



HOUSE OF COMMONS

## Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Defence in Scotland: the North Atlantic and the High North, HC 81](#)

Monday 5 June 2023

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Deidre Brock; Wendy Chamberlain; David Duguid; Sally-Ann Hart; Christine Jardine; Douglas Ross; Dr Philippa Whitford.

Questions 183-258

### Witnesses

I: Rt Hon James Heappey MP, Minister of State (Minister for Armed Forces), Ministry of Defence; Clare Cameron, Director, Euro-Atlantic Security, MOD; Brigadier Chris Ordway, Head (Military), Euro-Atlantic Security, MOD.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Ministry of Defence \(DIS0048\)](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: James Heappey MP, Clare Cameron, and Brigadier Chris Ordway.

Q183 **Chair:** Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee and our last session on Scotland and the High North. We are delighted to be joined by the Minister responsible for these issues and affairs, Minister James Heappey, who will now introduce himself and his two colleagues and say anything by way of a short introductory statement.

**James Heappey:** Thank you very much for having us. I will start by introducing my colleagues. To my right and your left is Clare Cameron, the director of Euro-Atlantic security in the Ministry of Defence; and to my left and your right is Brigadier Chris Ordway, the military head of Euro-Atlantic Security. Between them, they have more expertise than I could ever dream of having, and so hopefully, between us, we will be able to answer your questions both from the political and from the detailed policy perspectives.

By way of taking the opportunity to make some introductory remarks, I will offer a compliment, actually, that you are pursuing this inquiry. The High North is increasingly important to UK national security. As a map that I have in my office shows, if you look at the routes of the Atlantic from the Russian bastion on the Kola peninsula, if you look at it from that orientation rather than from the orientation in which we would normally put the map, you see very clearly not just the importance of the geography of Scotland and Scottish sea space in the defence of the United Kingdom, but its importance as the lefthand gatepost to the Atlantic for the entire NATO alliance. So it's an excellent line of inquiry that you are pursuing, if I may say so, Chair, and we are very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to your thinking.

Q184 **Chair:** We are always happy with compliments like that, so thank you very much, Minister. We will start with the region itself. It seems to be quite inconsistently defined. There seems to be a bit of confusion about exactly what the High North is. We all know what the Arctic is; there is the Arctic circle and there is an area beyond that. But the High North is something that I think a lot of people who have come to this Committee have found quite hard to define exactly. I don't know whether you have a definition or whether this is something that you might consider to be problematic.

**James Heappey:** I think that we are similarly inconsistent in the way we discuss it in the MOD—to be honest—from time to time. The north invariably includes all the Baltic nations, the Nordics and the Arctic beyond that. I think the High North is probably something that starts a bit further north than the northern Baltic coastline and is really about the Norwegian sea, the access to the Atlantic through the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Greenland and the High North of Canada and Alaska. While probably not defined as neatly as the Arctic circle, it's a

geography that means that the Venn diagram of countries that reach into the Arctic circle and the High North is probably the right definition.

**Q185 Chair:** That is as good a stab as we have heard, throughout this inquiry, at actually describing what the High North is. You did of course mention that the UK is not part of what are considered to be the Arctic nations. We are not on the Arctic Council, although we have a huge interest in the region both politically and strategically. We know, from the two Government papers that we have on this and from your own submission to this inquiry, that the priority is defined as retaining this as an area of low tension and high co-operation. Are we succeeding in that?

**James Heappey:** I think that that is the correct policy ambition, and I think from our actions we would be succeeding, but it will not have escaped your notice, Chair, that Putin illegally invaded Ukraine 15 months ago. There was a period of escalating tensions in the time before that, when, again, I think Russia was the belligerent. Since that illegal invasion of Ukraine, there is no doubt that Russia has sought to be more belligerent in the High North as well.

I think the response to that is both a UK sovereign response—the Royal Navy has been more present in the Norwegian sea in the last two years than it has routinely been in the previous 10 years—and, more importantly, a NATO response and a renewed NATO focus on deterring aggression in the High North and securing the North Atlantic.

**Q186 Chair:** I know that colleagues will have questions about our relationships when it comes to these particular issues, but I wonder whether there are any plans to update the MOD's response and policy given that we have the new tensions with the Ukraine war. If you are intending to do so, when would we be likely to see an update?

**James Heappey:** I think that one should not put too many things under review at one time. We are in the middle of a Defence Command Paper review. That then obviously leads to a check of our defence strategy and all the subordinate bits of policy that flow from it. We will get the DCPR out. The integrated review, as you will have seen, is quite explicit about the UK's interest in the High North, and we will need to satisfy ourselves that our existing policy continues to meet the Government's requirements.

**Q187 Chair:** You mentioned Scotland's particular area in all this, our geopolitical interests, the gap that we have and some of the other military arrangements in place. RAND described Scotland as a "physical and moral asset" for the UK's strategy in the North Atlantic. Is that something that you would recognise? How do you value Scotland as an asset when it comes to some of the issues around the theatre that we are describing here?

**James Heappey:** I am cautious about describing it as an "asset," because an asset is something that is owned, and Scotland is part of a wonderful Union of nations in the United Kingdom. That makes it an integral and important part of the UK's national security. But everywhere that I have been in the northern parts of Europe and in North America, they are



absolutely clear that Faslane and Lossiemouth—those two, most notably, as the two bases from which NATO can most credibly police the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap and the High North beyond it—are of enormous strategic importance to the UK and to NATO.

**Q188 Chair:** Is that recognised in NATO and our further relationships when it comes to defence arrangements for the High North? Is Scotland's place recognised by colleagues?

**James Heappey:** The Scottish geography is recognised as absolutely essential. If we had to move the base for nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed submarines to a different geography—one that is perhaps south of Ireland and creates a much longer route for submarines into the High North—the whole of NATO would be incredibly concerned by the loss of that base. It is an enormously important part of NATO's ability to police the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap and to deter Russian nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered submarines from getting out into the Atlantic and threatening our NATO supply lines.

**Q189 Chair:** I am just wondering how you operate and work across Whitehall. Obviously there will be other Departments that have an interest—I think the Foreign Office has the polar division, which has the overview of our relationships with our Arctic neighbours.

How do you work with other Departments? I am thinking specifically about security, energy infrastructure and the security issues of climate change. We will come on to some questions about the opportunities that might start to develop if routes become available, but how do you work across Whitehall in ensuring that there is a joined-up approach?

**James Heappey:** At the ministerial level, we tend to glance across geographies in the course of discussions about wider threats. We will talk about the High North most often through the prism of the Russia challenge. At the official level, there are probably more deliberate conversations about particular geographies. I wonder if Clare could reflect on what that looks like.

**Clare Cameron:** We do it thematically. We have many cross-Whitehall conversations about how to counter threat from Russia, and that would cross all geographies. This region will come up in that conversation and across Whitehall conversations. We also have cross-Whitehall conversations in some of our collaborations. On, for instance, the Joint Expeditionary Force, with many Arctic partners we will have cross-Government conversations about our engagement and leadership of that, and we will consider this. So it is probably more thematic. As you were about to come on to, whether it is climate change or energy security, this region will play an important part in those cross-Whitehall discussions.

**Q190 Chair:** Is there any merit in appointing a single Arctic envoy or ambassador to the region?

**James Heappey:** There is always merit in having such figureheads, if you have somebody who fits the bill. I think James Gray does fit the bill. We, as the MOD, need to be clear on how we will use such a figure—so too



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does the FCDO. Undeniably, there is a community of nations, of which we are one, that has an interest in the High North, both from a security perspective and an economic and geopolitical one. As well as having a network of ambassadors in the countries and sustained ministerial engagement in the High North, it is useful to have an envoy who might be a figurehead for wider discussion in the region.

Q191 **Chair:** Are there conversations happening across Departments with the Scottish Government, given that it is Scotland that hosts so many of these different assets when it comes to issues of the High North? Do you have regular conversations with colleagues in Edinburgh?

**James Heapey:** I cannot say that I do personally, but the matters I deal with are not devolved.

Q192 **Chair:** Lastly from me, there has of course been a big news story today. As part of this inquiry we have been looking at some of the changing interests that are going on, and we heard news of the counter-offensive in Ukraine and the news from the Russians that this has been thwarted. Is there anything you can share with the Committee about what is actually happening on the ground? We are interested to get your views on what has actually occurred.

**James Heapey:** When you are asked these sorts of questions, you are always frantically trying to remember the colour of the piece of paper on which you read the day's news. I am very aware of the Russian claims. It is far too early to say whether or not they are credible, but one would imagine that even if the Ukrainians were being wildly successful, the Russians would be claiming otherwise. Brigadier Chris, you may have a better recollection of on what colour paper you read various things, but do not fall foul of the Official Secrets Act if you are not sure.

**Brigadier Ordway:** I think the overall view at the minute would be that over the last almost 18 months, Russia has continued to perform to a lesser standard than it has reported. Therefore, we should wait and see what actually happens, rather than listening to the Russian reports.

Q193 **Chair:** Is there a sense that this is the start of the counter-offensive—the long-anticipated counter-offensive? Is that your view of what is happening just now?

**Brigadier Ordway:** I cannot exactly go into the particular movements of the activity, but we have seen an increase in activity over the last few weeks, which would be commensurate with the kind of activity we had been expecting. I am not going to divulge my knowledge in this forum.

**James Heapey:** It might be.

**Chair:** I think that is about the best we can get right now. Thank you very much. I will pass over to my colleague Sally-Ann Hart.

Q194 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Good afternoon to our panel. I am going to ask a bit more about the north Atlantic and the High North. To what extent has it become more integral to the UK defence and security agenda?



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**James Heapey:** I will give my fellow witnesses a warning that it will probably be useful if they download from both the policy and the military perspective, but it goes without saying that the High North is increasingly important. I would suggest so for three key reasons.

First, if Russia is the pacing threat against which the UK bases its military requirement—the most pressing challenge to our national security—the most pressing of the most pressing, i.e. Russia’s nuclear capabilities and the capabilities of its northern fleet, comes from the High North, so inescapably from a defence perspective that geography matters. The Greenland-Iceland-UK gap is, and always has been, the place in which NATO has the best opportunity to constrain Russian movement into the north Atlantic and to protect our supply lines across the north Atlantic.

Secondly, the High North is increasingly a place where some countries have an interest in resources. That will become, I suspect, ever more competitive. Whatever your views are about the degree to which hydrocarbons, for example, should be sought in the High North, and even if the UK were to decline to take that opportunity, the fact is that other countries may seek to do so. That will make it a place that is ever more competed over.

Q195 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Do you include China in that?

**James Heapey:** I certainly do. There is a place where our allies may find themselves in competition with China, but interestingly a place where the European and the Chinese interests probably overlap is, for good or ill, the ice is receding and a northern sea route may open up. China will be as interested in its right to move goods along a northern sea route as Europe will be.

The Secretary of State mentioned to me before I left the Department just now that in his meeting with his Chinese counterpart in Singapore last week that was an area of shared concern. If Russia were to be illegally assertive over its rights over a northern sea route, that is a challenge not just to European countries but to China and Indo-Pacific countries too. Those are the three reasons, but I will turn to Clare and Chris, in case there is anything that they want to add about specifics of policy.

**Clare Cameron:** I think the Minister has set out the three reasons for it becoming more important extremely well. The objectives that we therefore have because it is more important—protecting our critical national infrastructure and those of our allies; ensuring our freedom to navigate, as the Minister mentioned; and reinforcing the rules-based international system, including UNCLOS—are really fundamental and will become increasingly difficult.

Obviously, there is then contesting any malign and destabilising behaviours in the region. We really see it through those four lenses, as to how we can make sure that we respond to the changing situation in an agile way, so that we can play our part as a near-Arctic country with huge



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interests and influence in NATO in particular, and as I mentioned with the joint expeditionary force.

**Brigadier Ordway:** We are seeing an increase in activity—in some cases, increases that we have not seen since the cold war. Given the pacing threat that the Minister mentioned, and how Russia responded to Ukraine, having told us that they were not going to invade beforehand, we have to keep an eye on how this is developing.

Of course, for Russia, as the northern sea route opens, it is their coastline. You could understand that they would want to ensure the security of it, but it is about making sure, as Clare said, that it is through the rules-based international system, rather than controlling a piece of international sea.

Q196 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Russia passed a new law last December limiting the freedom of navigation of foreign warships. Is that a challenge to our freedom? Does Russia's claim have merit?

**James Heappey:** No, it has no merit, and yes, it is a challenge to our freedom. It is impossible to have a sea lane designated as open to all for the purposes of trade while denying it to that traffic. There are very clear UN laws on these matters, and the law that Russia has sought to pass is simply not in its gift.

Q197 **Sally-Ann Hart:** China has concerns about that as well, so there may be some ability to work with China.

**James Heappey:** The Chinese Government can speak for themselves, but China exports an awful lot to Europe. The opportunities to reduce transportation costs in the northern sea route are well stated; I suspect you have had people already contribute to your inquiry to map that out for you. Very obviously, it is in China's interests that the northern sea route is afforded all the rights of freedom of navigation that we would expect of any other major international seaway. It is therefore quite likely that the west and China will have common cause in asking for that from Russia.

Q198 **Sally-Ann Hart:** On the greater role that the UK is going to play, we had the Icelandic and Norwegian ambassadors in and, in summary, they perhaps do not think that the threat of the sea routes opening up is as concerning as we might think. The Norwegian ambassador said that there is an increase in maritime traffic but it might not be drastic, and that "there are many outstanding basic issues relating to navigation", including drifting ice and darkness.

We also heard from the Icelandic ambassador that, for example, resource competition is not very likely. He noted that a "large part of the Arctic region is either national territories or exclusive economic zones of the member states of the Arctic Council." Much of that exclusive economic zone is on Russia's borders. Do we have the co-operation of the Arctic countries? Is there enough of a concern to ensure that we have our interests protected?



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**James Heapey:** I know the Norwegian and Icelandic ambassadors, and I know that they know their stuff. This is not to contradict them, because I think they are right, but on a strategic timescale—over 20 to 30 years—those conditions may change. When one sets strategy, one has to be clear about what might be possible in 20 or 30 years' time. Inevitably in defence we tend to think about things from the perspective of the worst case, because that tends to be the best yardstick against which to measure.

It is also true that the receding ice will probably lead only to a marginal opportunity to navigate, and that will be within the EEZs of the countries that have a northern coastline from which the ice has retreated. It is not new that major international seaways happen to be within the EEZs of countries. Take the straits of Dover, for example: the eastbound lane is in the UK EEZ and the westbound lane is in the French EEZ, but it is an international seaway and governed as such under the various UN conventions.

The argument goes that the receding sea ice and the opening up of an opportunity to navigate is not in Russia's gift to restrict because it is in its EEZ. The opening up of that navigable route means that in theory the laws of the sea should be applied and there should be freedom of navigation.

Q199 **Sally-Ann Hart:** We did, of course, see a Russia ship go off the south coast—I think it was last year or the year before.

**James Heapey:** Yes, sometimes they come, and they are spewing out smoke, and we wonder whether it is better to send a tug out to help them rather than a frigate to escort them, but whenever they do turn up we make sure that the Royal Navy is there to appropriately shadow them.

Q200 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Bearing in mind the UK's other defence priorities in the Baltic and in the Indo-Pacific, how will the MOD balance the security demands in the region—the Arctic north and the north Atlantic—against our other national defence priorities?

**James Heapey:** The Euro-Atlantic is the non-negotiable, irreducible minimum. Our commitment to the NATO operation that seeks to monitor and control the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap is one of the most important that we have. Frankly, whatever we can do as part of an Indo-Pacific tilt is additional to that, and we will not ever let it be at the expense of that non-negotiable, really important part that we play for our own national security.

Also, people think about NATO as facing a threat on an eastern land border; the reality is that the Greenland-Iceland UK gap and the responsibility we share with the Norwegians—the US and the Canadians are part of it as well, and the French come up—and that ability to control access to the north Atlantic are every bit as important as your ability to line up tanks along the eastern frontier of NATO's land borders.

Q201 **Sally-Ann Hart:** You covered this earlier, but obviously Scotland does play a strategic role in that defence and the security of not just Scotland





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but the UK and the rest of Europe.

**James Heapey:** United Kingdom capabilities play a strategic role from the Scottish geography. I think that is the best way of defining it. It is not just that there is the availability of a naval base at Faslane; if that naval base was open to frigates, it would be useful, but nowhere near as useful as it is as a base from which UK, US and other allied nuclear-powered, hunter-killer submarines operate from and, of course, a base from which the UK's nuclear deterrent is also launched.

Similarly, it is not just that Lossiemouth is a really well-placed runway from which you get easy access to the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap; it is that the Royal Air Force, having all the capability that a country the size of the United Kingdom is able to base there, is able to put P-8 and other such aircraft up over the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, working alongside the submarines that we have already discussed.

It is not just that the Scottish geography is strategically really important; it is that it becomes really crucial to NATO when you put the UK's nuclear and anti-submarine warfare capabilities into that geography, with the proximity that it gives to get up into the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap quickly. Was there anything you wanted to add, Brigadier?

**Brigadier Chris Ordway:** No.

Q202 **Sally-Ann Hart:** It highlights how important Trident is to us.

**James Heapey:** It is indispensable—indispensable. Literally everybody is clear: you go round the Baltics and all those northern European countries, and everybody gets the importance of the UK to NATO. When you get beyond that idea that the UK is on a safe western flank of NATO, we are part of the depth. It is not just about that eastern land border: controlling Russian access into the Atlantic ocean is an essential part of NATO's ability to win any confrontation against Russia.

Q203 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Any further contributions?

**Clare Cameron:** The only other thing I want to say is that when we are operating, we are always operating with the full range of capabilities needed for the task. While some of it might come from Lossiemouth, for example, it will be integrating other capabilities that are usually based in other parts of the UK to form whatever we are trying to achieve.

**Sally-Ann Hart:** I have no further questions.

Q204 **Chair:** Do you think international law is sufficient in covering some of the increasing disputes that we see in open seas? I am thinking of things like the cutting of subsea cables and threats to some of the resources and infrastructure that nations have put in place on the high seas. It seems to be pretty woolly. We have heard from a number of people who have come to this Committee and from written evidence that it is difficult to keep pace with the emerging tensions we are seeing, particularly in the open seas. I think the EEZ is a show on its own, but when we are looking at some of these things and the amount of resources we have, how would



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this put a strain on defending some of the facilities and resources that we have?

**James Heapey:** This goes way beyond the High North: this is a global issue around the governance of the global commons. The answer is yes and no. There are some really clear rules around freedom of navigation that some countries choose to ignore or twist. There is no ambiguity in those rules; they are just undermining the rules-based international order by choosing to ignore the well-established law of the sea. There are other, newer developments in the global commons—particularly if we take maritime, as that was your question, Pete—where I think international law probably needs to be strengthened, particularly around interference with subsurface infrastructure.

Above that, there is an inherent tension about whether there should be a rules-based international order broadly on the basis of the one we have at the moment—which is one that is a community of nations living by a shared set of values of respect for freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity and co-existence for the purpose of mutual advantage, with the ability to allow your waterways to facilitate global trade, as the UK and France do in the Dover straits, for example—or whether you wish to abandon that rules-based international order in favour of something that excuses belligerence and allows countries to operate more nakedly in their own national self-interest. That is not just a High North thing; it is playing out day in, day out in what we see people like Lavrov saying. All weekend long he was pumping out stuff about a “so-called” rules-based international order. You see what is being chronically challenged by China in the Indo-Pacific as well.

Q205 **Chair:** An example was given to us by Professor Hartmann from the University of Dundee. He said: “The state whose ship damages the cable has jurisdiction. For instance, if a Russian-flagged ship damages a cable in international waters, then per the definition, other states do not have jurisdiction to deal with that as a criminal matter, because they are not allowed to exercise jurisdiction in international waters.” It is almost as though the Russians are given impunity.

**James Heapey:** I will let Clare come in in case she has any particular legal or policy insight, but in my experience, given the depth at which these cables lie in international waters, one does not accidentally snag them. I don’t know whether Clare wants to add anything; we probably should have brought the MOD’s lawyers to answer a question like that.

**Clare Cameron:** I’m afraid I cannot add any detail on that.

Q206 **Chair:** I ask because of the defence considerations when it comes to making sure that you can counter some of these issues. It must be pretty frustrating when you are in these situations.

**James Heapey:** On subsea infrastructure, just look at the dependency of the world’s financial system, for example, on those cables—yet it is a frontier that was never really legislated for. The same is the case in space:



it is not quite lawless, but the UK and our allies are hard at work looking at what a rules-based international order might look like for space.

**Q207 David Duguid:** I apologise to the Committee and our guests for being a bit late turning up today. This is a question that I have asked a number of witnesses to this inquiry. In relation specifically to the High North—although as the Minister has pointed out, this is equally applicable across the high seas around the world—the recently agreed United Nations high seas treaty has yet to be ratified, but does anybody on the panel have any thoughts on how it will be policed when it is? This is the high seas treaty that is a legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity. I am not asking you to comment on the biological diversity side of things, but has the MOD had any thoughts on how that will be policed?

**James Heapey:** Non-specifically on that matter, I reflect on the fact that freedom of navigation, for example—the most basic of international rights for the high seas and almost the least complicated part of governing the global commons from a maritime perspective—sometimes requires a commitment from countries to deploy hard power to ensure the right of freedom of navigation, whether that be against pirates or to assert a right over a challenger or competitor who is seeking to deny those rights.

But more often than not, this global system of governing the global commons—the high seas—is one of consent. It is not that there is an international police force out there doing it; it is just that it is in everybody's interests to live by a set of rules. That is why it is so outrageous and concerning when you have countries like Russia and, to a degree, China seeking to challenge that rules-based international order and question whether it is in the interests of a wider community of nations. It is incumbent on us to make the case that it is.

**David Duguid:** I wonder whether Clare or the Brigadier have any input on that at all.

**Clare Cameron:** No, sorry.

**Brigadier Chris Ordway:** No.

**David Duguid:** I always have to ask that question in almost every inquiry.

**Chair:** You always do.

**James Heapey:** On a global treaty on, say, trans-oceanic fibre-optic cables, there is an area of law that requires there to be a clear understanding about the right of nations to lay cables underneath the high seas. The MOD, just like every other MOD, is looking at what capabilities we need to assure the security of our subsurface CNI. The problem with the global commons is that they are so vast that there cannot be a police force in space ensuring that nobody is meddling with other countries' satellites. There cannot be a naval coalition—even if every navy in the world were willing to be a part of it—sufficient to monitor every last mile of



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subsurface fibre-optic cable, energy interconnector or whatever else. The global commons require a global consent to agree a set of norms that govern them, and then everybody to subscribe to them. It is a good-faith thing, which is why it is so worrying when key global powers seek to undermine that.

**Q208 Chair:** I think that is what we are trying to get at and why David continues to put these questions: it is dependent upon good faith and global consent. When you have a disruptor like Russia that does not play to conventional norms and rules, you will have an increased problem. We get the fact that these are huge spaces that are almost impossible to police, but it seems to us, in some of the things we have heard, that this is just rife for taking advantage of. I think what we are trying to get at is what the MOD is doing to try to address some of these concerns. Is there anything you could do to try to assuage or lighten our concerns about what might actually happen if Russia decided to do something like that?

**James Heapey:** I will let Chris come in in a second. Starting at the most basic level, just to gain an understanding of all the subsurface CNI that is of UK interest is a job of work in itself—something that the MOD is well into. We have recognised that the capabilities Russia has to interfere with our subsurface infrastructure require us to have a capacity to assure that it has not been interfered with, and obviously we are developing that.

At the policy level—although this mainly sits with the Foreign Office—there is the requirement to generate global consensus around how, through good faith, the global commons could be better governed given the emergence of things like subsea cables. Chris, is there anything you want to add about the specifics of the MOD's military response to the threat?

**Brigadier Chris Ordway:** I think it all stems from the NATO defence and deterrence of the Euro-Atlantic area. As the Minister said earlier, it is a 360° approach and, at every opportunity, Russia and other actors realise that they do not get to have complete freedom. If they are going to move around the area, they will be watched. As the Minister said earlier, when ships come past the UK, we make sure that they are tracked.

**Clare Cameron:** Specifically on cables, the Ministry of Defence is responsible for protecting our exclusive economic zone and territorial waters, and any other specific tasks. However, we have to remember that these cables are owned by industry, and the responsibilities therefore lie elsewhere across Government and indeed with the industry itself. The responsibility for maintaining the subsea cables is a commercial one, and we recognised that in our national risk register, which is owned by the Cabinet Office. It is a real cross-Government effort, but it is important that we remember the commercial nature of much of this.

**James Heapey:** The most visible expression of the investment that we are putting in is at Cammell Laird. A few months ago, a civilian vessel arrived; it has since been painted grey and is being refitted. That is the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Proteus, which is the multi-role ocean surveillance seabed warfare ship. That is a big departure. It is a sort of recognition that



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every bit as important as destroyers and frigates—armed to the teeth with missiles and whatever else—is a survey ship that is capable of understanding what our adversaries may or may not have been doing to infrastructure in which the UK has an interest.

**Q209 Christine Jardine:** Thinking about our defence capability in the north Atlantic, we have been concerned about being properly equipped in the future. Are new ships being designed with cold weather capability specifically in mind?

**James Heapey:** All UK naval vessels are built with a presumption in favour of the cold rather than the warm. That just suits our geography. There are no plans to make those hulls hardened to the extent that they could ice-break. The hull and the propulsion to be an icebreaker is pretty extraordinary. However, we recognise that our backyard is the Euro-Atlantic, that we are a maritime power, and that our role in the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap is absolutely central to NATO's plans. Therefore, everything that we build must be capable of credibly operating in the High North.

**Q210 Christine Jardine:** Given that everything needs to have that capability, and the role that we have to play, is it not surprising that we do not have ice-hardened ships and icebreakers? Do you not think that that might be necessary?

**James Heapey:** So, we do—HMS Protector is ice-hardened, but we do not have any icebreakers. To my knowledge, I think the only NATO country that has proper icebreakers is Canada. If that is not true, I will write to the Committee. Canada definitely does; I do not think that I am aware of any others that do. I will write to you, Christine. However, I think that HMS Protector being ice-hardened is enough to assert our rights to freedom of navigation in both the Antarctic and the Arctic, and she does so routinely.

**Q211 Christine Jardine:** Okay. Moving from sea to air, another issue is whether the RAF has sufficient numbers of P-8A patrol aircraft and E-7 Wedgetail aircraft to meet security demands in the High North—alongside their other duties, obviously. I know that we have talked about that already. How would you respond to concerns, which were raised with us by Dr Allport of the Human Security Centre, that Scotland's RAF base at Lossiemouth lacks ground-based air defence capabilities?

**James Heapey:** That is a wider issue around the UK homeland writ large. You could say the same of His Majesty's naval base Portsmouth as you could of Lossiemouth. That is not by omission; that is because the UK does its air defence by combat air control. It always did so during the cold war, and it continues to do so now. There is a live conversation in the defence Command Paper refresh over whether the changing nature of the threat to the UK homeland means that doing air defence by combat air patrol is still sustainable. But that is a very live debate within the MOD—it is not necessarily about there being a moment when you realise that Lossie doesn't have it. The UK doesn't have it; we have done our air defence in a different way.



**Christine Jardine:** Thank you.

**James Heapey:** Do you want me to answer the P-8 question? I should have just let it go, because it is a more difficult question, but, since we have come, we should answer your questions. I think we have enough P-8 for the job that we designed the P-8 force to do, which is submarine surveillance in the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap and contributing to the NATO north Atlantic mission. Very obviously, if our ambition grows beyond that, either we need to say to the US and other P-8 operating nations, "Can you step up your contribution to the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, because we want to go off and do some stuff over the Sea of Japan?" or we have to get more P-8. Both are equally credible solutions, but the Chancellor would probably prefer one over the other.

Q212 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Apologies; I was in the Chamber, so I have missed most of the discussion today. If I repeat anything, I apologise in advance. I will ask some questions around NATO. Obviously, since the onset of hostilities in Ukraine, the role and membership of NATO has become increasingly a topic for discussion. What does the current set of responsibilities for the UK in relation to the high-northern Atlantic look like from a NATO perspective?

**James Heapey:** To answer exclusively from a NATO perspective, I will turn to Clare and/or Chris in just a second. Actually, in any given year there is a set of activities, all done under different flags, but that all broadly combine to create the deterrence effect that we want. For example, sometimes when we have sent a frigate up into the Norwegian sea and further, alongside US, Norwegian or French allies, we have not done so directly under a NATO flag, but as part of an ad hoc grouping of nations that want to assert that right to freedom and navigation.

The stuff that we do to secure our nuclear deterrent is obviously a sovereign task, but there is a broader community of nations—UK, France and the US, obviously—that do to an extent co-ordinate on how we deconflict our deterrent and that sort of stuff. Then there is the stuff that is explicitly done under NATO; sometimes NATO exercises will go up into the Norwegian sea and demonstrate abilities. Not everything is done under NATO; a lot of what we do is sovereign or ad hoc—but it all adds up.

Q213 **Wendy Chamberlain:** I suppose my follow-up question is that you have talked about ad hoc exercises, but given what is going on with the changing security situation, do you foresee some of what you have described coming under a NATO umbrella going forward?

**James Heapey:** Maybe, but it is not ad hoc because nobody really thought about it and then we decided to do it—it is often ad hoc for a reason. Sometimes NATO requires a bit more consensus, so doing things as a different grouping is sometimes more expedient. The JEF is a great example of a non-NATO grouping through which we can do a lot of stuff in the High North. But it is all complementary; it all builds together. I do not think we would ever do anything that the Supreme Allied Commander turned out to be cross with.



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Q214 **Wendy Chamberlain:** It may be a proof of concept, potentially, for you to undertake those activities.

**James Heapey:** Exactly. Let me invite Chris and Clare to come in on this.

**Clare Cameron:** Unsurprisingly, NATO recognises the increasing importance of this region and, a couple of years ago, set up a new headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia, to specifically look at the north and command the northern bit of NATO. Part of NATO's transformation, which has been galvanised in particular by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has been new regional plans that are just being agreed through NATO and will hopefully be ratified at the summit in Vilnius in July. There is a regional plan for the northern command area that we are part of, and as we think about what we are offering to NATO next year, it is going to be in the light of these new plans. So I think the situation that the Minister describes will continue; at the same time, there will be greater clarity on what we would be asked to do by NATO if there was a developing crisis, and there will be a clearer exercise programme as well.

Q215 **Wendy Chamberlain:** I am assuming that those plans take into account the accession of Finland and the potential accession of Sweden to NATO.

**Clare Cameron:** They do take into account Finland—it has all been happening at the same time—but obviously not yet Sweden, because, as the Minister says, it has to be agreed by 31 at the moment. So NATO will be having another look at them in the happy event that Sweden also joins NATO in due course.

**James Heapey:** They will get there. I think the conclusion of the elections in Turkey should now mean that, ahead of Vilnius—or at the very least at Vilnius—Sweden can complete its journey, and collectively we will have reassured the Turks over their concerns. At the risk of sounding like a complete suck-up, it is worth noting that Ben Wallace has been pretty central to that. His relationship with Turkey is very strong, and his friendship with the Swedish Minister is similarly strong, so Ben has been able to play quite a pivotal role in helping each side to understand the concerns of the other.

**Wendy Chamberlain:** We can hopefully feel that your optimism is well placed.

**James Heapey:** I just got myself a Christmas card.

**Wendy Chamberlain:** Brigadier?

**Brigadier Chris Ordway:** I don't think I have anything to add, having worked with Clare on the regional plans.

Q216 **Wendy Chamberlain:** I just want to pick up on one piece of evidence that we have had, which was from Dr Marc De Vore from St Andrews. He was talking about Finland and Sweden joining NATO and about an expectation that potentially there may be some kind of High North



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command structure. Is that in the plans that are being discussed? If so, would the UK potentially be in a position to host a base that might support that activity?

**Clare Cameron:** As far as we are aware, there is no plan for NATO to set up any Arctic headquarters or Arctic command. Collectively, NATO needs to do more to make the relatively new headquarters at Norfolk better. That is really the first task.

Q217 **Wendy Chamberlain:** That's the primary focus. Great—thank you. In relation to Finland and Sweden, you have talked, Minister, about some of the bilaterals and some of the more expedient activities that you might undertake. Do you see more opportunities for the UK, Sweden and Finland to take up some of that activity outwith the NATO umbrella as they come into NATO?

**James Heapey:** Undoubtedly. Our militaries already enjoy a really close relationship. In the last few weeks, there has been a naval taskforce up in the Baltic doing stuff alongside both of those countries. Our armies have been working together. Last year I visited the battlegroups that at that point were in Estonia. The light battlegroup that was temporarily deployed to reinforce the Estonian border at the start of the war in Ukraine had sent troops off elsewhere, and they had had an amazing learning experience with the Finns. For those of you who have visited British Army training areas, wood blocks tend to be very square and no more than about 700 metres or 800 metres wide, and so our doctrine for fighting in woods and forests reflects the fact that the wood has an end. When you go to Finland, there is no end, so there was an opportunity to learn about fighting in that environment.

This is arguably the biggest strategic failure that Putin will suffer as a consequence of his war in Ukraine. It is not NATO expansionism that has led Finland and Sweden to join; Finland and Sweden are two countries that know their own minds, and throughout the entirety of the cold war they declined to join NATO. Because of Putin's actions over the last 18 months, they have changed their position. That is an extraordinary thing, and of course it means that the UK, as a leading member of NATO and a framework northern European power, will find itself ever more involved with the Finns and the Swedes. We are excited about that opportunity.

Q218 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Do you see the land border that now exists between Russia and NATO changing the situation in the Atlantic and High North, given what you have just said?

**James Heapey:** It is interesting. From the perspective of the Supreme Allied Commander, it is quite an interesting increase in his task for the land frontier because the arrival of Finland and Sweden in the alliance doubles the length of the NATO border with Russia. The Supreme Allied Commander is developing those plans keenly. Finland and Sweden, for what it's worth, have really quite incredible armed forces, which are designed to do exactly what they would need to do to respond to a Russian threat, so I do not think that their arrival makes them a net beneficiary from NATO. I do not think the alliance has to backfill Sweden





and Finland.

Q219 **Wendy Chamberlain:** And that is the evidence that we have had at the Committee. Dr Allport, who Christine referred to, said that their expectation is that they will be net contributors.

**Clare Cameron:** Exactly.

**James Heappey:** Totally.

Q220 **Chair:** You mentioned the scale of their armed forces. That means that a significant number of forces personnel will be available to NATO. As Wendy said, they will be a net contributor to the NATO exercise.

**James Heappey:** And we have been seeking to learn from two approaches as we go through our own Command Paper refresh. The Finns have a mobilisation model underpinned with lots of artillery. The Swedes have an incredibly high-tech model. They are both very, very credible military nations in their own rights. It is fantastic that Finland is in the alliance, and I am confident that Sweden will join them soon. It is even better for the UK, as a country that has such close relations with so many of the Balts and Nordics, that we will be able to deepen our relationships with them.

Q221 **Deidre Brock:** Apologies; I was also in the Chamber asking a question. In the past, we have discussed NATO at some length. I want to ask about the Joint Expeditionary Force and how you think, Minister—and, indeed, Brigadier and Ms Cameron—that supports the UK's defence and security objectives in the north Atlantic and the High North. Could you give us some thoughts on that?

**James Heappey:** The JEF is a great example of a good military idea that has grown in significance and has now become quite strategic. It started off as a community of 10 nations' militaries who recognised that they had a similar mindset and perception of threat and that meant that we would quite like to work together. We could work together as a twosome or a tensome. It didn't need complete consensus. It was just a flag of convenience through which we could see a number of problems that such a configuration might be able to solve. But so successful has it been and so enthusiastic have all of the various MODs become that invariably MFAs and the FCDO have become similarly enthusiastic to the point where, over the last year, we have started to see heads of JEF-Heads of Government meetings and it has become quite an important expression of UK foreign policy, not just security policy. There will be different opinions around this table about Brexit, but in our post-Brexit set of relationships with European countries, the JEF is a really good expression of what the UK does well, which is that we are a northern European country with lots of like-minded allies around the Baltic with whom we work well and with whom there is opportunity and intent to co-operate now on much more than just military matters.

Q222 **Deidre Brock:** Brigadier, within the limitations that you have because of security, would you outline a few of the operations that take place? Could



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you outline some of the JEF's activities for people watching who may not be aware of what the JEF does?

**Brigadier Chris Ordway:** Hitherto people have sometimes wondered whether it was a competitor to NATO, but what we have seen with the Ukraine crisis is that it is absolutely complementary to NATO. As the Minister said, it provides the ability for two or more countries to work together and to be able to move quickly; note that there is then a conversation with NATO to ensure that that is coherent with what the Supreme Allied Commander wants. During the initial stages of the Ukraine invasion, the JEF countries came together quite quickly to say, "We really ought to do something together while NATO is trying to understand what is happening." We saw an increase in international activity in the Baltic and in the North sea, as well as on the land, and in fact in the air.

That was complementary to the activity that we did in the Baltic states, which was directly in support of what the Supreme Allied Commander wanted. This was very much seen as complementary activity. There are times when it is really quite clear that it is for NATO—the example that I would probably use is the Nord Stream attack. There was immediately a conversation about whether the JEF nations wanted to do this together, and the immediate response was, "This is a NATO activity." Those would be the kinds of examples that I would give you. I think it has become quite clear that JEF is complementary. Clare, is there anything that you want to add?

**Clare Cameron:** No.

Q223 **Deidre Brock:** So it is a bit more fluid, would you say?

**Clare Cameron:** I would describe it as ongoing. There is JEF activity ongoing—quite often maritime, but particularly in the High North, the north Atlantic and the Baltic sea. A JEF nation has a ship transiting here; somebody else joins it and we work together; there is information sharing between the JEF nations. The immediate response that we and the Defence Secretary have when something happens is, "I want to talk to my JEF partners. I want to understand what we can do together." That ability to quickly share information, work and become a force multiplier is how I would describe it. There is a constant level of activity and information sharing; then, if there is an incident or something happens, we automatically turn to each other quickly.

Q224 **Deidre Brock:** That is interesting. We have had some witnesses say that there is potentially going to be a shift in JEF's focus, from the Baltic to the High North, on the back of the security situation that we see at the moment. Another witness said that that was a false dichotomy and that JEF had to do both. I wonder what your thoughts are on that.

**James Heappey:** Your second witness is much more in tune with the MOD's policy. The UK and Holland, for example, could say, "It makes sense to us as two countries with responsibilities in the Caribbean to cooperate in the Caribbean under the JEF flag." I do not know that you necessarily would, but you could. It could be that JEF says, "We can see



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an opportunity to support a regional solution in west Africa, because each of us unilaterally recognises the need to be involved in the region. The EU doesn't feel like the right answer, and NATO definitely isn't the right answer, so we'll do it under JEF." JEF is not bound by geography, although it is a geographically contiguous group of members, but it could in theory project itself anywhere in the world if it was in the interests of two or more JEF nations to do so. Very obviously, it needs to be cognisant of the High North just as much as it does the Baltic. Those are the two most obvious geographies within which JEF has utility.

**Q225 Deidre Brock:** What circumstances would flag the involvement of JEF over NATO? You mentioned Nord Stream, for example. What flags something up as one for JEF?

**James Heappey:** Time is the simple answer, but I will let the team expand on that.

**Clare Cameron:** In response to something happening, it is often time. JEF is more responsive and does not even need the agreement of 10 let alone 31 members. The important thing about JEF is that it is operating below the level of warfare. We do not envisage JEF ever operating above that level; that is absolutely NATO, but obviously NATO also operates below the threshold of warfare, and so much happens in what we might call the grey zone, or hybrid warfare. What we envisage quite often is JEF starting something off and, if a crisis builds, handing it over to NATO, because we have managed to get going more quickly or we already had something that was helpful. Chris?

**Brigadier Chris Ordway:** No, that covers it.

**Q226 Deidre Brock:** Good; thanks very much. I want to move on to other fora that could be used to work with Arctic allies on common defence and security objectives. Obviously, there have been some difficulties for the Arctic Council in very recent years. Have fora for Arctic co-operation like the Northern Group and the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable become more important, in your view, as a result?

**James Heappey:** There are lots of fora in which these matters are discussed. I think the Northern Group is much more a vehicle for mutual understanding and co-operation, rather than full-on military co-ordination. Similarly, the Arctic Council is a vehicle through which military activity would be co-ordinated and doesn't necessarily fit the bill. But this is the age of unilateralism, where there are lots of different groupings and combinations of nations. I have seen some geopolitical commentators say that that muddies the international waters, but I think that in most cases it creates a bit of resilience. In the case of the High North and the way we govern the Arctic, the belligerence of a single member of the Arctic Council has made that a less effective body in which to discuss matters that are of concern to the Arctic, but the existence of JEF, the Northern Group and various other fora buys that out, to a degree.

**Q227 Deidre Brock:** As a consequence, is there an intention for the UK to step up its activities in those fora, or are things going to continue pretty much



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as they are?

**James Heapey:** I am always amazed at how closely my Foreign Office colleagues watch my contributions in Parliament and I have to be careful not to overstep my mark! But I think the UK can lead in JEF, for example, because it is the framework country around which JEF formed. The Arctic Council is one in which I suspect we have to play a slightly smarter role, because we have to be careful not to throw our weight around in a place where our voice is not necessarily to the fore. It is a matter of diplomacy, I think. Clearly, the UK seeks to have influence as widely as possible, to meet our political aims, but we have to be smart about making sure that we are not throwing our weight around where it's not always wanted.

**Deidre Brock:** Understood. Yes, Ms Cameron?

**Clare Cameron:** I only want to add, in relation to the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, which is the forum for discussion of defence and security co-operation in the High North, that we are going to be chairing the next meeting, later this year. It's a virtual one and we are chairing it. I think we engage pretty consistently, at a high level, with all of these.

Q228 **Deidre Brock:** A last couple of very quick questions: how frequently does the Northern Group meet, and when was the last meeting of the Northern Group? Do any of you know that?

**Clare Cameron:** I can take that: I was there last week—or perhaps it was the week before. The Defence Secretary attended the last meeting, in Warsaw on 22 May. It meets every six months, at Defence ministerial level.

**Deidre Brock:** Every six months—brilliant. Thank you.

Q229 **Douglas Ross:** Good afternoon, Minister, Ms Cameron and Brigadier Ordway. Let me start off from a local perspective, as the MP for Moray and RAF Lossiemouth. It has been mentioned quite a few times today already, and Christine Jardine was discussing the evidence that we have received about it being a potential threat. Indeed, the Human Security Centre, in its written evidence, called RAF Lossiemouth “an inviting target” in the event of war. How would you reassure my constituents and me, living about 12 miles from the base, that there is that protection, as you said, through the air and that this is something that, as I think you said, is constantly reviewed? The security around the base is something that I have discussed with the base operatives and others, and is clearly very important locally and, strategically for the UK, at national level as well.

**James Heapey:** If you do homeland air defence by combat air patrol, being the place where the combat air patrols are at extremely high readiness probably makes your constituents the safest in the country.

Q230 **Douglas Ross:** But an inviting threat?

**James Heapey:** Any UK strategic base—be that the strategic headquarters here in Whitehall or any naval base, major RAF main



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operating bases or key garrison sites—of course is going to be on a target list. That has been the case since the second world war and earlier, from whenever it was that nations gained the ability to strike their opponents at that sort of depth. But I am concerned that the evidence that you received from the Human Security—

**Douglas Ross:** The Human Security Centre.

**James Heapey:** I think that is taking a long-standing approach to homeland air defence and contorting it into a way that seems to suggest a specific vulnerability where I do not think that there is any.

Q231 **Douglas Ross:** If I remember the evidence correctly, the ground-based air defence capabilities were actually ceased under the previous Labour Government, so it was some time ago. They did speak about something in about '95 or '96.

**James Heapey:** I would not make any straight political—

Q232 **Douglas Ross:** I do not mean political; I mean mainly on time. This is not a new event since—

**James Heapey:** The UK has not had a theatre-level air defence capability for a very long time. Even during the cold war, we still had the combat air patrol model of delivering air defence. I think there is a question, which lots of different countries are having to close with in an age of swarming one-way attack drones, over the degree to which combat air patrol remains a completely effective way of delivering air defence. But that is not a challenge for Lossiemouth any more than it is for Marham, Coningsby, Catterick Garrison or Bulford and Tidworth. It is just about technology emerging and, as ever in the cat and mouse of defence capability, working out what the appropriate capability is to counter it.

Q233 **Douglas Ross:** You were very clear to Christine Jardine and eager to answer her question about the number of P-8s. You are satisfied that nine is an adequate number, but it is always under review. Lossiemouth is due to host the E-7 Wedgetails, and there are going to be three of them. Is that enough?

**James Heapey:** Yes, I think it is the right balance for a capability that we do need now for airborne command and control. But looking at the development trajectory for missiles, I think that if we do not have plans that by the middle of the century we will have transitioned to something that is a bit more dispersed, you are creating some pretty key vulnerabilities if you put a critical capability like that in a single point of presence in the sky. E-7 is definitely a relevant capability, which is why we went ahead and bought it, but I think that three rather than five is the right number, given the pace of technological change and where we probably need to be in 20 years' time.

Q234 **Douglas Ross:** Following on from some of the discussions you had with Wendy Chamberlain, in terms of the infrastructure at Lossiemouth now, there has been hundreds of millions of pounds of investment by Boeing and by the UK Government; there is a significant footprint there now. The



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Atlantic Building, which was officially opened last year, has tremendous capacity and ability to service not just our P-8s, but our partners'. Is this an area, given the infrastructure that we now have at Lossiemouth, where more can be done with our NATO allies and partners?

**James Heapey:** Undoubtedly. The reason why P-8 and E-7 will both be based at Lossie is because the thing that is really attractive about the proposition of P-8 and E-7 is they are both 737s. Having a Boeing facility at Lossiemouth that employs lots of local people is great, but having a place through which all sorts of 737-based military capabilities can pass and be maintained and serviced if our allies require it, and the fact that Lossie becomes a main operating base from which not only RAF 737-based platforms can operate but so too those of our allies, is really attractive. If the UK manufactured that sort of plane at scale, you could make an argument that we should have bought that instead of the 737. Actually, if you get past the sovereign argument, there is an enormous benefit in operating a fuselage that is really common all around the world and has well-developed worldwide spares and parts' networks. Of course, in Lossie we set up a military base through which all sorts of different platforms can operate.

Q235 **Douglas Ross:** Before I move on to Faslane and the nuclear deterrent, you praised the Committee for looking at the subject of the north Atlantic and the High North. Do you think there is enough attention and scrutiny of this issue, not within the MOD, where I am sure it will be prioritised very highly, but within Parliament and between parliamentarians? Is this an issue we should be discussing and debating more, or do you think it has the correct level of scrutiny, given the threats that are currently faced in the region?

**James Heapey:** There has been debate on the renewal of the deterrent, there have been votes on it and decisions have been made accordingly. One of the oddest things about being an MOD Minister is that the part of operations every day that you think about the least is the deterrent, because it is out of sight and out of mind. There are incredible people doing incredible things, somewhere under the world's oceans. It just works, and it is there constantly. That means that we tend not to talk about it, and people are also nervous to talk about nuclear capability.

Q236 **Douglas Ross:** I was being more specific about the north Atlantic and the High North issue.

**James Heapey:** They are inextricably entwined. The Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, more than anything else, is a nuclear challenge. The submarines that are most relevant in policing it are nuclear-powered SSNs. The newest Russian submarines are nuclear-powered SSNs. The scale of the north Atlantic is such that diesel-powered submarines are just not going to be as effective. All of the cat-and-mouse games between those nuclear-powered SSNs is about protecting the nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered strategic bombers that are hidden away from view in their various patrol boxes. That is the ultimate guarantee of our nation's sovereignty and the sovereignty of our allies, because the UK declares its nuclear deterrent to



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NATO. It is an awesome responsibility to be carried by that community in the west of Scotland. What they host there is not just a great employer and a navy base, but a facility of strategic importance to the sovereignty and freedom of the whole of Europe.

**Q237 Douglas Ross:** First, on the element of the people employed there and their communities, having visited Faslane recently and having regularly visited Lossiemouth, the key theme and connection between them is how well they interact with the local community, and the work done by the MOD onsite to engage with that community. Potentially, there could be more concerns here, particularly if you look at how Faslane has pretty much reached capacity. When I was there, they were discussing how they have to build upwards now, because there is no further space to expand into. How important is it for Ministers and others at MOD headquarters to be reassured of that community support and engagement with these strategic sites?

**James Heapey:** It is hugely important, because the quality of the workforce needed to maintain platforms of that sophistication is extraordinary. The support of the wider community, as well as people's ambition to work there and maintain these incredible submarines, is vital. Also, it is not unusual for people with cameras to appear on the foreshore. Some of those are local spotters, and you see inbound US or UK submarines appearing on various Twitter accounts, but there are some people there with slightly more sinister purposes. The ability of the community in Faslane to assist us and the security services in understanding when people are not there for the right reasons is also really important.

**Q238 Douglas Ross:** Finally, you described the combination of the nuclear deterrent at Faslane and the number of aircraft we have at Lossiemouth as "indispensable", and you rightly said that these are UK forces based in Scotland. The current First Minister of Scotland believes that the country will be independent within the next five years. How high is that on the risk register within the MOD? You said earlier that the whole of NATO would be incredibly concerned if you even just had to move the nuclear deterrent from where it is in the west of Scotland to another base somewhere further south in the UK.

**James Heapey:** You will get plenty of NATO countries who would be cautious of opining on what they would regard as an internal domestic political issue for the United Kingdom, but you also wouldn't find a single NATO country, I think, who would be in any way comfortable with the loss of that nuclear submarine base at Faslane. It is the left-hand gatepost into the Atlantic for the Russian northern fleet, and it is therefore an absolutely essential part of NATO's plans.



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Very obviously, nobody in the UK Government wants to see Scotland leave our United Kingdom. I can make a military argument, and I can make a NATO argument, to which I have already alluded, but from a personal perspective, this is an amazing country in which four nations come together to achieve a sum that is greater than its parts. I think it would be a crying shame for the Scottish people and the Scottish economy if that was where they chose to go.

Specifically on the military point, however, it is really important that those who campaigned for independence—I do not doubt their motives, and many of them have long-held views and deeply powerful things that drive them—should be clear that, to NATO, if the UK's nuclear submarine presence had to move from the Scottish coastline, that would be a strategic problem for NATO, and that NATO countries would, of course, not want to see that problem arise.

**Douglas Ross:** Thank you, Minister, for that very clear answer.

Q239 **David Duguid:** I want to ask some questions about ground forces, but before we move on from air defences, we have already discussed the P-8s, the Typhoons and the E-7s when they come to Lossiemouth—mine is the neighbouring constituency to Douglas Ross's, so it is quite important to me as well, not least in terms of employment for those in the west of my constituency.

I want to ask about radar stations. We have what used to be RAF Buchan in my constituency, just outside Peterhead. I think it started in the '50s as a master radar station, and it was downgraded in the 1990s to a control and reporting centre, and then in the mid-2000s it became a remote radar head station. It is one of three around Scotland: Saxa Vord at the northernmost tip of Shetland, Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides, and Buchan in my constituency. Do we have enough radar capability in the north of Scotland? Are there any plans to increase it, or maybe decrease it if the technology has developed in such a way?

**James Heapey:** The easy thing is just to say yes but, for fear of it then looking like I am not engaging with any subsequent questions you might have, our military radar provision is a classified matter and not something I can share with the Committee.

Q240 **David Duguid:** You may not be able to answer this next question on that reduction in service, with RAF Buchan becoming RRH Buchan over the years. Are you able to say anything, even just conceptually, about how that would have come about? Was it a reduced perception of risk or to reduce costs? Or is it that the technology has improved to such a point that we just do not need what we used to have?

**James Heapey:** It was almost certainly the latter, over the previous two. The extent of our radar coverage is a classified matter, but very obviously we benefit enormously from being part of the NATO alliance, within which we do shared situational awareness. You will find that our sovereign air defence radar capabilities will overlap with our allies' and that that allows us to hand targets or hand challenges off from one





country to another. QRA is based in a constituency neighbouring yours; the quick reaction alert jets that are based in Lossie and where the pilots are on immediate notice to move all year round will be cued not by the arrival of a jet in UK airspace but by the arrival of a jet in a neighbour's airspace, and then there will be a co-ordinated handover of the escort duties from whichever country is escorting at the time. So our radar coverage is really around what the alliance's radar coverage is rather than specifically what the UK has.

**Q241 David Duguid:** That is reassuring; thank you. On ground forces, 2022's Arctic defence strategy set an ambition to increase the Army's cold weather training. Has cold weather training expanded since that time? This may be a question for Brigadier Ordway.

**Brigadier Chris Ordway:** Yes, it has. We have continued the Arctic capability primarily through the Royal Marines, but also we have increased the number of Army units, non-Royal Marines units—it's not just those that are attached to the Marines—with activities in both Finland and Sweden. That has increased the number of people who are getting not just training in the land environments but working experience, because as you know, training isn't enough; you have to actually practise operating there.

**James Heapey:** I will just add this, because it came up in conversation the other day. It's also worth noting, in relation to our permanent commitment to the battlegroup for Estonia, that in the winter deployment, that battlegroup has the opportunity to train and to operate in the extreme cold. So a capability that used to be quite widespread in the cold war and undoubtedly, and for very obvious reasons, withered during the Iraq and Afghanistan years is being regrown, and not only through our exercise programme in Norway and, as Chris mentioned, through the stuff we're doing with Sweden and Finland. That rotation, through Cabrit, in Estonia each year means that if people are on the winter tour, they, too, are able to do Arctic warfare cadres and develop their cold weather capability as part of that deployment.

**Q242 David Duguid:** You mentioned there that, obviously, different priorities over the years have necessitated different focuses, but would it be fair to say that there has been a shift, not to forget the desert warfare that we have been focused on in Afghanistan, Iraq and so on, but to—well, a couple of years ago, I visited the US and was speaking to some politicians over there and they felt that they had taken their eye off the ball a little bit on winter training, because they were focused on the middle east, but they were shifting back in that direction. I remember getting the impression that they looked on the UK with some envy, because we had never let that go—through the Royal Marines training in Norway. Is that a fair assessment?

**James Heapey:** That feels like a very generous assessment, to be honest with you. In the Army that I was part of from 2003 to 2013—was it Op Entirety?—there was a campaign approach to achieving success in Iraq and Afghanistan that effectively meant that that was what mattered. And just as someone who served in those 10 years, the peak of that



campaigning period, I was far more aware of what the risks were of sand in various parts of my SA80 rifle than of how I would stop it freezing up. I just think there's a familiarity that comes with training and operating in different conditions. There is a rule of thumb that says that if you can soldier in the jungle, you can soldier in the Arctic, or if you can soldier in the desert, you can soldier anywhere. But it is reflective of the renewed threat that we face to our homeland and to Euro-Atlantic security that in recent years so much of the Army and the Royal Marines has been focused on reacquiring those skills to fight in woods and forests, to fight in the extreme cold and to fight in urban areas—because those are the environments within which a war would be played out in the Euro-Atlantic rather than the middle east or anywhere else.

**Q243 Dr Whitford:** I have questions on a couple of disparate topics, starting with the MOD's strategy for protecting offshore and subsea infrastructure. We saw the attack on the Nord Stream pipeline, but also the data link up in Svalbard. One of the MOD's objectives in the High North is contesting destabilising behaviours. What kind of action are the UK Government taking?

**James Heapey:** It is really important to distinguish something. Within our own EEZ, the security of subsea infrastructure sits with the Home Office and with the Security Minister in terms of ministerial responsibility. Obviously, the Royal Navy is part of that response, but a whole-of-Government effort is needed to make sure that the subsea infrastructure that we deploy is as resilient as possible, that we know where it is, that we are able to monitor it successfully, and that within the Royal Navy we think about what we might need to have in our inventory in order to be able to assure that subsea infrastructure has not been tampered with. Of course, the business of the Navy writ large is to be present to deter malign activity by adversaries at sea. In that respect, we are playing but a part of a cross-governmental effort.

It is then important to expand on that. You took your question to what we are doing in the High North to protect against threats to UK interests. That is a slightly different set of threats. Actually, very few subsea fibre cables are running through the High North. Most of them tend to leave the UK from our west coast and head across the Atlantic or go across the channel, so invariably the stuff that we are responding to up there is more to do with the degree to which we understand Russian submarine movements, to make sure that we understand where their submarines are and that they are effectively tracked. That is probably a slightly different question to the one that you mean to ask. It is a much more military problem set.

**Q244 Dr Whitford:** Obviously it is both within our own EEZ and within international waters that there is an issue. It was raised by Professor Jacques Hartmann in one of our earlier sessions that the legality around international water subsea structures is actually quite woolly. It ends up coming back to the state of the perpetrator to prosecute it, which seems kind of vulnerable. Do you think that, like we have UNCLOS, we may need something a little stronger in international law to protect this critical infrastructure for every country within international waters?



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**James Heappey:** We went round that buoy in some detail about 45 minutes ago, but broadly yes.

**Dr Whitford:** I apologise—I was in the Chamber.

**James Heappey:** No, no—I understand, but broadly yes.

Q245 **Dr Whitford:** Okay. Does the UK have the capability to keep within our own EEZ the structures under surveillance, and to repair them quickly if they are damaged?

**James Heappey:** I cannot comment on repair because I think that is probably a requirement for the infrastructure owner. When we discussed this a little while ago, we spoke about how the MOD and Government more generally—the Home Office—have recognised the need to understand where all our undersea critical national infrastructure is. It had not previously been something that had been thought of as necessary, but our allies are doing likewise. Increasingly, there is much more granularity over where that infrastructure is.

We have to be careful. There is a thing about making sure that it is sited appropriately so that it can be secured and does not exacerbate other security concerns, but we do, through the multi-role ocean surveillance ship, now have a capability that is procured explicitly for the purpose of monitoring our undersea infrastructure and being able to assure that it has not been meddled with. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Proteus is currently being refitted, ahead of entering service in the next few months, I think.

Q246 **Dr Whitford:** In that role, as the multi-purpose ship?

**James Heappey:** Exactly.

Q247 **Dr Whitford:** And where is that refitting happening?

**James Heappey:** Cammell Laird.

Q248 **Dr Whitford:** Right, okay. This is just on a slightly different angle, on surveillance, looking at space-based technology. Obviously, there was the national space strategy in '21 and then the defence space strategy in '22, which was obviously more global. It was not looking at polar in particular, but obviously Scotland is very much sitting in the gap that you highlighted. It is the most northerly non-Arctic state. It is home to five of the UK's potential spaceports and, obviously, Glasgow is a world leader in small Earth observation satellites. Is the UK Government looking at the potential for Earth observation satellites, download data, analysis and so on to contribute as regards both the environmental threat we face from the receding icecaps and also the Russian threat?

**James Heappey:** Absolutely. The three key orbits are the equatorial orbit, which is very popular for all sorts of reasons, and then the two polar orbits. You are absolutely right to note that Scotland is in a fantastic position to launch into the northern polar orbit. It is a really important place for all sorts of reasons, whether that is monitoring the effects of climate change, communications or indeed more military purposes that are



probably above the classification of this meeting—but you can well guess what they might be.

**Q249 Dr Whitford:** In a previous session, Dr Adam Bower highlighted that most space-based or space-related technology is dual use. It is civilian developments; it is a lot of private companies that are rushing ahead. What discussions are the UK Government having with the Scottish sector, which is burgeoning at the moment? I have heard complaints from some—I think £25 million of recent funding went to Italy for observation of forestation and deforestation, and it made them feel, “Do they not actually know what we’re doing up here, or that Scotland is quite a leader in Earth observation?”

**James Heapey:** I am not familiar with the particular example you use. There is a shared ownership of space between—I do not know whether it’s gone to DESNZ or DBT, but it used to be BEIS and MOD. I am not sure quite which way the chips have fallen.

**Dr Whitford:** They may not yet have fallen.

**James Heapey:** I suspect they will have done, Philippa. Of course they will, but I am not sure I know off the top of my head right now which way they have gone.

As a rule of thumb, the co-operation between the Departments is around catalysing the core satellite technologies rather than deliberately seeking to collaborate over dual-purpose platforms. That is not to say that such platforms might not be necessary, but—it has gone to DSIT, there we go. Neither of the ones I thought. I will look into the exact case you mentioned, and I suspect it will be one for the Space Minister rather than for the MOD. The MOD is very aware that the money we spend on space is a really important part of the Government’s spend on it. We recognise the utility of the two spaceports, the one in Scotland and the one in Cornwall.<sup>1</sup> We see our role in being a patron of the UK space industry, so that those two launch sites can get up and running and those who are building UK space-based technologies can become a customer of the MOD, alongside all the other commercial uses, so that we are kind of catalysing the growth of that industry.

**Q250 Dr Whitford:** So you mean that the MOD would actually be a customer of them? I mean that you would see the MOD using satellite Earth observation to contribute to surveillance, but would also use that from the point of view of commercial companies, if they are delivering the data you are looking for.

**James Heapey:** The MOD has a big budget. We spend a lot of money relative to what everybody else in the UK is spending on space. We are a pretty big customer, and we recognise that although the thing that comes first is our contribution to national security through space, the money that

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<sup>1</sup> HMG is supporting the UK Launch industry and wider space sector in line with the National Space Strategy (2021). There are a number of facilities under development in the UK. More information can be found in the Government’s [Guide to UK Spaceports](#).



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we spend is also part of an industrial strategy that catalyses the UK space-based industry, both the things that are launched and also the sites from which they are launched.

Q251 **Dr Whitford:** So is the MOD actually having conversations with companies, with SpaceScotland or with the space sector in general so that account is taken of the MOD's needs, or defence and surveillance needs?

**James Heapey:** All the time, because it is such a nascent part of our capability. You mentioned earlier that industry, in some areas, is a bit ahead of where we are in our own capabilities; the conversation between the space force, as part of the Royal Air Force, and industry is really live. We have money to spend that is very catalytic to the wider development of the UK space industry.

Q252 **Dr Whitford:** Does that include the Scottish Government and SpaceScotland as organisations?

**James Heapey:** It is the UK space industry writ large, and there is a cluster of that within Scotland, which of course is part of that co-operation and collaboration. I do not know the specific case that you have raised about deforestation monitoring; I would need to go away, find out about that for you, and write to you.

**Dr Whitford:** Thank you.

**Clare Cameron:** I have one point to add, if I may. MOD and DSIT officials are working on a space sector policy, to be published by the end of this year. That is absolutely focused on the space sector across the United Kingdom and how we will engage with it.

Q253 **Dr Whitford:** Obviously there is the Scottish side of it: the Scottish Government is involved in stimulating development in SpaceScotland and in developing the road map to a sustainable space industry, so that we do not make the same mess up there that we have made of oceans and other bits of the world.

**James Heapey:** Yes. Earlier in this session we were discussing the fact that the sustainability of space, from the perspective of how one manages different orbits and space debris, is very similar to the challenge we face in governing the subsurface infrastructure in the high seas. It is an emerging area for international co-operation and international law/regulation, but like under the oceans, space requires a sort of good-faith willingness to consent to those international norms being developed and applied. It only takes one country to behave irresponsibly in space, and before you know it you have debris hurtling around that damages everybody else's assets on the same orbit, and indeed its own.

The governance of the global commons, both subsea and in space, is a very live matter of foreign policy. The UK is seeking to lead in bringing nations together to look at what that might look like, including with nations that we might regard as our adversaries or competitors.



**Q254 Dr Whitford:** Do you think we will be able to maintain that? Through the crisis in Crimea and so on, the International Space Station and other things have always managed to go ahead, but with the behaviour of Putin's Russia at the moment, do you think we face a more difficult time in space in the future than we have had even at times of really quite heightened tensions in the past?

**James Heapey:** Maybe, but I think the reality that if you do something irresponsible in space you will impact on your own platforms just as much as everybody else's tends to mean that it is not something that people have hitherto sought to do.

**Dr Whitford:** Thank you very much.

**Q255 Deidre Brock:** This is a question that occurred to me when I was listening to Mr Ross's questions about what is described as the nuclear deterrent, and the answers you gave to him.

I have been asking questions for the last few years about nuclear site events. Forgive me for taking advantage of the fact that you are in front of us, Minister, but my question is particularly about the figures for Faslane and Coulport. There were 153 events in 2021 and 204 events in 2022; the figures for the first three months of 2023 suggest that we will potentially see further rises. We do not know the nature of those events—the MOD chooses not to share that—but I just wondered: does that concern you, and what actions is the MOD taking to address it?

**James Heapey:** I think this matter came up in the last set of Defence orals, and the Secretary of State undertook to write to one of your colleagues on the matter—it was a particular issue that was raised around those events.

**Deidre Brock:** Obviously people get alarmed by this.

**James Heapey:** The security of the issues notwithstanding, I can honestly say that I simply don't have the briefing to hand to be able to offer you anything, even within the security classification of the brief. I will undertake to remind myself of what that exchange was in Defence orals and to check that the Secretary of State has written, as he promised to do. If that answers the question, I will undertake to make sure the copy of the letter is in the Library, and if it does not, I will see what more we can share, and I will share that with you directly.

**Deidre Brock:** Thank you.

**Q256 Chair:** One other thing that features quite regularly in our sessions is the use of drones. We have seen them deployed in the Ukraine theatre rather effectively by both belligerents. I am just wondering if you see any value for drones in some of the High North and Arctic operations.

**James Heapey:** Enormous, and not just in the air, but on the surface and subsurface as well. We are writing this Command Paper refresh at quite an exciting time for defence technology, although also at a time that gives you a bit of a sense of vertigo, because you can see where it is all



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going, but the technologies are just not quite there yet. There is a balance to strike between the hard reality of the capabilities that can do the job now, and they look awfully like the capabilities that have been doing the job for the last 60 or 70 years—but the real expectation is that everything will look very different within the next 20 years.

**Q257 Chair:** Have you been testing drones? The colder weather conditions will obviously have an impact on their efficacy—shorter battery life affects electric cars for example. Is there anything you have done to test this?

**James Heapey:** There is widespread experimentation with all manner of uncrewed systems across defence. Our partner armed forces around the world are doing similar. At the moment, we think about the way we sense threats through a sort of, “Can you see it on camera, satellite or radar?” but if you reach the point where you are running algorithms against the enormous datasets in which to spot tiny anomalies, you start to see an entirely different way of finding the plane, the ship, the submarine in the vastness of the ocean or the sky.

These are really exciting opportunities, and even if they feel beyond the boundaries of what current algorithms and computing allow for, the opportunity grows exponentially with the arrival of quantum computing. We are doing all of it and more, but the difficulty is that we have to meet the needs of the nation right now, which are still quite a conventional set of capabilities. If we are not at the start line at the same time as our adversaries on things like quantum, being able to crunch big data from a military perspective, and applying AI in the battlespace, then you are almost obsolete—tanks and horses territory.

**Chair:** Our time is over, so I thank the three of you.

**James Heapey:** What a joy.

**Q258 Chair:** This is the last session, and we will have three reports on defence and issues relating to defence in Scotland. I thank the Ministry of Defence for all its assistance, support and help throughout the three inquiries. I think we will try to package them together and present them to the MOD, as well as to the public. We are really grateful for all your input, and for coming along today and helping us out with this inquiry. We have done the military footprint across Scotland, military ship building, and now the High North. I hope that you, Minister, and your Department will find the reports of use. Hopefully they will form part of the ongoing resource when you look at some of the issues relating to Scotland.

**James Heapey:** I am certain that we will. I am conscious that, as part of today, necessarily, there is a matter of quite profound disagreement—

**Chair:** That’s politics.

**James Heapey:** That’s politics, but what said up front stands: this is an excellent inquiry to be looking at Scotland. For it to come from the Scottish Affairs Committee rather than the Defence Committee—the Scottish geography is really relevant to the High North, because it is the



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geography from which the UK projects its interest into the High North. I look forward to reading your reflections, and I know that the colleagues will be too.

**Chair:** Excellent. That is a perfect note to end on. Thank you very much for attending today.