

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Work of the Chief of the Defence Staff, HC 1689

Tuesday 4 July 2023

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Sarah Atherton; Robert Courts; Dave Doogan; Richard Drax; Mr Mark Francois; Mr Kevan Jones; Gavin Robinson; John Spellar.

Questions 1-107

Witness

I: Admiral Sir Tony Radakin KCB ADC, Chief of the Defence Staff.



Examination of witness

Witness: Admiral Sir Tony Radakin KCB ADC.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this Defence Committee hearing on Tuesday 4 July 2023. I am delighted to welcome the head of the Armed Forces, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin. Thank you very much indeed for your time, sir. We have much to get through. If you do not have an opening statement, we will go straight in. Is that okay with you?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes. I am delighted to be here; thank you, Chair. This is my first time solely in the role of CDS. It has been a fascinating and interesting 18 months, unsurprisingly dominated by Ukraine and by other enormous events—the passing of the Queen, the three different Prime Ministers last year, and obviously the whole range of topics that I anticipate that we will cover, whether it is acquisition or people, how we keep our nation safe, and how we contribute with our allies and partners.

Q2 Chair: Thank you. It has been said before, but I think that we can all be very proud of the role that the Armed Forces played in those incredible events. The nation was watching, and was delighted and very proud to see our Armed Forces play such a critical role in those historic events.

If I may turn to the weekend's press coverage, there was a lot of speculation about the head of the Army, and the process that is now being pursued for who will succeed him in leading the British Army. It is, I understand, highly unusual for the head of the British Army to leave the post after two years unless they are promoted to CDS. I do not think that that particular vacancy is there, so many were surprised to learn through the press that General Sir Patrick Sanders is going to step down. The background to that was not clear from any communications from the MoD, so perhaps we could begin with you confirming that General Sir Patrick Sanders' contract was originally only for two years anyway, and that you have now started the interview process for his successor.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes. The tenure of chiefs is very much something for the Defence Secretary. When he appointed Patrick Sanders, it was for two years. The thinking behind that was recognising that he had been at strategic command for three years. I think it was a view about the talent management that we have for the people in the Army. You would have to go into more detail with Ben Wallace because it is his decision. What I can assure you is that those press reports that he has been forced out or that it is somehow in response to something that he has done are all nonsense. Patrick and I have not fallen out either. We were surprised by the press reports and WhatsApped each other on Friday.

There is also other nonsense. The next CGS will come from the Army. There was never any intention that a Royal Marine would somehow be the next CGS. On some of the other aspects that are flying around this, there are no planned cuts for the Army. We are implementing the existing cuts that were made before my time. From our perspective, this is all genuinely nonsense as a story.



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Q3 Chair: Thank you for that. You have made that very clear indeed, but it conjures up a couple of questions. Patrick Sanders is highly respected. He is seen as a strategist. He is moving the Armed Forces forward. The question is why he was only given a two-year contract anyway, and even if he was, why wasn't that up for consideration for extension?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think you would have to ask the Defence Secretary these questions.

Q4 Chair: Right. That brings me to the question of why the Defence Secretary is making these decisions. We just had a bit of a discussion; there is a wealth of ex-Ministers on the Committee who worked in the MoD. The consensus was that the senior appointments committee and the CDS—you—would normally, historically, make a recommendation that was slid across the table to the Defence Secretary. The Defence Secretary would not attend the senior appointments committee. I understand now that the current Secretary of State is attending these meeting and therefore influencing, and perhaps not allowing the Army to conjure up who they believe might be the best person to lead that service.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, I think several adjustments might have happened since what you recollected there. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Nick Carter, who introduced an annual look at all of our senior talent. In the past, the danger was that you had talent looks in the traditional silos of Navy, Army, Air Force. We now have an annual look across the whole of the plot. We also look below to one-star and OF-5 ranks in terms of the talent that is coming up. The Defence Secretary attends some SACs. He is there really because he wants to understand the process that is ongoing.

Q5 Chair: But you do appreciate that the system has changed.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Oh, the system has changed. The other piece is that he is in attendance not as a voting member. He wanted to have the reassurance—

Q6 Chair: Sorry to interrupt, but his mere presence could influence the thinking, because people will know that he is the political master and will want to impress. As soon as they hear his thinking, they may want to yield in that direction.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I chair the senior appointments committee. We have a non-exec director from the Defence Board. The Defence Secretary attends, and he is merely in attendance. He is just understanding the process that is going on. We then provide a recommendation to the Defence Secretary because it is his executive decision for senior appointments. That is laid down by Order in Council, the Defence Council and so on. The other piece that he has introduced, which I think is different from previously, is that the selection of chiefs is now made by a panel. He chairs that panel. It includes me, the Permanent Secretary and a non-exec director. That is very different from previous systems, where it was solely the Secretary of State. Also, it is not the role of chiefs to nominate their successors.



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Chair: But I am saying that it was, and it seems to have got politicised. A couple of people want to come in—briefly, because this is still our first question.

Q7 **Mr Jones:** You said that Patrick Sanders was fixed for two years, and that we have to ask the Defence Secretary why he was not extended. Were you asked for an opinion on whether he should be extended?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, because he was earmarked for two years from the very inception. That was made clear. Some of that is the longer-term management of talent in the Army, and for all of us. We are all adjusting to longer tenures, and you cannot do that in one term. I anticipate that the new Chief of the Air Staff will serve for four years. There is a debate about whether that is two years and then a decision is taken for the next two years. What is happening is an iteration so that you can manage that and have longer tenures. You cannot do that in one term.

Q8 **Mr Jones:** Frankly that is all bull, but anyway, the point is this: his contract was two years, and you were not asked your opinion, as head of the Armed Forces, on whether or not it should be extended.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No.

Q9 **Mr Jones:** You must have an opinion on that.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I do, but you have to understand that what the Defence Secretary is trying to do is manage with us the talent in the Army and take it through.

Q10 **Mr Jones:** No he's not, I'm sorry. Stop trying to flannel. That is what you are trying to do. I am trying to get to the point. You are saying that no one asked you, as head of the Armed Forces, whether or not he should be extended over two years. That is very clear; you have said that. So whose decision was that? Was it purely down to the Defence Secretary to take that decision? Who did he consult on that? He didn't consult you as a senior member—

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It was taken as Patrick Sanders was being appointed, so there may have been consultations with my predecessor.

Q11 **Mr Jones:** Wait a minute. That's not true, is it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, it is true.

Mr Jones: No, it's not true, because if you talk to people senior in the Army—I do not know whether that includes Patrick himself—it was for two years but there was an understanding that it could actually have been extended.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No.

Mr Jones: You are now CDS and you are saying that because the decision was taken so many years ago on what two years was, you just accepted that and you are not really surprised that, if there was an option to extend



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it, you were not asked about that.

My other point is about putting Ministers in the selection process, which is a very big change from my day in the MoD. I will tell you something: if a Labour Government had done that, I can imagine the *Daily Mail* headlines about the politicisation of that process. Are you quite happy having the Secretary of State—you say that he doesn't have a vote—sitting in on that process? That is a huge constitutional change in the way the Armed Forces—

Chair: Can we let the admiral respond, and then we will go to Richard?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I do not think it is a huge constitutional change. The executive authority has always been in the Secretary of State. The piece that has changed, which I think most people would acknowledge is very orthodox governance, is the notion that the First Sea Lord, or the CGS or the CAS, chooses their successor, which goes back to before I was chosen as First Sea Lord. That is the big adjustment. The notion that the Secretary of State does it in a single one-on-one interview, like my interview with Gavin Williamson, has changed. I think we have a much more orthodox model now where the Secretary of State has a panel of the Permanent Secretary, the Chief of the Defence Staff and a non-exec director from the Defence Board to choose the next head of a service. The thing that remains the same is that the Defence Secretary then writes to the Prime Minister with that proposal.

Q12 **Mr Jones:** Yes, having been involved in the process all along. The idea—

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The SAC does not give recommendations for four-star appointments.

Mr Jones: But he is in the room when those decisions are taking place, and you are trying to tell me that those individuals do not take cognisance that he is sitting in the room when that happens. That is a politicisation of this process, which is a huge change.

Chair: I think that point has been made very clearly. It is something that we may take up further. It is different from how it was, let's say, five to 10 years ago.

Q13 **Richard Drax:** Good afternoon, admiral. General Sanders is a very successful, highly thought of head of the Army. He is very outspoken. He said what we all know is the situation, and bravely said so in post, which very few heads of the Armed Forces do, for obvious reasons: it is politically dangerous. After he made these statements, it was leaked and rumoured—by a journalist, if I recall correctly—that his appointment was going to be cut short. That turned out to be true. It was then officially announced that he was standing down, as I understand it, after two years.

Could you confirm that you and the Defence Secretary were not alarmed by him speaking out quite as truthfully as he did? Did you tell him, "Look, I'm sorry, either you shut up"—I know that has happened in the past; I served, albeit not at that level, and I know that officers who speak up are



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told to belt up. Did that happen? Did you and the Defence Secretary say to Sanders, "Enough," and then consequently, as a result of him speaking, "You've got to go"?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No.

Richard Drax: That's a myth?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is a myth. If you follow the previous conversation, he was told his appointment was for two years. Therefore, it follows that something that he said two months ago or six months ago has not impacted on when he was leaving the job.

If you actually look at what CGS said at the RUSI land conference, he did does not talk about his biggest focus being a larger Army; he said what I think the rest of us say as chiefs, which is that our focus is on ensuring that the Army that we have got is as lethal and deployable as possible. All of us as chiefs are saying, "Can we focus on the money that we have got and delivering as best as we can for the nation, and stop having these conversations about whether it is an extra 3,000 or 5,000 or a few more ships or whatever?"

Q14 **Chair:** We need to make progress. I think the point has been made very clearly. One of the things you hear at Dartmouth and, I am sure, at Sandhurst when you go through an exercise is, "If you had to do it all again, would you do it any differently?" If you had made it clear from the very beginning that General Sanders' contract was for only two years, we would not have had all the coverage that we had this weekend, all the speculation and all the questioning.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Just to try to—

Chair: It took a tweet from the Secretary of State last night—at 9.30 pm, I think—to clarify that General Sanders' contract was only for two years, not for the standard three.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: You probably need to ask General Sanders and the Defence Secretary, but my understanding is that the reason why neither Patrick nor the Defence Secretary wanted the announcement at the very start of his tenure that he was only in post for two years was deliberate.

Chair: I suspect Patrick didn't want it because he thought he might be extended. That is clearly not going to happen. We need to make progress—on to another chunky subject.

Q15 **Mr Francois:** I am not going to prolong this discussion other than to say that, on a personal level, I have always regarded Patrick Sanders as an absolutely exceptional general and I still do. I will leave it there.

I think you have had a chance to look at part of the report by Clive Sheldon KC, who was commissioned by the Secretary of State to look into what went wrong with the management of the Ajax programme. He has done an incredibly forensic report—167 pages—even down to the detail of



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"A sent an email to B and did or didn't copy C". It is a very detailed report.

The programme started 13 years ago. We have spent £4 billion of public money. No vehicle is in frontline service and it won't be for at least another two and a half years. In some ways worst of all, a number of the crews injured in the trials have unfortunately had to be medically discharged from the Armed Forces. Sheldon doesn't use this word, but I can: this has been a debacle. Who is going to take personal responsibility for it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: First, we welcome the Sheldon report. I think you have seen that, and I know that the Minister for Defence Procurement has written. There are 24 recommendations. We have accepted 15 in full and the remaining nine we are looking to implement at least partially.

We also welcome, as you describe it, the forensic look. Over 300 people were involved in the trials. Twenty-five suffered hearing loss and, sadly, for 12 people, it was so severe that they were discharged. That is shocking, in terms of people who were doing the right thing and serving their country; they were merely doing a trial.

There are lots of things that we are learning from it. Some of the big aspects I think align with some of your criticisms in the past about optimism bias and a process that seems to govern everything versus getting on and delivering. We know we have got to improve in that way. But as part of that forensic look, there was no point at which "this person was responsible for these hideous acts and therefore much stronger action should be taken". That is part of our process; we are saying that the clarity of who is responsible and accountable is not as strong as it should be and that we need to strengthen that in the future.

Q16 **Mr Francois:** To save time, admiral—the nature of the beast is that we never have quite enough time in these sessions; I do not mean to be rude—let me say that the lack of accountability comes out crystal clear in the report.

I want to touch on the specific aspect of safety. There was anecdotal evidence for years that the vehicle was not safe, and it was not just hearing; it was vibration—some people were carried from the vehicle shaking. What we see here is that for over two years, very senior people played, in effect, a game of pass the parcel. There was meant to be a safety system there to prevent exactly this from happening, and it palpably failed to operate. Why was that?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The Sheldon report gives a layering of reasons. Some of it is much closer involvement with DSTL. It should have the explicit ability to report much earlier on some of its misgivings and so on. There should be a much clearer ability for people who have misgivings to push it up through the system, and you are right: there were misgivings at a lower level—

Q17 **Mr Francois:** Lots of people tried, but they were not listened to.



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I agree, and it did not come through. The Sheldon report offers some techniques and says that there should be two or three things. One is whether you can go completely out of the system and go to one-star and above level in order to say, "There's something not right here." Again, that feels helpful. But the idea that there was some kind of deliberate culpability or whatever—it was mismanagement, and we acknowledge that it was mismanagement and that we need to strengthen. It was a series of factors rather than something that is directly culpable.

Q18 **Mr Francois:** Lastly—because, as I said, we have a lot to cover—after the very sad loss of a Royal Air Force Nimrod in Afghanistan, Lord Justice Haddon-Cave did an equally forensic report, which led to a tremendous strengthening of the safety culture in the Royal Air Force. Unquestionably, from this report, the safety culture in the Army is not what it should be—empirically, it is not. Its safety mechanisms failed. Could you give us an assurance that after this, the Department will consider completely reviewing the Army's safety procedures and methods to a degree of detail similar to what was done following Lord Justice Haddon-Cave's report? We have the evidence; what we want is for the Army to completely review how it deals with safety cases.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I cannot initiate a Haddon-Cave inquiry. I can definitely take back—

Mr Francois: Well, Sheldon has kind of already done it.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: He has already done it.

The other bit that frustrates me is that it is not just the safety of the individuals who were involved in the trials; it is also the safety of the individuals who are having to continue on operations on old kit and do not get the opportunity of the new kit. That is both ends in terms of how we need to adjust our acquisition system, how we need to learn from Ukraine and how we can do things differently in the future.

Q19 **Mr Francois:** We will definitely come on to that another time. If we call this the Army's Haddon-Cave, for want of a better expression, the point about Haddon-Cave was that someone then did something about it. What we want you to tell us, as the professional head of the Armed Forces, is that someone is going to do something about this.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Absolutely, Mr Francois. You are not seeing a Department that is in denial. We have had several Ministers for Defence Procurement; we all see it the same way. The head of the Army sees it the same way. You have the Army procurement system, Abbey Wood and me all saying, "Right, we've got to do this differently." That involves both ends of the acquisition system.

Q20 **Mr Francois:** Lastly, can you send us a list of the recommendations that you have accepted, the nine that you have not and a rationale for why?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Francois: Thank you.



Q21 Chair: Let me turn to another difficult issue facing the RAF: its illegal diversity drive, which you will be familiar with. Between November 2020 and March 2021, it ran a campaign for pilots that positively discriminated against candidates in favour of those from ethnic minorities and female candidates. Let me quote from the report that was then commissioned, which you will be familiar with: "We determined that prior to the former Gp Capt R&S's appointment, 161 Ethnic Minority and female candidates had been pulled forward on to Phase 1 training ahead of other candidates." That no doubt was affecting operational capability. When did you become aware of what the RAF was up to?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We had conversations with Mike Wigston when he was CAS on some of the allegations that were being made. There had been previous conversations about the drive for increased diversity and ensuring that that did not lead to positive discrimination, and about the fact that this obviously had to continue to be lawful. We then had the resignation of the Group Captain and the initiation of the inquiry. That was the point at which I was much more aware of the risk.

Q22 Chair: The question was quite specific. When did you first become aware that there was a change in policy, illegal or legal, for the diversity drive in the RAF?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I was never made aware of it being potentially unlawful until we had received the inquiry.

Mr Jones: That is not an answer.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I am just saying that I was aware of the allegations. There were conversations. I am trying to think when that was. It was probably last summer, when the allegations surfaced, and both me and the Defence Secretary had conversations with CAS about that. He provided assurances that he was confident that this was not unlawful. That was when the inquiry was initiated.

Q23 Chair: Right. Can you confirm that it was Air Marshal Wigston's policy—that he was responsible for this recruitment drive initiative?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Well, it was the Air Force Board and its policy, yes.

Q24 Chair: So all the Air Force Board were aware that they were pursuing something that was at least pushing the boundaries of the interpretation of the Equality Act 2010.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The way I would describe it is that the Air Force Board was pushing hard on increasing diversity in the Air Force, for the reasons that Mike Wigston has explained before. There are 1,500 pilots, 15 of them women and 10 of them from ethnic minorities. There is the concern that we all have about a war for talent. We want the best people in our country to serve in the Armed Forces, and we need to reach out to the whole nation. The meritocracy—

Q25 Chair: I do not dispute the spirit of what you were trying to achieve, but it



has to be done within the law, and what you did was affect the operational performance of the RAF by selecting people who had not met the top grade in their grouping. The inquiry came about in October 2022. It took Group Captain Lizzie Nicholl to spill the beans—to broadcast this—and then she felt that her position was no longer tenable, back in March 2021. She answered to Air Commodore Jo Lincoln, who was the director for RAF workforce requirements. She in turn answered to her boss, Air Vice-Marshal Maria Byford, chief of personnel. She answered to the head of the RAF, Air Marshal Wigston. They all knew what they were doing, so my next question is whether there was any ministerial oversight or approval for this policy change.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think the inquiry highlights that the Air Force policy was not intended to be positive discrimination. The inquiry highlights that the drive from the top to improve on those figures then got interpreted as it went down through the organisation, and then strayed into positive discrimination. Rich Knighton last week was really clear in apologising for that, apologising to the individuals involved—

Q26 **Chair:** We are running away. I will make it very clear. You came to your appointment in November 2021, which was after this happened. You then picked up on the fact that there was a problem that led to an inquiry, which took a while to come out. What I am trying to understand is how far up the chain of command in the MoD this went. It took a brave officer of integrity resigning and spilling the beans—whistleblowing—to make it clear that there was something wrong going on, and that the law was being broken by the RAF. We are trying to establish how far up the chain of command that went.

The head of the RAF was in front of the Committee in February this year and glossed over this. He dismissed the idea that there was anything to see here. He is now retired, and the report that has come out—the non-statutory inquiry into RAF recruiting—does not actually lay any blame on anybody. The Sheldon inquiry has done the same thing. It is a lot of words; it says that senior leadership should apologise, senior leadership should prioritise, senior leadership should ensure, and senior leadership should consider. Nowhere does it say that somebody had made the wrong decision, and that decision was illegal. It does not bestow on us confidence that we have moved on and learned when the report pushes this away, or blames it on people who are retired or can no longer be held to account. Again, I ask the question: what was the ministerial connection?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I am trying to understand if you are asking whether I knew that unlawful activity was going on in the Air Force and did nothing about it.

Chair: I didn't say that.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Did I know that unlawful activity was going on in the Air Force? The answer is that I didn't. If you are also asking whether the previous CAS knew that there was unlawful activity going on, then you would have to ask him.



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Chair: We did, and he said no.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think he was sincere in saying that he was not aware of unlawful activity going on.

Q27 **Chair:** Even though the RAF's own legal team said this was illegal? I will repeat my question for the last time. Are you aware of whether there was any ministerial approval for this RAF diversity drive policy?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There was ministerial approval for the macro piece. As I said, all of us are looking to embrace the talent that exists across the whole UK. We recognise that we are in a war for talent, and we need to be attractive to the whole nation. We are reaching out as strongly as possible. That is where Ministers would be. Ministers were not involved in the individual tactical elements of how the Air Force went about that.

Q28 **Chair:** So you are saying that there were 161 people who were selected—females and people from ethnic minorities—above those who had better grading, and no Minister was aware that the process was happening? I do not mean aware of the individual cases or the numbers, but of the policy.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, and with all due respect, Mr Chairman, if you and others think of your time as a Minister, I do not think it is surprising that Ministers would be unaware of that, in the same way that I do not think it is surprising that, as the Chief of the Defence Staff, I was unaware of that.

Q29 **Chair:** Okay, you have made that very clear. We will come back to this for obvious reasons, because I think there is more to this regarding ministerial oversight than we can see. I will ask an important question that Kevan Jones has reminded me of: did the Air Force Board sign off the policy?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I do not want to mislead you; I do not know the details.

Q30 **Chair:** Could you come back to us?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes. Again, I do not know if that would be the case. It depends what policy you are talking about—the broader policy or the way that it was implemented. This is another one where the way that it was implemented was never meant to be.

Q31 **Chair:** That is what I am trying to get to. This is my final point: somebody made the judgment to say, "We will not take the best in the class. We will not take the top guns. We will take females, because we need to bolster our numbers. Our ethnic recruitment drive is not working as we planned. We are at 6% when we should be at 20%. Let's do something. We will bend the rules—I think we can get away with it." That was, I think, the spirit in which this was conducted, even though it should have been checked with your legal teams, which eventually it was, only for them to turn around to say, "It's absolutely against the law."

Mr Jones: Chair, may we ask if he will write to us about the Air Force Board?



Chair: Yes, could you come back to us on that?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I totally accept that that should never have happened. The way that we recruit is as a meritocracy. In tandem with what emerged with the Air Force, we looked at the Army and the Navy, just to confirm that they had not strayed on to that path. They absolutely have not. My recollection, when I was both 2SL and 1SL, was of acknowledging this debate, but being really clear that we want to reach out to much broader aspects of British society while staying within meritocracy.

Q32 **Mr Francois:** Admiral, you have been clear that you believe that Ministers did not sanction that policy; you said that you were not aware of it—you have been clear on that too—and you have sort of suggested that the decision was taken by the Royal Air Force Board, but that will be minuted. All the discussions and decisions of the RAF Board, like all service boards, are minuted. Can we see the minutes of that RAF Board meeting, because that would make it perfectly plain whether it was a collective board decision?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes.

Chair: We appreciate that. Let us move on to Ukraine.

Q33 **Richard Drax:** Admiral, will you update us on events in Ukraine and, in particular, on where we are with delivering British equipment and munitions to the Ukrainian armed forces? What do you see as the priorities going forward?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Certainly. It is probably the most dominant part of my job at the moment. I am regularly in touch with the Ukrainian chief of defence, Valery Zaluzhny. I also deal with the commander of US Forces in Europe, General Chris Cavoli, and my opposite number in America, General Mark Milley.

In terms of where the counter-offensive is at the moment, you have probably seen some of the media reporting that the full counter-offensive still has not happened. I would describe it as a policy of starve, stretch and strive. Starve the Russian lines and attack their logistics—their command and control. You have seen some of the deeper sabotage operations going on in Russia. Stretch is how to take a frontline that is over 1,000 km and to make it more of a problem for Russia than it is for Ukraine. That is why we are seeing multiple axes being probed, with feints from Ukraine. We are seeing Ukrainian forces that have yet to breach the defensive lines of a Russia that has dug in over the winter. They are in the security zones and still waiting to get to the first defensive lines.

We anticipate that we will then see some of Ukraine's second echelon forces being brought to bear. Our view is that Russia has probably packed the security zone; it has very effective defensive lines, and the density of the minefields that Ukraine is having to push through is probably stronger than expected. There are the tactical issues, such as the lack of air cover



for Ukraine. The Ukrainians have not got all the equipment that they would have desired, so we are seeing that play out.

I am very cautious when people talk about timelines. This is going a bit more slowly than many anticipated, but that is unfair, because this is a counter-offensive that was never a singular act in terms of the military piece. It has always been a counter-offensive that involves the economic and the diplomatic, as well as military. That is what is going on. The piece that has been really strong this year—and you saw it at the tail end of last year—was America, just before Christmas, providing a substantial package. You then had the Ukraine contact group, chaired by SecDef Lloyd Austin, on 20 January in Ramstein. What Ukraine needs is additional equipment, and we need to help them with nine brigades. Those nine brigades have come to the fore in the last few months, and they are now being utilised, along with three additional brigades that Ukraine was able to generate itself.

On equipment, there is a continued requirement for a whole variety of things: air defence missiles, artillery, one-way attack drones, and support for the kit that has been provided, which is at least a division's-worth of kit, if not a division and a half's-worth. The dilemma that Ukraine has is one of mixed fleets, which we would all recognise, and this is an extraordinarily mixed fleet. We know that keeping that going, including in the fight, needs much stronger equipment support. All those things are going on.

Q34 Richard Drax: I hear you. Can I ask one final question, because I know time is pushing? We in the West say that Ukraine cannot fail. Russia cannot win and must not win, for all the reasons we know. We also know—you having served much longer than I—that to win a war of this substance you need mass; you need planes, tanks, guns, drones, and as many men and women as you can lay your hands on, and clearly Ukraine is desperate for that. We are still at a point, some years on, where it does not have all this kit; it is still asking for it. We had the President here begging for aircraft not that long ago.

In your view, why is the West not giving Ukraine the kit to do a counter-offensive, which can be very expensive as regards manpower and equipment, as we know? Attacking a dug-in position, as we know from world wars two and one, can be disastrous for the attacking force. Why are we not giving the Ukrainians the kit to attack properly, rather than make these probing attacks? They do not have all the kit to co-ordinate a proper assault. You imply that they are getting the kit, but it is all bitty and not constant enough. I think that is what you are saying.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I have described the response to the invasion as four things: support Ukraine; impose cost on Russia; avoid escalation; and maintain national unity. These nations are all going full-in, and that is where they are. You have a shared approach, and you have those nations fulfilling the promises that they made at Ramstein on 20 January to increase the combat power for Ukraine, so that Ukraine can



commence its counter-offensive. What you have not seen is the full roll-out of that counter-offensive.

The other aspects that I think you have seen are the economic piece—that has continued to be ratcheted up—and the diplomatic piece, whether it is the G7 a few weeks back in Japan, or NATO in Vilnius next week. If you look at the impact on Russia, this has been a catastrophic failure for it, especially at the strategic level. NATO is stronger; Russia is weaker. The international community is pulling together and defending the rules-based system. Last year, Ukraine took back basically 50% of the ground that Russia had gained. Even in the last few weeks, Ukraine has taken back more ground than Russia has taken in the last year. This will be deliberate and methodical. Nothing here will be swift.

Q35 Richard Drax: My last question is this: you raised the point that Ukraine has not had the kit that it wants. The West fears escalation; I think that is accepted. If Ukraine does not get the kit that it wants, we might well face something far worse in the war in Ukraine: Russia wins. Then we face God knows what. I would have thought that unless we escalate fast and give Ukraine the kit to finish this, and to kick Russia out, we risk a counter-offensive from Russia, which has hundreds of thousands of men that it is ready to fling on to the frontline. We sit here pontificating—

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, not at all. Russia is so weak that it does not have the strength for a significant counter-offensive. We are all really clear on that. Look at the UK in this: it was the first European partner to provide lethal weapons, NLAWs; the first to provide Challenger 2 tanks; and the first with a longer range weapon, Storm Shadow. On aircraft, the UK has been clear in its support of the F-16 fighter club, but that will not impact on this counter-offensive; that is a much longer-term piece.

Richard Drax: The United Kingdom has been incredible, and I think we are all very proud of what we have done. I believe that the Germans first gave helmets, which was not particularly helpful; they may be doing a bit more now. I think I have made my point.

Q36 Chair: You can add Storm Shadow to that. Do you think the Americans should follow us and give ATACMS?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The American contribution has been staggering, and they do not get enough credit. It is over \$40 billion. It dwarfs—

Chair: We are aware of that.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I do not want to get into public conversations about what the US should or should not give. Those are private conversations.

Q37 Chair: Would you like other nations to join us in giving long-range missiles?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Once again, the UK has led the way with Storm Shadow. The French and Italians have said yes—



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Q38 **Chair:** Is that a polite way of saying yes, you would like other countries to do that?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think it is a path for all of us to follow.

Chair: That is clear. Gavin, quickly.

Q39 **Gavin Robinson:** You have been in post since November '21; you are CDS; you know that there are difficulties supplying additional munitions, including NLAWs, which you referred to. You know that the MoD has been scratching around, trying to land an agreement with industry on the light weapons systems portfolio for four or five years. Is it not time to agree it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I must admit that I am not that familiar with that programme. I am familiar with a whole series of other contracts that we have signed.

Q40 **Gavin Robinson:** You are still doing individual procurements, yet for five years, the MoD has had the option and the opportunity to secure a 10-year agreement for the provision of the exact systems that we know we are short of and need.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: On some of the equipment that we have pushed forward into Ukraine, we are now spending the additional money that the Government have provided—half a billion that was included as part of the £2.3 billion package. Then, if you recall, we had an additional £5 billion given to us, £3 billion of which will be in nuclear for the next two years; £2 billion is part of the stockpiles piece. That has gone into a whole series of weapons and contracts.

Q41 **Gavin Robinson:** Singular contracts. I am asking you, as CDS—you should have a strategic overview of these things—to recognise that discussions have been had, and continue to be had, about a long-term, secured, sustained relationship with industry that would prevent stop-start and discontinued lines, and our having to invest in industry, having lost capability. We could provide those munitions.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There are two aspects to this. If I am honest, I have been, like, “Can we get some things on contract and start spending the money?”, but I want to agree with your point. NLAWs, Carl-Gustaf, Javelin, 155 mm—there are about 10 contracts. Your broader point is, I think, a challenge to all Western industry on just-in-time philosophies, the need to have deeper stockpiles, and the need to have a relationship with industry which is either “call off quickly”, or where industry is consistently fed, so that it has the capacity to swing up. I completely agree.

Chair: We will touch on this when we come to readiness.

Q42 **Gavin Robinson:** We have had very useful information from the MoD since the start of the Ukraine incursion from the defence intelligence unit. That seems to have slowed down now and we have not received anything since 23 May. Could you look at that, and ensure that we still get that information through, because it is incredibly useful?



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes. My apologies—we will definitely get you that information. I think I have been clear all the way through that I am immensely grateful that we have had such unity of support from this House and the other House all the way through. The way that we have been able to use briefings under Privy Council rules or just ask people to be responsible has been superb all the way through.

Chair: That is very much appreciated.

Q43 **Dave Doogan:** Welcome, admiral. As your two-year anniversary approaches, how has the dynamic with the reserves improved over that period of time? Lord Houghton has described the lack of properly functioning reserves as a “national embarrassment”.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I would not describe it in those terms, but I acknowledge that we have a lot further to go to meet some of our aspirations for where we want to get the reserves to by 2030. We had Lord Lancaster’s report. We have promised to come back in April next year with a much more substantial plan, because I do not think that we have the clarity that we ought to have in terms of our national policy and how we are best going to utilise reserves. I definitely do not think that we have the clarity that we should have in terms of the people who are in the reserves.

Q44 **Dave Doogan:** Is it your view that the, in my words, miserly calculation for reserves’ pay, which is based on a divisor of 365 on the basis that regulars are available 365 days a year, is a total disservice to people who are not regulars and who try to straddle both worlds, contributing significantly in terms of their human resource to defence, while also being part of the wider economy with families. A lot of regulars have families too, obviously, but it is not the same thing. What this actually results in for lower ranking reserves is really low daily rates, which is not very attractive and is not going to ingratiate that vocation to very many people, is it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, and to offer you some reassurance, if you then look at the Haythornthwaite report, that talks about a spectrum of service.

Chair: We will come to that shortly. We will look at that separately.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think that that helps to get us into the space that you are highlighting in terms of how we can have people who have careers that might involve regular time and what we call reservist time now, or who even go into the private space and then come back again—the classic zig-zag careers. We recognise that we have to modernise the way that we approach what Haythornthwaite describes as the total reward package. Some of that might also go as far as a single Armed Forces Act. Some of the bureaucracy about how we can mobilise reserves is sticky every time, rather than helping us to utilise these people who are willing to serve and have so much to offer. It is much more than just the pay.



Q45 **Dave Doogan:** It is not rocket science, is it? We only have to look at some of our close neighbours to see how they do it well and efficiently. Why is this yet another issue that is business as usual for other nations but so difficult for the United Kingdom?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We utilise the reserve. What the reserve is offering us now is more in niche skills rather than mass. There is a big conversation about the strategic reserve. People who have served as regulars and are still on the books are not part of turning up every week, but they have an obligation. How do we utilise that, because we might need more mass? There is that part of the conversation. It goes all the way to how, in a modern society, you can just reach out to people and see whether or not they want to serve, and how we look at our ability with Ukraine, where we are training their soldiers in five weeks and then they go to the frontline.

I go back to the period of covid, when the call went out to the nation for volunteers, and within 24 or 48 hours 750,000 people volunteered. When you start to look at the mass and how we might want to mobilise the nation in a much more significant way, that then challenges some of the ways that we currently shape ourselves around the reserves model. That is a much bigger conversation.

Q46 **Dave Doogan:** When was the last time that there was a test mobilisation of the strategic reserves?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I don't know. I only know about the conversations that I had with my predecessor, Nick Carter, when I was First Sea Lord. We talked about that. That is when you start to talk about some of the exercises that we have planned for next year, Agile Stance, and going back to the routines that some of us remember from our junior careers, when you would have either snap exercises or full exercises with the reserves to confirm that people can turn up, they have the kit and they have the understanding. Those are things that are starting to come back, but they have been in abeyance for a long time.

Q47 **Dave Doogan:** Right. Could you find out precisely when we last did that, and what the results were? Then please write to the Committee.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes. I can also tell you when we plan to do it next.

Q48 **Mr Jones:** The thing is, admiral, that cuts in the Army in the past 10 years were predicated on the fact that you would have a bolstered reserve that could fit in. It was the con that the Government ran at the time, trying to address the fact that we were not reducing the size of the Army. If you are saying that we have not mobilised them for 10 years, that has been a complete fantasy, hasn't it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is much clearer than it was, definitely clearer than when I was a junior officer, and I would say even in terms of the past 10 years, when the Army would describe itself as an Army of more than 100,000, which includes regulars and reserves.



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If you look at the conversation we are having with Haythornthwaite, and how you try to embrace these and make them more into a singular entity, that I think is going in the direction we set. When it comes to what I think you are saying, which is the fundamentals of, "What do you want from your Army, Navy and Air Force and how do you keep the nation safe?" You then have to join that with the threats that we face, and that we are part of the world's strongest-ever military alliance.

Q49 Mr Jones: The political spin on it was the fact that you were reducing the Army at one time to 84,000, but we would have at least another 30,000 reserves. Therefore, it showed that overall we were still able to have an Army. That has clearly not happened, has it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think we have an Army of 100,000 that is predominantly regulars of, shaping to be, 73,000 and a 30,000 reserve.

Q50 Mr Jones: If you have never mobilised it, how do you know if it is working or not?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: That is one element of understanding the capacity of your reserve. Some of the big mobilisations we used to have in the 1980s, I don't think we are going to be having lots of those on a regular basis. What we will do is look at how we mesh the reserve alongside our regular forces, so that they contribute to making us more effective.

Q51 Mr Jones: How do you know that you can do that? One of the issues that I raised at the time was the access to training for reserves, for example. At the time they were arguing that it was going to be a bit like the US National Guard. When I pointed out the fact that it was a bit different, in the sense that the National Guards form units of their own and things like that, that was just brushed over. It does not give a great deal of confidence to know if we are now just leaving it to April next year to mesh it together.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, we're not. I apologise if we are talking at cross purposes. When I refer to mobilisation, I am referring to a mass mobilisation. Those are the things that we haven't done for a long time. We regularly mobilise reservists and use them for all kinds of eventualities and operations. That is ongoing the whole time. My understanding of that exchange was about mass mobilisation.

Chair: Okay. We are only question 2, and we have done an hour. so we are going to have to make a bit of progress. Sarah wants to jump in on this one, and then we will have to pedal on.

Q52 Sarah Atherton: Thanks, Chair. The "Reserve Force Review 2030", published in 2021, said all the things you just said about redefining workforce and unlocking potential, and nothing happened. Now we have Haythornthwaite on incentivisation. That is unlikely to have any real benefit until you have one Armed Forces Act and a whole-workforce approach, which I think is where the MoD wants to go with that. That is going to take an awfully long time to do. What improvements have there



been for reservists and the reserve force since 2021?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: In terms of the scale of Haythornthwaite and what it entails, I agree with you. There will be elements of Haythornthwaite that we will look to implement very quickly, and we recognise that we may want to link that to some of our most severe shortages—in particular, engineers—and those operational pinch points.

The other piece is we all think that the notion that Haythornthwaite is a people programme that you support by putting it in the HR space is wrong. This is so big that it has to be a pan-Defence programme. Our retention problems are not necessarily because of HR policies, although they are sometimes a contributing factor. We lose engineers because they join up to fix things, and then the system doesn't provide them with the spare parts. They get fed up because they have these amazing skills, but they have to wait a couple of months to fix their tank, ship or aircraft. So Haythornthwaite will have to be a big Defence programme.

We have been using reserves in all kinds of operations, and using them more to supplement the regular force. That has existed across the whole space, including some of the domestic operations in the UK—whether covid or the help that we were providing with the industrial action—and operations abroad, such as supporting the eastern flank of NATO or Op Shader. We are using our reserves to supplement the overall force, and we are trying to do that in a way that is instinctive to the organisation. We do not want the slightly clunky mechanism that it has been in the past.

Q53 **Sarah Atherton:** I am just trying to get an idea of timescales for any improvement in our reserve force, which hasn't seen much focus for quite a while, in my opinion. If you are looking at having one Armed Forces Act, that is hundreds if not thousands of pieces of legislation that have to go through this place. In the meantime, our reserves are neglected. What are you doing to support our reserves, which make up a considerable percentage of our military strength?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The reserve organisations exist, and the investment into them exists. There was earmarked investment several years ago to help with the infrastructure. We are utilising reserves on a much more regular basis than we were five years ago. They all belong to individual units, and those units are part of the fabric of Defence. We all accept that we might want to strengthen the reserve component because we think we can utilise it even better, but I don't recognise the idea that it is somehow withering and being neglected. We want to utilise it better in the future, but none of us thinks we are neglecting it.

Chair: Robert, did you want to come in with your question now?

Robert Courts: I had something else, Chairman, but I am happy to leave that.

Q54 **Chair:** We will leave that because we need to make progress. We will now return to the integrated review refresh. It is a punchy document and is very clear that the next couple of decades are going to get very bumpy



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indeed. We are waiting for the Defence Command Paper. The term has almost run out, so when is it going to be published?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: My understanding is that the intention is still that it will be published before Parliament goes into summer recess. It is on write-around now, in terms of Government Departments.

Q55 **Chair:** We have had a spending review already, so we know that there is no extra money. You talked about the £5 billion: £3 billion for new nuclear and the AUKUS and then more money—more than £2.3 billion—for replacing the stocks, but no money really to advance the three services and their capabilities. So can we confirm that the cuts we saw to our tanks, our aircraft, our heavy lift and our personnel in the Army, none of those will be reversed?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: My understanding in terms of the defence command plan at the moment is that it will not. The command plan will acknowledge some of the big lessons from Ukraine, that nuclear and our being a nuclear power is incredibly important and that our membership of NATO and our role within the NATO alliance is incredibly important. Then things like the modernisation agenda and where we need to improve—acquisition, looking after our people better, resilience of the homeland and some of the stockpile issues—those are things that we are going to focus on.

Q56 **Chair:** So your takeaway from the integrated review refresh is not, as I said, that we will have entered a darker chapter, and that we need to move away from a peacetime budget of just over 2% to 2.5%.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Your Government—

Chair: Your Government too, I think.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes—our Government, in the IR23, makes it clear that the ambition is to get to 2.5%. As you know, there is no date on that. Then, we have had our spending limits approved and therefore we are looking at approximately £600 billion over the next 10 years and £50 billion a year at the moment. That is our money.

Q57 **Chair:** There is indeed an ambition to increase defence spending to 2.5%. I understand from the Treasury that that is conditional on the economic outlook improving. Would you agree that there is a symbiotic relationship between our economy and our security, in that we need to invest in our security to protect our economy? Ukraine illustrates that, with the price of food, oil and gas going up.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It absolutely does. We have seen with Ukraine that when security falls down, the impacts are not limited to a geography. They impact around the world. However, I would also highlight that we respond to those threats as more than the UK alone. If you look at NATO spending and the overmatch that NATO has—I am hopeful that next week, detail will come out on NATO's further response—that is the real contribution to how we stay safe.



Q58 Chair: Thank you. Before we turn to Mark, what are good outcomes for a Vilnius summit for you, bearing in mind that we are still waiting for Sweden to get the green light to join?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Good outcomes to me are clarity on a NATO that has extraordinary unity and continues to strengthen. Since the last summit, Finland has joined, and that is significant. There is also the ambition for the 2% to become a floor rather than a ceiling for some countries. Another outcome would be clarity on the path to countries spending more money.

Then, more at my level—this is slightly in the tactical space, but it is important—there is the issue of regional plans being signed off, and acknowledgment in this country of what NATO provides to us. I was at Cabinet this morning, contributing to the NATO discussion. NATO's combined GDP is 20 times greater than Russia's, and we highlight Russia as our acute threat. NATO's population is a billion, compared with Russia's population of 143 million. We have nearly 3.5 million people in uniform in NATO, and at the very strongest estimates, Russia has just over 1 million. If you go through the inventory, NATO has four times as many tanks as Russia, six times as many armoured fighting vehicles, four times as much artillery fire, four times as many attack helicopters, eight times as many transport aircraft, three times as many fighter jets—

Mr Francois: On paper.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Absolutely. It has three times as many submarines, nearly five times as many warships—

Q59 Chair: That is all fine, but only if you are willing to deploy them. The ability of Russia to endure harm and expend matériel, and the ability of its personnel to defend the motherland or to attack, is far, far greater than the West's, and that is a characteristic of warfare that we need to factor in.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: If we look at the manner in which Russia has conducted its illegal invasion of Ukraine, it has got weaker; it has probably lost nearly 50% of the combat effectiveness of its army for very, very little gain. It has a diminished place in the world, and an economy under pressure. It probably expended last year over 10 million shells and, at best, it can produce maybe 1 million shells a year. It has lost over 2,000 tanks and, at best, can replace those tanks at the rate of 200 a year.

I then look at what NATO has, and at its unity. What becomes really significant is some of the plans that I anticipate will be announced next week. This goes to your point, Mr Francois, about how we attribute these enormous forces we have in 31 nations so that they come under SACEUR. He already has the assurance that he has those forces, and he can use those forces to keep Europe safe. I cannot announce it now, but there will be an astronomical increase in the forces that will be TOAed—transfer of authority—or attributed to NATO.

Chair: Okay. In the last 45 minutes, let us turn to our own defence



posture.

Q60 Mr Francois: Admiral, those numbers sound impressive, but you and I know that half that stuff does not work—if you turn the key tomorrow, nothing would happen.

Let us talk about what we can really do, as opposed to what we can theoretically do. After the first world war and all the horrors of the trenches, the British Government brought in a rolling 10-year rule, which assumed that there would be no major war for at least 10 years. It was only rescinded in the mid-'30s, after the rise of Adolf Hitler. Your predecessor, Nick Carter, gave evidence to us a couple of weeks ago on the topic of readiness. He was very candid, and he said that up until about 2018, the Army—he was talking about when he was CGS, but I think he meant defence more broadly—was operating, in effect, a 12-year rule, because the planning assumption was that there would be no major war for 10 years, and even at the end of that period, there would be another two years when we could reconstitute before we would have to fight a major conflict. That was only five years ago. Are we still operating a 10-year rule? Five years, ago, apparently, we were.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I know we are short of time, so the answer is no. We work to readiness requirements, as per our NATO contribution, and those, with our domestic readiness requirements, are the golden thread.

Q61 Mr Francois: We will come on to those, service by service, in a minute, but for brevity, are our Armed Forces ready to fight a major war with Russia, if we had to fight tonight?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes.

Q62 Mr Francois: You are sure of that?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes.

Q63 Mr Francois: When we asked Malcolm Chalmers, in the same inquiry, whether we could produce this war-fighting division to NATO, he said, “We would struggle to provide a brigade.” The Committee believes that we could fight, and no one is doubting the martial spirit of our Armed Forces, but we just do not have the kit to do it any more, do we, if we can barely produce a brigade to take the Russians on when we are supposed to provide a division. You sound to me, if I may say so, a tad complacent.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We have been really clear on our contribution to NATO, and that we would do the major combat operations that I think you are referring to as part of NATO. When you look at what we provide and at the maritime contribution, it is really significant, and probably accounts for nearly 20% to 25% of the whole of the NATO plans. There are five combat squadrons for the Air Force, including an F-35 squadron. Again, that is probably about 10% of NATO. You are right that we want to strengthen the Army even further—so, a core headquarters, a warfighting division, a second division that is more of a divisional HQ with one brigade, and then several brigades that fall underneath that. What we



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are saying with NATO is that the investment in our Army, which, if you look at it in capital terms—

Q64 Mr Francois: Apologies, but we are tight for time. On paper, we are supposed to provide a warfighting division to NATO. The Government's policy is that we will not have that warfighting division until the end of the decade—that is official policy. At the moment, we would be hard pressed to provide a brigade.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We have a warfighting division now—you have 3 Div. We are really clear that we want to strengthen 3 Div, and that is why there is substantial investment going into it; 3 Div is lighter than we want, and that is why we are investing in it.

Q65 Mr Francois: Admiral, if you crashed 3 Div out of barracks tomorrow morning, half the vehicles would not get out of the tank park; many of them are 40, 50 or even 60 years old, and all their replacements have not arrived yet. I am sorry, Sir, but you keep doing this. You keep giving us theoretical constructs of what we can provide. There are multiple former Ministers on this Committee. We know that we are nowhere near being able to field it. Do not keep glossing us; tell us the truth.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We have two divisions: 1 Div is much lighter and part of a global response force that the Army provides, and 3 Div is our warfighting division. We put that under the ARRC. The ambition is that the ARRC will be part of NATO's strategic reserve. We anticipate NATO having two strategic reserves. 3 Div will operate with probably two other nations to form that core. We have a warfighting division that we put forward to NATO, and we recognise that we need to strengthen that division. That is what is in existence now, and we will strengthen it even further.

Chair: Okay, we will rotate back to the Army shortly. Kevan, you wanted to move on to readiness.

Q66 Mr Jones: How many Challenger 2s could we deploy at the moment—put the keys in and get out?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I have to be careful when it comes to specific numbers, but I absolutely acknowledge, on the Challengers that we provided to Ukraine and the AS-90s, that we had, on paper, quite large fleets, but the number of tanks and batteries of guns that we could put forward with confidence was lower than we anticipated.

Q67 Mr Jones: It is 40, isn't it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I will not go into specific numbers.

Mr Jones: It is, because I have been told that.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I will not go into specific numbers here.

Mr Jones: We talk about the 200-odd we have, and the ambition on Challenger 3 to have 130—



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: 148.

Mr Jones: At present, we have 40.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I will not go into specific numbers.

Q68 **Mr Jones:** But that is a long way from what Mr Francois has just said about being able to deploy 3 Div. You cannot do it, can you, without relying on other NATO allies—which I am not opposed to—to fill in some of the deficiencies?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There is no doubt that for those big fights in Europe, UK defence policy relies on us fighting alongside our allies.

Q69 **Mr Jones:** Why do we not just be honest? I accept that 3 Div is an ambition, and I have no problem with supplying a division that is made up of other nations—I think that is the way forward, personally—but we keep coming back to this nonsense that we can deploy 3 Div as a warfighting force tomorrow. It is not the case.

Mr Francois: It is just a fantasy.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: 3 Div has just come back from the US, having done Warfighter and so on.

Mr Francois: That was a command post exercise.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I know it is. We have all these people—20,000 or 30,000 people. You are saying that they don't exist and that they are useless.

Q70 **Mr Francois:** But all of their vehicles are completely outdated. They exist; there is nothing to fight in.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We accept that the vehicles are really old. We are investing like crazy in our warfighting division to improve it for 2030. It is still a warfighting division; it is not the one that we want.

Q71 **Mr Jones:** I accept that it is, in name, but come on! Why can't we have some honesty, and say, "This is where we're at"? If that means that we change our role in NATO and say, "We will deliver a division, but it will be made up of other nations," I have no problem with that. We just need some honesty. It is absolute nonsense that you keep coming before us, as do Ministers, and saying, "We can deliver this," when we can't.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Rather than prolong this, shall I write to you with what—

Chair: Our concern is this. On our visits, we establish exactly what is going on. We establish the truth. We understand how many vehicles are not just lined up but, as Mark says, can actually leave the parade square. It is far short of our NATO promise of being able to mobilise a full division. Indeed, because of the reduction in tank numbers, we cannot meet our original commitments of two armoured brigades. That is our concern. We are on your side in wanting more funds to make sure we can do this, but



we cannot pretend it is all okay. We cannot get given the niceties and the assurances, and all the “Nothing to see here”, when the reality is very different. We would be found wanting if we had to mobilise—if NATO called on us to launch that division.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: But I would also say—

Q72 **Mr Francois:** Admiral, you said something very significant. You said, “We would expect our allies to fight alongside us.” Of course—that is what NATO is about—but our allies would expect us to fight alongside them. It is an open secret; the Americans are extremely concerned that we are no longer a first-tier Army. Why are we putting so many resources into the other two services, including the one that you used to lead, while perennially leaving the Army as the poor relation?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I can go through some of the figures, because we have looked at this. When we look back over the last 10 or 20 years, the investment in the three services has broadly always been the same. It is surprising to me that it is not some reassurance. I am not saying that we have got 3 Div the way that we want it—

Mr Francois: Admiral—

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Let me finish. The really important piece is that the investment in the Army—*[Interruption.]* Mr Francois, you have asked about the investment. The investment in the Army, particularly in capital terms, has gone up by about 80% since 2021. CGS mentioned it last week; it is £35 billion to £40 billion over the next decade. If you look at that in macro terms, the biggest spenders in Defence are the Army—over the last 10 years, that has been 25% of the Defence budget—and nuclear, which is about 20% to 21%. Over the next decade, the Army will increase, in macro terms across the whole of Defence, from 25% to 30%. That is a staggering increased investment. It is an acknowledgement that we really need to invest in our Army to make it stronger.

Q73 **Mr Francois:** Look, we’ve spent £4 billion on this, and it still doesn’t work.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is more than that. It is £5.5 billion on Ajax.

Mr Francois: No; we have spent £4 billion so far. It is £5.5 billion in total.

Chair: Let’s not go down the Ajax avenue again. The bottom line is that we are starting to replenish, and to look at replacing the obsolescence in our Army in the longer term, but we left it very late, and it has taken the war in Ukraine to recognise that our combat effectiveness in land warfare is hugely wanting and needs to be addressed. Unfortunately, there isn’t the money coming in the budget for you and your Defence Command Paper to address this.

We have done the Army. Can we now move on to the other two services, beginning with Sarah and the Navy?

Mr Francois: I would put it the other way around: I would say that the



Army's been done.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Just for clarity, the investment I referred to was before the war in Ukraine, and that is what I think is surprising: the substantial increases in the Army programme, particularly in capital, to address the issues that the Committee and all of us see are never acknowledged.

Chair: We are hugely behind schedule, so over to Sarah, on the Navy.

Q74 **Sarah Atherton:** It is generally accepted that the Royal Navy is very capable of deploying key capabilities with limited platforms as part of a multinational operation. We have received considerable evidence saying that the Royal Navy is not capable of putting together a whole-force package, which I think we often liken to a Falklands taskforce. Are you concerned that there are so many key players in the defence domain, or ecosystem, who share that opinion?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: You refer to the Falklands scenario, which is one of the few scenarios where we might anticipate fighting on our own, so I think it has an elevation from a military point of view as well as a political and psyche of the nation point of view. When we look at that in terms of the strength of Argentina and the differences now, with the base that we have in the Falklands and our continued presence, with Typhoon, a small Army presence, our ships that are down in the Falklands, and our ability to support that with submarines, carriers and escorts, that is not a concern.

This is a Navy that is on the up—a Navy that between 2020 and 2030 becomes a carrier Navy again, that alongside the Air Force goes from fourth generation jets to fifth generation jets, and that then has, by dint of previous investment, 22 ships and submarines coming through. Those straddle some of the workhorses—the solid support RFA ships—to new frigates, Astute class submarines and also our Dreadnought deterrent. So I suppose I see it differently. In terms of all the commitments that we are supposed to meet at the moment—this applies across the whole of defence—there are 41 operations ongoing, and all of those are being met.

Q75 **Sarah Atherton:** So could we defend the Falklands?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Absolutely.

Q76 **Sarah Atherton:** There are 17 major surface escort ships available, and we have received evidence that, to fulfil your commitments, you need substantially more. How many of those 17 surface escort ships could fight tonight?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We were at 19 frigates and destroyers, I think, when I appeared before the Committee as First Sea Lord, and then I subsequently wrote to say that we were reducing some of those numbers because some of those ships are really expensive and so that we could take those crews to help with the transition that happens throughout this decade. We are now down to 17 frigates and destroyers. Of those 17, some will be in maintenance and some will be in deep refit, so probably 11



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or 12 are actually available to go out on operations, and those are sufficient for all the operational commitments that we currently have.

Q77 Sarah Atherton: So we could send 11 to the Falklands.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We could. I don't think we would, because I don't think it would be required.

Q78 Sarah Atherton: How do you balance, then, the commitments you have under the integrated review and the ships you actually have available, or the resources and capabilities you have available? I am going to go on to AUKUS, which is a fantastic opportunity for us, but you do not have enough SSNs. If you wanted to deploy an SSN in the Indo-Pacific, that would mean taking one out of the Euro-Atlantic area. Do you have enough ships and subs to meet your commitments?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: At the moment there is not a commitment to always have an SSN in the Indo-Pacific.

Sarah Atherton: But there might be very soon.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: You are absolutely right. When you look at the ambition that might flow from AUKUS and more regularly having SSNs from our existing fleet in the Indo-Pacific, that is part of the modernising of the submarine fleet. We are still on a path to get seven Astutes, and that takes several years. We also need to invest in some of the really dull stuff that we have not invested in—some of the infrastructure. We have one SSN-A boat at the moment. It will take a long time to bring it back in because we do not have a dock available in Plymouth.

When you carry on with AUKUS, that really is out into several decades' time. There is the replacement for our Astute class after Dreadnought, and then there is an even bigger debate on what the numbers are to replace the seven Astutes. Does that stay at seven or is it more, as part of this big AUKUS programme? That then gets you to a new ambition and what our ambition is, particularly with SSNs in the Indo-Pacific. We have not got to that decision yet.

Q79 Sarah Atherton: Are you happy with the capability and readiness of the Royal Navy as it stands today?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think this is true across all of the Armed Forces: we need to have deeper stockpiles, we need to be more lethal and we need to increase our productivity. I would not say I am happy. We have to improve across all those strands. The piece that worries me, which we have not talked about, is having sufficient people so that we can get that level of productivity. Again, I think that exists across all three services.

Q80 Chair: What has happened to Type 32?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Type 32 is still a programme that is to be funded.

Q81 Chair: Not a typo from Type 31?



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There will be a decision as to whether Type 32 becomes Type 31—does it become Type 31 batch 2, or is it is a completely different ship?

Chair: That would be Type 31 batch 2 rather than Type 32, but that's semantics. Let us move to the RAF with Robert Courts.

Q82 **Robert Courts:** Admiral, I have a number of questions about Air Force readiness. For years we have operated on the basis that we will have air supremacy over a target and we will be able to operate. That is how our way of war works. That has been denied to both sides in Ukraine, so what are you doing to ensure that the RAF is able to suppress enemy air defences so that they can operate in contested airspace against a peer adversary?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The simple answer is lots of things. When you talk about Ukraine, that is a really interesting comparison because the Ukrainian air force does not compare to the Royal Air Force in terms of its sophistication and capability.

Q83 **Robert Courts:** No, but it is the S-300 in particular. It is the effectiveness of the ground-based air systems that are denying the ability to operate. That is what I am interested in.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I have to be careful here, but when you look at some of the fifth generation aircraft coming in—Ukraine is in many ways an affirmation of a Western way of warfare.

Q84 **Robert Courts:** It is, except it is without air power. That's the point.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: But there are glimpses that give us real confidence in the way that we are operating. If you take Storm Shadow, in the suite of weapons it is reasonably sophisticated, but not at the super-top end. It is defeating Russian air defence systems because of the wrapper that we are applying to enable Storm Shadow to get in and hit the target.

Q85 **Robert Courts:** But it is a stand-off weapon.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is a stand-off weapon. When we talk about integrated warfare and joining things up, whether that is on space, cyber, electronic warfare, dynamic targeting—some things that have been absent with Russia and, if we are honest, have slightly surprised us—that gives us confidence about our fifth-gen capabilities, our space capabilities and our EW and cyber capabilities. You blend all of those together, and that is how you defeat some of these best-in-class air defence systems.

Q86 **Robert Courts:** Are you saying that the combination of stand-off weapons and our EW capabilities means that the Western way of war is changing and that you do not need to operate in that contested airspace any more—you will just stand off?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I am saying that we are increasingly confident of our ability to both take out those systems and operate in that contested airspace with the sophistication of what we have got.



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Q87 Robert Courts: It is the ability to take out those systems. That is what I am after.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Both take out and operate in them. I pay tribute to the Air Force for some of the work that they have done. What they are demonstrating is phenomenal.

Q88 Robert Courts: The evidence we have had is that NATO as a whole is deficient in the suppression and destruction of enemy air defences. Do you reject that analysis?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think we want to strengthen it, but looking at what has happened in Ukraine, and the way that Russian air defences are being defeated, gives us a lot more confidence.

Q89 Robert Courts: Okay. For many years, we have placed a reliance upon main operating bases, because that is cheaper, you can bring everybody together and so on—commercial construction. I understand that in peacetime, and I understand it when you are dealing with the sorts of policing operations that we have done. But again, we are horribly vulnerable against a peer adversary when all of our assets for air mobility, ISTAR and air defence are based on those bases, which are so vulnerable. What are you doing to build resilience?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Those are some of the big decisions—whether they are in the defence command plan or at the next spending review. There are NATO programmes that we are involved with in terms of integrated air missile defence, but when you look at what is happening in warfare, the range is being extended. The proliferation of drones and long-range missiles, and the ability to attack capitals or critical national infrastructure at range—it is more than the air bases—is provoking the question, how much depth of defence have we got, and what are the systems that we have got? I think there are some vulnerabilities for the UK.

Q90 Robert Courts: You are right, of course, about critical national infrastructure; I just do not want to start looking at all of that. There are perhaps three options, are there not? You have ground-based air defence and defence in depth, you have hardening of airfields and you have dispersal. Are you looking at those three things?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We are looking at all of those, and it is more than ground-based air defence. We are looking at integrated air missile defence in a much larger way.

Q91 Robert Courts: What about dispersal in times of emergency?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Again, if I am honest, we have talked about it. That is part of learning, particularly with our Scandinavian partners, who I think are much more adept. Can you use some of your commercial airfields? Can you even use your motorways? How would you then operate?

Q92 Robert Courts: They are very good at it. Are we learning lessons and



looking at doing the same?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I just want to be honest with you. We are thinking about it. If you take F-35, for example, I think we would struggle. You could put the aircraft into somewhere else, but when you look at the support that is required and all the data support, that would again be a bit of a figment. You have got to take the whole system with you.

Chair: We are running out of time.

Q93 **Robert Courts:** Forgive me, admiral, but I have three more things. I am being pushed for time, as you can see, much as I would like to take you up on some of the points you made there.

The next thing I would like to ask you about is training. We have been operating it in discretionary conflicts—air policing and so forth. That is very different from complex air operations against a peer adversary. Are you leaving enough space in the operations schedule to make sure that people can do the very different training they need for that level of high-intensity warfare?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We are. I was at Coningsby a few months ago, and I think there is a tension between training and the amount of operational sorties. Last year, the Royal Air Force doubled the amount of operational sorties compared with the previous year. It is a staggering impact. My frustration with some of the other conversations we have about the Royal Air Force is that they miss the critical thing that the Royal Air Force delivered twice as much as the previous year in its operational sorties, but it also still did the classic Red Flag series. When it did Red Flag, testing against some of the most difficult air threats in the world, it did incredibly well. Some of our missile systems are far superior to even the Americans’.

Q94 **Robert Courts:** It did, but what concerns me is that increasing operational tempo. You are absolutely right about what the RAF has turned out—that is superb—but there is pressure on people, in particular, and on airframes, which are constantly asked to do more with less when the training dynamic that is needed now is very different.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There are other systems coming in, as well as the traditional Red Flag and being put against the toughest threats. Take the F-35: the toughest flying for F-35 will be in simulators.

Q95 **Robert Courts:** But there is a limit to what simulators can do, isn’t there?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There is, but if you look at the investment going into Coningsby and the investment going into Typhoon, growing from five squadrons to seven squadrons, that to me is where the Air Force is keeping its warfighting edge. I also see an Air Force that, as well as doubling its operational sorties last year, now has more lift, by dint of the A400M, than it has had for 50 years.

Robert Courts: Now you have touched a nerve, admiral.



Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The Air Force is also going into space command.

Q96 **Robert Courts:** I will come back to air mobility in a second, but first I want to continue with training. When the now CAS was in front of us last time, I asked him to confirm the shape of the F-16 support package that they were putting together on basic training, and he said it was still being put together. I know it is basic training and not MFTS, but what I am asking is: is it in shape yet? Can you update us on what shape it is taking, and whether it will have any impact on RAF pilot training?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It won't have any impact on RAF pilot training. The reason is that pilot training is full at the back end. Some of that is because the capacity doesn't exist as well as it could in terms of the problems we have had with Hawk and so on. If you look at the front end and what Ukraine needs, some of it is as basic as language training, ground school and elementary flying training, and we have spare capacity for that. So we will take on the front end, and then link in with a European project for the F-16 flying.

Q97 **Robert Courts:** Forgive me for interrupting; it is simply because of time. I understand the way the project is based—I know it is elementary training and not MFTS—but can you reassure us that none the less it will have no impact on RAF pilot training?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Absolutely.

Q98 **Robert Courts:** Fantastic. Thank you very much. Right—air mobility. Please don't tell me that A400M can carry twice as much, twice as far—I know that. The point is task line availability. I am concerned about A400M availability, and about the niche capabilities that have not yet been transferred off the C-130. What are you doing to make sure that there is not a shortfall in task line availability after the retirement of Hercules?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Lots of things. We are working with Airbus and the Royal Air Force to increase the availability of the A400M. I think you probably know that has been on an upward curve, but it started at a low point. Some of that was to do with spares and just getting much more adept at utilising the aircraft. If you look at some of those niche capabilities, high-altitude parachute training is now achieved, and we are now conducting the trials for low-altitude parachute training.

Some of the other discrete capabilities take a couple of years, but when you look at whether we have ever used those capabilities, the answer is no. Those deficiencies in introducing the A400M are accepted. The test that I gave myself was the recent non-evacuation in Sudan. Probably like you, I was receiving reports about concerns with the A400M. I can assure you that if we had to do a non-evacuation on the lines of Sudan again, but with no C-130 fleet, we could absolutely do that.

Q99 **Robert Courts:** All right. It seems to me that it is unavoidable, as a result of fewer airframes' availability, we will have fewer task lines available, and however capable an aircraft is, it cannot be in two places at once, and nor



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can people. We will need more airlift capability over the course of the next few years, aren't we?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The way to do this is to drive up the availability of A400Ms. We have 22 A400Ms. I think everybody agrees that it is an excellent aircraft and has additional lift, and it can manage some of those discrete capabilities. We are continuing with the availability and that is how you get more task lines.

I have had this conversation with the Prime Minister. The answer is not more airframes. We have 22; we should be getting 15 or 16 working, and we have had nine. We have had five, seven, nine, then 11 and so on. That might mean more people. It definitely means more spares. It definitely means linking in, in the way that commercial airlines do. We still do not share all our data in the way that commercial airlines do, even with partners of ours in NATO. That is how you get more availability—not more airframes.

Robert Courts: We will watch, and wait and see.

Q100 **Sarah Atherton:** Our "Women in the Armed Forces" report highlighted failings in the way that women are treated in the military. We highlighted the failings and made recommendations, but it is up to the MoD how they fix and rectify this; it is certainly not up to us to do that. Since our report, quite a number of high-profile cases of misogyny, bullying, harassment and sexual assault have come into the media. We have had Sandhurst, the Red Arrows and the Submarine Service, and there is a tendency for services to undertake non-statutory investigations. I am not quite sure, actually, what a non-statutory investigation means or doesn't mean.

Particularly with the Red Arrows case, a substantial number of witnesses felt that the process was a cover-up, with a number of cases that they felt met the legal threshold not being referred for criminal investigation. With the Submarine Service, the whistleblower has withdrawn, having said that it is a whitewash. The key investigating officer has now left the naval service, and I have heard of webs of collusion by senior officers. Can you see how service personnel and veterans are very disillusioned by what is going on?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I can, but the non-statutory inquiries are a much faster way to get on with it and to respond to these horrendous allegations, and—

Q101 **Sarah Atherton:** Sorry, admiral, but with due respect I think speed is one thing and justice is another.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is, but we're slightly caught. If you go down the judicial process, sometimes it elongates it and takes a very long time. Every time we have had these incidents, we have called it out, so the notion of collusion and hiding this stuff I totally disagree with. You have given three examples that go completely against what we stand for. With the shocking allegations in the Submarine Service, at a very senior level, the First Sea Lord instantly calls it out and we get after it.



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It is the same with the Red Arrows. People were dismissed from the Red Arrows. It is something that the nation reveres about who we are and part of our culture, and you have the head of the Air Force saying, "I'm going to get after this," and people get kicked out.

The other piece, which I think is really important and has come since your report, is our clarity about zero tolerance for this behaviour. That didn't exist in the past; I think we all felt it, but now it happens and people get kicked out.

We have also adjusted the way that we investigate these things. Those misgivings that people had about their chain of command, "Will this rebound back on me?" and so on—we have now removed the chain of command and we have a much more assured way of investigating these things.

We are trying to give people confidence by saying, "If these things are going on, or if they have gone on in the past, it is hurtful and embarrassing, but we want to hear about it and get after it, because it's not who we are." I am slightly frustrated. I can understand some of those views, but actually I think we are being really open with where we are and what we are trying to do about it.

Q102 Sarah Atherton: We have received some evidence from defence medics saying that the process regarding the chain of command does not really make much difference on the ground. We received that evidence not so long ago, contrary to what you have just been saying. We plan to review and refresh towards Christmas, to look at the recommendations and how far the MoD has come, and we will be looking at exactly that. We have been told that there will be a report on the RAF recruitment policy investigation. Will we see a report on the investigation into the Submarine Service when it is concluded, and on that into the Red Arrows, which has now concluded?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Can I write to you so that I am really clear on that, because I do not know where we are on it? I would be grateful if you shared with us, even if it is anonymised, those medics who say, "This isn't working in the way that it should be."

Sarah Atherton: You have had it.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Oh, right. Okay. We welcome your following up your report. We welcomed your report in the first place because we share the same intent to get after this, and we know that we have to improve.

Q103 Sarah Atherton: I have to say that a lot of progress has been made towards that, so thank you very much. One part of that progress is that the Defence Serious Crime Unit has now been stood up with a very good witness care unit, which I advocated very strongly for, and which I think is doing very good work. Will we see any future cases like this being heard and investigated by the Defence Serious Crime Unit?



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes. Again, I will write to be absolutely clear, but my understanding is that that is a new process, and we use the Defence Serious Crime Unit to both investigate those allegations and then pass them on for prosecution. The other piece is our courts martial now: we always include women on the board and, similarly, on our promotion boards.

Q104 **Sarah Atherton:** Very quickly, there are thousands of women and men—those serving now and veterans—who feel unfairly treated in the military, a lot of them around serious sexual assault and serious injury. Can I suggest that there should be some reconciliation process for those people? Would you perhaps look into having a legacy unit embedded within the Defence Serious Crime Unit? These people feel unfairly treated by the military, and some of them are serving now.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Definitely—we will look into it and write back to you with proper advice on that.

Chair: We have covered the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. In the last couple of minutes, we will very quickly turn to the non-conventional space of cyber-security and space.

Q105 **Richard Drax:** The IR23 stated that “the UK’s conventional, cyber and space forces must be sufficiently capable, resilient, deployable and adaptive to deter potential adversaries from engaging in conflict, and to win a conflict if deterrence fails.” Are you satisfied that the Defence Command Paper refresh will deliver that?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I am trying to recall what we say about cyber in the Defence Command Paper refresh. I do not know about some of the private or in camera briefings that we give the Committee, because I think that there are some operations that we could describe to you that would more accurately answer the question.

Chair: Let’s pursue that, and thank you for offering that. The Committee would be grateful to learn more on that front.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: In broad terms, one of our pieces with NATO is that we describe ourselves as a full-spectrum force. That is a bit jargonistic, but it is true. We have maritime, air and land, and space and cyber. We are proud to be a space and cyber force, but these are both areas that we need to keep strengthening.

Q106 **Richard Drax:** I accept that you do, but it is extremely costly. Will that come at the cost of reducing our conventional Armed Forces, which, as you know, are going to struggle? The Army certainly is being reduced to 72,000. As time goes by, it gets extremely expensive, as it is a domain that we have not really invested in until now. Are you going to fight the space and cyber against the conventional? Is that going to be a real problem?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I think the plan at the moment would be that the traditional Armed Forces are going to have to morph and change to take on some of these new capabilities. I actually welcome that. I think



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that it would be too easy for us to stay the same and then add on space and cyber. You should be demanding of us that we adjust and change rather than the really easy thing of keeping everything the same and adding on. That would not be good for us. I do not think that it is good for the taxpayer. We actually need to blend—

Chair: Because of time, let us take up your offer and advance this in that way. That would be very good indeed.

Q107 **Gavin Robinson:** We have had land, air, sea, space and cyber. Let me ask you about something that you are not responsible for but have an interest in: veterans. You know that there is a strategic action plan agreed for 2022-24. At times, the Committee struggles with the outworkings of action plans and policies that do not reflect the UK-wide nature of our Armed Forces—the Welsh interest from Ms Atherton, Scottish from Mr Doogan, and Northern Ireland from myself. A new helpline was launched yesterday as part of that action plan, but it is only available for veterans in England, Scotland and Wales. As Chief of the Defence Staff and somebody with an interest in everyone under your care, who will be a veteran and potentially needing to avail themselves of these services, does it disappoint you that Northern Ireland was not included?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It absolutely does, and I was unaware of that. Again, can I chase that down and get back to you? I think the answer will be that we tell you when that service will be available in Northern Ireland.

Gavin Robinson: Thank you.

Chair: There is not time to answer, because we really are over time—you have been very generous—but I will write to you about the Haythornthwaite review and the concerns about the tri-service recruitment model, which it warns should not undermine each service's ability to set its own overall approach to recruitment. If we may, we will write to you with some of the concerns expressed in it, and hopefully get your reply and your perspective.

Sir, can we say thank you very much indeed? It has been a wide-ranging discussion. You have been very candid with your views. We very much appreciate that. We look forward to the publication of the Defence Command Paper before school is out this summer, and an opportunity will, I hope, be presented on the Floor of the House for us to debate and discuss it. For today, thank you very much indeed, admiral, thank you to the Committee, and thank you to the staff.