HOUSE OF LORDS

International Relations and Defence Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The implications of the war in Ukraine for the UK's ground forces (including size and training)

Wednesday 24 April 2024

3.15 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Ashton of Hyde (The Chair); Lord Alderdice; Lord Bruce of Bennachie; Baroness Coussins; Baroness Crawley; Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie; Lord Grocott; Lord Houghton of Richmond; Lord Robertson of Port Ellen; Lord Soames of Fletching.

Evidence Session No. 5 Heard in Public Questions 43 - 56

Witnesses

I: General (ret'd) Sir Nick Carter GCB CBE DSO ADC Gen, former Chief of the Defence Staff; Dr Peter Roberts, Senior Fellow, Centre for Public Understanding of Defence and Security, University of Exeter.

Examination of witnesses

General Sir Nick Carter and Dr Peter Roberts.

Q43 **The Chair:** Good afternoon to General Sir Nick Carter in Bahrain and Dr Roberts here in London. Thank you very much for being with us. General, I know that you have only 30 minutes or thereabouts before you are called away. Dr Roberts knows that. He will add something if he has to; otherwise, he will wait and we will concentrate on you. We are very pleased that you can be with us today.

We are focusing on the implications of the war in Ukraine for the UK's ground forces today. This is the fifth public evidence session we have had on the implications of the war in Ukraine for UK defence. This is broadcast live on Parliament's website and a transcript will be taken. Afterwards, we will send you a transcript to which you can make small corrections, if necessary.

I remind members that when they speak they should declare any interests they may have. My wife is a shareholder in BAE Systems.

It would be very useful if the witnesses could make a very brief introduction about themselves when they answer the first question.

With no further ado, can I start with General Sir Nick? We have heard throughout our inquiry that this is the new age of industrial warfare and about the need to demonstrate the importance of "mass" to counter attrition. What does that suggest to you for future force design and, particularly, the size of the British Army? To what extent is the lesson of the importance of mass applicable to UK defence in general?

General Sir Nick Carter: Thank you and good afternoon, everybody. By way of introduction, I was Chief of Defence Staff until the end of 2021, so, essentially, I have been out of service for the past couple of years.

In answer to the question, we need to be careful about learning too many lessons too quickly and to be particular about certain lessons. Although the war has been under way for over two years now, one does need to reflect a bit on the particular circumstances associated with this war. Yes, it has demonstrated that mass is important, because what has happened is that Russia has used a significant amount of human capacity to overwhelm Ukraine on parts of the battlefield, but we also need to recognise that we will fight at that scale and level of intensity probably—maybe certainly—as part of the NATO alliance. If you aggregate all the land forces in the NATO alliance, I would be surprised if that did not provide adequate mass for many of the opponents that we will be up against.

You inferred that there was a question or two to ask about the size of the British Army, and, yes, I do think the size of the British Army has fallen too low and below critical mass. As the architect of Army 2020, when General Nick Houghton was then Chief of Defence Staff, we sized the British Army against its ability to deliver a warfighting division, which was

the requirement from NATO, and a second division at slightly lower readiness, also for NATO.

In order to achieve that, the minimum number of human beings that would be necessary was 82,000 regulars and 30,000 reservists. In the defence review of 2019-20 the decision was taken to reduce the size of the British Army to 73,000. I think at that point it was probably necessary to go back and ask some more profound questions rather than simply salami slicing and, therefore, undermining the integrity of the force design from 2011 and the Army 2020 design, and, for that matter, hollowing out the Regular Army rather significantly.

Dr Peter Roberts: I am an author and researcher. I spent some time in the military and RUSI. I would add only two points to what Sir Nick has said.

First, if you have seen one war, you have seen one war. Ukraine is but one war. If you look at the other conflicts across the past 30 years, you will see that mass has been important for military forces in all of them. Indeed, if you look at Israel, Yemen, Sudan, Mali, or anywhere around the world where conflict is going on at the moment, mass is important. Mass is not about attrition, industrialised warfare or position; it is as important for manoeuvre as it is for any other military strategy you try to take. The idea that somehow you can get around this requirement for mass and capabilities goes against what we know from history.

Secondly, we need to understand that in terms of numbers Ukraine outnumbered the Russian invaders by seven to one at the start of the campaign in many areas. It was not that Russia had overwhelming numbers. Russia used its numbers in very fixed ways, which we really understand, and Ukraine did very well in using mass on the defensive, but at a ratio of seven to one. That is starting to reverse this year and that will bring about a different dynamic.

The implications of that for the British Army are really significant, particularly when we start to understand the force ratios—which perhaps we can go into a little later—and the number of supporting elements to the number of frontline bayonets, as it were. Traditionally, in the Second World War this was three to one, and we are seeing it move towards five or even 10 to one in modern combat situations. That changes the dynamic for whatever you require, and it is certainly not reflected in NATO's force posture that we would see in the land environment.

The Chair: I would like to use the General's time as best we can, so I move on to Lord Robertson.

Q44 **Lord Robertson of Port Ellen:** I am senior counsellor with the Cohen Group in Washington. That is my declaration of interest. General Carter, it is good to have you here on screen today.

I want to try to draw a broader lesson from what is happening in Ukraine. I refer to the apparent fear on our side of escalation, which seems to be inhibiting the West in supporting Ukraine from giving it the appropriate

ammunition and equipment to counter that mass on the other side. Do you believe we are more inhibited by the fear of escalation to the extent that it is damaging the cause of Ukraine?

General Sir Nick Carter: That is probably fair. What we have seen is a process of incremental escalation from day one of the war through to the present day. You will remember that right at the very beginning, when Poland offered Ukraine some Russian fighter jets, there was a lot of worry that that would lead to significant escalation and, therefore, the NATO alliance decided that it would be inappropriate for Poland to do that. Of course, we now find ourselves training the Ukrainian air force on F16s.

The big question that probably needs to be asked is: what is the overall strategy here? What does defeat and victory look like? Until we have had a proper conversation about that, it is very difficult to know what our tolerances are in terms of what we are going to offer Ukraine to achieve what we define, and they help us to define, as defeat and victory. That is why I think we have seen a bit of a process of incremental escalation, as we have in a sense tested Russian tolerances and red lines as we have gradually given slightly more equipment. But it makes it really difficult for the Ukrainians to plan their campaign and understand what the overall strategy should be for developing their military capability to achieve the objectives that perhaps they believe are appropriate, and maybe we should have a discussion about whether we agree with that.

So I think it is a more complex question than simply our fear of escalation. It would have been helpful, maybe in a smoke-filled room, to have had a conversation about what defeat and victory look like, because then you can work back from that to understand your tolerances and what risk you are prepared to take in relation to escalation as a whole.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Might it be possible to devise a strategy that would persuade the Russians that they might escalate to the point where a major confrontation between NATO and Russia would take place, and that might inhibit some of the things that they are doing?

General Sir Nick Carter: I agree. To be fair to the policymakers, right at the outset there was a sort of war game around the NSC table while I was still CDS on what would happen if Russia did invade. At that stage we were very clear that an obvious objective was to avoid World War Three. That is entirely understandable in the way that this has played out, but I still believe that without really understanding what our overall objective is in clear terms it is very difficult to know what you are prepared to give the Ukrainians to achieve those objectives.

Dr Peter Roberts: Discussion about escalation in Washington is very different from that in Europe. There is, and has been for the past two years, a paranoia in Washington that shapes all decisions made there.

The Chair: Thank you for being brief. We will definitely come back to you in greater detail later.

Q45 **Lord Alderdice:** I am John Alderdice. I am executive chairman of the

Changing Character of War Centre at Pembroke College, Oxford.

General Sir Nick, if I understand you correctly, you said earlier that you felt the size of the British Army had been reduced to a level that perhaps does not realistically match current and future threats. Please correct me if I am wrong about that, but you said you felt that the potential total provision by NATO might well be appropriate. Can I press you a little bit? We have had a number of statements from NATO members talking in general terms about things like conscription and the need to increase their numbers. Does that suggest that some of our NATO colleagues do not believe that overall NATO numbers are actually sufficient?

General Sir Nick Carter: The straight answer is that I do not know. When you have a conversation about conscription, so much of it depends on what your national strategy is and where you sit geographically. It is entirely understandable that a country such as Finland, or the Baltics for that matter, would want to have conscription, given where they sit and given that I suspect their initial defence will be a porcupine-style defence where people leap out of their bedrooms, with their weapons from under their beds, and away they go. If you sit where the UK or, for that matter, France sits, you have a rather different perspective on the need for conscription.

If you aggregate all the numbers of regular forces in NATO, perhaps linked to those that are under conscription if they are in Norway, Finland or Sweden, and you look at all the resources available to NATO, I think that answers the question about mass. I also think that when we are talking about force ratios and all the rest of it so much depends on the character of the conflict you are in. What we have relearned from the war in Ukraine is that the nature of war does not change but the character of conflict evolves. That was why I said in answer to the very first question that one needs to be careful about what lessons one learns from Ukraine, because there are already some very relevant lessons that we can deduce, but also things that are particular to that campaign.

Dr Peter Roberts: I do not think the numbers for NATO add up in the way many of us expect them to, which is why we see lots of nations being more concerned. The interoperability of everything from ammunition to potable water is not what it once was across NATO. Therefore, the interoperability of units to be able to operate together in a formation is less than it has been previously. I do not think that NATO land forces have as much capability as they had before, and those that experience this at the sharp end, such as Poland, are spending a huge amount of money to re-equip and recapitalise their land forces. We need to be very grateful to them for bearing the brunt in becoming NATO's front line of the future.

Q46 **The Chair:** We visited Finland at the end of last year in an inquiry on the Arctic. We talked about the fact that Finland could put 640,000 soldiers into the field in a number of weeks because of conscription. They have to do six months. I am interested in whether it is useful in modern warfare to have a soldier with six months' training who has not been in service

except possibly for a week a year. Is that useful?

General Sir Nick Carter: If you look at what is happening in both Russia and Ukraine now, the armies in being when the war started have been decimated in many ways, so they are having to rebuild. There are people now on the front line who have not had much training in either of those armies. So I think it depends on the timing of the war and what occurs in it.

I take slight issue with what Dr Roberts said. When referring to mass, I am talking about the number of human beings; I am not talking about capability as such. When you look at the number of human beings and aggregate them, I do not think we would have too many complaints. I agree with him that whether they can fight together is a different question. We have not exercised at scale since the end of the Cold War in NATO. There was a large exercise this year, but, frankly, it probably was not an exercise that tested some of the things that Russia and Ukraine have learned over the course of the past couple of years.

Q47 **Lord Bruce of Bennachie:** You said earlier that you thought the Army was being reduced to too small a size, regardless of the wider discussion. I want to ask about recruitment and retention. At the moment, there are quite a lot of issues about management within the forces, particularly the Army, which is discouraging recruitment and retention, and the outsourcing of recruitment to Capita. We have heard that sometimes people are withdrawing their applications because they are waiting so long for them to be processed. Do you think more could be done to improve recruitment and retention? In particular, do you think that perhaps in the case of the Army, or any of the forces, it would be better if it was taken back in-house on the grounds that serving forces are much better at motivating recruits than independent private contractors?

General Sir Nick Carter: This is a very complex issue. In my time as head of the Army I inherited the contract with Capita. I had to work extremely hard with it to try to make it work. One learned a lot about the failings of that particular outsourcing at that time. It is complex. I will give you an example.

When Nick Houghton and I joined the Army, we would have gone to a recruiting office and probably would have had a medical with a military doctor. That military doctor was not subject to litigation like a civilian doctor and, therefore, would be more likely to take a risk. If you said that you had childhood asthma they would probably ignore it and let you come in. As head of the Army, I found that almost the longest pole in the tent was the medical process and the way in which it was not prepared to take any risks with even the most enthusiastic of recruits.

I also agree with you that it makes sense to try to use the soldiers who are serving in the Army to help recruit their successors, because the young are much more likely to be influenced by their peer group and respect people who are already serving and perhaps understand what

they are talking about. I think that having more military people involved in the recruiting process is a good thing.

Having said all that, we also need to acknowledge that the place of work and, therefore, the recruiting process associated with it has become much more digitised than it was when I was growing up and joining the Army. One has to recognise that there is probably a balance between the two things. One thing that is for certain is that the young do not want to hang around. If they have to wait for more than, say, three or four months to join the Army, they will withdraw their applications. We have to be much clearer about them getting in and getting in quickly if we are to hook people and pull them through the system. There is no doubt that the duration from initial application through to recruit training is too long, for all the various reasons I have just described.

Q48 **Baroness Coussins:** I would like to ask about the current state of the Reserve Forces. Your review was published in 2021. I understand that there has not yet been a response from the Government. In the light of the war in Ukraine, can you say whether you would now add to or change any of the recommendations you made in that 2021 report, and, more broadly, how the Army could better train and utilise the Reserves?

General Sir Nick Carter: I have always been a very strong advocate of the Reserve. Indeed, when I took over as head of the Army, one of the things that I put a great deal of effort into was the implementation of the Reserve review, which I think Lord Houghton knows a little bit about. The Army 2020 structure that we had was very much dependent on the 30,000 reservists who were there to be integrated into the regular structure to provide the two divisions that I described by way of our commitment to NATO.

There is no doubt that since then, the effort that has gone into the Reserve has diminished, as has the amount of resources applied to it. That was why, when I was Chief of Defence Staff, we asked Lord Lancaster, formerly Minister for the Armed Forces, to do the review you describe that was published in 2021. That review had some extremely sensible proposals in it that need to be implemented as quickly as possible. They variously include redefining the Regular Reserve as a Strategic Reserve. Members of the committee will know that, broadly speaking, there are about 200,000 ex-regulars across all three services who are liable for mobilisation having served as regular people. If you have a decent databank that understands where those people are located and you can perhaps see them for a day a year, that gives you the core of a very impressive strategic reserve that can be mobilised at short notice in the event of the country requiring them, or having to go to war.

Equally, Lord Lancaster made some very sensible recommendations about what was the Territorial Army but became the Reserve Forces, which fundamentally was about reserves who are used on a routine and regular basis. He also made some very sensible observations about Specialist Reserves. You are right that this thing needs to be published and implemented, because the Reserves are a fundamental part of our

military capability and how we would deter our opponents and pull together the Army that will be necessary once the small Regular Army has been decimated on day one.

Q49 **Lord Soames of Fletching:** Good afternoon, General. Given your strictures about not learning the lessons too quickly, looking at the training programme for the Regular Army and not having had any major manoeuvre or high-intensity warfare practice, as it were, since the end of the Cold War, what is your feeling about training now, looking at Ukraine and the use of a wide range of alternative high-tech equipment? Do we do enough training with the new technologies, such as drones and goodness knows what else? What is your view about the general standard of training for the regular forces?

General Sir Nick Carter: Like so much, not least our recruiting system, it has suffered from a lack of resources. We need to recognise that if the Army is not engaged in combat operations, as it was throughout the first 15 years of this century, then it is training through which the Army generates its combat ethos and ability to fight. Of course, that plays straight into its ability to deter our opponents and win on that battlefield as well. The reality is that there has been high-intensity training, but at a relatively low level, which we would call battlegroup level, which essentially is around one regimental formation of around 1,500 to 2,500 soldiers.

What we have learned from what we have seen in Ukraine is that warfare at scale—we answered questions about mass earlier—requires people to understand how you move large formations of land forces around the battlefield and make sure they do not all end up in a very large traffic jam, as I think we saw towards the end of February and beginning of March as Russian forces tried to find their way south to Kiev. That is basic staff work that we all grew up doing in the Cold War but which we have not practised since then. These are the sorts of exercises you need to understand if you are serious about fighting at scale.

Secondly, you are exactly right that technology has changed the character of warfare. In changing the character of warfare, it needs to change the character of our training. There are now a lot of very smart technologies, not least virtual technologies, which can help you with simulation in a much more sophisticated way than might have been the case 15 years ago. The answer is that the Army needs to embrace those. The simulators that the Army has have not been hugely updated over the course of the past 10 to 15 years, again because of the shortage of resources. The sorts of technologies that we deduce from what we have seen in Ukraine, such as air defence, drones, electronic warfare and robots more broadly, need to be integrated into the training as well.

The answer is that it requires attention and the application of modern technology, which the young now understand much better than we do. I sense they will respond to that sort of training in a much more effective way, but we need to remember what it is about. It is about the combat ethos of the British Army and its ability to fight. The reality is that we

have always trained well and as a result we have always had extremely professional output in combat operations at the lower tactical levels, and that is something we must never lose.

Dr Peter Roberts: I am a big fan of the British Army's new land training system, the LTS, which will give every sub-unit—300 of them or so across the British Army—10 weeks' continuous dedicated training, which takes them from tier 1 training, making sure everyone has their basic skills up to standard, right the way through to combined arms training. Every unit in the British Army will do that every year. Every unit will have 10 weeks' dedicated training every year. That is a phenomenal move that we have not seen for decades, and that is before you get to the tier 3 high-end stuff.

That stuff is being implemented right now. We saw the first unit go through last year. We are seeing units that have never had any formal training in warfare skills over the past three or four years now going into that system and moving through to come out at a readiness and capability level that we have not seen hitherto. That system, run by Major General Chris Barry, director of land warfare in Warminster, does things like electronic warfare. You can go there and see how they operate. The signatures on the battlefield are very different where you see them. They are monitored constantly. Both IR and EW signatures[1] are looked for to see whether they can map them. It has changed completely how infantry and armoured formations disguise and operate on the battlefield. It is a really impressive thing to see now.

That change is coming; those lessons from Ukraine are being learned, as well as the ones coming from Yemen or Israel. Those are being put together.

The one thing they have to do is use technology. There is no question about whether it is useful. Doing live training is just not affordable. We cannot do what the US does, which is to hand over most of Colorado to the US National Training Center and allow it to operate on brigade-style operations for four weeks at a time, and do it properly. We cannot do that any more. We have to do the next best thing, which involves using technology to simulate a load of the stuff that we would want to do live if we could afford it. We just cannot afford to do that. Therefore, we have to go to some of this stuff. None of the people such as Bohemia International, Omnia and all these other great training teams out there who do this stuff will say that this is as good as live training, but they acknowledge that they have to do it because it is not affordable and we do not have the ground space, let alone the money, to do it. I am afraid that is a fact of life.

Q50 **Lord Robertson of Port Ellen:** A lot of space in Ukraine might be available once it is liberated. I want to ask about the equipment budget, which is pretty dire at the moment. The National Audit Office estimates a shortfall of £17 billion. In the light of the experience we have had, or we

1 Thermal and electromagnetic signatures

are seeing in Ukraine, what do we need to do to modernise the equipment for the Army, and how do we do it within existing financial constraints? Do you have any ideas?

General Sir Nick Carter: Maybe the Prime Minister's announcement will go some way to sorting that out. I doubt it, though, because it will take a while to spend the money, if indeed the money comes through. My own view is that the answer is that the British Army is hollowed out not only in terms of manpower but equipment.

It has some very good equipment coming into service, which we must not ignore. Ajax is a much better vehicle than perhaps people might imagine from all the furore we have seen over the past couple of years in the press. Boxer, when it enters service, is excellent, but again numbers matter. The fact that we are going down to only a couple of regiments of tanks is not a good place to be. Even though there were people during the last defence review who thought the tank had expired in terms of its relevance, the reality is that it has not; we still require tanks. We also require artillery at much larger scale than we have had in the past. We also recognise that we need air defence systems, the like of which are not in service either. I do not think we have the electronic warfare capability that we need, and we certainly do not have drones down to the lowest tactical levels that Ukraine and, for that matter, Gaza pretty profoundly teach us we do need.

There is a great deal of additional equipment that one would want to give the British Army if it was going to fight, and that is before you start looking at its stockpiles. One of the lessons that is entirely relevant from what we have seen in Ukraine is how rapidly you go through materiel at the scale of warfare that we have seen played out in Ukraine. We do not have the stockpiles and munitions, frankly, to fight for the length of time that I suspect we would have to fight for.

All of what I have described is very expensive. I do not have a smart way of working out where the money is coming from, or how quickly our defence industry will be able to boot itself up to be able to deliver all of that, but the reality is that, if we are serious about a British Army that can play a proper role in NATO and deter our opponents, those are the sorts of things that we will need to find.

Dr Peter Roberts: The question for me is: what do you want the British Army to do? It has to be stated: do you want it to be a recce-strike complex? Do you want it to be a mech element? Do you want an armoured division that is capable of fighting? Do you want a command at corps level? What do you want it to do? We have swapped between so many of these things that we lack the focus to say, "This is it, and we're investing in that and delivering it".

For me, 4% of GDP spent on the Army is probably not enough—and that is all of it spent on the Army—to recapitalise to the size, level and capability that you need today. All these things that General Nick so rightly talked about are addendums, not replacements. We need to go

back to having anti-tank mines because we do not have enough of those, let alone the fact that the Ukrainians are running out of them. All these things such as combat engineers, all the skills in breaching and all these courses cost money and they take time to deliver, and they are addendums. It will be a huge amount of money, but it comes out from the start, which is the political dictation of what you want the Army to do.

We have lots of ideas about what it should be for, but it has to be dictated as a policy that this is what we need it for and from that we can start talking about equipping and how much it will cost. General Nick's point at the very end was the most important one. How long it will take the industrial base to spin up is the most important part, and we have seen that it cannot do that with the second line of submarines or it cannot build enough frigates, let alone when we get into tank manufacture or artillery shells.

The Chair: General Sir Nick, are you getting anxious? Can I just say thank you very much? It is really appreciated considering your busy schedule. We will continue, but thank you very much for coming today. We will send you a transcript.

General Sir Nick Carter: Thank you. It is a very important piece of work that the committee is doing, which we are very grateful for. Thank you.

The Chair: Professor Roberts, you are on your own, I am afraid.

Lord Houghton of Richmond: I will ask my question now if I can.

The Chair: Yes, of course.

Q51 **Lord Houghton of Richmond:** What I was going to ask him is this, and General Nick hit most of them. Sadly, he is the only ex-CDS we have, and we are told that we cannot report what our witnesses do not tell us. Summarising what he might have said, as a Parthian shot coming from you, what would be the main strategic lessons, the four or five bald points, not just from the perspective of ground forces but the balance of national capabilities or strategic posture in NATO, the responsiveness of the defence industrial base, and the recreation or reinvention of conventional deterrence? What are the meatier things that you think we should put in our report?[2]

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[2] Gen Sir Nick Carter provided the following information in writing after the meeting:

- We need to reinvigorate our defence industrial base and design a procurement system in partnership with the private sector that is genuinely responsive to the advent of rapidly evolving technology.
- We need to address the hollowness of our armed forces including growing relevant existing capabilities and force structure as well as stockpiles.
- We need to improve some capabilities and introduce new capabilities that have been relevant in Ukraine such as Electronic Warfare, Air Defence Interceptors, uncrewed capabilities, data and information exploitation.
- We need to give real meaning to our Reserves and resource them

Dr Peter Roberts: The first one is our intellectual ability and capability to consider things that we thought were heresy before. We have had a way of thinking about how our adversaries will operate and we have built our military forces around that. Largely, those are built on fairy tales. We went down the idea of "shock and awe", which came to us from AirLand Battle, and so we have ended up with this ridiculous thing called multi-domain operations and multi-domain integration. It means absolutely nothing.

We have ended up thinking about wars and combat as the way we want to fight, agnostic of the adversary. We have created a series of structures and processes about how we think about national security that bounds us in the way we are able to react. We cannot come up with response options that sit outside this little glass case that we have placed ourselves in. Everyone else is merrily dancing away around the outside and we are bounded by this way of thinking.

My first big lesson is about our intellectual agility. I do not think at the moment that we have it, certainly not politically. I do not see it militarily at the senior levels of the military. The CGS starts a sensible conversation about demographics and manpower and it turns into a national service knee-jerk reaction. If someone tries to lead us into a mature conversation about some of the big questions we have to have about how we value the importance of national security, it is cuffed off in a *Daily Mail*/*Daily Telegraph* series of soundbites. I do not think that is helpful. We need to elevate this level to the kinds of discussions you want to have, which are: what does deterrence mean? What does credibility mean in military terms today? We have lost that. Our processes and our formulas for how we construct national security have all but disappeared, from the national security level, right across the interactions of announcements by Prime Ministers, which are about signalling to our own population rather than our adversaries: these are the ridiculous sorts of things we are doing these days.

We really need to relearn some of those lessons that we held dear towards the end of the Cold War, when we learned about signalling and how to interact with our adversaries. We really knew what credibility meant. We knew our adversary, which is just the greatest force multiplier ever, and we knew what we were trying to achieve. Some of those things are my number one lesson.

You see that through Ukraine. You saw it going badly wrong in Israel. Ukraine did it very well in turning every intelligence assessment on its head. Yes, we could predict how Russia would go in and attack, and the United States intelligence apparatus did that really well. What it got wrong was how the Russian military would behave, act and perform, and indeed how well Ukraine did in fighting a very slow defence, something

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adequately, this means practising their mobilisation routinely.

- We need to be sure that our overall approach to deterrence - both nuclear and conventional - is fit for purpose given the likely nature of the threat from hostile states whatever the outcome to the war in Ukraine.

that, you will know, General, is a difficult thing to do, particularly when you have no command and control—nothing.

From the political down to the tactical level, you are relying on bicycle riders and bits of paper. None of this digitised battlespace existed. All that stuff is fantasy. There is something about our intellectual agility, and that comes down to the willingness of politicians and senior military to engage in exercises, to use peacetime to get it wrong and to fail, and to be told so in brutal terms, so that they can get it right in wartime. That runs right through this sort of thing and we need to think about it within that.

I know Ed Stringer was here talking about nuclear. Those conversations are also important within this to raise the level of discussion. I am not talking about a discussion with the general population, because I do not think they want to have this discussion. We should not force them into it. We need to have people within the national security apparatus having such open, honest and difficult discussions that they are able to expand their intellectual envelope and not get overloaded when it comes to it. That is the first lesson.

The second one is the lesson about political will, and we see that a lot in Ukraine at the moment. It is absolutely incredible. We have seen it for the past two years. We see it in Israel at the moment, not that we understand it, and we see it in various ways that other people are operating around the world. I am not sure we understand political will or the will to fight here. I am not sure we understand what it means philosophically.

In the UK, and indeed across most of Europe, we think about the will to fight in financial terms. We think about it as 2% or 2.5% of GDP. That is a very lazy way to think about defence of the nation. "How much am I prepared to spend?" It is not that. Do we need to think about it in an emotional way? How do we need to relate to these big concepts? We do not have that. That understanding of the will to fight and the political will is a big one for me.

The third one is resilience. This is thinking about national security not just in terms of our Armed Forces but as our national duty. You see that in the Baltics and Scandinavia. There was a question earlier about the Finns and their ability to put people in the field. I spent some time over Christmas 400 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle operating for a few days up there. The amazing thing about the Finns is that they are the only ones who can survive up there. The fact that they can survive with a gun means they automatically outmatch their adversary in sheer numbers. That is the game of it—who can operate there? It is the same with the Swedes. It is absolutely incredible. I spoke to the former chief of the Swedish army at Christmas. He said he would not let British troops operate up there because, frankly, it was just dangerous. They did not know how to survive. We are far better using those people. It is those skills, that kind of understanding and that kind of resilience.

We have been very comfortable in offloading the responsibility of national security to the military, and then to the police and to the intelligence services, but we do not involve the general population in this. All the announcements that tend to come out from a politician say, "Yes, that's fine. We've got it. We're going to spend a bit more on defence, so don't worry about it. Don't worry because this is where we are geographically. No one can hit you with a missile, so you're fine". I think that is a bit disingenuous and a bit dishonest, perhaps, to the people of Liverpool, London or anywhere else who could get hit by a missile today, and there is no protection for them.

We need to have a conversation with them that says, "These people are the front line, but you own part of this as well", and that slow engagement with the population that says, "You have a responsibility towards this. It's not just, 'We're doing it for you'". It is moving away from the idea that the military stands alone looking after you, it is the beacon of light, it is the front line, it is the guys who stand on a wall, and starting to involve the population in this, making them part of the conversation.

I do not think we are doing that in a very honest way, particularly when we talk about a pre-war era or a world more dangerous than ever before. I do not see the follow-on from that, as in, "And, therefore, this is what it means to you". What action do people take because of that? Do they need to stock up on generators, on three weeks' supply of wood or on water? Do we need to issue pamphlets, as they have done across Europe? I am not saying these things are necessary, but do we need to have a conversation about that? At the moment, they just sit back and say, "Well, the police and the military will handle it, and the intelligence will come out, because we're told GCHQ is amazing". We just need to move on from some of that in terms of resilience and part of that conversation.

The last point from me is that we need to massively recapitalise on our military forces because I do not think they have the credibility that we believe they do in the eyes of our adversaries.

The Chair: It is not an effective deterrent?

Dr Peter Roberts: No, I do not think it is, and we have seen that since 2008 in Georgia.

Q52 **The Chair:** Lady Coussins had a follow-up. I left Lady Crawley out. It was entirely my fault. She will come later. This is a follow-up to the current question.

Baroness Coussins: Thank you. I think that last question and your last answer also loop back to what General Sir Nick said about the need for a conversation about what defeat or victory actually look like. Would you like to have a stab at describing very briefly what you think a defeat scenario and a victory scenario in Ukraine would look like?

Dr Peter Roberts: Of course, the question there is: "For whom?" For Ukraine and President Zelensky, victory looks like reclaiming all its territory to the pre-2014 boundaries, and defeat looks like anything that is not that, quite simply. I do not think it is viewed in the same way in Washington, London, Paris or Berlin. We have no homogeneous sense of what defeat and victory look like.

From the point of view of Russia, what does Putin see as victory? He has varying degrees of what is an acceptable victory to him. The line he has at the moment might be acceptable for a couple of years, but there is no doubt that at some stage all of Ukraine being annexed within the Russian Federation, as is his desire, is his conception of victory, and his conception of defeat is anything that does not allow him to do that over five to 10 years. It is very difficult.

What is interesting when you talk to leaders, as you will, across Europe is that political and military leaders talk about change being constant—big muscle movements—yet what they try to relate to their audiences and to their electorate is the idea of a status quo: "We will go back to the good old days and it will be pre-2014. Russia will behave itself. China will be rising but it will not be a problem. We won't worry about North Korea and Iran. We will just go back to the idea of prosperity". This is what they want to go back to, yet everything that they seem to acknowledge in their subconscious is that the world has changed so much that going back to that is almost impossible. They live in an Orwellian dualism that says, "Everything might have changed, but somehow we will make it all go back to where it was pre-financial crash and everything will be fine".

We do not seem to have sorted out this problem, and therefore we have a problem with what defeat and victory look like. What do defeat and victory look like in the UK? Is it just us not being attacked any more? Is our conception of victory about prosperity and full employment? What does it mean? I do not think we have that in anything, from post Brexit to what happens in Ukraine.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: If you were in the Kremlin looking at the war in Ukraine, what would actually shift the dial—an extra 20,000 British troops funded, with proper equipment, or Britain's independent nuclear deterrent?

Dr Peter Roberts: I put a caveat on it, in that I do not think I am capable of thinking as if I was in the Kremlin. I cannot remove my head enough and put on a completely different one that has grown up in a completely different culture that says this is what it is. I find it quite hard to do that.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: You talked earlier about knowing your enemy and knowing your adversary.

Dr Peter Roberts: Indeed. I am not a Russian specialist by trade. There are people who are far better at doing it than I am. Is it a trade-off? What does credibility mean? I am not sure it is either of those two. To

me, what credibility would mean in terms of the UK is a commitment to a two-corps military land force. You might have a regular armoured division and a regular mechanised division, and then from the reserve or the Territorial Army, whatever it is, you create core structures and you create such a mass that, over a period of a decade, you will create an arm as a capability that becomes an equal to what Poland is aspiring to. That then changes the balance entirely about the way you think about the European problem.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie: I want to follow up on victory and defeat. You said that for Zelensky, it was back to the boundaries. You also said that the Kremlin would settle in the short term for what it has now, but that would only be short term. It is interesting to me that you say people in the UK are not quite engaged about this, but the reality is that it is not that different from 1939. We know that if we do not push Russia back, it will keep coming. Surely, we have to have a deterrent that says to Russia, "We're not letting you have what you've got. We want to push you back". After all, there was an agreement that Ukraine would be a sovereign independent state. It gave up its nuclear weapons for that. America seems to have a rather different view. There is a whole debate in Europe about whether Europe now needs to take care of itself and not rely on the Americans. The challenge is that a victory for Ukraine on Zelensky's terms is what Europe needs, is it not? Anything less than that is a victory for the Kremlin.

Dr Peter Roberts: Yes, indeed. A military analysis would say that that is absolutely what we need, particularly if, on the way, we can decimate the Russian armed forces or we can help the Ukrainians to decimate the Russian armed forces so that they are incapable of fighting again over the next 10 years. That would be the ideal solution.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie: What is the British contribution to giving us a chance to achieve that?

Dr Peter Roberts: Interestingly, the investment of defence manufacturers in Ukraine is a significant step. Where you have companies opening manufacturing plants for ammunition and military equipment, and they are doing that inside Ukraine, that is a really important signal. That also reduces the most important part, which is the timeline of delivery to the front lines—that final-mile delivery.

The US last night signed off on a huge aid package. Some of that stuff is ready to be shipped, and it will be shipped through Germany and Poland. That will not get to the front lines for between four and six weeks. In that time, you are down to 6,000 rounds of ammunition a day and a couple of ATACMS. You are really not making it add up.

The speed of getting it through and re-engineering all this stuff can be circumvented by manufacturing inside Ukraine. Where you have companies willing to step up and do that, that is one of the biggest things that we can do. In the meantime, our provision of things like

ammunition, guns and spare parts for the stuff that we have supplied is important.

The Chair: That leads us quite neatly to the question I should have asked Lady Crawley to ask quite a long time ago. I am sorry that I missed that.

Q53 **Baroness Crawley:** That is all right. Thank you, Chair. Dr Roberts, we have heard today from the PM that we will be working more closely with Germany on procurement and so on. My question is about future ways of working with our allies and how working on procurement and interoperability can ensure that our purchasing power is more efficient. How do we create a balance between collaboration of this kind with our allies and the development of our own sovereign capability?

Dr Peter Roberts: There is quite a lot there, is there not? Every state in the world wants to have sovereign benefit come out from any taxpayer spend—it is a given—whether it is Australian submarines, F35 manufacture, tanks, warships or whatever it is. If you are spending UK or German tax currency, you feel there should be a benefit that comes back. We know that a significant benefit comes back through tax revenues by spending it in your own country.

This comes back to part of that conversation, which is: how close do you think the threat really is? At some stage, you say, "Actually, those tax dollars don't matter so much to me now as having the kit next year". If you wanted to have some new tanks really quickly, you might not build them in the UK. To get maximum interoperability, you might go to Rheinmetall in Germany and say, "Right, build me the new Leopards", and then I will have cross-domain interoperability or cross-service interoperability with my German counterparts and those elsewhere in Europe. You can get some things like that, but you do not get the sovereign build benefits that you would get, in terms of skills, tax returns or anything else that you would have. Those are the trade-offs according to where you perceive the risk and the timeline by which you want some of this.

There is a temptation that you can go down the specialisation route and you can say, "Okay, Germany builds all the tanks. That's great. The UK will build all the missiles. The Netherlands will build all the 155-millimetre shells", but then you come across the risk that they might red card or veto what you can do with it. Germany could veto. Therefore, if it sold us tanks and we had German tanks, it might veto our ability to send tanks to Rwanda or somewhere else. How do you get over that problem of red cards—of risk? The Americans are famous for doing this with their missile systems at sea. They would never let anyone see what is inside their missile systems, so we do not tend to buy their naval missile systems. These become very complex issues.

It is related to the timeline and risk. When you have people such as the Chancellor of Germany saying that the greatest risk will occur between 2027 and 2029, this idea of sovereign trade-offs should start to disappear

from the agenda depending on how quickly we want to ramp up. Many of you will be aware that to buy kit, have it commissioned and arrive is usually quite a long timetable, the exception being for things like the Archer Artillery pieces for the British Army, which arrived in incredibly quick time through a deal with the Swedes. There are some things like that that we do have the ability to get hold of.

This is a function of modern combat as well. General Nick, had he been here, might have said it. If the British Army is decimated on day one, so too is all its kit. What do you fight with on day two, week two and year two? What are you left to fight with if your manufacturing capability cannot produce it because you are hoping Germany will? There is lots of complexity in that.

Holding of war stocks, as Lord Houghton said, not just in terms of ammunition but equipment, is important. If you are talking about using people who have recently left the services, they are familiar with the kit they operated on at the time they retired. Therefore, it might be that Warriors are really useful. Are we keeping those Warriors for them to operate with in week two, month two and year two of the war, or are we selling those off cheaply because it makes sense financially for the MoD to sell them? There are no ships for reservists to be called up to, for Royal Navy people who have previously left who could get in those ships and know how to operate them. They have all been sold off for razor blades because, under resource accounting and budgeting, the Navy was penalised for holding those old stocks. The idea of having not just the equipment but the people to operate them is important.

How you get hold of that stuff is very difficult, which is why we see the South Korean arms industry doing exceptionally well at the moment in its ability to sell stuff, particularly to Poland but also elsewhere. We see North Korea doing very well also with what it is selling to Russia. Everyone is scrambling for day two kit. Day one kit can be beautiful, boutique, gold-plated, sovereign, keeping your defence industrial base going. Week two/month two kit is an entirely different proposition and I do not think we have thought about it enough yet. That probably does not answer your question.

Baroness Crawley: It answers some of it. Thank you very much indeed.

Q54 **Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie:** To follow up on that, Dr Roberts, you mentioned South Korea's industrial capacity taking advantage of the situation and benefiting from it. Why do you think that our industrial commercial partners in Europe and in the West are not thinking along those same commercial lines and becoming a bit more adaptable to the market that they see in front of them?

Dr Peter Roberts: Because they do not trust the promises of politicians, quite simply. If you are working in Airbus in Germany or elsewhere, you have had promises for huge orders for the Eurofighter, or you are working for Saab and you think there will be a new Gripen order. You constantly have those promises and constant announcements but they

are never delivered. If you are going to commit to having a second line or third line of nuclear submarine built, employing 1,000 new people and investing hundreds of millions of pounds in infrastructure, which is your shareholders' money, where is the government guarantee? The Government have gone back on it so many times that I do not think the industrialists will see their shareholders saying, "Yes, finally, we're seeing it. Open new factories".

Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie: With respect, that is a history lesson, and we are now looking at what the future is. I am looking at the South Korean companies thinking that there is a commercial opportunity here, not in big kit that takes years and much investment, but in stocks that we need, in ammunition. I get the point that Governments historically have been absolutely rubbish at procuring, and I have some sympathy for our commercial partners in that, but are their risk levels and their shareholders' risk levels too low, and should we be doing something to encourage them to be a bit less risk averse?

Dr Peter Roberts: It would help to have those conversations with industry, certainly. I would still be pretty cynical if I was in industry about government promises and talk. If you look at the German announcements on defence spending and then what followed through, if you look at British announcements on spending over the past 30 years and then follow through on what has been delivered, if you look at the aspirations over defence reviews consistently in the UK, it is just not there.

How do you convince your shareholders that, this time, it has all changed? There is not much support for it because there is more profit to be made elsewhere, even on a single-source contract where defence companies are limited to an 8% return profit margin. That is not much for shareholders to go for. We have demonised the big primes enough that I think they are a little bit shy of coming forward.

I agree; I think there are huge opportunities—enormous opportunities. South Korea produces some brilliant military kit. Who would go to them if there was a European arm that could do it just around the corner? You would not. But there isn't one, and at the moment I do not see that many companies willing to take that risk.

Q55 **Lord Alderdice:** You mentioned will to fight. A couple of American Presidents have talked about how they and their colleagues completely failed to realistically grasp the will to fight. Barack Obama said it about ISIL. President Biden has also said it. How much are people focused on understanding and developing the notion of the will to fight, both for our country as a whole—you have mentioned the civilian population as well as the Army—and also our military forces?

Dr Peter Roberts: I am very interested in the will to fight. There are two people I go to for this, who I think you should talk to. One is Professor Paul Cornish, who did some brilliant work on this about 10 years ago, based on some polling that was done—I will come to that in a moment.

The second one is Professor Beatrice Heuser at the University of Glasgow, who is absolutely phenomenal on the historical aspects of the political will to fight, in particular. Those two really frame everything that I would say.

In brief, we are always quite surprised in decision-making circles about the will to fight of the population. Paul Cornish has quoted on several occasions the last big survey that was done about the willingness of the population to intervene in Taiwan if it meant so many deaths. How many deaths would you be willing to accept to defend Taiwan? The last survey I saw was done some time ago—five or 10 years ago—where in the US, the military leadership response said that a couple of thousand military deaths would be acceptable, the politicians said 5,000 deaths and the general public said 60,000 American deaths. The same rough figures are reflected in the UK about the same question. The polling size was smaller. We cannot be certain. Again, it was a few years ago, so it is dated.

Cornish's work on this is brilliant. He says you need to look at this because the military risk is far more constrained than the political risk, and, again, that is far more constrained than what the public would accept. The silent masses would accept a far greater military loss in their name than we have come to expect. We have not tracked properly the idea of a will to fight. I encourage you to speak to both Paul Cornish and Beatrice Heuser, who are both brilliant on this.

Lord Alderdice: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Q56 **Lord Grocott:** To jump back to the question before the one we have just heard, I always pay particular attention when someone blames the politicians. We are used to it. I am not saying it is unfair. Can I put this to you, as a member of the defence community—I do not know whether that is fair—as someone whose job, in part at least, is to anticipate threats and solutions and the wider questions that we have been talking about? From the point of view of the Ukraine war, how much of it was anticipated and expected? Perhaps more relevant, how much has been got wrong, if anything, that has resulted from inaccurate expectations? To put it even more specifically than that, did anyone expect us to be nearly two and a half years or thereabouts into a conflict with, at least so far as I can see, no quick end in sight? Was this anticipated? If it was anticipated, all sorts of things flow from that in terms of recruitment and size—anything connected with the conduct of a war, obviously. Are we in uncharted territory?

Dr Peter Roberts: In March 2021, Russia did pretty much a full-scale mission rehearsal, pre-deploying troops around Ukraine. I spoke to Michael Kofman, who is a US expert on Ukraine and an absolutely superb researcher. Michael said at the time that it will not invade. The West said, "Yes, it will not invade. This is just an exercise. It's a big exercise with 140,000 troops deployed in the north round to the east". The fleet was active. It was all there. The western intelligence was very pleased with itself. It had seen all these movements, recognised that there was not going to be an attack, and did nothing.

What we missed was our interpretation of that. Our interpretation of it was, "We should do nothing because it is not going to attack". What we did not do was draw a red line, because, in effect, from the Kremlin's perspective, it might well have been, as Michael explained to me, the final permission. "We're going to the border. We're rehearsing this. We're putting all the troops there. What will you do to us because of this? What should we foresee as a reaction?"

Were there any démarches? Were there any expulsions? Was there any increase in training? Was there any increase in sales? Was there any move towards putting more forward-deployed forces and more training teams in Ukraine as a result? It is hard to point to anything, if you are on the other side, in the Kremlin, that says, "The West signalled to us and said, 'Don't do this'". Shortly after that, Germany signed a gas deal.

When you are that centralised, in the Kremlin, trying to read the signals from the West, you do your full-out mission rehearsal, everyone has recognised it, everyone says they have recognised it, everyone says they will not invade, everyone has got it right, and then you are getting massive trade deals with the main player in Europe—Germany—for gas. That is like a "permission granted" slip.

When it came round to the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022, we started to see the forward deployment and people started to recognise this will happen; the US intelligence machine will tell you that it accurately predicted exactly how the Russians were going to invade and got it right. What the intelligence machine got wrong was how poorly the Russian land forces would deliver. We have been through that, building the Russians up to be 10 feet tall, their recapitalisation and so on. We know all about their supply problems and all the rest of it.

They were also completely wrong in how well Ukraine defended, lost slowly and then counterattacked, and then how both sides innovated. The war in Ukraine is hugely dynamic. You have 10,000 drones being lost every week; you have an electronic warfare jamming spectrum that changes day by day with patches and codes. It is phenomenally dynamic. It is different in the northern theatre from what it is in the southern theatre. They are like completely different wars—how they are attacking, how they are defending, how they are doing it, how command and control is being executed, the orchestration of effects, how they use and meter out the ATACMS long-range missiles, how the integrated air defence systems are operated, the drone-on-drone operations and the counterdrone operations. It is a phenomenally dynamic environment. Just staying up to date with it, let alone when you see people fighting in it, is quite incredible. It is no different from people fighting in dynamic battlefields in Gaza and Israel, in Yemen with the Houthis, or in Sudan. They are all dynamic, but this one is particularly interesting.

Were our expectations right? The intelligence community predicted a lot that was right. It also got a lot wrong, and there will be familiar tomes. Some scholars have pointed to the idea that we do image intelligence brilliantly now. We look at lots of pictures and we can tell you exactly

where they are up to and what we think they are doing. We have pulled so far back from human interpretation into machine interpretation that we do not know what they will do or why they are doing it. Our inability to understand intent is a major flaw, and that leads us into lots of problems and lots of ill-conceived predictions and expectations.

There was a widely held belief across many national security communities in the West—Europe and the United States—about how quickly Ukraine would collapse and how well the Russians would perform. There have been expectations from the West about how the counterattack would have changed completely if the Ukrainian army had had a more manoeuvrist mindset—a ridiculous statement if ever there was one. So, the understanding is not very good. Our human interpretation of it, our intellectual ability to conceptualise the war, has not been good. Our inability to understand the context of the war is difficult because, as I said at the start, if you have seen one war, you have seen one war. This might not relate to any other war you are going to see. It might not relate to a piece of action in the northern theatre next week; it might be completely different.

It is very hard to learn lessons that have some kind of enduring applicability, whether it is for the intelligence community or elsewhere, and mostly in the West. So many of the lessons that we want to see are baked into our military consciousness. We want to see drones as very important; therefore, drones are very important. We selectively pick evidence that shows us that first-person video drones are the answer to everything. We want to see that space is important, because we have invested in space, so we will pick out things that tell us that Starlink is important, that space connectivity is essential and we could not execute the war without space. But these are highly selective. They come from our own baked-in ideas about what we want to see. Much of this is confirmation bias about things like the integrated review, the Defence Command Paper or the Defence Command Paper Refresh.

It is very hard to take an objective view so as to pull out exactly what these things are. We have been better at trying to interrogate some of that, as you are doing, for the military. What we have been less good at doing, which I think is where you are going with this, is in terms of some of our intelligence assessments, which merit a greater, more detailed look.

Lord Grocott: It is interesting to me that an awful lot of the important issues that you have described, and the problems and dilemmas, remind us not to go too overboard about the absolute critical significance of wondrous modern technology. At the end of the day, what is just as important, if not more important, is what human assumptions are being made about the mood in the Kremlin. I do not know of any AI equipment that could help you with that.

Dr Peter Roberts: That is very true.

Lord Grocott: That kind of thing reminds us that human decisions have

to be made.

Dr Peter Roberts: The most interesting conversation I have had in two years was with a military psychologist and a Russian strategist in Paris last month where we tried to understand what military rationality looked like from the Kremlin's perspective, to go back to an earlier question. I tried to figure that out with a military psychologist, Sarah Chapman Trim, who works at UK Strategic Command, and with Katarzyna Zysk, who is a brilliant Russian thinker at IFS in Norway. Putting those two together to try to understand what rationality was from a Russian perspective, so different from the way we thought about it in Paris, London, Oslo and wherever else, was critical. Some of those conversations that we are not having would give us this thing that we constantly talk about—the competitive edge. That would be our force multiplier in understanding our adversary.

The Chair: It is quite difficult when you are dealing with dictators. We have kept you for a long time, so perhaps we might wrap it up soon.

Baroness Crawley: I have a very small point. You talked about us missing the signalling from Russia, in answer to Lord Grocott's question, but surely that signalling started way back when Russia went into Crimea and the West did nothing.

Dr Peter Roberts: And before that. You can start in Georgia in 2008, with the largest amphibious landing since the Second World War, with 14,000 naval infantry landing, silent and dark, with no electronic warfare signature at all. These were huge incursions, and the West did nothing, effectively, as a result. There was the use of nerve agent in the UK, the use of chemical and biological agents, experimentation in Syria—we do not have to go very far.

Our response to that, even to the using of nerve agents in the UK, has been some démarches and expelling a few people, which we congratulate ourselves about. We are placing sanctions on them. Sanctions are important to us, but are they important to the Russians? Our idea that they are important to us and therefore they must be important to the Russians is sometimes where we go wrong.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You have stayed on for a long time. Thank you particularly for being very restrained when General Sir Nick was getting the first say in all these things. Thank you for handling it by yourself. We will send you a transcript.