



Defence Committee

Oral evidence: One-off session on Ukraine: 1000 days on, HC 506

Tuesday 10 December 2024

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 10 December 2024.

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Members present: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Chair); Mr Calvin Bailey; Alex Baker; Lincoln Jopp; Ms Emma Lewell-Buck; Jesse Norman; Ian Roome; Fred Thomas.

Questions 1 - 38

Witnesses

I: Dr Patricia Lewis, former Director of the International Security Programme, Chatham House; Air Marshal Edward Stringer (Ret'd) CB, CBE, Senior Fellow, Policy Exchange; Orysia Lutsevych OBE, Deputy Director, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Patricia Lewis, Edward Stringer and Orysia Lutsevych.

Q1 Chair: This is our public evidence session on “Ukraine: 1,000 days on”. On behalf of the House of Commons Defence Committee, I would like to give a very warm welcome to Dr Patricia Lewis, former director of the international security programme at Chatham House, Orysia Lutsevych, the deputy director of the Russia and Eurasia programme at Chatham House, and Air Marshal Edward Stringer, senior fellow at the Policy Exchange and former director general of the Defence Academy. Thank you very much for agreeing to come before the Committee.

To set the scene, since the full-scale illegal invasion by Russia, according to the BBC and in co-operation with two independent Russian media organisations, the level of death and destruction is shocking. Around 150,000 Russians are estimated to have been killed in the conflict, with a further 250,000 to 300,000 seriously injured. The Ukrainians have also suffered huge loss of life, estimated to be around one half to two thirds of those numbers. We are also now aware, sadly, of the escalation, with thousands of North Korean troops on European soil and Russia having recruited hundreds of individuals from Yemen, as well as mercenaries from India and Nepal, often forcibly.

With that context, I would like to start off in terms of the questions. As things stand, what are the most plausible outcomes for Russia’s war in Ukraine by the end of 2025?

Dr Lewis: Thank you very much for the invitation to come and speak. One plausible outcome is for there to be no outcome. That is one possibility: that it continues like this at enormous cost to all sides, with the Russian gains, as we have seen them, perhaps being contained. Perhaps there will be gains and losses in the way that we have seen at the margins of the areas where the fighting is hardest, and perhaps little breakthroughs here and there from both sides. That is one possible outcome: a continuing hot war at an enormous cost in lives, in the economies of both countries and, of course, to the supporters of both countries. You mentioned North Korea, the Houthis, the Nepalese, the Indians and so on all sacrificing themselves for this terrible war.

Another plausible outcome seems to be increasingly likely, given the change in Government coming in the US and the situation on the ground, and the sustainability of the previous possible outcome I mentioned. That would be a negotiated ceasefire. Then there are other possibilities that are less likely. One would be a complete Russian win, taking over Kyiv in the way that it had intended in February 2022. That will be resisted, and resisted fiercely, by not only Ukraine, but all of Ukraine’s supporters.

The other would be a Ukraine win driving Russia out, due to perhaps some crisis in Moscow. There is a whole range of possibilities.



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I would like to address the issue of a potential ceasefire. I do not know whether this is the right time to do that. I am reminded that, almost exactly 10 years ago, the ceasefire negotiations over eastern Ukraine broke down, mostly on the issue of the strong position from Russia that Ukraine must never become part of NATO. If Russia has done one thing with this war, apart from lose 150,000 of its people, mostly young people, it has strengthened NATO. For Ukraine to now give up the idea of joining NATO or to be fobbed off with long-term NATO membership would be a very difficult thing to accept.

We can imagine a ceasefire negotiation in all sorts of ways. There are a number of drafts circulating looking at how it might be monitored, given past experience with Russian violations of agreements, particularly the Budapest Memorandum in this case. It would be really important to look at security guarantees for Ukraine, and that is where I would put the effort.

Q2 Chair: No doubt we will come back to these issues. Air Marshal Stringer, are there any introductory remarks from your good self about where you see things by the end of 2025?

Air Marshal Stringer: Let me echo the thanks for inviting me to come and talk today. Thank you very much to you and all on the Committee. I agree with everything that Patricia has said there.

The shade I would add is that, if things continue as they are, the Trump Administration is the big variable, but even without that, the Russian economy is going to sail increasingly into headwinds in the next year. The Russian military is burning through its stocks of equipment—those buried deep in Russia and not touched for decades.

If you look at, for example, gun barrels, it is losing, through tanks and artillery, 300-odd gun barrels a month and its forges allow it to make about 20. It is running out of stuff, and we could argue about where the people might come from. A very plausible outcome is the no outcome. Both sides will be getting extremely tired if this war is still going on this time next year. That would suggest some form of frozen conflict.

Add to that, though, the big variable of what the Trump Administration are going to do and that makes that outcome very unpredictable. If things are to continue as they are, you are going to see not much movement of the frontline, and probably a reduction in casualties, but still massive casualties, which are dreadful. We are probably looking at a frontline that has not shifted too much from where we sit now if we were sat here in a year's time.

Orysia Lutsevych: It is an honour to be here and share our insights, both personal and collective in Chatham House, because we have been thinking a lot about Russian aggression against Ukraine, and for the same matter against Europe, in a way. What will drive the outcome this year is the fact that Putin is not altering his war aims. He keeps publicly



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repeating his demands that not only Ukraine recognises his illegal annexation, but also withdraws its troops from the parts of Ukraine that Russia illegally annexed in the constitution, but does not physically control on the ground. He also talks about demilitarisation of Ukraine and no NATO membership for the country.

On Ukraine's side, it is clear that Ukraine remains in the fight. To be honest, the ceasefire at the moment, when Ukraine is on the back foot, is losing territory and does not have a clear security arrangement, is considered a big threat to Ukraine, given that Putin does not change his objectives to destroy Ukraine on the political map of Europe. Internally in Ukraine, it is interesting that still, despite all the heavy casualties and losses, 64% of Ukrainians think that it is unacceptable to cede territory. That number would decrease to 42% who think it is unacceptable if there is a NATO-type or NATO membership for Ukraine.

Trump, of course, is a big variable. I was in Washington last week and it is clear that he will engage with mediation or the Ukraine case if he can win. He wants to do it quickly and will be very transactional. They are talking about peace through strength in Washington, but it is not clear what that will entail. The call from Ukrainian leadership to European allies is actually to formulate a proposition to Trump on what it is that Europe is prepared to do to secure its future by making sure that Ukraine can end this war with the best possible outcome for itself. Everything remains in flux. Nothing is predetermined, but it depends on these variables in Ukraine, Europe and Washington.

Q3 Mr Bailey: Going back on some of the remarks you have made, under current dynamics, which of the specific outcomes do you think will be the limit or will help us to arrive at the outcome that you think likely? Is it military, Mr Stringer? You spoke about materiel and people. Is it the economic, where, Patricia, you spoke about them literally running out of money. Ms Lutsevych, you spoke about Trump and the political backstop. Which one of those will we hit first?

Dr Lewis: Military is obviously the most significant and that takes the money. It would also take President Trump being behind that. One proposal that has been moving around for a while is that President Trump would offer a deal to Putin, but, if Putin were not to take it, he would then support Ukraine much more strongly. That would be the counter-offer, if you like. You would have the carrot of a DMZ, almost a Russian-controlled Ukraine. It would be not dissimilar, perhaps, to West and East Germany back in the Cold War, or possibly like Finland. There are different models that could be negotiated, but the alternative would be a Ukraine strengthened by President Trump's Administration, and that would be the stick. How President Putin might see that is the most difficult thing, because it is very hard to see how he might be able to portray that as a very big win for him, but he could, perhaps, if he were helped to do so.



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Orysia Lutsevych: It is all of the above, to be honest. All these drivers matter. On the military, Ukraine specifically has two tasks. One is to continue defence, and especially air defence, because we see horrendous bombardment campaigns that I do not think we have ever seen in the history of warfare, where Russians are using 10 types of different drones and flying over 1,000 long-ranges per day, specifically, most recently, targeting energy generation that powers nuclear power stations. That is an intentional effort to put Ukraine in a blackout mode, but also endanger the whole of the world with such reckless behaviour. On the other level of capabilities, Ukraine desperately needs to reconstitute its battleground capabilities with armoured vehicles, with continued supply of artillery just to hold lines.

It is important to understand that Putin is trying to take key economic assets away from Ukraine, such as the enriched coke mine that supplies 80% of Ukrainian metallurgy and rare earth minerals that are located in that basin. People in Ukraine are seriously discussing how to improve mobilisation. They understand that they have taken a lot of the cost of attrition, but they need to reconstitute force. There is a discussion about perhaps not mobilising to the frontline from 18 years already, but maybe from 22. This is a serious discussion.

Economy, in this type of long war, wins wars of attrition and protracted war. That is why we need to make sure that Ukraine has both budget finance and war insurance. With Trump, the US will not be willing to give budget finance to Ukraine. That will fall on the shoulders of Europe.

Last but not least, we have to start seriously thinking about the security arrangement that we can put on the table. I personally do not think that NATO should be something we negotiate with Russia. It is something we negotiate between Ukraine and allies. It is up to NATO to decide when and how Ukraine can be integrated, not for Russia to dictate the terms, because this war is about limiting or destroying Ukraine's sovereignty. We should not allow Putin to decide that parameter.

Air Marshal Stringer: Trump is already having an impact now. We heard Zelensky talking about casualties. In two months' time, we will know the full extent of that. If no other factors change anything, this is a sustainment race through 2025 to keep going. I will defer to Patricia here, but those economic headwinds get very strong for Russia at the back end of next year and that is when it really starts to run out of military equipment. Can Zelensky keep the fight going with questions of mobilisation? That is the balance.

Around Trump, what will all the other western allies do? One could free up the permissions around range weapons and start supporting the defence base of Ukraine, which is proving very imaginative and innovative in what it is doing with what you might call poor man's air power. It has cruise missiles at a fraction of the cost of what we would spend, but very effective. Look at the explosions in the ammo dumps at



the back end of September. If we were to allow Ukraine to take the fight into Russia and fight at the depth that we, NATO, would fight, that would alter the dynamics on the battlefield significantly. Those are the factors that we would have to consider that would alter the equation as it stands today.

Q4 **Mr Bailey:** That sequences very nicely into our next question. The west placed limits on Ukraine's ability to fight through the constraints that we have placed on the weapons that we have given it. How have these impacted its ability to fight? How critical is the introduction of US ATACMS and Storm Shadows in shifting the battlefield dynamics?

Air Marshal Stringer: It has been significant, but too episodic and small scale. It has been significant enough to show the world that it could be more effective. You can look at what the Ukrainians have managed to do, say in the Black Sea, where, without a conventional navy at all, they have pushed the Black Sea fleet back to Novorossiysk on the eastern side of the Black Sea through clever use of intelligence and long-range weaponry. After all, who thought the Storm Shadow was going to be an anti-maritime weapon and take out submarines? It has.

The trouble is that those are clever science projects that need some stitching together and happen once every couple of weeks. They need to be happening three or four times a day. Therefore, I would argue that there needs to be a better co-ordination around the operational planning and the defence industrial base to provide Ukraine with the materiel that it could best turn into that sort of sustained effort. We could then see it as part of a joined-up joint campaign.

There could be some help in military education and training there. Sorry to sound like an ex-director general of the Defence Academy, but I think even Ukrainians admit that they are a post-Soviet military and do not have that instinctive five-domain way of planning military operations, even though, across their Government, as I have just said, they will pull together intelligence agencies, special forces, air-launched long-range missiles and so on, and indeed lots from the private sector. Look what Mykhailo Fedorov has done to stitch all this together. There is an admirable entrepreneurial spirit, but that needs to be scaled and made a little bit more systemic. If we could give that to Ukraine, I think that would make a big difference. Individual weapons in and of themselves in small numbers, no, but done more systematically, yes.

Dr Lewis: Since early 2022, there has been a very sensitive calibration that has been going on within NATO countries, and particularly the United States, about making sure that this war was not seen as NATO versus Russia. This calibration was what was holding back air defences, combat aircraft, long-range missiles and allowing deep strikes into Russian territory. That, if you like, red line has been broken, but there are still some big issues about that.



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We saw the Russian response with a test of its new intermediate-range missile, which is dual-capable. That was probably going to take place anyway, but it was nonetheless timed at that particular time in order to send that message. We also have to be concerned about Article 5 and NATO cohesion if NATO is seen to be the fight. That is how Russia keeps trying to portray it and NATO keeps very carefully making sure that that is not the case. What does that shift and change into deep strike on a much bigger basis do to this war and what will it do to the cohesion within NATO? This has been the difficulty all the way along.

Chair: Just a polite note to the panel: there is no necessity for every panel member to answer each question. There is quite a lot of area to cover by 12.30 pm. There will be certain questions that only one panel member may wish to answer.

Q5 **Fred Thomas:** Dr Lewis, you brought us on there to talking about this idea of activity sub-threshold and the deterrence balance. I would like to discuss Russia and Russia's potential future activity. Clearly, Ukraine's incredible resistance has been enabled and supported by western support and there is a complicated matrix and calculus going on about how far to go with that support. There is what has happened recently. You alluded to Russia using its new type of missile system, which you call dual-capable, i.e. it could take nuclear warheads, as we understand it.

When Ukraine first used western missiles into Russian territory in November, Russia immediately, as a response, changed its doctrine, apparently, around how it views military activity from partners, basically indicating that it would view anyone supporting Ukrainian activity, if they were a nuclear power, as a kind of joint activity, i.e. potentially opening the door to a nuclear response. That caused the headlines, here in the UK and wider in the western world, that they wanted it to cause, and it caused discussion. I am going to come to Dr Lewis first. What are the next things on Russia's list of activities to make the west concerned about continuing or increasing levels of support to Ukraine?

Dr Lewis: One issue that we have been grappling with is how seriously we take the Russian nuclear threats that have been made. You mentioned the doctrine change. That was not an immediate response to the use of missiles. That had been in development for months and in fact takes us back to the pre-2020 Russian doctrine, so it is a hark back to its old Cold War-style doctrine, if you like, that it had changed. It moved away from this nuclear use as an existential threat to nuclear use if the boundaries are, essentially, crossed. It has lessened the threshold of use, but this was something that has been on the cards for a while, but certainly as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine. That is for sure.

How concerned should we be? In late 2022, we saw Russian nuclear mobilisation. The United States, Germany and others sought to act and brought China in, and India as well. President Xi spoke with President Putin and said, "Don't be daft," essentially. We imagine that it would be complete folly for Russia to use nuclear weapons in this conflict, because



the response would be horrendous. The problem that we have is that many things that President Putin has done seem to us like complete folly, so we cannot rule it out. We have to think very much about how to prevent that from happening.

My concern is that we do not think properly about deterrence. We even call our nuclear weapon the deterrent. That is not a name for a weapon. A weapon is a weapon and it may or may not deter. We have to understand what deters. We have to have a much better understanding and much better intelligence. Part of the problem now with our relationship with Russia—and this is not only true for the UK but others as well—is that we are increasingly distanced from the thinking of what is going on. That is where I would put in some serious, immediate and long-term investment.

Q6 Fred Thomas: Dr Lewis, I am very grateful for that response and I am sure you are right with what you say. I am trying to ask what the next things are that Russia might do to cause consternation in the west about continuing or increasing support to Ukraine, not what it has done already. What are the next things it may do, according to your thinking?

Dr Lewis: I think that we will see more use of the Oreshnik missile to frighten—there are no defences against it—in a conventional capability. Russia has used other dual-capable weapons throughout this whole war, so the fact that it is dual capable is not the critical thing. It is its range, its speed and the fact that defences do not work against it. That would be pretty horrendous.

It will be simultaneously sending a message about its new weapons systems. I think that we will see more tests of weapons systems—I think something like “demonstration in combat conditions” is the phrase that was used. We are likely to see more of that. Russia has been developing new missile and weapons systems. We may see more and more cyber interference. Ukraine has been able to withstand most of the cyber-attacks, but a massive onslaught would not be off the cards. We are likely to see more and more engagement in space, particularly cyber-attacks in space.

Q7 Fred Thomas: That is really helpful, thank you. I will just add that we call our nuclear deterrent the continuous at-sea deterrent and we have other forms of deterrence.

Dr Lewis: Yes, it is just that often people call it the deterrent.

Q8 Fred Thomas: Yes, I am familiar. Mr Stringer, Russia is continuing to, sometimes quite subtly and sometimes very overtly, seek to influence democracies and political events in a range of countries, including our own and some much nearer Russian borders. Recently, in September, we have had the head of the CIA and our own Secret Intelligence Service publishing a joint statement saying that Russia is producing a reckless campaign of sabotage across Europe. What is your view of how this might



develop over the coming years?

Air Marshal Stringer: It is a good question. The first thing I would say is that Russia does not have that much left with which to escalate. Its real triumph in information operations has been suggesting that there are some great hidden depths—that there is a whole Red Army left untapped that could be unleashed and it has these great powers. Look at Syria and other places. We should start to question this myth. I was talking in this place, speaking a month or so ago with an academic, when I asked him what he had learned about this. He said, “I dismissed info ops and grey zone ops as the sort of thing that people were fetishising before the war. Now, when the war starts it is all about 155mm shells and artillery again,” but the grey zone stuff does not go away and is arguably Putin’s biggest success.

On the battlefield, the Russian military has performed abysmally. Where it has been massively successful is in info operations and convincing electorates and western politicians that it has some latent strength. Essentially, we have ourselves been deterred. I do not like this self-deterrence phrase. You are either influenced or not, and we have been influenced.

The first thing I would say is that we need to have a very good assessment of just what Russia is capable of. The second thing I would say is that we need to move our thinking in the way that we did when terrorism ramped up a couple of notches two decades ago, and we responded very well in this country. OSCT, out of the Home Office, pulled together Government Departments. We have a very robust way of countering international and national terrorism. We need to do the same now across Government Departments to look at what our critical national infrastructure is before cyber-attacks take down our railway system or something like that.

My final thought on that and things we could do is that I know the team doing the strategic defence review will be thinking about this, but of course it is a strategic defence review, not a defence and security review. It will be interesting to see the boundaries of that, where their thoughts are and how they might get us back into where we were when we used to think about the great power threat being the real national security threat. We used to produce the war book, have alert measures and be able to mobilise the country in its own defence. We have to get back into that way of thinking, and the SDR provides an opportunity. It will be interesting to see how the Government respond in a broader sense to taking the SDR but nesting it with a greater sense of national defence. This is the perfect time to do it because, as you have said, we face a clear and present danger.

Q9 **Alex Baker:** You have talked there about the sorts of tactics that Russia could use, but we are really interested in the bit that you have just touched on about how you deter these threats and build resilience. Could you speak a little bit more about that?



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Air Marshal Stringer: Resilience is understanding your weaknesses and being able to do something about them, so therefore you deny your enemy the chance to make your life hard or you make it very difficult for them to do it. We only have to go and look at our joint expeditionary force partners, who have been living just across the border from Russia forever, or as long as their states have been constituted, I should say. They have much better civil defence programmes than we do. It starts off with educating your people, first to understand that there is a threat and then to be able to do their own bit, first in just countering hostile disinformation—knowing how to contextualise it and not finding yourself afeared from the word go.

Then you have to fold in those elements, mostly in the private sector, that run your critical national infrastructure. In places such as Sweden, and Finland especially, those running their critical national infrastructure take part in national civil defence exercises and know what they would do in wartime. All that makes them a much harder target. It deters the opposition from having a go, because they are not sure that they will be successful and then they would look a bit silly. There are good examples from our allies around northern Europe from which we could learn, and learn really quite quickly.

Orysia Lutsevych: Can I jump in on resilience, if you do not mind? We have been working quite a lot in Chatham House on trying to understand Ukraine's resilience and published several papers. We observe that this whole-of-society approach is really working. The downside of Ukraine is weak institutions, so people, in a way, are not expecting much from the state, but in what seems like that external weakness of governance lies Ukraine's source of resilience, which is now, using the silver lining of this horrible war, that you have society, state and local communities working together. We have seen that in the first days of war, when the local mayors were taking initiative and were prepared on the ground. We can learn from Ukraine about pillars of resilience that range across preparing for human security and preparing for information channels to be ready at times of crisis.

I would like to re-emphasise cyber as part of Russia's war. These massive ballistic missile attacks on the Ukrainian energy system are always preceded by cyber-attacks, so that the engineers cannot regulate the system. It is inclusion in the society and social cohesion, because that is where the enemy hits hard in democracies, because our democracies depend on some majorities forming, at least based on some common facts about assessment of threats and direction of policy.

I would like also to mention smaller countries such as Moldova. We look carefully at how it countered massive Russian interference in elections, managed to preserve its European course, and re-elected a democratic President. It took a massive effort of law enforcement, jointly with civil society, to deter these grey zone operations to obstruct the country.



Q10 **Alex Baker:** Everything you have said to this point speaks to the fact that we are dealing with countless levels of uncertainty. The strategic defence review is the big opportunity to put ourselves in the best possible place. How do we deal with the levels of uncertainty about the future direction of the conflict and relate that to the threat to the UK within that piece of work?

Dr Lewis: First is to acknowledge that. One of the most important things is to acknowledge the uncertainties and vulnerabilities and then work out how to address them. We have mentioned cyber. I would like to mention another place where we did well. It was the issue of biothreats, such as when we had the terrible pandemic. The public health system, the scientific engagement and the whole-of-country effort was very successful in producing a vaccine that helped. That is the kind of attitude that we need for all these aspects of developing resilience.

Resilience will only take you so far. There are some things that you cannot be resilient against. Again, we have to acknowledge that. To me, it is mostly about honesty and understanding as well, as Ed said, the amount of disinformation that is out there and educating our public about how to sift through that and understand, which is extremely hard to do. We have done it, for example, with password protection and so on. Most people would have an understanding of how to provide some basic cyber hygiene. For those events that occur that are very large, we have all sorts of resilience measures in place there for recovery.

It is that kind of attitude generally in society that would be really helpful and it works right across the board. It is not just about war. It is also about climate change, extreme weather and all those things, so, in fact, it is very cost-effective to do that.

Air Marshal Stringer: Your question was also about the strategic defence review and, if we have an uncertain future, what happens if we put all our chips on—you did not say this—red and it turns out to be black. That is a problem for all defence and security reviews. I remember the 2015 one. The future looked very different within months of it being published. Much less heralded than the defence review itself, because everyone is waiting to see how many ships, tanks and aeroplanes come out of it, is the defence reform that is underway at the moment. For full disclosure, I was part of the team that was advising John Healey when he was in opposition, so you could throw the Mandy Rice-Davies defence at me here. This is what I would say, wouldn't I?

The defence reform is looking at giving a much more agile head office to the MOD, such that it is in a much better place to implement the strategic defence review and create a military that is designed around an integrated idea of how we defeat our enemies, as opposed to the three services going off and building a model of themselves that they would like to see in their own mind's eye. That is also within a Department of State that is thinking more expansively, as we have just discussed, and a Department of State that has to think about how it will be the war office



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in the future, not just the regulator of the peacetime military and adjudicator of the peacetime spend. That is the thinking as well behind the national armaments director, which is a centralised post to make sure we get a much more efficient bang for our buck and prevent duplication, but also give the services that which they need to fight the fight that the Government wishes them to be able to fight, not furnish them with the toys that they would like to have on the shelf day by day.

The defence reform is already a really big change to the way in which the MOD head office is organised and the way the services will have to position themselves. If the defence reform is right, the strategic defence review can be implemented. I know that George Robertson and Richard Barrons are very aware that they need the defence reform to happen in parallel.

More importantly, if the SDR is not quite right, remember Michael Howard's famous dictum, from *The Use and Abuse of Military History*, that every war is different from the one you expect it to be. The secret of success is to be not too far away when the war starts that you cannot adapt. My final point here is that all wars are wars of adaptation. The force you have in peacetime is gone very quickly. The war that emerges is not the one you planned for and we need a head office that can cope with that. Your question is not floating a possibility; it is floating a probability. When we fight the next war, it will not be the one that the SDR has actually planned for. Hopefully, it is not too far away, but the defence reform gives us an agile head office and services that can adapt quickly to an unknowable future.

Dr Lewis: I would add in procurement practices.

Air Marshal Stringer: That is the national armaments director. That is why that is in there, yes.

Orysia Lutsevych: I agree that there is a lot of uncertainty, but we have some clarity and we should operate on what we see clearly. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we see clearly the convergence and support that Russia gets from North Korea, Iran and, so far tacitly, China. That is the new reality of the world we live in today, where this is not going to go away anytime soon. The goal of these actors is to undermine transatlantic co-operation on securities and to squeeze the United States out of their respective regions. That is clear. We have to counter that jointly. We should not see all these theatres separately. Connecting the dots sometimes helps with clarity.

Also, we know that Ukraine is able to put up a good fight. We should allow Ukraine to finish the war. That would improve our security collectively, not make it worse. We also understand that Trump will be asking Europe how much Europe is investing in its own security. That is why there is this effort now to create the European defence fund of €500 billion, where there is a national instrument to borrow. That will be managed by the European Investment Bank. It is such an urgent matter



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and I understand that the UK has not decided yet whether it will join, but it could be a powerful European answer to how Europe—it will not just be the EU; there will be Norway and other countries—is taking care of its security. That is what I would suggest.

Q11 Alex Baker: To come back to this piece around defence reform, I am really interested in those processes running in parallel, but that must be a massive challenge. Until you have the reforms, it is very hard to make decisions in an SDR. Could you talk about how you think that process should be working?

Air Marshal Stringer: The high-level design for what the MOD should look like, I believe, is pretty much done, so the shock of capture has now happened. The MOD has realised it is definitely going to change and it is now working out how it is going to do it. The first cut of the SDR will be in the next couple of months. The MOD knows the big-ticket items in the reform. There will be a strategic military strategic headquarters under the Chief of the Defence Staff that takes the three services under command. There will be a revised Department of State and the Secretary of State has spoken about it being more upwards and outwards and more influential on the national and international stage, for reasons that we have just discussed.

The big change, which you alluded to, is a national armaments director to shift the whole focus of procurement. Getting that person appointed is quite vital for when it comes to delivering the defence review. All the other bits are in place and could be corralled very quickly. We are just into the normal office politics of how quickly you can deliver the change. At the moment, I think that the defence reform is just ahead of the strategic defence review, but there is not much wriggle room for delay.

Q12 Mr Bailey: Moving on to the effectiveness of British military support in Ukraine, we ultimately want to know what kind of military aid is most urgent and what the UK should prioritise. Ms Lutsevych, with limited resources, what specific forms of military aid should the UK prioritise and how should we balance these choices against immediate Ukrainian needs and our own needs to develop and advance our own readiness?

Orysia Lutsevych: On behalf of Ukrainian people, I hear all the time when I travel now, even during the war, how appreciative they are, how critical that UK assistance has always been from day one and how the UK was always at the forefront of delivering various capabilities to Ukraine while other allies were reluctant, afraid of the escalation or paralysed by inaction. That is hugely appreciated and helped to save the capital in the first phase of the Russian invasion when Kyiv was really threatened.

A lot of assistance that was provided, as we have discussed, was slow and limited. A lot of what has arrived—I would not be able to say whether it is specifically from the UK—was not in a shape that could be immediately deployed to the battlefield, especially armoured vehicles. Massive investment in providing air defences for Ukraine is needed now.



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Even if there is a ceasefire, Russia can at any time violate it and keep launching these combined attacks on Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure.

Long-range missiles are key and this is what we were talking about. We need to destroy the Russian capability to wage war at range, not in close combat. Ukraine right now is fighting the worst war possible. It has all the intelligence seeing what Russians are planning, but cannot effectively prevent it. It can partially do it through its own drone capabilities, which are increasingly growing in technology and scale. The Storm Shadows are key. Also, the signals of intelligent electronic warfare are so important. We see now that an increasing number of drones, rather than being shot, which is quite expensive, are being disabled by electronic warfare systems. It is engineer support and protection for armoured vehicles.

Let us remember about the Black Sea, because it often falls through the cracks in assistance. Keeping Russians out as much as possible from the Black Sea fleet is key, because that is where they mount operations in the south of Ukraine. That is also where all the trade routes for Ukrainian agriculture, steel and other commodities lie. It is key that the UK keeps providing assistance as part of the navy capability coalition for Ukraine, with coastguards and demining equipment and training.

The training of Ukrainian personnel is also very important. I visited the Interflex training ground two weeks ago and it is an impressive operation of 12 nations. They want to extend it from five weeks to six weeks, but I think that it is time to consider moving some of the training into Ukraine. That would increase scale and Ukraine will be able to train more people. At the same time, we should think about the higher-level brigade commanders training, or senior Ukrainian military training in the UK, exactly as we have discussed previously. It is so important.

Last but not least, in terms of capabilities, drone and technology co-operation should be expanded. We know that Ukraine has innovation and seed technologies, but it lacks capital. Perhaps there could be a bilateral fund that would invest part of the UK state budget, but there is a lot of private investor interest in that technology. It would also be beneficial for the future of UK defence.

Q13 Mr Bailey: To add on to that, and perhaps broaden it to the other two panellists: based on past failures, a number of which you have quite brilliantly highlighted, but also past success in military aid and delivery, what adjustments should the UK make to its procurement and deployment processes now?

Air Marshal Stringer: So as not to repeat the excellent answer you have had already, maybe I could talk about quality and quantity. I ought to say, because I have been working with them, that any criticisms I have are not of the individuals who have been working incredibly hard in various programmes to help Ukraine, but you can work incredibly hard on not necessarily the right thing. By a second world war analogy, you can



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work very hard to pull together a flotilla of small ships to run Dunkirk, which is great for myth, but does not do very much, or you can work very hard pulling together the Liberty ship programme and bang out three intercontinental large cargo-carrying vessels a day and swing the war, so I am going to talk about quality and quantity.

On the quality side, in a well-meaning way, we have tried to rush things to the Ukrainians. Going back to my point about adaptability and innovation, the battlefield evolution is about a six-week cycle at the moment. Things that take months to procure in the UK against a technical spec, which are not developed in Ukraine to work on the battlefield, have a very slim chance of success when we send them out. Spending money, therefore, in the UK to buy stuff that does not work is a rather expensive way of not really developing the UK defence industrial base well.

There is one thing the Government could do. I am very aware of what Patricia has said about this not becoming overtly NATO, but just to help another nation under Article 51, our own defence industrial base, and our ability to learn lessons from the conflict and very quickly turn them into technological solutions, could be much more closely aligned with the Ukrainian one. It is, in fact, in Zelensky's plan. When I was last in Kyiv, they were crying out for this. I know that the ambassador here mentions it a lot.

There is quite a lot of commercial risk and some technical risk. A lot of that probably will not materialise, but companies cannot take that risk. Government could, so Government could underwrite that and allow the British companies to work alongside the Ukrainians, learning the lessons of the battlefield. That would help Ukrainians. It will help us in the long run as well, because all of that will feed back into technologies for the JEF and eventually into our broader alliances. There is no reason why we should not involve JEF partner nations, many of whom punch well above their weight, and draw on their technical capacities.

Then there is the quantity argument and we are now back, I am afraid, to reintroducing President Trump into the equation. It has been clear for a very long time that European NATO has had to step up and do more. In two and a bit years, the European NATO powers have not really stepped up to the plate to increase the ability of their defence industrial base to scale. Next year, we may be producing—though most analysts think the claims will not be met—somewhere close to a million shells across the whole of European NATO. When you look at the number of Europeans and the number of Americans, the Americans once again are outproducing us.

We need to do this for our own good. We need to do this to hold NATO together in the short term. We need to do it to provide the quantity of basic materiel to Ukraine. There is the quality side, as I have just discussed. On the quantity side, we need to invest in rearmament in this country, not least if we want to hold NATO together. On the technical



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capacities, I have listed them here: air defence, electronic warfare, education and training, help with Ukrainians developing their own range weapons that will be used at range in Russia, and then that technical development of drone modern digital age warfare.

Q14 Mr Bailey: Could you pull on the JEF part and our partner agreements within that?

Dr Lewis: The experience of doing these smaller, more likeminded cut-across capabilities and focusing on a particular area or particular sets of technologies has proven to be a very useful experience. Looking to the future, there is the work of JEF in the Arctic, where we have a major Russian claim geographically, but increasingly a Chinese claim, for the longer run. The adaptation of the Arctic by China and coming through into Europe that way is going to make a huge difference, so the experience from JEF is absolutely vital. It would be good to see more of those sorts of things happen and perhaps bring in other countries that are not part of NATO, but would like to contribute to northern waters and northern territory.

I wanted to talk about the spiral procurement policy that came out earlier this year and how we might adapt that thinking, which was much more adaptive in terms of bringing in equipment, getting it out into testing in the field, along with Ed's suggestion that we do more of that in the UK for Ukraine, but we could also do it for ourselves. We could have a different type of spiral, if you like: a circular learning the lesson from Ukraine and bringing it into the UK, and developing equipment much more speedily with a lot of adaptive capability. I know that that is what a lot of military people would love. If we could use this and have a silver lining to this terrible situation, it would be really good.

Q15 Fred Thomas: I am a military person and I would love that. To be clear, Mr Stringer, are you suggesting a joint venture between the UK Government and a Ukrainian company, probably state-owned, where we make and manufacture products to go to the front here in the UK, using a feedback loop from the front? You alluded to a six-week timeline. Let us say that we make 100 drones or autonomous submersibles and 90 of them go to Ukraine and are used immediately and we keep 10 of them, so that we have the IP and can keep making them ourselves for future conflicts. Is that what you are suggesting?

Air Marshal Stringer: That is certainly within the bounds of possibility, yes. That is a perfectly valid option that you sketched. When aerospace was the centre of the cutting edge of military technology, we had a place such as Boscombe Down, where private and public sector met and the public sector funded a whole load of testbeds that were flying testbeds. Where is the digital-age Boscombe Down? We need one of those forward in Ukraine and one back here, but in every other country as well—let us internationalise this—feeding their tech forward and testing it, and then produce componentry or even assemble it forward, like the Danes are doing at the moment.



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Ukrainians very much like the Danish approach. The Danes have bit the bullet and said, "You know what you need. We will furnish you with the raw material. You turn it into the kit that actually works on the battlefield of today and tomorrow." Regarding the feedback loop, the Danes are learning quite a lot and the Danes are a JEF nation. There are things here, as the framework nation, that the Brits could do, and certainly the thinking on spiral development has formed Labour's defence reform.

Dr Lewis: This speaks to what Ed was saying about fighting the war you do not expect. It is about the adaptability of equipment that you have tested. You have your basic platform and you have made it specifically adaptable to a range of situations.

Orysia Lutsevych: Ukraine has quite a significant network of underground facilities from the Cold War that are protected from missile strikes that it is using for production in Ukraine. That is the question of time and cost. Ukraine, despite the mobilisation, is trying to protect its labour force so it is still has that industrial base and trained people who can quickly produce the necessary equipment. Perhaps the location of manufacturing could be both ways, with some in Ukraine and some in the UK, in order to speed up the process, because logistics and servicing takes time, so having manufacturing on the ground makes sense.

I was struck last time I was in Ukraine, talking to military personnel, by how fast things change. They were worried, being out of the battleground for two or three days, that they would come back and not recognise things. They would use different frequencies. There would be different software. I was struck by that: that there was this battle against time. In a way, Ukraine is buying time for all of us here in the west to modernise and be prepared for whatever may come our way.

Q16 **Ian Roome:** Coming on to that, I was at a briefing yesterday in the MOD and they were saying that even drone technology is changing on a fortnightly basis. Once you have manufactured one, it is out of date. There is always something new. We have given a significant amount of drones to Ukraine and then it is up to us to replenish those drones. What risks might there be to the UK's own military capability of giving this aid to Ukraine?

Air Marshal Stringer: The obvious risk, as stated earlier on, is that we take all our kit, give it away to Ukraine and we do not have any. To our horror, we found out just how much kit we had that was serviceable and could be given to Ukraine. There is a lesson in there.

If you look at what the Americans have done, they have actually used this opportunity to recapitalise their forces, which is why the Biden Administration can point to a huge chunk of the \$60 billion and say, "It is actually being spent over here. We are giving the stuff that is 20 years old, it is still working and we are recapitalising". That risk is overblown.



There is a risk of giving away some of your high tech. As we have just said, the tech that matters on the battlefield is changing every week. Our high tech from two years ago is no longer high tech on that particular battlefield. Some elements that you would want to protect are few and far between and we will protect those, and every nation will as well. No doubt there are capacities in the cyber domain that we would sit on.

The risks are far outweighed by the benefits. The big risk is we cling to the fact that we can look back a few years and say we were the second biggest power in NATO. The world has moved on and we have not moved with it.

Q17 **Ian Roome:** Can the UK learn lessons from Ukraine's own use of its military aid for future military procurement and operational planning? How can we do this?

Air Marshal Stringer: Yes. The first thing to learn is that what was successful in the first couple of months is now absolutely obsolescent. You now have a next generation of weaponry that is slower to obsolescence but it all depends on the software it carries, the electronic warfare environment—this, that and the other.

We must be careful not to learn the wrong lessons. As several of us have said, we have constrained Ukraine to fight in a way that NATO never would. We have forced them to fight in a narrow, land-centric, tactical way—the meat grinder of popular folklore. We could not fight that way, so we have to think how we would adapt this modern technology to fight in a better way, and perhaps even help Ukraine to do that as well.

The big one—I am going to keep banging this one out of sight—is that it is not the shiny stuff you put on the shelf in peacetime. I think I have put this in print somewhere else. We have taken decades to buy a fleet of drones for two of our services that number somewhere between 40 and 60 drones, depending on exactly how many get bought. The combined cost of both programmes—one has now been cancelled—is £3.2 billion. Ukraine's entire defence budget before the war was £4 billion. We have just said those things would last hours on the battlefield, and in fact in their current construct, without the EW knowledge, they probably would not last that.

What we need to invest in is the ability to spirally develop product. We need the ideation at the front to come up with the novel concepts. That needs to be turned into prototypes. People in the military are now talking about prototype warfare. The prototypes are tested on the battlefield and then they quickly scale with industry. It is almost like a supermarket; what you are actually investing in is the supply chain that can very quickly deliver what is needed at the interface at the battlefield. We have tended to buy stuff at the interface in peacetime for the services without any of that behind it.



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What we are learning from Ukraine is how real wars are fought, not how peacetime operations and exercises are conducted. We have to learn to put aside looking really good on set-piece exercises in peacetime and remember the real hard lessons of how you sustain a long war.

Dr Lewis: I agree with all of that, but I would add in as well that we would be fighting in a very different way, in large part because we would be part of NATO. It is a very different situation to the issue of Ukraine, where it is defensive, territory, etc. The UK comprises part of two islands and is part of NATO. This is where we really have to focus. It is not just about UK investment and UK equipment; it is about how we work together in NATO. Interoperability has always been a major problem. It is interoperability not just in technology, but also in training, servicing, operations and so on. We must not lose sight of that.

I would add that one of the big things we have learned from Ukraine is not only the issue of adaptability and agility, which is huge, and the issue of mass, which is really significant, but also the protection of the infrastructure, energy, logistics, communications, and prioritising those, and having the resilience within those to be able to quickly reconstitute after attack. This is something we have to put a lot of focus on.

Q18 **Ian Roome:** Could I just come back to you on those priorities? When you are saying about climate change, is that specific to Ukraine? Could you just embellish on that, please?

Dr Lewis: Yes, absolutely. There are a number of things you can do in terms of resilience planning, such as social cohesion, social preparation, training for first aid and training for people to know how to use radios at different frequencies. All of those things can be built into societies that would work across a number of crises, pandemics and extreme weather. I lived in California for a while. We hopefully do not get as many earthquakes here, but they work across all of those things such as understanding storage of food and how to backfill.

It is the same idea as with the military. You do not keep the cans in there, as my aunt did, for 40 years and hope that they will still be okay. You keep on using them and then backfilling them. This is the training that we need to give, particularly to young people. I am quite keen on there being a national gap year, where everybody is given some basic training in first response, first aid, communications, logistics and all of these things that we need as a society. We should do it in a way that people who have had fewer opportunities at school, etc., can then recalibrate as a society. It would be a really interesting thing. I would also include cyber-protection in that.

Orysia Lutsevych: It is a fascinating question. We will try to do a bit more work on that to be able to answer it well. From what I can say right now around lessons from Ukraine in terms of procurement, the fact that so much of private sector and civil society is fundraising for the Ukrainian army gives the ability to pick and choose quickly. It is not all fully done



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by the Ministry of Defence. Again, it is part of the weakness, but perhaps we should integrate it as part of the future response, where it is not only big defence primes that are providing, but also smaller companies that perhaps have a dedicated procurement pipeline that means they can compete.

It is an interesting question about how we mobilise society beyond the professional army in case of a war. Ukraine is trying to grapple with this question. How do you maintain an economy and continue raising taxes to fund the army while putting people on the battlefield at the same time? Ukraine is developing a system of that, which is worth looking at. It is still a work in progress, but one digital solution now for military personnel is, if they have problems in a specific unit, they can use the Army+ app to actually change units. It is service-person focused to make sure that people feel that they are properly managed and that they can give feedback in the Army, which is such a hierarchical organisation. It is not obvious that that would happen.

Last but not least, I would encourage looking at Ukraine's own Ministry of Defence learning unit that has now been set up, where they are scaling technology. It is a think-tank within the MOD, which did not exist before. They are analysing Russian battlefield experience. NATO newly set up a NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis Training and Education Centre in Bydgoszcz in Poland, which would be a good place to have some of these lessons learned and integration take place.

Air Marshal Stringer: I wanted to comment on Patricia's point about interoperability and the fact we cannot do this on our own. That is absolutely right, but there are ways. Before the pandemic hit, we were well on the way to achieving what you spoke about through two vehicles. The first is the Allied Command Transformation, the NATO organisation in Norfolk, Virginia, where I was not just director general of the defence academy but also director general of joint force development, and therefore wrote future operating concepts and things like that. Those chimed with my opposite number in the Pentagon, and then I could walk them around the nine other capitals of the JEF, where they also chimed in, and we learned from the JEF. We wrote concepts of resilience in it. We learned from the Finns and the Swedes, and that was going somewhere.

If you take 10 North European nations with you—they are now all in NATO, of course, with the ascension of Finland and Sweden—and you are aligned with the leader in NATO, the Americans, then you are playing a really important role. It is a good pivotal position. It is something that the UK can do and it is something that the defence reform is organised around. The problem previously was always that, if that did not chime with what the services had in their 10-year plan for what they wanted to spend their money on, it was sometimes hard to force them to do what might be necessary. I come back to the importance of getting the defence reform done.



- Q19 **Jesse Norman:** Panel, you will be aware that Russia has received a lot of different kinds of military support since the beginning of the war, both from aligned nations and from putatively non-aligned nations. They might be drones from Iran, missiles or drones from China, troops from North Korea, basing support from Belarus, or, allegedly, troops from Yemen and components from India. Can you just talk about what impact you think those different kinds of military support have had in supporting Russia, and their effect on the course of the war?

Orysia Lutsevych: Clearly we are in a stalemate. It is a war of attrition that we are talking about now that was created as the result of, on the one hand, delayed US assistance at the beginning of the year. You may recall that, for half of this year, Ukraine basically had no US assistance coming, as it was blocked. We keep forgetting that moment. Ukraine was already in a situation that somebody was saying may await in the future with Trump cutting assistance.

- Q20 **Jesse Norman:** Could you just dwell on that for a second? Just talk for a second about what the impact of the blockage or the delay of US support was on the ground.

Orysia Lutsevych: It was significant. What it meant is that Ukraine could not get the HIMARS missiles. It allowed Russia to reconstitute and to train its force to make another push that we are now seeing evolving. It also led to the fact that the air defences were weakened. and we have seen this massive bombardment of energy infrastructure. What Russia seeks to achieve is to destroy Ukraine's economy, as we talked about, and depopulate Ukraine by these kind of vicious attacks.

That had a quite negative effect but, thanks to assistance from Nordic countries such as Finland, Sweden and Denmark, as well as Czechia and, partially, the UK, Ukraine, through an initiative to procure 155mm artillery shells, managed to stay in the fight, but it was not able to exploit some of the opportunities it has created through its previous months in the battlefield.

This is why I mention it, because the outcome of this war is not predetermined. It depends on what Ukraine's allies do or do not do in a particular moment of time, because, as Ed probably knows better than me, war is a time-sensitive event. Things are very flexible and are moving, and the enemy is exploiting any pause or vulnerability on the battlefield.

- Q21 **Jesse Norman:** Just to be clear, the effect of the US blockage or temporary withdrawal was to create a strategic weakness because Ukraine was incapable of dealing with evolving strategic threats to block the linkage between the US and the front in Ukraine from an evolution of warfare standpoint, but also to prevent it from exploiting opportunities it would have taken itself. It is quite important to get that in the record and well understood.



Orysia Lutsevych: I agree. It prevented mobilisation, as Zelensky was reluctant to call more men and women to arms when he knew that his storages were empty. That was the moment to do it, but unfortunately he did not have the kit.

Q22 **Jesse Norman:** Let us turn to the other side then and look at what Russia has received and what the effect of that has been. There is obviously a big difference between the early phase of the war and the more China-enabled drone context of the later phase.

Dr Lewis: First of all, I would look to what Russia is receiving in terms of their economy and in terms of other technical support. In terms of the types of sanctions that have been placed on Russia, they have managed to get around an awful lot of them through the sale of oil and gas, which is then, of course, brought back through third countries, if you like. In fact, they may be selling at a much discounted rate to what they were selling to Europe, for example, but they are nonetheless able to sustain that. Europe is then buying back the same gas and the same oil. That has been a very big part of the undermining of the attempts to constrain Russia's military capability.

Q23 **Jesse Norman:** The functional failure of the sanctions regime.

Dr Lewis: Yes, exactly, because not every country agrees with these sanctions, of course, and they are deliberately supporting Russia in that way. Then there is, of course, the issue of equipment from China. China has not given much, by all accounts. There may be things that we do not know about, but they have not given much in terms of actual military equipment. They have given a huge amount in terms of support for military equipment and in terms of the capability to manufacture.

I would also say that the Iranian drones, for example, which is exactly the sort of thing that Ed was talking about, which are so much cheaper and more adaptable, have now been, essentially, retrofitted and re-engineered, and are being manufactured in Russia. There has been enormous capability there.

The North Korean one is interesting. Obviously, there have been missiles. We talk about circular economy; those missiles were originally from blueprints from Russia, and back again and so on. North Korea sent thousands of troops—probably around 10,000. How will they fight? How will this be? Also, what happens back in North Korea? North Korea seemingly has technology from Russia in exchange, but what will happen in North Korea as more and more of those soldiers get killed? Will it have any impact at all, given the instabilities in the region? What will be the feedback loop? I would certainly be looking at that to see if there is any negative impact in North Korea that it would be very hard for the Government to be able to explain.

Air Marshal Stringer: If we take apart some of the Russian weapons, about 90% of the essential semiconductors and what-have-you actually



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comes from Europe in one way or another. It is not China pumping this stuff in, so there is more that we could do there to really crack down in our own backyard.

Q24 Jesse Norman: Is there enough of a feedback loop where we go after the people who are actually selling this stuff or the people who are manufacturing it within Europe?

Air Marshal Stringer: The fact that it is continuing and you are not reading about people in the courts suggests that there is probably not nearly enough of it going on.

For the oil and gas, yes, absolutely; a lot of it ends up back here. There are two points to make there. The general one is that there is still a complacency in NATO gatherings. People still say, "But we have allies and they do not," but they never specify who "they" is. There seems to be quite a lot of support. Also, unaligned nations are saying, "That is your fight. You are having another fight in Europe that is having an impact on us. Why should we take sides?", especially because they are getting cheaper hydrocarbons out of it.

One thing we could do is crack down on the shadow fleet of tankers. My knowledgeable maritime friends tell me that we could be doing more to crack down on the shadow fleet and prevent that conduit.

Q25 Jesse Norman: That is very helpful. Could we just touch a little further on Orysia's earlier point about the earlier blockage? The Kiel Institute has estimated that military aid from Ukraine's partners could drop by almost half next year, relative to current levels. Without being too melodramatic, can we just talk about some of the specific impacts that that would have on the conduct of the war and on the capacity of Ukraine to sustain the fight itself?

Orysia Lutsevych: It will have very negative effects. Some 50% of military assistance that Ukraine received was coming from the United States. The other 50% is all the European nations combined. If Trump decides that putting leverage on Kyiv is easier than having leverage over Putin by pressuring Kyiv into some kind of deal to end the war through denying access to military support, that would pose a serious problem for Zelensky and the Ukrainian general staff. As Zelensky said, we lack equipment to man the brigades, to train them and to provide.

The frontline is a very long one, at over 1,000 km. It is interconnected, as you know, and Russians know exactly where to push in order to deny access through control of railroad hubs to logistics. There could be a risk of a frontline collapse if such a big gap in assistance happens. That could also politically mean that Ukraine will have to concede to some deal that will further undermine its nationhood and worsen wider European security. This is where we sometimes dwell too much on the land war lines and villages taken by Russia, and forget the bigger picture.



Of course, the bigger picture is that NATO is trying to prevent as much as possible this war being portrayed as the war with Russia, but the so-called global south, non-western societies already see this war as the war between the United States and Russia. What is more disturbing is they believe that Russia will prevail and win, and that power projection of both the United States and its allies will be seriously damaged. In a way, I could say that the worst thing already happened for Ukraine. If Ukraine collapses, the worst things are coming our way.

Q26 Jesse Norman: Is there any expectation that, if there was a breakthrough and the Russians got closer to Kyiv, there would be a more resolute allied or supportive reaction?

Orysia Lutsevych: I hope so, but you need to have capabilities to provide that much assistance to hold the lines. This is where every day is precious, whether it is understanding the possibility of Trump's pressure on Ukraine or whether we are having enough production and training for Ukraine to maintain and defend the frontline.

Dr Lewis: What we are trying to do at the moment is project to 2025 and how we are envisioning the Trump Administration and what they might do. From what we have seen with this particular approach, the focus will be on trying to end the war, "To do it as soon as I get in", is what the future President has said.

How would that work? One big thing is that, if there were to be a long-term monitored ceasefire, perhaps leading to a longer-term process, what guarantees would there be for Ukraine? This is where President Trump will have to put a lot of his effort in thinking. Would this be guarantees that Ukraine would then be armed to the hilt? That would be the stick presented to President Putin that we talked about earlier. Would it be security guarantees from the United States directly to Ukraine? Would this be a form of temporary security guarantees with a view to joining NATO, which was always a red line for President Putin?

Also, one of the things that we need to think about is how to sustain Ukraine to a point where perhaps the Russian economy would be really teetering to a point where it would no longer be sustainable within Russian society. What would that point be? Could the Europeans be able to frontload that amount of money and that amount of support into Ukraine prior to getting to a point of collapse? These are the very big questions that we need to answer in Europe.

Q27 Mrs Lewell-Buck: Just following on from my colleague's questions about possibilities of reduction in military aid, what are the further implications if Ukraine is pushed into a ceasefire because of that reduction along the lines of a settlement, as recommended by Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia? In particular, what I am concerned about is where he has written about Ukraine not being asked to relinquish the goal of regaining any territories, but that the diplomacy needed for them to regain those territories would be after Putin leaves office. What are the



implications of that, if that is part of a ceasefire settlement?

Dr Lewis: It is huge, and we cannot predict any of this. We can put things in place to reduce the likelihood of some things, the support for Ukraine being one of those. The understanding that it is Ukraine first then others is another issue; we have to learn the lessons of history in that sense. It is very much about where the money best goes, and whether there are more intelligent ways that the Europeans could support Ukraine. Ukraine needs to be part of that. This should not be a discussion without Ukraine's views being paramount.

This has been one of the problems within our own discourse. We tend to think about it in much more geostrategic points of view, rather than understanding as well that this is a very big issue for the country of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. President Zelensky has been saying that he understands that things are going to change in the coming year, and that it is a critical year. Every year is a critical year in war, but in terms of President Trump coming in and in terms of the quite serious impact of the delay in funding from the United States earlier. That has been clear, and therefore the gains and the sustainability of gains that had been made being much harder for Ukraine.

What will happen in the future where Ukraine is being put into a much more difficult position? It is about whether we can see a pathway through to sustainability and then to the collapse of the Russian effort, or whether we understand that this is the way it is going. The important thing is always to negotiate from a position of strength. Working out where your optimum position of strength is is one of the hardest things you can do in any negotiation, because when things are going well, you always hope that they are going to get better and so you do not negotiate then. When they get worse you do not want to negotiate then, because you are in a worse position, but your opponent does want to negotiate then. We are always in this very difficult position where some pressure would be put on in the end, probably from the United States.

Q28 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** What I was keen to try to explore as well, Dr Lewis, is the implications for the people who will be living in those territories, and how they will actually feel about that, and what their reaction would be if that was a settlement.

Orysia Lutsevych: You are absolutely right that there are a myriad of implications. I spoke a little bit about the way it will be perceived for America, but since we are in the UK Parliament it is important to understand what the implications will be for UK security. There is unanimity of European intelligence, US intelligence and defence circles that Russia is preparing to mount a military operation against NATO in the future. The median publicly released assessment is that it may happen within three to five years.

It will not be legally recognised, but if Russia has de facto control of Ukrainian territories that it has newly occupied, it will exploit resources



from those territories, including rare earth minerals. It will mobilise Ukrainian men by force into the Russian army—because this is what they have been doing in the occupied Donetsk and Crimea—to protect its own people in Moscow and St Petersburg. Putin prefers to turn militarised Ukrainian children on those occupied territories into soldiers of his army. It will give time for the Russian army to reconstitute itself and keep being a threat to the rule-based order and to European security.

There are also implications inside Ukraine that are very important. That means that a ceasefire from the position of weakness would actually be a very threatening situation for Zelensky personally, because of those high costs that Ukraine has paid for the war. If there is no serious security treaty for Ukraine, he will be blamed for ending the war in a bad way. Let us remember it is the 30-year anniversary of the Budapest Memorandum, which hangs like a big shadow over Ukrainian heads. The two smaller clouds are the two Minsk protocols that Ukraine has signed from 2014 until the full-scale invasion.

Russia will insert more pressure internally in Ukraine to destabilise any agreement that they will sign, in order to wreak havoc inside Ukraine, in order to make it non-governable and in order for it not to integrate with the European Union—if there even will be an integration, because we know that every NATO member country has to have a solid defence reform, Ministry of Defence and civilian oversight over its military. In the worst-case scenario, it is a grey zone, Ukraine is left in limbo and no investors come in. This is plan B for Putin, if he cannot fully subjugate Ukraine.

Q29 Mrs Lewell-Buck: Do you want to add anything, Air Marshal?

Air Marshal Stringer: I have been ticking them off. One thing for us to think about is that if Russia emerges from this credibly and those non-aligned countries are still supporting it, and it decides that, with its wartime economy, it still needs an aggressive posture, then us and the JEF are responsible for about half the frontier with Russia.

There is still a lot of NATO thinking about central Europe being where it all happens. Actually, central Europe is probably in a reasonable place with Germany and Poland, especially with what the Poles are doing at the moment. If Russia wanted to foment trouble in the future, it is going to be on the northern flank or down, as it is doing, right on the southern flank. For us in the Joint Expeditionary Force, having set it up, we need to do some thinking about what the future posture looks like and not just think backwards to the NATO of Cold War 1.0.

Chair: Some of our members could not join us today because they were part of the Armed Forces Commissioner Bill Committee, but I am very glad that Lincoln Jopp has joined us from that.

Q30 Lincoln Jopp: I am multitasking. I am interested to hear your views on the UK's support for Ukraine, and particularly the public's support for the



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UK Government's support to Ukraine. The Secretary of State for Defence said we cannot take it for granted and we have to nurture it. What is your assessment of the UK's strategic communications push in this area? Are we in the right place? Are we heading in the right direction, but conscious, of course, that we will be buffeted by other voices in that debate?

Orysia Lutsevych: Living here and being here, I see huge solidarity with Ukraine among people opening their homes and really feeling empathetic to the suffering of Ukraine. My explanation is it comes back to the second world war and the UK's history standing on its own for quite some time against Hitler's Germany. We should not hope that this will last forever because of the competing priorities on economic difficulties, partially caused by the Russian invasion with prices going up, and partially the post-covid period.

Given the fact that there is this natural tendency to support Ukraine, it should be harnessed more through the way of connecting how Ukraine's security is linked to European and UK security. The constituencies should be in support of increase of defence spending at times like that. We are not often explaining how Russia is already waging war on UK soil below the kinetic threshold. It should perhaps be made clearer why and how investment in defence will protect and how the British public is a target.

In a classical understanding of warfare, people think it is between the military, somewhere on the battlefield or somewhere in the sea, but we see how Russia wages a total war against Ukrainian society. This is part of their military doctrine. Preparing society that it will be a target in case there is a war is so important, and I would like to see more emphasis on that, not only to scare people, but to explain, like Patricia was saying, what they can do, and how they can defend themselves, to equip them to stand by and to persevere in their resistance.

Dr Lewis: I agree. I would add to that that, on the disinformation side that comes from Russia, it has been fascinating that people in the UK have seen that it was a Russian invasion of Ukraine from the very beginning. The idea that Russia has been putting out that somehow it was all Ukraine's fault and it was all NATO's fault has not washed very well within the British community and in other European communities as well.

There is certainly that narrative in other parts of the world, where we have not done a good job in terms of communicating and perhaps we have prioritised other things over that communication, which has been a mistake, particularly if you look at the United Nations and the support that we have seen ebbing away from the early days of February 2022. That has been really important: that the invasion of Ukraine was seen as illegal, quite correctly, and that Putin or Russia was the bully.

The other thing that has happened is that, because of that, it is easier to communicate the danger to the rest of Europe. This was an unnecessary



invasion and all that is required is for Russia to just pull its troops back and the war would be over. Russia has not been doing that. It is going forward with all these historical references and excuses for going forward and what it claims. People can see that that does put everyone else in some danger. That communication has been strong and good.

Orysia is correct in saying that we need to empower people as to how to resist that. We are doing quite good jobs on resistance in terms of not believing disinformation and resistance in terms of cyber-attacks and so on. It can be strengthened, but we need to do better communication around resistance for the future and putting in the measures that we need to put in place now should worse things happen.

Air Marshal Stringer: I would start with a hat tip to the defence teams of both parties, who have gone out of their way to maintain a cross-party consensus from the start of this conflict, which is not lost.

Dr Lewis: That is all parties.

Air Marshal Stringer: Yes. I said cross-party, but it is the teams who have been in power who have gone out of their way to involve all the others. I most recently saw that the other day, with John Healey inviting James Cartlidge to the cathedral. That is very important, because if you do not keep the country behind you and if it becomes a political game, then we are lost.

People like to know what the plan is. We have always fought shy of saying what the theory of victory is and what victory looks like. My friend General Ben Hodges keeps talking about this when pointing at the Biden Administration. The language, "as long as it takes", seems open-ended, rather than "to do whatever it takes" to achieve a positive outcome. That would change the rhetoric.

Finally, I am just reinforcing what the others have said here, which is to place this in the UK context as well. Russia is a threat to us all and we need to expand from that. In the opening comments, we talked about an SDR being very defence-focused, and whether there should be a security element and bringing in national resilience. On the military side, I hope that the SDR will be making a point that we could learn from some of our JEF allies such as Finland, which can put close to 300,000 soldiers in the field tonight, fully trained, with months' worth of war stocks exercised at the core level, and yet dismissed by some of my friends and colleagues in the British military as only 21,000 Regulars, but that can deploy more effective combat power.

In the defence review, I would like to see a thorough overhaul of our reserve forces. That is the way we link the military back into society. That is very important if we are going to make any case, as I hope you have heard from all three of us, for some form of rearmament.

Q31 **Lincoln Jopp:** Without wishing to appear totally supine to the will of the



President-elect, we do potentially meet a fork in the road. Some people have said that that will challenge Europe in terms of having to step up considerably. Presumably between now and 8 January, our strategic communications within the UK have to cleverly produce both viable options in terms of taking the British public with us in whatever course we continue on. That is not going to be a simple trick, is it?

Air Marshal Stringer: No. That is why I say, if it is the worst of those options and Putin staggers away with some credibility in a militarised society, which is going to have to keep going as a militarised society, if you look at the economics of it, that poses a threat. It will cost us a lot of money in the long run to be able to put up an effective shield to that. That should focus minds, not just in the Treasury.

If people are not thinking now about what an integrated air and missile defence system for the UK looks like, they should be, given everything else that is going on in the world, also outside of Ukraine. There are some very pressing geopolitical questions, military questions and questions about what happens when the military interacts with UK society, which are going to have to be addressed, as you say, with both the best and—we hope not—the worst outcomes of what the Trump presidency decides to do.

Orysia Lutsevych: The cost argument is quite powerful. It has been documented. There was a mention of the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. They did a simulation in Germany, which is are now spending 0.1% of GDP, in four scenarios. One of them is Ukraine's defeat; they say that Germany would have to spend 1% to 2% of GDP on defence. In the end, it is cheaper to support Ukraine right now.

We have to also understand that, for Ukraine to stay in the fight, a lot of things have to happen. Right now, Ukraine is fighting for all of us, in a way, and paying the highest price. Perhaps what is missing for external communication is this joint plan. Ukraine has a victory plan and we say we will back this plan, but I honestly do not think that is the best way to win this war. There has to be a joint plan.

What was interesting yesterday, during the visit of the candidate for the German Chancellery with President Zelensky, is that they said we should convene a group of the UK, Poland, France, Germany and Ukraine to try to have a common plan and present that to President Trump. This is the right way to do it, so that it is not just Ukraine saying, "Help us", but it is a common European proposition to Trump around how, together with America, we can prevail.

Q32 **Lincoln Jopp:** I will not use the word "turmoil", but, given the turbulence in the French and German political systems at the moment and the absence of an ability to set a budget, the UK might find itself pushed forward within that quadrangle relationship over the next few months.



Orysia Lutsevych: In a way, that is where the UK was at the start of the war. It was at the forefront. It was the leader in explaining what is possible and backing it with capabilities.

Q33 **Chair:** Just to build upon that, I completely agree that we cannot take public support for granted. We have seen fluctuating levels of support, whether it is here in the UK or elsewhere. I have a similar exercise in trying to convince my own Slough constituents, let alone others in the UK, about the need to continue that support.

We have seen what Lincoln Jopp just mentioned regarding France and Germany. Germany is the second largest contributor after the US. According to a survey in Germany, in January 2024 or at the end of last year, those who felt that military support for Ukraine had gone too far has now grown from 28% to 36%. Perhaps it was no surprise that in August of this year, Germany announced that it would be reducing its military aid by 50%. Likewise, according to the polls in France at the beginning of this year, only about 20% actually favoured increasing military support, while 39% felt that the level of military support should decrease, and some of the respondents thought it should even cease.

Would you not agree that we definitely have an information war to win? Despite having cross-party support at present, if we do not take the public along with us, it will become difficult for politicians to continue along those lines. What do you think we could do to tackle that disinformation and misinformation, especially on social media, especially with the likes of TikTok and Instagram?

Air Marshal Stringer: All politics is local, and you have to talk the local language. Both of those countries you mentioned, France and Germany, have an interesting relationship with Russia for different historical reasons, but where Macron had gone before his own particular brand of turbulence has made it rather difficult for him to make good on what he was looking to do.

Set against that, if you go into the Baltics and Nordic countries, there is a very different view. Kaja Kallas has just taken over as the high representative and will bring some different thinking into the European halls when they start to look at it. You have to speak to those electorates in a language that they understand. That is why I mentioned that you need to bring this back to, "There is a threat to us here".

Someone mentioned climate change earlier on. We are now rather reliant on all sorts of undersea infrastructure. If we cannot show what is going on with attacks on subsea cables and other bits and pieces, and we cannot talk about the cyber threat and how that can hit the NHS and other things that people hold dear, then we are missing a trick, because that is bringing home what the real threat is.

Back to the point you made earlier—"It might be foolhardy but sometimes he does it"—you can paint the case that this could happen



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here. Elements of it have already happened here. There is a strong case you can make about national resilience.

Q34 Chair: We can say it all we want, but the defence of the UK starts in Ukraine. Some of us as Members have been saying that publicly on the Floor of the House, as well as in our respective constituencies, but that may fall on deaf ears if we do not get the strategic comms correct.

Dr Lewis: We do not yet know what the effect of President Trump's initiatives will be on public opinion. It is very hard to predict how that might work in Europe, but we should just be aware of that possibility. It could go either way.

Chair: I agree.

Q35 Ian Roome: The Ukrainian Government have had many reshuffles, and obviously that impacts on supply and communications through our own MOD procurement aspects, where they are used to dealing with one Minister and then it changes to another Minister. The Chair has mentioned society here in the United Kingdom, but how is civil society within Ukraine feeling about the war and the different aspects of the different political parties within Ukraine?

Orysia Lutsevych: There is politics during wartime, despite martial law. Ukraine remains a quite pluralistic society, so there are a lot of discussions in media, social media, Parliament and everywhere else about how best to organise society for a long war. There was the painful realisation that it will last longer than people had thought when Zelensky and his team communicated at the beginning of 2024. It was painful, but Ukrainians are tired; these nightly air raids, deprivation of sleep, difficulty with providing education in this environment and maintaining mental health takes its toll. I do not see that Ukrainians are ready to capitulate to what Putin requires, because they understand that there will be no Ukraine. Putin erases any traces of Ukraine on any territory he takes.

Zelensky has a challenge in his internal victory plan, as it is called. It is very much underpinned by replenishing resilience, and that means putting the economy more on a war footing. Painful decisions have to be made about that. He was criticised by the opposition about how mobilisation was organised, about instances of corruption in the mobilisation units, and about border guard corruption and some men of conscription age escaping, but what gives me hope is that Ukraine has a culture of this contested discussion.

For example, civil society had a quite significant meeting with the President of Ukraine, including volunteers providing for the army, about how to improve the system of recruitment. They gave their ideas and some were already turned into action points, like the one I mentioned about the switch between the different brigades that was enabled. This is where I see that Ukraine is such a good partner for the west, because it



is modernising in wartime, which is very painful. It is implementing a lot of reforms needed for EU accession.

Let us mention that, because the fact it is on the future membership track is a significant victory for Ukraine already. The European Union gives quite a positive assessment along all sectors of reforms in wartime, and that includes the security and defence. Of specific interest to us is to make sure that there is accountability in contracting. There are questions to the current Minister of Defence in his effectiveness of running that state procurement, but he is under very close watch by Ukrainian civil society, Parliament and investigative media. The system is changing.

That also includes the new initiative to protect property rights for new technologies. In order to offer something to allies, you need to have a proper regulatory framework inside Ukraine. I know that it is a priority for the President to make sure that that is put in place.

Q36 Fred Thomas: For full disclosure, I am an MP for Plymouth. Air Marshal, I wanted to come back to what we were talking earlier about making sure the UK can learn lessons and produce the technology that is having an effect on the battlefield and has had the effect on the battlefield in the past two years. It is open source that marine autonomy has come on leaps and bounds in the past two years, and we have seen the Russian Black Sea fleet move around the base of Crimea. What can the UK specifically do to make sure that we have learned from that? You have spoken about the defence industrial strategy, defence reform and the security and defence review. We have had Lord Robertson, General Robins and the Secretary of State for Defence in front of this committee.

Specifically, do you think we, as the UK, should have a centre for marine autonomy in somewhere like Plymouth so that we can develop those capabilities ourselves? That is what Lord Robertson suggested in front of this Committee.

Air Marshal Stringer: It is a very good place for all sorts of reasons. I chaired one of these three-day conferences for transforming defence with some very high-powered speakers and some from industry. There was an ex-Royal Marine who has a very interesting company doing a lot of this. We need to harness that.

Once again, we had something like this up and running in 2020. The programme we got up and running, Integrated Warrior, had 122 companies at Shrivenham, from small SMEs and startups with a handful of people to the big ones—the big primes. We are trying to get their R&D merged with the ideation that should come out of the military strategic headquarters, as we have talked about already, looking at genuinely novel concepts and the theory of winning for the future. We need to merge the R&D from industry and encourage the primes to take a little more risk in putting private venture money in, because at the moment they can be quite risk-averse.



We need to develop that R&D along with the military test and evaluation and the stuff that goes on, as you will be well aware, at places like DSTL, down at Porton Down. We were on the verge of creating this quite vibrant ecosystem when the pandemic and other things got in the way.

There is a great opportunity on the back of this. I would like to see an independent lessons learned process for Ukraine. There is an opportunity, when the SDR is published and the defence reform happens, to make sure that that of which you speak absolutely happens. I had already mentioned it when I talked about what the digital Boscombe Down is; an offshoot of that is its maritime wing down at Plymouth, which is doing wonderful things in your constituency.

Orysia Lutsevych: People should feel the benefit of all this investment in defence and security. It is not just somewhere in the outer territories but it is here on UK ground.

Q37 **Fred Thomas:** The context is that we are an island nation. We are part of the Joint Expeditionary Force. There is, of course, a sea channel from here to Russia, and we need to think about the future. What would be absolutely catastrophic and unforgivable is if, in five, 10, 15 or however many years' time, we are dealing with a different situation to now and we have not properly been able to produce the type of capabilities that are having an effect now. If things do not change, we will not be in that position. Nothing that we have heard from the people I have said who have been in front of this Committee has assured us fully that that is happening. That is why I am trying to get to concrete steps to make sure that happens.

Air Marshal Stringer: One concrete step was RFA Proteus actually going out and buying commercial off the shelf and converting a North Sea tender to the first maritime surveillance vessel, and doing it very quickly and much more cheaply than allowing the military to go away and design something bespoke that we were only ever going to build one or two of.

If I pick a Navy example—you can extend it to land and air warfare as well—as we discussed earlier on, what has happened in the Black Sea is quite staggering, and yet, if you had been down to the Ukrainian navy headquarters early on, they would have probably tried to plan something a little more conventional. Our three services, faced with a similar operational problem, would certainly have come up with a more conventional maritime battle.

That is why I would like to see an independent inquiry, because these problems are often solved by bringing in industry and academia. Those people emerge in wartime—the R. V. Joneses, for those who were brought up, like I was, on *Most Secret War*.

Q38 **Fred Thomas:** Who do you think should be on the inquiry, Air Marshal?

Air Marshal Stringer: I will give you some names afterwards.



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Chair: Thank you very much. On that note, I would like to thank your good selves very much, Dr Lewis, Mr Stringer and Ms Lutsevych. Thanks to some military discipline from members, we have finished just in time. Thank you very much.