you are able to comment on that?

Sir Tim Barrow: I have to apologise. I cannot really comment on the IR refresh until it is ready. Therefore, I am afraid I am rather limited in what I can say. I note your interest, but I cannot give answers in advance of the refresh itself.

Lord Dannatt: We will wait with great interest. Thank you.

Sir Tim Barrow: I am sorry about that.

Q4 **Darren Jones:** Sir Tim, this is Darren Jones here, chair of the Commons Business Committee. Could you advise this committee on the role the NSC plays in guiding key decisions around the IR refresh?

Sir Tim Barrow: Of course. Thank you for the question. As I say, there are those in my secretariat who are working on this, along with No. 10 and elsewhere. The NSC will be the forum for discussion and agreement with regard to the IR to make sure that we have everyone fully happy and in agreement, as it covers the full span of business. The NSC is the forum in which that discussion will take place.

Darren Jones: And that consider spending allocations as well, will it?

Sir Tim Barrow: The IR refresh is not a spending review. As you would expect, the spending will be part of the Spring Statement. That is why there is a connection between the timing of the two.

Q5 **Darren Jones:** There were previously cross-departmental committees—I understand that they were called IRIGs—to look at implementation across Whitehall. Do you envisage those continuing, or do you think that you will change the structure for looking at implementation of the IR?

Sir Tim Barrow: I fear I will frustrate you in the way I just frustrated Lord Dannatt in that I really cannot prejudge what will come out at the end of this. We are looking at structures. I am very familiar with the IRIGs process, having been leader of one or two of them, but we are looking at structures as well as policy. As soon as we have the refresh we will happily engage and give you all the information we can.

Q6 **Darren Jones:** The Department for International Trade, I think in partnership with the Cabinet Office, had previously been working on an initiative called Project Defend, looking at supply chains and supply chain resilience. Could you give update us on where Project Defend has got to and what you envisage will happen to it next?

Sir Tim Barrow: As you will know, we have been working generally on the economic security piece. Indeed, it was very much the subject of my discussions recently as we all gathered as G7 Sherpas. We looked at the need to make sure that we have those supply chains and that critical minerals are looked after. That was a big theme of our G7 presidency. We are working nationally, with things like Project Defend, and internationally, particularly, as I say, in the G7; we took that issue into the G7 presidency when we were there. It is a major piece of work, and economic security will be an important strand of the IR refresh.

Darren Jones: Forgive me for asking a simple question, but I had understood that Project Defend was a discrete task, where there might be a report or output at the end. What you have described, I think, is an ongoing operational initiative. Could you clarify what Project Defend actually is?

Sir Tim Barrow: You are right that we might well produce a report at the end of Project Defend. It is part of the wider economic security focus. That is how I view it. It is not something to be seen as separate from the wider economic security piece.

Darren Jones: Would you mind writing to us to confirm its status when you have checked—or, if you have the answer now, you can quickly tell me before I hand back to the chair?

Sir Tim Barrow: We will happily write. We have processes ongoing in this area and Project Defend is part of them, but it is not a discrete task, as I was saying. If you would like more information we will happily write to the chair.

Darren Jones: Very kind, thank you.

Q7 **Baroness Crawley:** Good afternoon, Sir Tim and Mr Collins. It is good to see you both. Since the Integrated Review was published in March 2021, there have been no formal reports to Parliament on its implementation. I

know this committee has tried to maintain scrutiny through correspondence, but the Government have declined to give us the necessary information. How would you characterise the Government's level of transparency on their delivery of the IR's ambitious vision, and their accountability to Parliament on this issue? Are you content with the transparency and the accountability?

Sir Tim Barrow: I am a great believer in transparency and accountability. I am very happy to engage with this committee and others after the refresh, if you feel that there is more we could usefully do. The refresh will give us the opportunity to have that sort of discussion—not just for me to ask questions, but for us to listen.

Baroness Crawley: Are you committing today to sharing with us the full list of sub-strategies under the IR refresh—in private, if necessary—and, if not, why not?

Sir Tim Barrow: I cannot commit today until we finish the work and we know exactly where we end up, but I recognise your offer for private process as well as public process, and I will take that on board.

Baroness Crawley: Thank you.

Q8 **The Chair:** We are about to move on to a slightly different, perhaps more familiar, area, but before we do, may I raise one issue with you about the refresh? You may recall, or you may have been told, that this committee has taken a good interest in the past in the Biological Security Strategy.

Sir Tim Barrow: Indeed.

The Chair: And you will have seen reports over the weekend—I fully recognise how this plays out and how delicate it can be—about the death of a child from Avian flu. We are awaiting the Government's refresh of that Biological Security Strategy. Can I express the hope that, and ask whether, you can indicate whether that is likely to feature prominently in the IR refresh and whether the lessons from one pandemic are being embedded into the NSC's work for the future? As you will know, there has been concern about whether the NSC is kind of going, "Oh well, there'll be another pandemic some time, but we won't worry about it now".

Sir Tim Barrow: I can reassure you that we do not feel that we can just wait and not think about these things. We are learning lessons. We will look at biosecurity, as well as other things, in the IR refresh. As you say, there is the strategy itself. We think this is a really important piece of work and that we all have to learn the lessons of the pandemic. We are not putting it off for another day. It features in our work both in the IR refresh and more generally. Matt may want to add something on that.

Matt Collins: Only to say two things. First, we really welcome the interest that you and the committee have shown in this area. As Sir Tim says, we are working very hard towards the publication of the strategy, and I would say that we are close.

Q9 Lord Butler of Brockwell: Good afternoon, Sir Tim. We now move on to demands upon you. It has been reported that you have been leading negotiations on the Northern Ireland protocol. Is that the case?

Sir Tim Barrow: Thank you for the question. As you know, the Prime Minister has me, as NSA, involved across a range of issues, whether on matters European or Indo-Pacific, the G7, the G20 and the like. So of course I play a role, but it would be wrong for me to take away from those who had responsibility for that project.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: You are also the Government's G7 envoy.

Sir Tim Barrow: Indeed.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: The aspect that I really want to ask about is the interrelationship between security aspects and trade aspects. Is it sensible to combine trade aspects when there are so many national security implications going on at the moment?

Sir Tim Barrow: The G7 envoy role—the Sherpa role—involves all sorts of different economic aspects, but, crucially, the G7 has very much emerged as one of the core groups on the Ukraine conflict. I do not find that there is a tension between being involved in various different issues at any one time. The G7 really matters; it covers a huge waterfront in which there are trade, economic and foreign policy concerns. So I think there is compatibility.

Q10 Viscount Stansgate: Good afternoon to both of you. This is another question about our relations with Europe. The Foreign Secretary said in November that one of his priorities would be “resetting the relationship with our European partners”, and we have all been following the news today about the agreement that seems to have been reached on the Northern Ireland protocol.

In your job, are you taking forward this priority to improve our relations with our European partners? If so, in what way, from a national security perspective, are you doing it? My follow-up question will depend partly on your answer.

Sir Tim Barrow: Thank you for the question. I will give the answer and see which way that takes us.

For me, probably the most vivid relationship with our European partners at the moment is on the Ukraine conflict. We have done a huge amount of co-ordinated work in NATO, bilaterally and with EU institutions, and, on the EU side, which I interpret as being the nub of your question—tell me if I am wrong—the co-ordination on sanctions between us and the G7 partners, which the EU sits as part of, has, I believe, been unprecedented. There are also our military training programmes. We have been very open with each other about military training partnerships to make sure that they are compatible; indeed, we have a liaison officer from the EU in our own military training.

So a lot of it has been about Ukraine. But even outside that we have been working very closely with the G7, which we just talked about with Lord Butler, on wider issues such as supply chains, which have been mentioned, and the like. That is also very important.

Then there are foreign policy issues. More specifically, a lot of my time before this job and a fair amount of time in this job has been spent dealing with issues of Iran. There, of course, we have the US and the E3 format, but there is very much an EU part to that.

I could go on about particular bilateral co-operation with particular EU members, or indeed things like the JEF. There are lots of different ways in which it comes into my life, to be honest.

Q11 Viscount Stansgate: Well, then, allow me to ask you this. Given the range of things you just mentioned, is it your intention or wish, as an objective, to develop what you might call a formal framework for national security co-operation with European partners to build on all the various examples you have just given us of work that you are in fact doing—some sort of formal arrangement that can provide the right framework for whatever future issues need to be discussed, of which I am sure there will be many?

Sir Tim Barrow: Personally, I find that we are able to do the sort of co-operation that we have been talking about without a formal framework, whether it be working with counterparts as Sherpas or with counterparts in the External Action Service or the like, or with opposite numbers around Europe. There are certain structures that we potentially work within, such as the EU PESCO. We have applied to join the military mobility project led by the Dutch.

Where it makes sense, we can look at those more formal arrangements, but the co-operation that I have been describing has happened without the need for a formal structural underpinning.

Viscount Stansgate: So, in essence, you would be happy to have it said that you are happy with an ad hoc approach that maximises the flexibility that you have to deal with other European countries on national security issues, as and when they arise, in the most formal way possible.

Sir Tim Barrow: I believe that we can do a great deal with networks and counterparts without the need for some particular formal underpinning, unless we see a specific arrangement—I mentioned PESCO—that would benefit from that.

The Chair: We are about to move on to another question, but I have been asked to pause the hearing for 30 seconds so that our technicians can adjust the volume somewhat.

The committee paused for a technical adjustment.

On resuming—

Q12 **Alicia Kearns:** Hello again. It is good to see you not rushing between corridors and rooms.

The Government published their Resilience Framework—I note that it says “Renamed from ‘strategy’ to ‘framework’”—back in December, but the international section and the community sections were not necessarily as developed as I would have liked, given that resilience should be our foremost priority over the next two decades or more.

In particular, there were no commitments about what we are going to do internationally, and there was not much about hostile state threats. I am not asking for the content that the IR might have set out but whether the IR will flesh out a bit more on resilience and whether the new sub-committee on resilience has sat yet.

Sir Tim Barrow: As you know, we do not lay out the meetings of sub-committees or committees, except in retrospect over a period of time, which we will do. But you are right to identify that we do indeed have an NSC(R)—NSC (Resilience)—which will be chaired by CDL.

There is an awful lot of work going on on resilience. Part of it falls within my immediate group of fantastic staff. The COBR part deals the preparation and management of specific, rather immediate concerns. We also split the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, as you know, so in EDS we now have the resilience unit, and the head of resilience is very much responsible for the planning and preparation.

It is a really big part of the work, and I am sure that the IR refresh will touch on it, but it is already up and running, and we are doing a lot of work in my part of the Cabinet Office and in EDS, which is Nick Joicey’s part.

Alicia Kearns: Very clearly, this Prime Minister understands economic resilience, I think mainly as a result of the pandemic rather than necessarily what we have seen on the geopolitical. However, that state threat piece is key, because when we look at resilience and who is most effectively undermining us at every level of influence through all sorts of cut-outs and other authorities, it is the state threats that I am most worried about.

So is the priority and pushing forward on the state threat side of the work now down to the defending democracy unit that Tom Tugendhat is chairing, or do you see it coming within the resilience strategy and we just need to wait for a hell of a lot more detail at some point?

Sir Tim Barrow: Clearly, resilience needs to cover the waterfront. That is why we look at the risk register and identify the risks. We are trying to get up front on this so that we are better prepared and better able to deal with it. We work on national resilience risks internally, and we cover a broad range of risks; we do not confine ourselves to the sorts of risks that you suggest might be a focus. The Cabinet and CDL are absolutely alive to all the risks on this.

Alicia Kearns: That is the problem, though: that economic resilience is

one aspect of hostile state resilience.

Matt Collins: First and foremost, to your question on international engagement, leading up to and following the publication of the framework there has been quite a lot of international engagement with allies and counterparts in the Five Eyes, including at NATO, which I attended, which has a dedicated stream of work on resilience looking very much at some of the hostile state activity that you mentioned in the second part of your question.

As Sir Tim says, there is a broad set of activity, including the Security Minister's Defending Democracy Taskforce and some of the work that we have been talking about on economic security, getting after supply chains and making sure that we are prepared for some of the issues that we will face in the future. All that is part and parcel of the implementation of the framework. It will be a heavy feature of the Integrated Review refresh, but there is lots of work to do continually with international partners.

Alicia Kearns: Sure. I will leave it there. I just land the point that you keep coming back to economic security in your answers, but you cannot have economic security without national security, which should be our foremost responsibility above and beyond.

Sir Tim Barrow: If I give the impression that we keep coming back to economic security, that is not my intention. We do a national security risk assessment. That is what underpins this, and that is our responsibility. I hear you; you have landed the point, as you always do.

Alicia Kearns: I will land it again in a speech on Wednesday, so watch out for that.

Sir Tim Barrow: I am looking forward to it, of course. As I say, what underpins this is our national security risk assessment.

Alicia Kearns: Great. All right. Thank you.

Q13 **Lord Dannatt:** Staying with the Resilience Framework, the Framework references a whole of society approach to resilience, but the community section is notably thin. How exactly will the framework achieve that whole of society approach? Can you be a bit more specific?

Sir Tim Barrow: I will try. You are right about the importance of this. One of the lessons we have drawn from Covid and the like is that we need everyone to play their part. Central to this will be local resilience fora, which you will have heard about as a priority in this area. We also want to work with the voluntary and community sectors, and we are looking to see how we can bring people together. We had the third UK Resilience Forum this month, and we are seeing whether there would be scope for chief resilience officers for local resilience fora and things like that.

So we trying to develop the networks and frameworks across society. Chief, as I say, are the LRFs, but I also want to stress the importance of

the voluntary and community sectors, and engagement that is as broad as possible.

Q14 **Lord Dannatt:** As chair of the National Emergencies Trust, your last point lands well, as far as I am concerned.

Staying with this, the new Resilience Directorate sits outside the National Security Secretariat, reporting to a different part of government. How much oversight do you personally retain over domestic resilience under these new structures?

Sir Tim Barrow: As I was trying to say in my answer to Alicia, we have organised this by splitting the Civil Contingencies Secretariat into two parts. You are right that domestic resilience now sits with Nick Joicey in EDS, and we have a head of resilience. My side, which is the COBR bit of this, and the head of resilience work extremely closely together, they really do. I see them together all the time. That gives me a way of influencing across the piece. As I say, we start with a national security approach to this.

So there are structures, which is right, because domestic resilience is key and we should not feel otherwise. It is right that EDS has that, but we are fully playing our part. Nick and I work very closely together. The domestic and the international intertwined is a theme that, if I may say so, I feel very keenly, having taken over this role. Sometimes I think we create a division that is unhelpful, and that is not what I want to do.

Lord Dannatt: I think I am right in saying that the resilience framework is based on three core principles, the second of which is that prevention is better than cure. I am sure we can all agree that prevention is better than cure, but in order to make sure that that is not just a cheap comment, do you think we will be able to substantiate that from a financial point of view? Prevention always comes at a cost.

Sir Tim Barrow: Yes, but I think we would be able to, and indeed we are doing a lot of work with statistics in the SitCen and with others to look at the data underpinning what we are doing in this area. If we take the example of the pandemic, I suspect that the economic arguments would be very strong on that. So you are right: it is the second of our three principles and we have learned that, and that is true whether we are talking about events like a pandemic or indeed some of the other issues which Alicia and others referred to.

Q15 **Baroness Fall:** Thank you, Sir Tim, for your time today. What is your assessment of the West's support for Ukraine being characterised as constrained by fears of Russian escalation?

Sir Tim Barrow: Thank you very much for the question, Lady Fall. It is nice to see you. I think you can see that we and our partners have been very clear that we will support Ukraine and give it the means to defend itself, and that we will say publicly and work with partners across the globe to say that the reckless language on escalation which we heard earlier has no place and that it will not deter us either.

I take it that you are referring to the language of nuclear escalation. Of course, we have seen that there have been different forms of escalation in theatre, including attacks on critical national infrastructure and civilian structures, which we deplore. However, in answer to the question as I understood it, we will not be deterred. We will be very clear about our support for Ukraine, and we will call out and push back on reckless escalation language. It is not just us, though. Let us be clear. I think we can see that many others around the world have made the same points. The voices of our Indian colleagues and the like have been equally clear.

Baroness Fall: One form of escalation, of course, would be a form of proxy war, with the Chinese possibly giving weapons to Russia. What is your assessment of those alleged rumours, as well as of China's attempt to be the independent arbiter? We saw its peace plan over the weekend, and I was interested in what you made of its intervention.

Sir Tim Barrow: First, we think it would be extremely damaging and the wrong decision for anyone, including China, to supply weapons to Russia in this terrible and misguided invasion. We look to China as a P5 member—you may note that Russia is also a member—to uphold those principles, which are so important and should underpin any peace effort, and which include recognition of sovereignty and not rewarding aggression, and the fundamental principles of the UN charter.

We find those principles recognised in President Zelensky's comments about peace and in his plan, which as you know we welcomed during his recent visit. Those principles are essential to get a durable, sustainable and fair peace, which is what we need. We would very much like to see an end to the conflict, but there has to be an end to the conflict on the right principles and with recognition of Ukraine's sovereignty.

Q16 **Mr Tobias Ellwood:** Thank you very much, Sir Timothy. It is good to see you. It has been a while since we first met. You were based in Moscow, I think it was, many years ago as ambassador.

Just to pursue Baroness Fall's questions on what victory looks like, would you agree that this is not just about Ukraine but about a changing and dangerous attitude of Russia, so it is in our interests to put this fire out and we should have a collective view as to what victory looks like? You are nodding, in which case I can quickly move on to my second question. That makes it a lot easier for the Chair.

If that is the case, which I think everybody would now agree and recognise, we have moved into a new era of insecurity. With that in mind, if this becomes a frozen conflict, Putin can claim some form of victory. The bully moves a couple of steps forward, is pushed one step back, is able to control a bit of Ukraine, everything calms down and he does it again in a couple of years' time. To avoid that, Ukraine needs to gain terrain and punch through the Russian defences. That is why it asked for main battle tanks.

This is a long question to say that if you are to give main battle tanks, you have to give the air power that gives the main battle tanks the

necessary superiority to punch through those defences, to show the West that terrain is being gained, progress continues and the West will continue collectively to back Ukraine. Anything less than that and it stalls, there will be more calls for a deal to be done, and Putin will continue to be able to claim a victory. Do you disagree with any of that?

Sir Tim Barrow: Thank you for the question. Perhaps I should not just nod but start at the beginning of the question. It is nice to see you again, as you say.

It is absolutely essential, as you rightly say, that the message out of this conflict is that aggression does not succeed and that this sort of action should not be contemplated by others; this is not just about Russia but goes more broadly. We need to be absolutely clear that Ukraine needs to have the means to defend itself and to be able to succeed on the battlefield, with diplomatic and economic support to it, as a prelude, if we can, to finding a negotiated end to this conflict. Obviously we would like to see this conflict end as soon as possible. Moscow could choose to do that, but I do not see signs of that at present.

That means that we have taken the view that we need to accelerate the assistance that Ukraine needs, which is why we took the lead with regard to the main battle tanks and why we are providing air defence and armoured vehicles. I can give you all the facts and figures, but I suspect you know them very well yourself. That is also why, during President Zelensky's recent visit, we chose to extend the training of pilots in the Ukrainian armed forces, both marine and otherwise. That process of training pilots is a long-term process, not an immediate one, but it is vital as we support the Ukrainians.

Mr Tobias Ellwood: I appreciate that we have done very well in supporting Ukraine, but what I am trying to say is: what next? If we do not continue this and lean into this, as I say, it becomes a frozen conflict. Challenger is not the right battle tank for Ukraine. Leopard makes far more sense; there are a lot more of them. But our symbolic gesture nudged others; it had convening power. We have 30 Tranche 1 Typhoons—that is also the wrong aircraft to give to Ukraine—but 12 are in storage. They are not going to appear overnight, we know that, but the symbolism of what we are doing could nudge other nations forward.

We seem to be too timid and risk-averse for fear of escalating this. I put it to you that we have the ability to offer the air power, which symbolically can nudge other countries to move forward as well.

Sir Tim Barrow: You will forgive me, but I do not feel that we have been timid.

Mr Tobias Ellwood: I mean collectively, not Britain. I make it very clear that we have done brilliantly, but NATO is still sitting on its hands—it is formally not involved—and it has taken us a year to provide main battle tanks. Britain has absolutely done brilliantly, absolutely. We have pushed the envelope. Collectively, though, a year on, this is in danger of reaching

a frozen conflict.

Sir Tim Barrow: I agree with you a frozen conflict is not what we want to see. We want to continue to give Ukraine the means to defend itself and succeed on the battlefield, because we think that is an essential part of any strategy that gets us to peace. As you described, a frozen conflict that means we are back in this situation in two years' time or whatever is not in anyone's interest.

We have concluded that we should accelerate what we give to the Ukrainians in support; I outlined the tanks, the armoured vehicles, the anti-air missiles, looking at longer strike, as you know, and those precision munitions. We look at this and talk to the Ukrainians all the time. We believe that we need to help them to succeed on the battlefield so that we do not fall into a long, drawn-out, static conflict. We say, "frozen conflict", but those conflicts are rarely frozen. We do not think that is in our interest.

We have a very comprehensive offer to the Ukrainians with regard to weaponry and armaments, and we will continue to engage with them.

Q17 **Mr Tobias Ellwood:** You mentioned earlier the Joint Expeditionary Force, which is an amazingly capable organisation that most people are not aware of. Ukraine will not be joining NATO any time soon. As you know, the JEF is something that Britain created. It is made up of forward-leaning, capable countries, mostly in eastern Europe. Could I invite you to consider inviting Ukraine to join the Joint Expeditionary Force so that it is part of a security alliance in the longer term?

Sir Tim Barrow: The focus for the here and now is us and all our partners supporting Ukraine for its task on the battlefield. Of course, we also need to develop longer-term conversations about its security, security assurance and the like.

I note your question. I believe that, for the moment, our focus is rightly on making sure that Ukraine gets the support it needs for its urgent and courageous endeavours.

Lord Dannatt: I noticed that you used the word "defend" three times in your answers. I think we are beyond defending Ukraine. Ukraine now has to be given the means to win on the battlefield. There will be no short-term meaningful dialogue to bring the two sides together. The dénouement will be on the battlefield and it must be there this year. The language of defence is wrong. It must now be the language of giving Ukraine the offensive capability to break the morale of the Russian soldier and the backbone of the Russian army. If done well, it can be done this year.

Mr Tobias Ellwood: That is counterattack, in a simple word.

Lord Dannatt: Counteroffensive, properly constructed.

Sir Tim Barrow: When I say “defend”, I am not suggesting that the Ukrainians should just hold the line where they are. I am talking about them defending their territory, their land. I agree that they need to prosper and win on the battlefield. I would like to see a speedy end to the conflict, but when I say “defend” I am not suggesting that we should ask the Ukrainians to sit where they are and be a target of aggression.

Q18 **Alicia Kearns:** I do think there is a problem where our allies still want to hide behind the fact that they truly seem to believe that defence is somehow an escalation. Defence is never an escalation. I spent the weekend in Ukraine talking to President Zelensky about this. The Italians and the French in particular need to be moved on this point.

My question is about why we have missed out rotary in our discussions about equipment. I understand why the Ukrainians are pushing for jets, but we have Lynxes and Sea Kings, for example, sitting to one side that we could get back in service within about two weeks. Some 58 countries around the world have Mi-24 gunships. Ukrainian pilots already know how to fly Mi-24s, and we could shove Brimstone 2 and other great capabilities on them without having to strip out native capabilities and all these sorts of things. Why are we skipping out of the rotary discussion when we talk about the support we give, when we know the Ukrainians need to get in deep? That is the sort of capability that the gunships would give them.

Sir Tim Barrow: I do not think we are completely missing out rotary. There have been discussions. You point to Sea Kings and the like. I talk to my Ukrainian opposite number—you will have seen Andriy Yermak, and others, in President Zelensky’s office—and we have looked at rotary and Sea Kings in discussions with them. I think we identified three Sea Kings, with two delivered and a further one possibly in March. So you are right.

We look at all these capabilities. I completely take the tenor of the committee’s questions, which is that we need to really invest and accelerate. That is what the Prime Minister took from considerations he made after he came into office. We cannot sit passive in this. We need to accelerate our support and look at the capabilities necessary to do so.

Alicia Kearns: It is fantastic that Rishi Sunak has announced that we will give more equipment and support to Ukraine in the next few months than we gave in the whole of the last year, but it makes me question our narrative over the last year that we have been doing everything we can, if we can suddenly step it up so significantly.

I found the tenor of the international community’s narrative around the anniversary of the renewed illegal invasion of Ukraine quite offensive. This is not about our Prime Minister, but the narrative was that we should somehow be grateful that Ukraine is still standing and that we have supported it as we have. It should have been, “We’re sorry that you’re still here and that we didn’t listen to the UK and the US in the first place. We’re sorry that Ukrainians are still dying today”. The fact we have been

able to show that we can do so much in the next three months shows that we need to put more pressure on allies who are still lagging far behind in spirit and delivery.

Sir Tim Barrow: I think that we all, across the international community, need to accelerate and do what we can, for the reasons we have all given. As a former ambassador to Kyiv, I feel very keenly exactly what you said about the suffering of the Ukrainian people. I see that. I found being in Kyiv just before the invasion extremely difficult, seeing a city that I know extremely well and the horrors that awaited.

The one thing I would say about the anniversary is that it is a moment to reflect on the extraordinary heroism, courage, innovation and ingenuity of the Ukrainians in the face of this onslaught. I found being in Westminster Hall when President Zelensky gave his address very moving, as I know you did. That cross-party support across the UK is really important.

Q19 **Richard Graham:** As you know, this summer the UK hosts with Ukraine our reconstruction summit, which seems to many of us absolutely critical to winning the peace. How tragic it would be, after all the efforts by Ukraine, supported by the West, if at the end of all this we had an oligarch and corruption dominated democracy. How important is this summit? What can we best do to try to prepare for the peace, whenever it comes, and use all the assets that we have? Who will lead on this?

Sir Tim Barrow: The summit is extremely important. It follows an earlier summit. Reconstruction and getting Ukraine's economy back and functioning is vital. As I look at the conference, a key aspect will be not just the work that Governments and international organisations will be doing, but whether there is a way we can use our particular skills in this country to engage the private sector as well.

Obviously that is difficult in a time of conflict, but that will be really important for the longer-term economic security success of Ukraine. That is one of the hallmarks of this: we should not think that this is purely about budgetary support, vital though that is, but how we galvanise a successful and vibrant Ukraine after this.

You mentioned reform. Reform is really important, and we have been talking to and engaging with Ukraine about reform for years, including when I was there. We need a Ukraine that has all that modern infrastructure and is not left with a legacy of Soviet corruption, in order for it to move forward. It is a huge country with massive potential, so that private sector engagement is important.

Richard Graham: I think we can all agree with all that. Obviously, I have a stake in the fire as chair of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which can do very useful things, and there are other government-led organisations or NGOs that can be hugely helpful. Who is going to lead this, in your view? Who will be responsible for almost a Marshall aid-type programme to make sure that Ukraine can be a sort of

beacon for neighbouring countries like Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan?

Sir Tim Barrow: I think you will see a connection, where the IFIs will play an important role and certain countries and partnerships, such as the G7, will be important, and the US lead is substantial. Look at the Canadians, for instance; they have a huge Ukrainian diaspora and huge interest and knowledge, and I am sure they will play a role.

It is about trying through the conference, as we did last year, to bring interested parties together and to convene as widely as possible, and not put it under a particular hat. I hope that partners outside the G7 and across the wider international community will play their part as well, and we need to make sure that we do more of that.

Lord Robathan: Sir Tim, I see you said that you were responsible for the assessments of the national security risk. In 2018, before your time, there was a report on the Modernising Defence Programme. In that, the Government identified the need to increase our stockpiles of weapons and spares as a key priority. Last June, four years later, Ben Wallace admitted that UK ammunition stocks were inadequate. Since then, we have laudably been further depleting our stocks by sending an enormous amount of munitions to Ukraine.

Are the Government doing anything to ramp up industrial capacity so that we increase our stocks? Furthermore, how long would it take to reach an adequate supply and fill up our bunkers? Supposing we were in a similar situation to Ukraine's—God forbid—have you made an assessment of how long it would take before we were out of ammunition and munitions in general, our bunkers completely empty, if we were to expend ammunition and munitions at the rate that Ukraine is doing at the moment?

Sir Tim Barrow: Thank you for that. Of course, you are right that in 2021 we made an announcement on modernising and transforming our Armed Forces with an uplift in defence spending, and we need to make sure that we continue to press ahead with the modernisation, including the Future Soldier programme.

On the question about ammunition, clearly we need to restock, which is why we are looking at how we do that. I cannot give you details at the moment; clearly, this is part of the conversation we are having on the IR refresh and the work we are doing as we look at what we can give to Ukraine. We are very conscious of the need to restock. I agree with you about making sure that we have had conversations—we will have more—about how we are galvanising the defence industry. That applies both in this country with traditional partners but also—I was having this conversation with my Indian colleague just the other day—perhaps with partners we have not worked with so much in the past.

One of the consequences of this conflict will be a greater, and welcome, focus on the defence industrial base.

Q20 **Lord Robathan:** Thank you. I think we agree on that, although, if I may

say so, I think the Government—I am not blaming you personally—could be a little more urgent in their reaction to these things.

Furthermore, Ben Wallace described the UK Armed Forces as “hollowed out and underfunded”. Do you agree with that, and if so, what will the Government do to rectify the situation?

Sir Tim Barrow: We have had a huge investment in our Armed Forces over recent years.

Lord Robathan: Everybody says that, but I can promise you that we are reducing, as we speak, the number of soldiers, ships and aircraft.

Sir Tim Barrow: We had, what, £242 billion over 10 years, a £24 billion uplift over four years—the biggest since the Cold War. We are investing, and we need to invest. I fully accept that, and I think that all of us around the table would agree on the need to invest. We will continue that process, because defence is vital, and we should be very proud of our Armed Forces. So we will continue to invest across the full range.

Q21 **Lord Dannatt:** If I may interject and include our land forces, the investment plan for the land forces is scheduled for the end of this decade. We have had a very hot, brutal land war going on in Europe for the last year, or even the last nine years. Why are we not investing more in our land forces, at least to be part of a more significant NATO deterrent force in the future? Do we expect that in the IR refresh, the Budget statement and the revised Command Paper on defence? I wait with interest, sir.

The Chair: Mr Ellwood wants to come in on this point, so I will bring him in as well and you can deal with the two of them together.

Q22 **Mr Tobias Ellwood:** Just to row in behind Lord Robathan, I visited Thales a couple of weeks ago with the Defence Committee, and we were quite shocked to learn that we stopped making Starstreak a couple of years ago. Starstreak has done so well and everyone has become so familiar with it. There has been no investment to make Starstreak 2.0. Thales has requested this, but the Government have yet to confirm that this will happen. That is an example of us emptying the cupboards and not replenishing them. The last order for the lightweight multirole missile—the other star, if you like, in Ukraine—was back in 2012, and the last delivery in 2020. The NLAW is in a similar predicament. Perhaps you need to be aware that we need to invest heavily not just to continue to support Ukraine but because we do not have the necessary stockpiles to defend ourselves.

Sir Tim Barrow: Clearly, we invest and are spending a lot of money on supporting Ukraine, but it is also key that we invest in our own defence. That is what we are doing and will continue to do. I fear, Lord Dannatt, that you were able to guess what my answer would be on the specifics in that we have the IR refresh, the Spring Statement and the like coming up.

Lord Dannatt: If we just kept it to the level of principle, during the Cold

War our logistic principle was to have stockpiles just in case. We have moved to just in time but the trouble is that we do not move in a timely fashion, and if we try to do so and industry is not capable of firing up, we will run out very quickly.

Lord Robathan: Sir Tim, I do not want to keep you on the spot for too long, but perhaps you might take back to the National Security Council what I expect you agree with, which is that it is no good waiting for a review in a year or two years' time; we need to be looking at these subjects now, addressing them and increasing the number of munitions—and the number of troops, aircraft and ships, in my opinion—but that needs to be done now with extra money. I do not expect you to commit the Government to lots of spending, but I just mention that.

Sir Tim Barrow: All I can say is that I am not talking about reviews in a year's time or whatever. We are doing the IR refresh right now.

Mr Tobias Ellwood: I will read the refreshed refresh next year.

The Chair: We have a change of subject, from Ms Kearns.

Alicia Kearns: I will cheekily throw in one last question on Ukraine. On this point about rebuilding areas liberated from Russian occupation and atrocities, I am concerned by the Government's narrative around why we cannot seize Russian central bank funds. The argument appears to be that we have complex property laws and that we are not convinced about the legalities of doing so.

My ask to government is that we are legislators; our job is to change property law if it does not allow us to do it and for us to test that in court. We were not scared to test in court the Rwanda scheme, which I do not stand behind and do not support. Why are we not willing to test something in the courts that would release \$350 billion that would allow for the rebuilding of Ukraine? I am really struggling. I am a former Foreign Office civil servant; you and I have sat in the same rooms having discussions in the past. I just cannot get my head around why we are standing behind these poor arguments for not pursuing this, at speed, as a solution.

Sir Tim Barrow: The truth is that I do not think it is a poor argument. We have to operate within our laws, and we have to operate within our agreements.

Alicia Kearns: We can change our laws. I am sat here offering to do it. Tell me what you need me to do and I will do it, but the Government just want to say that property law is too complex. We are here with open arms.

Sir Tim Barrow: We operate within our legal constraints, but we do not think that Russia should or will have access to its funds while it continues its illegal invasion.

Alicia Kearns: The problem is that this is not a sanction. This is not

something where, once it starts behaving well, we should give it back its money. When a country commits a crime of aggression, national sovereignty or sovereign immunity should no longer stand. Please can we stop saying that we do not have the legal parameters for this? We did not have legal parameters for a renewed illegal invasion. That is the reality. If the Government are going to keep making the point, they will have to prove which bit of law does not allow us to do this and prove to me as a legislator that there is no way for us to re-legislate or change the legislation on this.

The narrative has to move on, and that needs to happen in the next month. It is not acceptable. You will not get the money from Governments at the reconstruction conference, and the reconstruction conference will be a failure because we will not have the numbers we got for the Syria conference. Our populations will not stand behind us if we say that we need to tax them when there is that much Russian money sat in the bank. We need to get past, "We don't have the opportunity to do this", and you need to tell us what the specifics are, because we will then work to work around them.

The Chair: That is a point made to you, Sir Tim, which I am sure you will take on board.

Q23 Alicia Kearns: I move us on to China. We are told that there is China strategy. I am not going to call for you to publicly declare it or publish it, because I recognise that you need to operate without constantly telling those who are working to undermine us what we are doing, but could you please talk us through how that strategy is sitting and working across different departments, which do not appear to be aligned in any way, and your approach to deterrence and diplomacy to protect Taiwan?

Sir Tim Barrow: On our work on China, we work across many departments, with leadership from the Foreign Office and elsewhere. We join up in NSC(O), and indeed in the NSC, so that we have the full range of government activity.

You know how we regard this. There are serious challenges and we do not shy away from them. We need to defend our interests and our values. Equally, we need to work very closely with our allies, including the US, but more broadly. We also recognise that we need to be able to engage China on issues; we cannot wish away or ignore the salience of China.

It is a three-pronged approach; it is very familiar. As you said, we have sat in the same rooms and heard that strategy before. It is difficult to ensure that we manage absolutely to defend against challenges while also being able to engage. That is why the conversation with allies really matters. We bring in Whitehall from across the board. These are some of the most active discussions that we have across many different departments, as you have seen.

Our policy on Taiwan has not changed. We have to be very clear. We believe that the issue of Taiwan should be solved peacefully by people on both sides of the strait. It should be dialogue and it should not be subject to coercion or action. We are talking about Taiwan more in international statements and international considerations than we did in the past. It is very important that we are very clear about those principles.

Q24 **Alicia Kearns:** Great, and if we want to be very clear, obviously there will be explicit references to Taiwan in the Integrated Review refresh, which I know you will not comment on, but when I pushed the Prime Minister on that in December he laughed and mentioned that it was noted. I am pushing for that to go beyond “noted” to being actioned.

My final question is this. Should the Chinese Communist Party decide to attack Taiwan—the most likely way being, if I was them, a feint humanitarian response to a typhoon or something along those lines—what are we doing to plan how we will be resilient to the enormous economic disruption we would face as a result?

Sir Tim Barrow: You are right that, as we look at our resilience, an awful lot of the consideration of economic security looks at critical supply chains, semiconductors and other issues. That is part of it, but it is not just about that. Let us be clear: there are broad scenarios that we need to look at. That is one of the reasons why resilience is such an important part of our work. I will be honest: it is one of the things that I underestimated before I took up this appointment. I had been involved in it, but I had not seen the amount of work that went into it. It is really good and necessary. I also thank the committee for pushing on resilience.

Alicia Kearns: While you push that door open, and since you mentioned semiconductors, when will the semiconductor strategy come out?

Sir Tim Barrow: I cannot give you—

Alicia Kearns: I know you want to, Tim. Go on.

The Chair: Darren Jones wants to know that as well.

Alicia Kearns: Yes, go on, Darren.

Darren Jones: I was going to ask Tim the same question. I think we were waiting for two years. As I understand it, it has been largely written for many months but has been delayed on maybe two or three occasions. Perhaps it will come out at the same time as the Integrated Review. What is your view on that?

Sir Tim Barrow: If you will forgive me, I am not going to give you a timeline, but I note your enthusiasm and interest in it. It is really important. A semiconductor strategy really does matter as part of this, but I cannot give you the timing.

Q25 **Richard Graham:** On the balance between “co-operate, compete and

challenge”, which is in the Integrated Review and will no doubt form a part of its refresh—

Bless you. I hope that this session will not cause a relapse into long Covid.

—is it a disadvantage to Britain’s ability to export not to have the Business and Trade Secretary on the NSC to fight the case, where there is no sensitivity involved, for the human rights of British exporters to grow their businesses and employ more people by exporting to China?

Sir Tim Barrow: As you know, the published list of who is on the NSC and other committees is the standard arrangement of who is there, but others are invited according to the issue and the fact that it is useful to have broader ministerial attendance at times on different issues.

Richard Graham: I have asked the Foreign Secretary and the Business Secretary whether they can provide some clarity for business, because at the moment a lot of businesses are confused about whether they are allowed to export at all or whether they have to do it in a rather covert way, whether it is embarrassing for the Government, and whether they should stop doing any of it for fear that there will be some new policy that means a complete decoupling and no more exporting. Do you think the Government deserve to provide more clarity?

Sir Tim Barrow: I will not give another teaser for the IR refresh, but, to be honest, I think we have been providing clarity. If you look at the National Security and Investment Act, for example, we want open economic relations globally, we want investment, but it has to be investment that meets the standards and does not compromise security from wherever it comes.

If there is misunderstanding, of course we should see whether we can help with that, but let us try to be clear on this. As I say, look at the NSIA. We are not in the business of stopping economic activity; we are in the business of making sure that we have resilience and that we look after national security.

Q26 **Baroness Crawley:** On Taiwan, is it the case that each year nearly a third of the new computing power that we rely on in this country is fabricated in Taiwan?

Sir Tim Barrow: Taiwan provides a huge amount of semiconductors internationally, not just for us. You have the advantage over me in knowing whether it is a third—I cannot say that—but they are extremely important for semiconductor production.

Baroness Crawley: We know that it is the most advanced semiconductor producer in the world.

Sir Tim Barrow: As I say, it is very important in that endeavour.

Viscount Stansgate: Forgive me for asking this question, but it is not just us who are worried about the semiconductor situation; the

Americans are extremely worried about it, and they are doing something about it. So when I hear it said that we will wait for a further paper on a semiconductor strategy, when it comes to risk I have to say that it would be catastrophic for us, and we would be rather less protected in our current geo situation by not being part of bigger units, and so on. The point is that the Americans have taken real action. Do you not look to them and think that this is something that we should actively do more about sooner?

Sir Tim Barrow: I talk to my American colleagues and, again, semiconductors were one of the things that we talked about in the G7 context, because it is not about specific national action; we need to work with partners so that we have reliable supply chains, including for semiconductors.

It is an active conversation. If I do not make it sound like that, I am misleading you. It is very much part of what we are doing in government and with national partners.

The Chair: Thank you. We have come to the end of the formal public session, so may I thank you, Sir Tim and colleagues, and say, "Order, order"? I am afraid that those who are appearing virtually have to reverse the route they took before and go off Zoom and on to Teams so that we can have the next conversation.