



HOUSE OF LORDS

International Relations and Defence Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The Arctic

Tuesday 18 July 2023

11 am

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Members present: Lord Ashton of Hyde (The Chair); Lord Anderson of Swansea; Lord Boateng; Lord Campbell of Pittenweem; Baroness Coussins; Baroness Morris of Bolton; Lord Robertson of Port Ellen; Lord Soames of Fletching; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Sugg; Lord Teverson; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 14

Heard in Public

Questions 150 – 164

Witness

I: Angus Lapsley, Assistant Secretary-General for Defence Policy and Planning, NATO.

Examination of witness

Angus Lapsley.

Q150 **The Chair:** Good morning. Thank you very much indeed for coming. We are very grateful for you sparing the time. Today, we are talking about NATO's approach to the Arctic and its assessment of potential conflict in the region. This is a public session, streamed live on the Parliament website, and we will send you a transcript afterwards and you can check it to make sure that it is correct. Can I just remind members, when first speaking, to declare any interests pertinent to the inquiry? Perhaps when you first answer, you could briefly introduce yourself and your background.

The rather long communiqué from Vilnius referred—in paragraph 14, I think it was—to the strategic challenge posed by Russia in the High North. On the other hand, we have had evidence that direct military conflict in the Arctic is unlikely at the moment. I wondered whether NATO's assessment of the challenges and the issues in the Arctic had changed dramatically since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. What issues might cause escalation to move into the Arctic?

Angus Lapsley: Thank you, Chair, and good morning to the committee. I have a career of 30 years or so mostly in the Foreign Office, but also in the Cabinet Office and the MoD. I am currently the assistant secretary-general for defence policy and planning in NATO. Essentially, my job is looking at capability planning, policy on defence, and nuclear issues.

I will start, if you permit me, with a little context, because a lot of the way in which we are thinking about the Arctic in NATO today flows from that broader context, and it is one that will not be a surprise to the committee. We have known for some time now, certainly since 2014, that we faced a more aggressive, assertive and risk-taking Russia, and NATO has been strengthening its deterrence and its defence posture since 2014 in response to that.

The big shift that happened with the second invasion of Ukraine at the beginning of 2022 was that it brought home to allies two things: first, the potential scale and complexity of what a Russian attack might one day look like; and, secondly, the realisation that we could not assume that competition with Russia would stay below the threshold of open conflict. We knew that we faced things like cyberattacks, hybrid attacks, disinformation, all these things, but the invasion of Ukraine brought home to NATO that we really did have to be ready for the possibility that one day we might face an attack by a highly capable nuclear-armed peer opponent. Everything we are doing in the Alliance at the moment, in one way or another, flows from that recognition.

I would put the way we see the Arctic in two ways. First, we recognise that the Arctic or the High North of Europe is a special place. It is a special place geographically; the conditions in which you operate up there are special. Some of the politics, as we might explore, have been special; the Arctic nations—Norway, Sweden, Finland—have all, in different ways,

historically managed their relationship with Russia in a pretty stable and predictable way.

So it is special, but it is arguably becoming less special in the sense that it is now becoming more like any other part of NATO's area of operations—an area where we might be tested militarily. The assumption that it would be a backwater, that it would not be part of an overall conflict, is one that we and the Arctic nations now feel much less confident about now.

What do we worry about in particular, and how has that changed? In some ways, there are relatively few Arctic flashpoints; there are no territorial disputes, and there are relatively few obvious ways in which conflict would break out in the Arctic. It is much more a question of the role that the High North and the Arctic might play in a broader conflict between the Alliance and Russia and, in particular, the strategic importance of the Kola Peninsula to Russia, both as the base for many of its nuclear forces, its submarines and many of its bombers, but also as the base for its conventional but nuclear-powered submarines and its Northern Fleet.

That speaks to two very strategic challenges for NATO. One is making sure that the Atlantic stays open and that we can reinforce across the Atlantic in a crisis, but also being able to manage nuclear escalation if we got into a conflict. In that respect, the Arctic is becoming more important to us. Essentially, we are trying to work out what we need to be able to do as an alliance to manage the problems that might flow from that. We will come on to Sweden and Finland, but obviously the accession of Finland—and, we very much hope, shortly Sweden—also changes the politics, the geography and the military calculations in quite important ways.

The other theme that I will keep coming back to in this discussion, hopefully, is that there is a role for the UK in all this. The UK is not an Arctic nation itself—it is a near-Arctic nation, if you like—but it is one of the nations that has retained and invests in the military capability to operate in the High North. That is really quite an important role, which I think we will come back to.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is a very good background.

Q151 **Lord Anderson of Swansea:** We are indeed touching on Finland and Sweden, one of the unintended consequences of the invasion. What is the timetable for Sweden's full accession? What hopes remain? What will Finland and Sweden bring to the table in personnel and matériel? Finally, NATO, as we saw at Vilnius, is clearly concentrating more on the Arctic. Is there now seriously an Arctic tilt, a greater concentration by NATO in the Arctic?

Angus Lapsley: First, on Sweden, at the Vilnius Summit last week President Erdoğan of Turkey said publicly that he intended now to send Sweden's instrument of ratification to the Turkish Parliament. Obviously,

it is up to the Turkish Parliament to decide how quickly it handles that. The general expectation is that it will take a few more weeks, maybe into the autumn, before that happens, but it could speed up. We are very optimistic that that will happen quickly, and it needs to happen: we want to get on with fully absorbing Sweden into the Alliance.

On what the accession of Sweden and Finland means, what they bring to the table, I would say that it has four main implications. The first is just geography. I understand that the committee is going up to the High North at some point, and one of the things that will strike you there is just how different the geography is, how big it is; the distances involved up there are very considerable. Finland and Sweden change the geography of NATO quite profoundly. Finland adds about 1,300 kilometres of land border with Russia, so it almost doubles NATO's land border with Russia. Sweden means that pretty much all of the Baltic Sea now has a NATO shoreline, the exceptions being Kaliningrad and St Petersburg and the area around there. Sweden is also extremely important to the geography of how you would reinforce and sustain Finland and the Baltic states. So both those countries give NATO strategic depth. For Norway, in particular, it is extremely good news. It has always assumed it would need to fight very closely with Finland and Sweden, and now that geography becomes an integral part of NATO.

The second way in which it changes things is that there has been very close planning between Sweden, Finland, and Norway for some time now. This allows us to bring that planning into the mainstream of NATO planning, which means that countries like the UK, the US and others that play a role in the region can now do that planning as one.

Thirdly, it has implications for how we organise command and control for the Alliance. You may be aware that the Alliance has three what we call Joint Force Commands—one in Norfolk, Virginia, one in Brunssum in the Netherlands and one in Naples. We now have an opportunity to build up Joint Force Headquarters-Norfolk, which controls the Atlantic, the UK, Iceland and Norway. SACEUR's intention is that it will also take on Sweden and Finland as soon as possible, which means that we will build a genuinely joint headquarters that can look at the High North, the Arctic, and the Atlantic as one piece.

Lastly, there are definitely implications for capability. Finland has one of Europe's most formidable armed forces—in particular its army and its air force. It has a different structure to western European armed forces, because it relies very heavily on reserves and conscripts, but it has a lot of mass and can bring to bear quite a formidable land force—in particular artillery, and integrated air and missile defence. It has a very potent air force as well, which is also now moving to F-35.

Lord Anderson of Swansea: Interoperable?

Angus Lapsley: It is becoming increasingly interoperable. It has been on a journey now for the last 10, 15 years through the European Union, through the Joint Expeditionary Force—the JEF—of the UK, and through

its co-operation with Finland and Norway. It has got to the point where we are very comfortable that it will be fully interoperable with NATO from the get-go.

Sweden has a slightly differently structured force. It has a potent Baltic-facing navy. It does not have a blue-water navy, but it is very effective in the Baltic. It also has a pretty flexible air force and land force that are specialised for the High North, among other things. So both nations can look after themselves extremely well, but they will also bring capability to the Alliance as a whole, especially as they move to planning to provide forces that are also expeditionary, which is a shift for both of them. Under the NATO planning process, we will require them to have some forces that can be used elsewhere in Europe.

On your last question about whether there is an Arctic tilt, I am not sure I would put it that way, because I could just as easily say that there is a Black Sea tilt, there is a Baltic Sea tilt, an eastern Mediterranean tilt, or there is a tilt towards the Suwałki Gap. There are several areas of geography that NATO is refocusing on now from a collective defence perspective, and the Arctic is one of those. We need to do more in the Arctic, but I would not want to say that we are moving towards the Arctic away from other areas, if that makes sense.

The Chair: Lord Soames' question leads straight on from that.

Q152 **Lord Soames of Fletching:** Mr Lapsley, have you detected any change in Russia's strategic or military posture in response to Finland's—and soon to be Sweden's—accession to NATO? Has it already manifested itself?

Angus Lapsley: Not particularly, so far. So far, we have seen quite a lot of the forces that were in the Kola and were facing Norway and Finland redeployed to Ukraine. So a lot of the land forces have been sent to Ukraine and have fared pretty badly. In the short term, the Norwegians and the Finns see less of a Russian land presence opposite them. We have not seen much change to the posture and the capabilities of the Northern Fleet. As Russia cannot move forces into the Black Sea because of the Montreux convention, we have not seen a big movement there.

In the longer term, our assumption is that the Russian army has been quite badly beaten up in Ukraine, and that continues. At least until Russia can reconstitute its land forces, it is likely to lean more heavily on the air and maritime strategic assets that it has, and a lot of those are in the Kola Peninsula in the High North. So, in some ways, that part of Russia may become relatively more important to Russia's strategic posture than it is now.

The Chair: Obviously I understand about naval forces, but is it surprising that more air force capability was not moved south?

Angus Lapsley: I do not know if it is surprising. Generally, what we see is that the Russian air force has not been fully committed to the war in Ukraine, for all sorts of reasons. It may be that they do not want it

beaten up too much and it just has not been that effective, but the Russian air force is one of the services we see being largely held back.

Q153 Lord Stirrup: Of course, we could add that a great deal of the Russian air power in the north is long-range air forces, so rather more strategic.

Some of our witnesses have suggested that the conundrum facing NATO in the Arctic and the High North today is very similar to the conundrum it faced throughout the Cold War, which is: how do you provide a really robust, credible deterrent posture without sparking unintended consequences, such as a commensurate build-up on the other side and the emergence of the Arctic as a sort of bristling armed camp, with all the risks that that involves?

So there are two sides to the question for you. First, does NATO have the capabilities that it needs to provide that kind of robust deterrence posture in the north? What more should it perhaps be doing, providing? On the other side of the coin, how, in policy terms, do you strike a balance between that credible, robust deterrence, but not, as I say, turn the whole area into an army camp?

Angus Lapsley: To some extent, that is a military judgment, and I would defer to you on that, to be perfectly honest. From the pol-mil perspective, if you like, NATO is always very clear that we are a defensive alliance, and we are not seeking to box Russia in or contain her as such. What we most need to do in the Arctic and the High North—and there may be some other bits of geography where this holds too—is to demonstrate that we are capable of operating there. If we need to be there, we can be there, and we will not be intimidated out of regions. This is something we have seen with a number of allies, particularly the UK and the US, for example operating in the Barents Sea more over the last couple of years, as much as anything to demonstrate that we can still do this. We practise this, and we know how to operate here, and you are not going to declare that part of geography a Russian-only zone. So being there in a predictable, consistent way is quite important.

In terms of the actual capabilities that we need to invest in to be effective in the region, there are some capabilities that we know that NATO as a whole needs more of at the moment or needs to develop. We know that we are short of integrated air and missile defence. We know we need more deep fires. We know that we need to invest in the digital underpinning of command and control so that you can command and control in a genuinely multi-domain way. We know that we need to make progress on logistics. Almost all those areas are more challenging in the Arctic, because the distances are so huge and the conditions in which you operate are more extreme.

You can see some trends. There is a lot of interest in how you do ISR—surveillance and reconnaissance—in such a vast area. That may be partly through using more UAVs or through using space-based assets, so you are seeing a trend in that direction. A number of nations have been focusing quite hard on making sure that their amphibious capabilities are

usable up there. Certainly, the US, the UK, the Netherlands and Norway have focused on that.

The other area of capability that we are quite interested in is how you maintain air operations in a highly contested environment. Of course, both the Swedes and the Finns think about this a lot. The Finns and the Swedes both practise dispersed air operations, operating aircraft from roads and back-up runways and things like that. I think the UK made an announcement last week that it was thinking of getting back into that game as well.

So in many ways what we need up there is what we are doing elsewhere in NATO, but it needs to be adapted to the particular circumstances. Politically, it is about finding the right balance between demonstrating intent and capability and not being unnecessarily provocative, and that is a day-to-day art.

Q154 Lord Stirrup: Just to throw in a wider strategic question that is relevant to deterrence and, indeed, to more fighting capability in the Arctic and more widely, and is of great interest to this committee, how concerned are you, in your position, about the shortage across NATO of munitions, ammunition stockpiles, and the industrial capacity in western nations to restore those and, indeed, to provide the other sort of capability that we are talking about that is necessary in the High North?

Angus Lapsley: We are concerned, and that is why both those issues—stockpiles and the industrial capacity that supports them—have become big points of interest for NATO. They came out very strongly from the summit.

On what NATO can do in that area, first, we are trying to make sure that we set a very clear demand signal to allies. We know there is a big spike at the moment coming from the war in Ukraine, but when that spike subsides we will find that we are at a level that was higher than where we were before. For example, we have recently adjusted the targets that we set allies for what we call battle-decisive munitions. These are the higher-end bombs, missiles, et cetera. We have done that precisely so they can start doing the planning nationally and they know where they have to be, and they can send that demand signal to their industries.

When it comes to industry itself, it is mostly allies that have to do this, but NATO can help a bit. We have mechanisms for joint procurement. The NSPA—the NATO Support and Procurement Agency—is now handling several billion dollars' worth of procurement contracts on behalf of allies. We can also help critically through standardisation. One issue that we have faced in the last couple of decades is that, because they have not been under quite so much pressure, a lot of allies have basically gone their own way with their own industry, and everybody's bit of kit is bespoke to them and so is not very interoperable with others. We discovered, for example, that 155-millimetre ammunition could not be used on different guns, et cetera. We are also driving quite hard on standardisation.

So those are the ways in which we are trying to help it, but we recognise that this is quite a big challenge for the Alliance at the moment.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: Could you give us an illustration of joint procurement?

Angus Lapsley: The kind of projects that the NATO Support and Procurement Agency tends to take on are often munitions procurement. So you might get a group of 10 or 11 allies, particularly smaller ones, that would not be able to bulk buy themselves, that will go to the NSPA and say, "We all need some 155-millimetre shells", or, "We need some rifle bullets. Please go off and buy us—" whatever the number is. We are using that a lot now and it has been taking off in the last couple of months.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem: That is, perhaps, at a different level from aircraft or tanks or things of that kind.

Angus Lapsley: Yes. The more complicated, larger-scale, longer-term procurement projects like that would tend to be nationally managed.

Q155 **Lord Robertson of Port Ellen:** It is not particularly relevant to this, but I declare my interest as an adviser to BP.

Can I turn to China? The communiqué from Vilnius addresses China quite seriously as a major problem and challenge. We have had evidence before the committee about an increasing interest by China in the Arctic region, especially given the weakness of Russia and its dependence, economically and politically, on China as a whole. What does NATO make of the Chinese interest in the Arctic, especially the Russian Arctic? We have been warned by a number of people coming here that we should not think about the Arctic as one monolith, but what assessment have you made of the Russian Arctic, particularly in relation to China?

Angus Lapsley: NATO's primary concern is Russia and terrorism. So far, we have not identified China as a threat to NATO. We have recognised that China is a systemic challenge; it is changing the global balance of power, it is changing technology, and it is raising all sorts of issues in the Indo-Pacific region that are very similar to the issues that we are grappling with in NATO.

As you rightly pointed out, we have not yet seen evidence of China's military power extending into the European Arctic. I think you would need a military judgment on when that might be possible. It turns out that, actually, operating in the Arctic is really difficult and requires a lot of investment and practice. I do not think that Chinese warships would necessarily just want to pop up in the Arctic; I think they would find it hard going. But we have a long-term eye on the prospect of China starting to expand its presence, for two reasons.

First, there is a possible development of Chinese trade across the northern route, so coming up through the Bering Straits and across northern Russia and down into the Atlantic. I say "possible", because I

have heard differing accounts as to how likely that really is; some people argue that, as the Arctic warms, it becomes harder to navigate there because the ice breaks up and it is less predictable and becomes more dangerous to navigate that route. But that is one possible strategic interest for China: that it starts seeing trade across that northern route.

The other reason is that China's nuclear arsenal is developing very fast and at large scale. It is possible at some point that, like Russia, it seeks to use the Arctic as a bastion for its nuclear forces. Again, we have not seen that yet.

China has identified itself as a near-Arctic nation. It has set out the fact that it has ambitions to develop its presence there. We will keep a close eye on that, but it is something we see in the longer term rather than now.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Does it not make sense to look to the longer term? The Chinese certainly think in much longer terms, and their capability of building ships that will be able to navigate the Northern Sea Route, their ability to command satellites that have strategic importance at the top of the world, and of course the connectivity of undersea cables, means that you must assume that China has a longer-term ambition based again on the weakness of Russia and its dependence on them at the moment.

Angus Lapsley: I agree. When I talk about NATO defence planning, there is an immediate operational planning of what forces we need right now in place doing what. We look 10, 15, 20 years out at what kind of capabilities we want allies to invest in. By and large, if we get the capabilities right to handle Russia in the European Arctic, we will have the capabilities right to handle any appearance of China in that region as well. Areas like long-range ISR and submarine and anti-submarine warfare generally are all areas of long-term capability interest to NATO.

Q156 **Lord Boateng:** Mr Lapsley, I think you said China has shown no military interest in the European Arctic. Is that right?

Angus Lapsley: As far as I am aware; I know that Chinese ships have certainly come up into the Baltic on the way to St Petersburg. I am not aware of them having been up to the High North yet, but I may be wrong on that.

Lord Boateng: I ask, because the Chinese have long made clear, most recently in the 2020 edition of *Science of Military Strategy* coming out of China's PLA National Defence University, which you all know well, that, "Military-civilian mixing is the main way for great powers to achieve a polar military presence". It goes on to say that China should, "Give full play to the role of military forces in supporting polar scientific research and other operations". We know that China or Chinese interests have attempted to buy an abandoned US naval base in Greenland and an inactive Swedish submarine base in Fårösund Island, and they have made various other attempts at acquisition in Lapland and, indeed, in

Sodankylä in Finland. All those seem to indicate a desire to mix the military and civilian applications.

Should we not be concerned about that, not least because the United States suggested in 2019 that “Civilian research could support a strengthened Chinese military presence in the Arctic Ocean”? In 2022, the Biden Administration asserted that China has “used these scientific engagements to conduct dual-use research with intelligence or military applications in the Arctic”. That would suggest to me that NATO really ought to take the Chinese presence in the Arctic in the form that it has taken it to date: with some considerable degree of seriousness.

Angus Lapsley: We do, and we definitely look at those kinds of trends. You will find that the Arctic allies are now very attuned to it and picking it up. Most of the examples you give are probably best dealt with by the ally concerned, looking at what is being bought and what regulatory options it has to manage that. We absolutely take that seriously. My point is that we have not yet seen Chinese military presence being projected into the Arctic, and building forces in the Arctic that could operate successfully up there is quite a steep hill for them to climb.

Lord Boateng: Would you accept that they wish to do so?

Angus Lapsley: I do not think we know that yet. We know that they have an aspiration generally to make themselves a more powerful Arctic nation, to build their presence. Whether that translates at some point into wanting to project hard military power into the region we do not know yet, but we certainly should keep an eye on it.

Lord Boateng: China's military-civilian fusion strategy has that as a specific objective: to support the PLA and ultimately to fuse together China's various national strategies to simultaneously advance security and development goals. That is a policy that President Xi has consistently pursued.

Angus Lapsley: It is one thing to set out a long-term intent to mix civilian and military presence in the Arctic. What I am saying is that we have not yet seen that military presence manifest itself. You are absolutely right that the stated intent is there, and therefore it is one of the things we keep a very close eye on.

Baroness Coussins: Could I just broaden this question out a little further to of other countries' ambitions in the Arctic? We were told by a previous witness to the inquiry that we should not overlook the interests and potential influence of the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE. I wondered if you assessed those interests as purely commercial and economic or whether, in your assessment, there are any potential implications on the defence and security front.

Angus Lapsley: I am not aware of any defence implications that we have picked up yet, which is not to say that there might not be some. The High North is one area of the world where future hydrocarbon finds

are likely, and therefore they will attract interest from quite a wide range of actors. To go to Lord Boateng's point, I do not think any of them have that kind of dual civ-mil approach to the region.

Q157 **Lord Wood of Anfield:** It is very nice to see you. We have heard a lot in the last few weeks about the marine sabotage of critical infrastructure and issues around that, and Secretary-General Stoltenberg recently announced a new Critical Undersea Infrastructure Co-ordination Cell. I wonder if you could just explain a little about the work that will do and how it adds to the work of individual nations, and your assessment of the severity of the threat in this area over the next few years.

Angus Lapsley: Awareness of threats to undersea infrastructure has been growing now for a couple of years; I think the British Prime Minister wrote a report on it before he became a Minister. Certainly, the Atlantic nations in the Alliance have been tracking this more and more closely.

In the last couple of years or so, NATO has also developed an increasingly important role on resilience. One of the points we make to allies is that we do not just need them to have effective military forces; they need to be able to operate in an environment where civilian society and government are able to continue functioning, and that includes things like telecommunications infrastructure or energy infrastructure. We now have a process in NATO that is designed to help allies to plan against civilian resilience, and then we hold them to account on that.

On undersea infrastructure and the purpose of the cell that was set up by the Secretary-General, essentially in the aftermath of the Nord Stream explosion in the Baltic Sea we realised that there was a joining co-ordination function that needed to be picked up. On the one hand, you have NATO's Maritime Command—MARCOM—which sits up in Northwood, which is responsible for overall maritime awareness and can use ships and other assets to maintain that awareness. Then there are private sector operators, most of the time, who are responsible for the physical security of their infrastructure—cables, et cetera—and Governments who have crisis-response, civil emergency-type mechanisms.

In the aftermath of the Nord Stream instrument, we realised there was nobody who was the gearbox between them all so that if a company was worried about something they could put a call through and be put in touch with the right people straightaway, whether in MARCOM or a national Government, and we shared awareness and understanding of what was happening. That is what that cell is doing; it is essentially a joining box.

Some of you might remember, 15 years or so ago, when the European Union set up a counter-piracy mission in the Indian Ocean and PJHQ took on responsibility for running that operation. One of the first things it did was set up a cell that brought the shipping industry into the military headquarters so that they could just talk to each other properly. It turned out that the best way to protect ships from pirates was to tell them where to go and to avoid where the pirates were. It is that sort of idea; it is

basically about improving information flow between industry, the military and civilian authorities.

Q158 **Lord Teverson:** Operation Atalanta worked brilliantly there. Thank you for mentioning that.

From our notes, I understand that, at the beginning of this year, NATO, together with the European Union, established a joint taskforce on resilience and critical infrastructure protection. I do not think we have mentioned that so far today. It would be very useful to understand whether it has an Arctic dimension or where it is going.

Angus Lapsley: We did have a taskforce. I led it on the NATO side. Actually, that was about sharing our assessments of where risk and threat lay to critical infrastructure, and it was the first time we had done that across the two organisations. We look at risk and threat from slightly different perspectives. NATO is obviously concerned with essentially military threat. The EU is more concerned with, for example, the functioning of the single market if infrastructure breaks down, so we have slightly different perspectives.

We did a joint threat assessment and have identified a number of work strands that we will take forward. They are mostly about talking to each other more and making sure that we are information-sharing as much as possible, and that when either side takes a policy initiative, like the cell, we talk to each other and swap notes in a joined-up way. There was a second part to your question.

Lord Teverson: It was really whether that has an Arctic dimension to it.

Angus Lapsley: No, it did not. It was geographically agnostic. In NATO, we have just completed a series of regional resilience assessments, and we have done one for the north, looking at particular issues that we need to make progress on. Those are classified, unfortunately; they are not public documents. But they are all about helping allies to identify particular issues that we need them to make progress on as an alliance.

The Chair: I think Lord Robertson has been thinking hard about what you said and wants to come back on it.

Q159 **Lord Robertson of Port Ellen:** I wanted to come back on the question of Swedish membership and Turkey. I often joke that I spent four years trying to get Sweden and Finland to apply for NATO membership and Vladimir Putin managed it in four weeks, but you indicated a degree of optimism about Turkey's decision here.

I have been reading a commentary by Professor İlter Turan, a very respectable commentator on Turkish affairs, who makes the points that the Grand National Assembly will go into recess now until October, so it will not be available even to take President Erdoğan's recommendation, and that they will probably await the decision on the F-16s before they make the formal decision to endorse. The decision on the F-16s depends on a congressional decision being taken in the United States of America. Are you not being slightly optimistic about Sweden joining the Alliance?

Angus Lapsley: There are a lot of issues wrapped up in that question, which you have clearly thought about quite carefully. At the summit in Vilnius, there was a very clear handshake between the Secretary-General, the Prime Minister of Sweden and the President of Turkey, where the President of Turkey said, "My intention is that this is going to move forward and I want it to happen". As always, I am sure there will be complex domestic politics to work through, but we are confident that it is going to happen.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Good. Let us hope so.

Lord Teverson: Do not underestimate Orbán, though.

Q160 **Lord Soames of Fletching:** Can I ask a further question about the Kola? Is the Russian nuclear fleet as extensively harboured in the Kola as it always was?

Angus Lapsley: Yes, and it has been extensively modernised over the last few decades and continues to get the highest priority in Russian defence spending. It is not just the nuclear fleet; Russia has nuclear-powered conventional submarines, the Severodvinsk-class in particular, which are highly capable and very modern submarines. They have never stopped modernising that part of their armed forces.

Q161 **Lord Anderson of Swansea:** I have a question about the pipelines, the critical infrastructure. It was in February this year that the cell was formed, but there were several well-publicised examples of the Russians using civilian ships for clearly tracking the underwater cables and so on. Was there any co-ordination beforehand? It seems rather late, given the vulnerability of those cables and the immense damage that could be done to us if they were to be sabotaged.

Angus Lapsley: As I said, in particular, the Atlantic nations have been co-ordinating and talking to each other quite intensely about this threat for some years now; it is not that new. Perhaps there is more awareness of this across NATO as a whole, as an alliance, now and what it might mean, but the threat of the Russian RERP programme, as it is known, is pretty well-known now.

Q162 **The Chair:** Can I ask a question that is connected to but not exclusively about the Arctic? Underlying all your plans, and bringing on possibly two new countries and interoperability, et cetera, is money. To what extent are you confident that members of the Alliance will contribute what they say they will? Secondly, one would have thought there would be a change since Russia invaded Ukraine. Has there been?

Angus Lapsley: You are absolutely right. All this modernisation or reset or re-engineering of collective defence in the Alliance is going to cost money and we have to be realistic about that. The pledge that was made at the Wales Summit in 2014 was that allies would reach 2% of GDP by 2024. At the moment, we are at 11 allies, 12 including Sweden. Looking at the announcement that allies are making, I am optimistic that by the

time we get to the Washington Summit next year it will be a lot better than that.

There is some really quite serious money going into defence in Europe now, particularly as some wealthier countries in Europe—Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark—are all committing to 2% and have credible plans to get there in the next year or so.

The Chair: They had committed before.

Angus Lapsley: They had, but there is a difference between committing and budgeting. They had committed to the target, but they had no plans to actually raise the money and spend it. Now they do, which is different.

Looking forward—we tried to capture this in the new defence investment pledge that we agreed at the Vilnius summit—2% is now not an aspiration; it is a minimum. All allies need to be spending at least 2%, and quite a few allies will need to spend a lot more. It might be because they have historical legacies that they need to overcome or because they are doing more than one thing at once. That is the case with the UK, for example, with nuclear modernisation, a new combat air system, recapitalising the Army, and AUKUS all happening at the same time.

Those of you who followed this debate over the decades will know that it has often been a debate as to whether we really do have to spend 2% to keep the Americans happy. What encourages me is that that is not the debate in Europe now; it is that we need to spend at least 2% in order to meet the military requirements that we now face. That is quite a different debate than the one we have had in the past.

Q163 **Lord Stirrup:** Since we are lucky enough to have you captive for a short while, can I probe a wider issue with you? My perception is that, for the last decade and more, the UK military has not been placing nearly enough emphasis on manning key positions in NATO with the right sort of people. I am not just talking about the top post now but key positions in the engine rooms across the Alliance that drive so much of the work and the policy, and my own service is probably guiltiest in this regard. Saving your good self, do you think that the UK is devoting enough talent and numbers on an enduring basis in the key areas of NATO to be able to influence Alliance policy in this rapidly shifting world, and all the dynamics that the Alliance is undergoing, as it should?

Angus Lapsley: I see British officers and sometimes British civil servants making a real impact in NATO. General Sir Tim Radford, who steps down this week, I think, as DSACEUR, was critical in pulling together the new family of planning, which underpins a lot of what we are doing. He will be replaced by Admiral Keith Blount, who has been MARCOM for the last couple of years, and I think he is the first admiral to take on that DSACEUR role. The number two in air command, Air Vice-Marshal Johnny Stringer, is playing a hugely important role at the moment. You see a lot of high impact from British service personnel and civil service personnel in the Alliance, and we are always a strong voice around the NAC table,

but you are right: like other allies, we face considerable challenges in finding enough people to fill the billets, so to speak.

The NATO command structure—the higher-level commands that are paid for and funded by NATO itself—needs to grow over the next couple of years. We need to expand JFC-Norfolk. SHAPE is being rebuilt and reconstituted as a war-fighting headquarters capable of conducting multi-domain operations; there are other commands, like the logistics command in Ulm, that need investment. We will need to find officers who can fill those jobs. That will be quite demanding for the UK, as it is for other countries.

Q164 Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: The UK Treasury has always been extremely parsimonious, taking a lead in parsimony in terms of resourcing NATO. Having signed up to the Vilnius communiqué with all the ambitions that are now newly outlined in that, do you think there is any possibility the United Kingdom might retreat from some of this parsimonious attitude it has to funding what NATO does centrally?

Angus Lapsley: My job is to keep pressure on all allies at the moment and that is what I do.

The Chair: Anything else while we have Mr Lapsley here? He has about four minutes. No. Some of the most recent questions are probably outside your bailiwick, but you made a valiant attempt to answer them, and we are very grateful. We will send you a transcript for your review and, with renewed thanks, I declare that this public session closed.