

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: The work of the Chief of the Defence Staff, HC 974

Tuesday 10 June 2025

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Members present: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Chair); Alex Baker; Lincoln Jopp; Mike Martin; Jesse Norman; Michelle Scrogham; Fred Thomas; Derek Twigg.

Questions 1 - 53

Witness

[I:](#) Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, Chief of the Defence Staff, Ministry of Defence.

Examination of witness

Witness: Admiral Sir Tony Radakin.

Chair: I call to order today's Defence Committee evidence session on the work of the Chief of the Defence Staff. May I say, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, that it is an absolute pleasure to welcome you back? Thank you for appearing before the Committee again. It is with some excitement, as well as some sadness, because I believe this may well be your last evidence session with the Defence Committee. We are going to very much miss you. Thank you for your incredible service to the country, and thank you for also being available to give evidence to the Defence Committee.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: That is very kind. Thank you.

Q1 **Chair:** Without further ado, I shall now move on to our questions. I anticipate we have a couple of hours before the next vote, which could be at around 5 pm. Admiral, can you just explain to us what your role has been? We have seen the strategic defence review, which has now been published. What has your role been in the costing and the commitments contained within the SDR, and making sure that they are affordable within the 2.5% to 3% envelope?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: All the chiefs and the Permanent Secretary have been involved with the SDR as it has been formed, so it is a different SDR in terms of having an externally led team. We have been comfortable with that. There is a freshness to that. We recognise that that was the Government's position from the outset. The team that did it have been very good in saying that this is not being done to us; this is being done with us. We have been reassured by the report, those submissions, where the chiefs are, and what they would want to see in it. It feels comfortable in that way.

Then you get, as you say, to the hard bit of how this all maps together in terms of the money. Again, we have been involved in that. That has then been the final element before you can be comfortable for the Defence Secretary to announce the review. That has been done with the Permanent Secretary, the finance department and the capability department. We have helped the Government to take some of the difficult decisions that go with that. How much can you do in terms of some of those new aspirations? What is your timeframe for this? It cannot all be done in the first few years, so how do you manage those balances?

It is only partial, because we have also said that the detail will come later this year with the defence investment plan. Again, that is a variation. In the past, we would have had an equipment plan and we would focus on an equipment plan. The Government are clear that they want to take a bigger approach. It is a pan-defence investment plan, so it focuses on people, infrastructure, your new capabilities, how you service your



existing capabilities, and whether we can do that as a singular conversation. Again, that feels the right way to do things.

Q2 Chair: You have mentioned the 2.5% to 3%. Seriously, is that enough? Do you feel some sense of anger or frustration that the SDR that has been published is, in effect, out of date already? It is my understanding that we will be compelled by NATO—and in particular our American allies—to move to a 5% funding model. Do you feel that sense of anger or frustration about the outdatedness of the document that has already been published?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: This may be a reflection of lots of other previous defence reviews, which have tended to be talking about cuts. I am in a very different position. This is the first defence review I have seen that has such clarity that this is the end of the peace dividend, and that we have an increase over the next few years to 2.5%. That is going to be tough through the 2020s. There are going to continue to be tough decisions. We then have the increased ambition as we grow to 3% by 2034-35.

I recognise that there is a further backdrop within NATO and that conversation that is going on, which might mean that the ambition for spending goes higher. We have a defence review that sets the vision, the direction and what we need to do. If there is an increase in spending, then it means what we plan to do will be done much more quickly and in a more substantial way.

When you ask whether I am angry or frustrated, this is a slightly different position than for most CDSs after a defence review. It is based on that shift of the end of the peace dividend and what it feels to me is a shifting era. I have been consistent on this in various speeches and so on. This is going to be something that goes all the way through the 2030s. It is part of a big national conversation. It is a part of a substantial response to the geopolitical challenges that we face.

Q3 Chair: Admiral, you have talked about ambitions that need to be achieved, but, ultimately, many of us knew that there was a change of Administration. We knew the direction of travel of the Trump Administration. We knew about what Russia was doing with its illegal invasion and how it was arming to the hilt. It is now spending well in excess of 40% of its budget on defence. What I am positing to you and why I feel that that anger and frustration may be there—and maybe you want to articulate that—is that the SDR process was not ambitious enough at the outset.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is ambitious. It affirms the programme that we had, which is extraordinarily ambitious. The UK is renewing its nuclear deterrent. We are recapitalising the Army. We desperately need to do that and get on with it. That is over £40 billion. We are investing in enormous projects such as AUKUS, and we are retaining an ambition for



projects such as GCAP and a sixth-generation fighter. That is all affirmed, as is the importance of nuclear going forward.

We then recognise that we need to modernise and embrace technology in a much stronger way. We have been to the fore in supporting Ukraine with its fight, and we have lots of lessons to learn from that, to embrace, and to take on. We also recognise that we have this extraordinary industry and innovation that is a part of the UK, and we need to harness that more strongly. We need to have a stronger conversation with society to make them aware of the threats that we face. That is the core of the defence review. We now have strong armed forces, but we need to be even stronger. That is the ambition that is in the review.

Q4 Chair: The Government's own introduction to the strategic defence review outlines that it is "costed within an increased defence budget of 2.5% of GDP from April 2027 and 3% in the 2030s, subject to economic and fiscal conditions". Even then, we have a lot of caveats. While NATO, our American allies and others are pushing us towards 3.5% on just military hardware, supplemented by 1.5% on other issues, we are operating in that caveat mode. Do you think that that shows that ambition that should be there in order to meet the threats of today?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The planning guidance that I have is based on that 2.5% in 2027 and to plan around 3% in 2034-35. That gives me a certain assurance that allows us to progress the ambition that is in the defence review. I have to leave the debate about whether we go to 3.5% or 5% to the Prime Minister and to the wider Government. We have a defence review that, if the spending level is increased, we then have a direction to apply that additional spending to.

It is not for me to start to say what the answer will be from a NATO summit that is just a couple of weeks away. You will forgive me, especially when it is the Government's spending review tomorrow. I can assure you that is where we are at the moment in terms of 2.5% and an ambition for 3%. What it means is that we continue with the existing programme and we make some progress in the 2020s, but the really significant progress is in the 2030s when we are heading to 3%. That is just being honest with you in terms of what that fiscal constraint means.

Chair: You have been very diplomatic. No doubt Members, including myself, will keep pushing on this point, just to make sure that we are meeting the moment.

Q5 Lincoln Jopp: Admiral, I used to work in the Ministry of Defence. When one of these was produced, my boss, General Simon Mayall, always used to ask, "Lincoln, where are the down arrows?" I have read this, and there are not any. There clearly will be down arrows for certain capabilities and structures, but it is very difficult to get that information at the moment. I wondered whether you could broadly suggest where those down arrows might be.



Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There are very few down arrows and, in a way, I welcome that. I welcome the ambition of the review. I acknowledge that that means there is considerable financial pressure with a review that does not have a particularly large down arrow. People will talk to an adjustment in policy terms of the language we have used in the past of “persistent engagement”, which is how many of your forces you have around the world on a persistent basis. The focus on NATO, and particularly in north-west Europe, might mean a little more geographical focus in the Euro-Atlantic and slightly less further abroad. That is not a substantial down arrow, because we do not spend that much money, whether it is in the Gulf or in the Indo-Pacific.

The ambition versus resource is very, very tight. That is especially true in the 2020s. That is why some of the projects that are being talked about in terms of the new aspects—if you called those marquee projects—are definitely signposting the way forward. We need to have a stronger industrial base for the likes of ammunition, so the six factories. We need more lethality, so the 7,000 cruise missiles. We need more in terms of artificial intelligence autonomy. Those tend to be in single billions, and then they will get stronger in the 2030s. That is where the ambition versus resource is being played out. Those could be much thicker if there was more money. There is not any more money, because you have an existing programme that is quite ambitious. Then you have these new elements, and then it gets stronger in the 2030s.

Q6 **Lincoln Jopp:** If I may, Chair, when we had Lord Robertson and General Barrons sitting there at the beginning of this process, they said two very important things. The first was that they had been told that they were not required to seek consensus in the building. Secondly, they had no obligation to fill in holes in legacy programmes. We read in the newspapers that the version we have here is version 12. Can you just give us a sense? Not in specifics, but when comparing the one that was delivered to the one that we have now, was there quite an iterative process to come to the final version?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: That is really interesting. I may not have followed every iteration. I have followed it closely from start to finish, and once it was being formulated as a distinct product earlier this year. The themes have been incredibly consistent, and very, very clear. They are not particularly surprising: a geopolitical reflection that the world has become more dangerous; a clarity that our armed forces need to be stronger; a clarity about embracing technology, a stronger relationship with industry, and a stronger relationship with society about these concerns.

The elements that might have been the final pieces were very much in the resource debate. You see that in the recommendations. There are some recommendations that are very distinct, so, “We want X by this date”. There are some other recommendations that are much more generic, and they reflect, “We will have a defence investment plan, and



that will be a conversation this summer and in the autumn". That will then be able to say to you, "Right, how do we turn those generics into specifics?" The crucial thing is, "Okay, when is that going to happen?"

That is also part of an honesty of not showering the defence review with lots of wonderful promises and up arrows, knowing that they are not affordable. Again, it has a clarity about it in terms of where we are going; it has an honesty about what we can afford; and it has the ability to be even stronger if there is more money.

Q7 Derek Twigg: CDS, this is particularly opportune, given that you are now coming towards the end of your tenure. Clearly your experience over the years, not least as CDS, gives you a great overview of what is happening in terms of the three elements of our armed forces. What is your view about the actual readiness of each of our armed forces, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force? What is your assessment currently of their war readiness?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We are ready to fight. We are always ready to fight. We recognise, though, that we need to be even stronger in the future. The way that I look at it, the Air Force has gone through the strongest recapitalisation programme. You are seeing that, whether it is the shift from fourth generation to fifth generation, the A400M, the arrival of Protector, or the investment in the Air Force's bases. That feels the strongest. The Navy is halfway through its recapitalisation programme, and that feels quite tough.

Q8 Derek Twigg: What do you mean by tough?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is tough in the sense that you have some frigates that are really old and coming to the end of their life. They are due to be replaced. Their replacements are not quite ready, and so you are in a difficult transition. The good news is that there are 21 or 22 ships and submarines either in build or on order. That is going in the right direction.

The Army is at the very inception of a recapitalisation programme. That is the one that needs to get going, and is then on a 10-year journey so that we can meet our NATO responsibilities in the 2030s. That is how I see each of the services.

The correct way to look at that is to put that in the guise of NATO, what is going on within NATO, and what the threats are that we face. When I put it into NATO, I see an extraordinarily strong alliance that is getting even stronger. Since 2014, there has been about an extra €600 billion, predominantly from European countries. You now see NATO getting stronger in investment terms by about €70 billion to €80 billion a year at least. I see a Russia that is dangerous and malevolent, but I also see a Russia that is weak and is struggling in Ukraine. That is where I put the readiness story.



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The crucial thing is whether we are deterring Russia and whether we can face down the threats of Russia. The answer is “absolutely”, and that is where our armed forces are now. What I should mention, which are on a par with the Army in terms of the need for additional investment, are those things that we call the enablers, so logistics, medical, our comms and our cyber. Those need more investment as well.

Q9 Derek Twigg: Is there not an issue about our resilience and being able to backfill losses in any conflict? Is there not a real concern around that at the moment?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I genuinely do not tend to subscribe to that anxiety, because we are so extraordinarily strong compared to our principal threat, which is Russia. The question that is difficult to answer in public, but that you should be asking people like me, is, “If we were to get into a war with Russia, how quickly could we get control of the air?” If you have sufficient control of the air, your ability to put a nation at risk, and especially a nation’s economy, is very, very strong.

How quickly can we have control of the sea? Again, that ability for NATO to have control of the sea is phenomenal.

For the land forces, the piece that has changed in the last few years in terms of NATO—and a stronger NATO that has clearer plans—is that it is no longer a NATO that thinks, “If Russia was to invade and to gain a piece of territory, how do we then fight to get that territory back?” It is a NATO that sees the risk of territory being invaded and thinks about how quickly it can get its land forces in there to block any risk of aggression and territory being grabbed. Again, I feel incredibly confident that that is what NATO has, and that is how NATO can keep its citizens safe.

The risk with thinking, “If you go to war with Russia, you are then in a long war; you are going to have this protracted war; and you are going to need the relief for casualties in the way that Ukraine has suffered”, is that that is not how we would fight. We need to be really confident of our phenomenal overmatch. It is the overmatch that deters Russia.

I have never been clearer at any time in my career about the success that NATO is having in deterring Russia. Russia does not want a fight with NATO, and Russia does not want a nuclear war. We should be really confident of that. We have a dangerous, malevolent Russia, and we need to maintain that advantage. The best way of maintaining that advantage is for all of us to get a bit stronger.

Q10 Derek Twigg: If the USA withdraws its contribution to NATO or its presence here in Europe, either entirely or in part, is Europe still strong enough to match Russia?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Europe is strong enough, because of its strategic depth, with 500 million people and incredible economies. I reject the premise. I have been alongside the Defence Secretary in those initial meetings with SecDef from America, and we have been fortunate to



have the clarity from America that America is sticking with NATO. At the NATO level, America has just agreed its next candidate to be SACEUR. It then has to go through the American political process. That should give you reassurance that America is continuing its role with the alliance.

The other piece of the American conversation is a frankness. The frankness is that America is going to continue to provide all of us in Europe with a nuclear security guarantee, but it is also saying it has other priorities, such as its homeland security and the challenges in the Indo-Pacific. "Europe, you are going to have to do more for the security of Europe". We no longer have that guarantee in terms of conventional American help for the security of Europe. That is a significant change, and that is why you are seeing Europe responding.

Q11 Derek Twigg: I have one final quick question. We have had difficulty at this Committee at getting information out of the MOD in terms of readiness. The SDR proposes a defence readiness Bill. Do you think that is a good idea?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We should have a very honest conversation with this Committee about our readiness levels. That needs to be done in camera, because that is sensitive information. You should know how many days' notice we have for our various force elements, how long we can support them for, what the ammunition levels are, what our resilience is and so on. The Defence Secretary is very comfortable with that conversation. Having a readiness Bill that highlights the importance of that clarity and the respect to Parliament is a mechanism that reinforces that, so I do not have any problems with that.

Q12 Mike Martin: Thank you, Admiral, for your time. The current Government are instituting a period of defence reform. This is a significant rewiring of the Ministry of Defence. As a brief introduction, could you just take us through the problems with the old structure and how this new structure is going to solve those problems?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We all know that trying to have clear accountability in the Ministry of Defence has been difficult. Everybody has a vote but nobody is quite responsible enough. That has been a problem. We have problems with layers and layers of process and hierarchy, and that is going to be difficult to get rid of.

Q13 Mike Martin: Why?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Because we struggle to get rid of it, even with reform programmes. I will come to that. It is so important that the peace dividend has ended. We are in a different era. When people walk through those tiger traps in the Ministry of Defence, we should all have at the forefront of our minds, "How do we make our country safer today, and how do we make it even stronger with our influence abroad?" When you are in the middle of a peace dividend, I query whether the tone of people walking through those tiger traps has been too much about, "How do I make sure that we come in on budget by the end of the year?"



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That is the rationale. That is the shift. If you want to go to a focus on warfighting readiness, you need to have that clarity that, when you walk through those tiger traps, it is all about getting our nation even safer. You have a programme that says, "The Permanent Secretary continues to be the accounting officer. He has the Department of State, but can we stop a Department of State dabbling in the small stuff? Can you make it a bit more muscular in Whitehall to have the big policy conversations, especially with the Treasury and with the Foreign Office?" We all welcome that.

You then have the nuclear area, which has gone through lots of reforms. Let us stick with the leadership there. Let us stick with how we have created the defence nuclear enterprise. That is a massive, massive area for us to get stronger in. We have started that programme, and to a certain extent we leave that well alone.

You then get to the military strategic headquarters and to the national armaments director. The biggest piece of reform is the national armaments director, and I welcome that. That is about recognising that, when we have been debating about investing in a particular capability, we have actually been having conversations about that individual programme. We do not look at it through a domain lens. We do not look at it through a big industry lens. We have not been looking at it through exports. Again, it is trying to say, "Can we lift that up?"

We also want to create a national armaments director who is free to not be chasing 1,000 user requirements in order to produce the thing that we imagine we want, which might not even exist. Can we as chiefs describe the problem that we want to get after and give the national armaments director the freedom to see what is out there in the market, what might be spawned by that problem, and where our industry and innovation can come up with better solutions?

Can the national armaments director, when he or she comes back to the chiefs, say, "The good news is that there is something out there. The bad news is that you cannot afford it, but I have something that you can afford, which is 80% of what you might have had in mind, and you can have it twice as quickly"? Can we have grown-up conversations about how we are going to support it properly, we are going to deal with the resilience, we are going to deal with the infrastructure, and we are going to ensure that we have the people? We have been doing too many things piecemeal, rather than taking bigger looks.

For the military strategic headquarters, that is about giving additional influence to the Chief of the Defence Staff with the chiefs committee. If you want to have an integrated force, to embrace maritime, air and land with space and cyber, and to ensure that they can all fight together in a much stronger way than we currently do, you cannot have a system where you do not have a controlling mind in the CDS, but you have a chiefs' table where they are all in competition and fighting for resources.



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As the Chief of the Defence Staff, you now have more much authority. You then embrace your chiefs committee and we have those difficult conversations. We lock shields around, "The priority has to be that we get more lethal and we invest more in the Army, and that might mean that we accept it is going to be a slower investment programme over here".

Q14 Mike Martin: It sounds great, and like many good ideas it also sounds obvious. The idea of having the Chief of the Defence Staff commanding the other chiefs is obvious. The idea of having a national armaments director is obvious. Why was it not done before?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: In the same way that it may not be surprising that there might be a better way of running things, it is also not surprising that large bureaucracies very rarely make substantial changes. They rarely volunteer to engineer those changes, because that is the way that bureaucracies behave.

Q15 Mike Martin: If I may, why will this time be different?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: You are absolutely right. This has been a frustration for me, because we have not made as much progress as we should have in reforming and taking the opportunities around that. Particularly in terms of head office, we have had a series of change programmes that have made very little progress, so defence design, head office reform, and some things in terms of our ops commitment area. The resistance to change has won out.

We have gone to a very different method with the current reform programme. It is top-down led, and that is very strong leadership from the Defence Secretary. It has not been the usual debate of, "Can we have 20 different ideas about what the best model might be?" It is, "This is going to be the model, with these four big players. We are going to bring some people in, and we are going to organise around those four players. We are going to design it that way, and then we are going to demand changes". That is very, very different from the way that we have been doing it in the last few years.

I would argue that I did something similar when I was First Sea Lord. It was not a consensual, "How might we change?"; it was leadership saying, "We are going to change, and this is what it is going to look like". In bureaucracies, you need that even more than in other large organisations.

Q16 Mike Martin: If we look at the UK military and compare it to other militaries, we have a very high ratio of admirals, air marshals, and generals as compared to the number of personnel across our militaries. We are talking about reform and radical thinking, so it seems there is an argument for reducing the number of starred officers, and bringing it more in line with the US Marine Corps or the Israeli Defense Forces. There are lots of other small military forces that have much better ratios. Could you explain to me why that has not been considered as part of this



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defence reform?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is part of the defence reform, so it will be considered. The difference with the US Marine Corps is that it is a single entity.

Q17 **Mike Martin:** It is integrated. We are going in that direction, are we not?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is definitely integrated, and it is definitely lethal. There are lots of things to admire about it. The big difference is that, when you step back, the US Marine Corps is not the national armed forces of America. I am obviously more familiar with the Navy. In the Navy itself there are probably about 10 or 11 admirals. In the United States there are miles more. In the complete Navy there are over 30 admirals.

The reason is that you have other responsibilities within NATO, where you are national representatives. You have other roles within the Ministry of Defence. You have other roles in terms of head office. You have other roles as part of your joint command, strategic command, and so on. Those do soak up additional positions. We just have to look at that carefully.

I talk about the Royal Air Force. The Royal Air Force costs about £8 billion to £9 billion a year to run, and every year we generate over £6 billion of aeronautical exports. The US Marine Corps does not do anything like that. It does not have those kind of ratios. We should definitely look at everything, but you are comparing apples and oranges.

Q18 **Mike Martin:** It is not just a cost issue, because the salary of an admiral or an air marshal is nothing as compared to an F-35. There is that idea that, when you have a very busy field at the top of an organisation and they all have staff and departments, that actually slows down the ability of that organisation to make fast decisions. One thing that has been outlined is that the number of civil servants is going to be cut. The staffing at the MOD, where many of these starred officers sit, is going to be cut. It is interesting that you have said that we are going to be looking at that. Do you think we are going to see commensurate cuts to starred officers as we do to the civil service, on a comparison basis?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Potentially, but none of us has a difficulty with what you are proposing. It is absolutely what we are doing and what we are looking to do. The other piece that goes with it, particularly on the military side—which, again, is part of the defence review—is that we need to have fewer people who are back office or not doing military tasks, and to get them back into a core military function.

To your other point, it is not just military or civilian; it is both. We need to give more authority to our people at a junior level. Whether you are an assistant head civil servant, or whether you are a colonel, lieutenant colonel or equivalent in the military, we have to get over the level of frustration that those people have dealing with the series of layers that



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do not necessarily add value to the beauty that starts off with the staff officer, and the time that it takes. That is part of some of the reforms. Some of that might be different ways of working, and some of it might be removing the layers. I did that in Navy command; it is much harder doing that in London.

Q19 Lincoln Jopp: Just on the military strategic headquarters, Admiral, is it going to still be in the MOD?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes.

Q20 Lincoln Jopp: If I could summarise what I think it means, people are going to get into and stay in their lane a lot more. The military is going to do military stuff, and the Department of State is going to do its policy stuff. Is that a fair way of putting it?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is, but I would make a distinction as well in terms of where you are on that scale. For me, the Department of State will be doing what I call "big P" policy, such as, "What is our approach to the Gulf?", and then translating the political intent into policy language, outcomes and, in effect, guardrails for the military strategic headquarters to then achieve those outcomes.

The issue will be whether we can get that clarity, or whether we continue doing this fudging where we are all doing the same and there is too much duplication and so on. Can you stick at big P and not come down to this level? Can you have real clarity on your outcomes, which we then deliver on? I welcome that, but I do not want to pretend that the beast that is the Ministry of Defence and the muscle memory is not going to have to be adjusted and changed.

Going back to the previous questions, sometimes the way to accelerate or make sure that adjustment happens is that you force change on an organisation; you change the leadership, you change the way that it is being operated, and you force it to happen. My worry is that if the reform is not strong enough, fast enough or deep enough, then it will tend to reverse back to its comfort and will continue with too much duplication, too much process and too much hierarchy. There is a real challenge there.

Q21 Lincoln Jopp: On the model that you now have, the CDS is actually legally in command of the other three. Running alongside the three service pillars, you have the joint staff. I remember that 20 years ago there was a big push to make the younger generation more joint in order better to support the integrated force. Is that still the direction of travel, or is it avowedly single service until you get to four star, and then you show potential for joint service and can become the CDS?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We are way past that. All of us are now joint. I am so old that I did the third advanced commander and staff course where we all came together, at Bracknell, then Shrivenham. I



describe my generation as being joint and being comfortable, even as a naval officer, to employ and direct tactical activity in air and land.

The bit that is different for the coming generation who are on staff course now is that, instead of being joint, they have to be able to be an integrated commander. Are they able to employ space and cyber in a tactical effect way that somebody of my generation and training might not be? I am guilty of being slightly in the bluffer space of how I am tactically employing space and cyber, whereas I would expect somebody going through staff course now to be much more proficient at being able to do that. It becomes an integral part of their career as they are going through.

That is what is the change. That is happening with other nations. We are leading on some of the clarity with that. We also have organisations that are comfortable with that direction. You have your strengthening of cyber command as part of the defence review within strategic command. We have already created space command, but they need to be even stronger.

Lincoln Jopp: Just for the record, you are not ancient at all, CDS, because I was on ACSC 4.

Q22 Fred Thomas: Admiral, we have spoken for some time about defence reform. That is under way with the military strategic headquarters and the new national armaments director. I am going to ask you how that is going to change things for the actual fighting force, as opposed to within the MOD. The context for that is that we still have people training how to do weighted marches and marksmanship on a 300-meter range, when you know and we all know that that is not current warfare. It is certainly not future warfare. We are talking about deterrence and credibility. How is defence reform at the top going to actually bring some modernisation to our fighting force?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: You are right; some of those things have to change. Given your background, you know better than I that the core aspects about how you test individuals and ensure that they have the character and determination to be able to do a whole range of things endure.

All the services are changing. I have a letter here from the Commander Field Army, and I will share it with the Committee. Just to give you an example, as part of the Army's drive to modernise it trained over 2,000 UAS pilots—so drone pilots—through the land training scheme, and 350 first-person-view pilots, earlier this year. We have introduced a much tougher regime in terms of the electronic signature, which we know is such a difficulty in that fight with Ukraine and Russia. We have introduced that on exercise. Taskforce Hannibal is a much tougher OPFOR, which is trying to get after a less scripted version of how we do exercises. That is happening at the tactical level, and that is happening across all three services.



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At the higher level, the example I would give—and the reason why people like me are much more confident that we can do things differently, and we have the opportunity for change in a stronger way than we have had in the past—is Taskforce Kindred and what we have been doing with Ukraine.

We have always been able to do an urgent operational requirement, choose one specific thing and get it through the system really quickly. We feel really proud of ourselves and we pat ourselves on the back. The thing that is different about Kindred is that we are spending billions of pounds on hundreds of lines. It is nearly 1,000 programme lines. We are doing it at a speed that we have never been able to do at that scale in the past. That gets to your core point: that the warfighter gets the kit that they need in a much quicker way.

When you ask how we are doing that, Andy Start, the interim NAD and boss of DE&S, will say, “Under our old system we had 11 people checking for the contract to go through and all the rest of it. We have got rid of 10 of them, and we rely on one person”. There are other aspects that the Chancellor announced in her spring statement. We have to get those big capability items on contract inside two years. The medium capability in terms of cost items has to be within a year. Everything else has to be inside three months. I cannot tell you how much I welcome that. Again, that is the top-down piece, because that forces the system to adjust.

The reason why that is necessary is that we have some horrendous figures; even to just do a business case for our cat A and cat B programmes takes us between 1,000 and 1,200 days. It is 1,000 days before you even have a contract to buy the thing, before you bring it in and before you take it into service. It is years away before it gets to that individual who needs it on the front line. These are massive changes. They can be done. They are top-down, and they are going to have to be driven all the way through.

Q23 Fred Thomas: You are right to highlight Kindred. You and all your staff should be very proud of what Kindred has achieved, but also acknowledge that Kindred has been a mechanism to arm the Ukrainian warfighter. That is good, but, respectfully, does not answer my question, which was about why our people are not being trained in this. You mentioned the FPV trial training programme—let us call it that—because that is not a capability we have in our force. It is training purely for the sake of the training. Those people who have done that course are not able to deploy with it, because we do not own that capability. We have to acknowledge that.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I agree with that. That is very fair.

Q24 Fred Thomas: If I may have another question, you mentioned earlier in this Committee hearing, reflecting on previous change programmes in the MOD, that you found that resistance to change had won out. That speaks to a culture of resistance to change. Looking back now at your time in the



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military, why do you think there is this cultural inability or resistance to modernise that goes potentially from the top, right down to a section in a platoon of infantry?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There will be other people who have written PhDs and theses on this. Some of it is in the way that we have been training and in the military psyche. That extraordinary responsibility where you are risking people's lives does impose a caution. Therefore, the way that you take your orders of, "This is how you are going to use this piece of kit. This is how you are going to act as the section commander. These are your tactics and procedures", has been very, very strong for very good reason. When you are at peace that gets reinforced, and there is no incentive to change. You get promoted by being very good at following those TTPs, being a decent leader and so on.

What we have learned—and this goes all the way through the system to senior officers as well—is that when you are in an existential fight, as you are seeing with Ukraine, you absolutely change. You change your whole culture. You change the way that you are fighting. Ukraine does not have the mass that Russia has; therefore, it has to come up with different ways to keep those Russian hordes at bay.

The way that Ukraine is doing it is fundamentally through the guts, courage and ingenuity that it has spawned. It is ahead when it comes to drone warfare. It is leading the world in drone warfare. That happens when you are in an existential fight. We have to get closer to that mentality, because we can definitely do it. You have seen that with Kindred and how we have been able to support Ukraine. We have to get closer to that edge, and have that edge in peacetime. We have to be more sceptical and questioning about doing things the way that we have always done them. That is a problem for all peacetime militaries. Because we have been so close to the Ukraine fight, that is why we have an added advantage to up our game.

Q25 **Chair:** With regards to the national armaments director, it is my understanding that the individual would be getting a salary of £640,000, which includes bonuses. That would be double what the Prime Minister is getting, and way more than many of our brave servicemen and women. Do you think that that is right? Do you think that situation is tenable?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is not directly in my lane, but I am really selfish when it comes to the national armaments director. If the national armaments director improves the system so that we get the kit more quickly, ideally to a better price and at higher quality with the amount of money that we are spending, with the difference that the right person might be able to make, we should not fixate on their precise salary. We should fixate on them improving, so that we get a much better system, you get much better value for the taxpayer, and we get much better service to the warfighter. I would not mind if they were paid £300,000, £600,000 or £1 million. I want to be really selfish that they deliver, because it can be so much better than it currently is.



Chair: I do not think anybody would argue about value for money; it is just whether the taxpayer is getting value for money at £640,000, but no doubt that is something else that we will be looking into later on.

Q26 **Michelle Scrogham:** Previous reviews have talked about transformation and have used the same sort of language. Why do you feel they have found it so difficult to achieve?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is in some of the earlier answers. By the way, you should be very questioning about whether we can achieve it this time. We need the pressure to force us to change. What is different with this one is a review that has been complementary in terms of the submissions that the service chiefs put in and what they got back. There has not been a clash. You have service chiefs who are desperate to move their services on, to modernise, to embrace technology and to be a bit bolder. I have been fortunate to serve alongside them.

The other piece that is different is this top-down approach. That feels very, very different. There are times where you can have a much more consensual approach, and you definitely need to bring the people with you and so on, but I would advocate that, if you are going to do large change in big bureaucracies, then you need people to stay there for longer. You need to be really clear that you are going to focus this from the very top. You drive the people at the top and, again, force them to push this change through. We are starting it. We have not done it. That is why we are still going to have to push this through, but that is why I have much more confidence in this.

The other aspect is that the clarity we have with some of the opportunities that we have learned from Ukraine will help us. The geopolitical backdrop that we need to do this and we need to get stronger provides more emphasis as to why we need to get on with it.

Q27 **Michelle Scrogham:** Should we believe that it is possible to achieve it this time round? What do you think are the biggest stumbling blocks that we would come up against?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is definitely achievable. The stumbling blocks will be some of the bureaucratic politicking—"my area does not need to change, but everybody else's area needs to change". Some of the more fundamental ones will be the relationship with the Cabinet Office and with the Treasury.

When I go back to Kindred, Kindred spends about £3 billion a year. It is quite light touch by me and the Permanent Secretary. It is effectively run by a one-star civil servant in main building. We then have a two-star who is pulling together all the contracts in Abbey Wood. That system is working, because I am able to take more operational risk because there is a war on, and therefore we push things through more quickly to our Ukrainian friends.



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Because there is a war on, we are also then prepared to take more financial risk. That is an antithesis to the way that we normally behave. We normally are a bit stressed on the money side, so we then impose more control. If you put more control on, it gets slower, and you do not have a hope of getting to the advantages that you are trying to get.

It is about whether we can make those adjustments. That is why I welcome the clarity on contracts. It is a big contract, but you have to get on contract in two years. If it is a medium-sized contract, it has to be one year. It stops the debate. "Now, adjust all your systems to ensure that that can happen". That feels very, very different.

- Q28 **Michelle Scrogam:** We had a review recently in my patch where we brought defence together. One of the biggest sticking points was the fact that the SMEs could not get into the MOD. What you are saying is, "Reduce the bureaucracy and it will work better".

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Absolutely, and do things that other industry does. We have some examples with Kindred. I have to be careful as to what examples I give. We might want a very long-range powerful drone that might be closer to a cruise missile. In the past, we would go to the big primes with, "Here are 100 user requirements and so on". Some of the techniques that we have been using are, "Can we keep that very vague? Can we push that out to a whole series of people?" Can we say, "You have to come back inside six weeks, and you have to have a concept of operations that we are satisfied with, and six weeks later you have to be able to fly it and prove it"?

What was really interesting is that, when we started those techniques, some of the really large primes came back to us and asked, "Sorry, is there a typo here? We can provide you a ConOps in six months". They have changed as well. That is part of my confidence that we can do this, and we can do it very, very differently.

- Q29 **Mike Martin:** Just dealing with this personnel issue, obviously all three services were shrinking in size. As I understand it, the Navy and the RAF have just started—

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes, they are now net positive.

- Q30 **Mike Martin:** They are net positive, but still below the trend line that you would like to fulfil the whole. The Army is still shrinking in size. Could you just comment on some of the challenges that still remain? The Army has been shrinking in size for some time now.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes. It is both recruitment not being as strong as we would like it and retention being worse than we would like it. If you go to retention, some of that is the bureaucracy in the process, treating our people better and trusting them more. That is strongly in the defence review.



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You are an incredible person in the Army. You are a section leader. You are a sergeant. You literally put your life on the line. You look after your team, your family and friends. You bear that commitment. That is what you do for your country. When you come back from operations and you want to hire a car, we treat you like you are a potential fraudster. We want the reassurance of a one-star sign-off before you take a car on company business to go to Abbey Wood.

There are things that we are getting wrong in how we treat our people and how we look at that.

Q31 Mike Martin: Are those things changing?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Those things are changing. I give that as an example. That is where we have to change the culture.

We need to look after our people better. One of the most significant things that we are doing is buying back our homes. If I think about the 36,000 homes under Annington, that is a massive win. We are now the landlord. We are not paying hundreds of millions a year to the landlord. We can use that to invest. This is service families' accommodation. Some of them have large gardens and so on. In the modern way of living, you might sell off half the patch and get a receipt, and on the other half build some modern homes really quickly. Can we get after some of those things? The £1.5 billion extra in the defence review, as part of that programme, which is then £7 billion, helps us. That is good.

If I go to recruitment, the frustration is not that we have a country that does not want to serve in the armed forces. We have 16 people applying for every place in the Air Force, about 10 to 12 people for every place in the Army and about seven to 10 for every place in the Navy. We have not been good enough at converting those people who are interested in joining the armed forces and making them recruits. Some of that is because we are just behind the times.

Young people expect a response and they expect engagement. They do not expect to have to fill in the most difficult computer system ever. We take too long to deal with medical issues. We lose too many people. We are changing. We have had medical rules that assume everybody might serve for a full career of 22 years, even though we know on average, for most people, it is between seven and 12 years.

Why not have this system: "Are you going to be fit enough for the next five years; if you are going to serve for a further five years, we will do a medical again"? It sounds really obvious, but those are the things that we are introducing and that we need to get after.

When I was head of the Navy, I tried to join the Navy. It was shockingly difficult. I could not believe it. I paid one of my son's friends to try to join as a chef and to do a sort of "secret shopper".

Mike Martin: It is a pinch-point trade.



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Yes, it is a pinch-point trade. That was to understand how ridiculous some of the systems were and how were we treating the individual. It is leadership.

There might be a very good reason why you are promoted, but you might not be the best person to be in charge of our recruiting or involved in recruiting. Can we look at the individuals who are doing this so we get after the best people for recruiting, rather than the person who is most deserving of being promoted? It is really basic stuff like that.

The good news is that we have turned it around in the Navy and the Air Force. It is so much better in the Army than it was 12 months ago. We have to keep improving. We had chiefs' committee today. The Army is not comfortable with the pace of change. It is going to introduce a whole bunch of new initiatives because it has to get after this in the next couple of years in order to meet some of our big NATO commitments over the next couple of years. That is at the chiefs level. It is our responsibility. We need to get after it. We can do it, but it needs to be much stronger than it has been.

Q32 Jesse Norman: Sir Tony, you have been admirably clear in your remarks today, whether it is on the importance of better reporting on readiness, the struggle to deal with process and hierarchy in the MOD, the difficulty of making any progress with change programmes, the need for less back office or the 11 people checking a contract for Kindred and 1,000 days to get a medium-level contract through.

In that spirit, can I just ask you about the timing of some of the spending announcements we have had? If you talk to people at senior levels in the armed forces, one of the worries is that no new money is going to start flowing until after the defence industrial review in the wider ecosystem. Is that a proper worry? That could be up to 18 months after the Government took office, in the face of a war in Europe. Is that a fair assessment?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is a worry. It is completely understandable. When a new Government come in, they want to take stock. They want to have a defence review; they want to set strategy for the whole of the Parliament and beyond.

I do not think we are going to be waiting until the defence industrial strategy in order to lay those contracts. That is why it feels very different. That is why for lots of us there is a sense of relief that the defence review is out there. We have had all the conversations with the Treasury. We will get our spending review detail tomorrow. My job and the job of the chiefs is to get on and deliver against the SDR. That is where we are. It is to implement the SDR.

Q33 Jesse Norman: The so-called demand signal is coming now, therefore, and will not wait for the defence industrial review.



Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: No, that will be complementary to it. The piece of departmental mechanics will be the defence investment plan. We are in a different position to where we were 10 days ago by having got the review out. Therefore, we can get on with some things that were being held up.

I can reassure you that we do not have to wait for all these other things. We can get on with much more now. Some of them will have to be meshed with the defence industrial strategy and the defence investment plan, but it feels completely different to where we were 10 days ago.

- Q34 **Jesse Norman:** Mark Rutte, the Secretary-General of NATO, said on Monday that, if we did not spend 5%, we had better learn to speak Russian. Is that a view you agree with?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I am so tempted to say “nyet”.

- Q35 **Jesse Norman:** What would the sentence to follow be, Sir Tony?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The other piece that the Sec-Gen talked about was the reassurance that we should have about how strong NATO is.

- Q36 **Jesse Norman:** Just to be clear, you do not agree with him. He is wrong about that. It is not right to think that, if we do not spend that 5%, we face a very serious threat.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: We all accept that we are in this era of change. The piece that is so true and consistent for the UK and where we are is that this security construct is extraordinary and we should celebrate it. We are a nuclear power. We are in the world’s largest and most powerful military alliance. We have, as our principal ally, the most powerful country on the planet. That is what keeps us safe. That is what we need to bind to. That is what we are doing. That is what we need to strengthen so that we do not have the concern that we are all going to be speaking Russian.

We are a day ahead of the spending review and two weeks out from a NATO summit. It is for the Government to decide precisely what the spending level ought to be. I give privately the advice about what risk we are taking at different spending levels.

- Q37 **Jesse Norman:** You would agree that we have a war in Ukraine, in which we are doing everything we can to support the Ukrainians. We know Xi Jinping has instructed the People’s Liberation Army to set a 2027 deadline for invading Taiwan. What difference is this SDR going to make to our lethality and our ability to make a difference within the next two years, which is the timetable of planning that that implies?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The problem with that question is that you skip over what we already have.

- Q38 **Jesse Norman:** There is nothing wrong with that. I am asking what the



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increment is. I wanted a specific reason why. I will come to that in a second. What is the increment, first of all? What more does this give us that we would not have had two weeks ago?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The increments through the 2020s are modest. The defence review reinforces some of those core aspects. We are a nuclear power and we are investing in nuclear. We know that we need to strengthen our Army. We have these big programmes called AUKUS and GCAP. We need to embrace technology and our resilience in a stronger way than we have been, hence those ammunition factories, those new cruise missiles, some of the drones and some of the autonomy.

That will flow in the next few years. I am not going to pretend to the Committee that there is going to be a vast change in the next two years, but I can tell you that the substance of what keeps us safe and why you should be assured of our safety and our ability to act around the world is with the armed forces that you have and how we operate.

Q39 **Jesse Norman:** Is there not a slight bait and switch here, Sir Tony? When you ask what is different about the spending review, the response will be, as you have emphasised in your testimony today, about capital investment. You talk about AUKUS, subs and GCAP. The problem that is going to affect lethality in the short run is a current spending problem, not a capital problem.

If you think about the things that are going to make a difference, they are going to include drones, AI and things that require the acquisition of specialist skills and technologies. Those things are going to be desperately needed in the short run. You have already suggested to us that there is going to be relatively little change in terms of the funding that will go to those.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Where I disagree with you is your assumption that we are in deficit now. We are extraordinarily strong. We are a nuclear power in the world's strongest military alliance with America as our principal ally. There are more dangerous threats out there. We have to get stronger in order to maintain and even increase the overmatch.

We are not in a deficit trying to play catch-up. It is about the strength of alliances and the strategic depth that you get from these gigantic economies. NATO has a billion people in it. NATO has 3.5 million people in uniform. Russia is struggling in Ukraine. It would be enormously difficult for China to seize Taiwan militarily. That is why I am slightly more cautious. A date that a leader comes out with when he wants his armed forces to be ready for something does not necessarily mean that his armed forces will be ready or that he is going to act on it. We can do things to try to maintain that stability and to try to head off what would be a very bad decision.

Q40 **Jesse Norman:** I have one final question. Two key areas that do require



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current spend as opposed to capital spend are the acquisition of interim technologies and training and recruitment. If you were writing the SDR now, would you have made more investment out of current spending in those areas? They feel quite light. You have suggested that they are quite light, given the relatively shallow impact of current spending over the rest of the decade.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I am less worried about training and recruitment in terms of investment. We have the people. That is more on us. It does not necessarily require investment.

If you ask me where I would want to thicken, it would be anything AI, anything autonomy, far more drones. As well as ammunition factories, while I welcome the additional resilience that comes from that, I would also want to deepen my stockpiles while those factories are being built. To me, that is a better capital example. We are doing the right thing and investing in capital terms, but, in operating costs terms, I would like to buy more ammunition at the same time.

We cannot do everything. The Government are being honest about the choices they are taking. That is why this is something that goes through the 2020s and into the 2030s.

Q41 **Lincoln Jopp:** When you say we are not in deficit, I get the impression you are talking about in strategic terms. If I were to ask you how many working tanks we have, you are not going to know that figure off the top of your head, but one of your brilliant team will pass you a note in a minute. I would be fascinated to hear the answer to that question in terms of backing up or otherwise your statement that we are not currently, today, in deficit.

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I suppose my caution on that would be that, while we are charged with the nation's security and safety, it may be that having 50 tanks or 100 tanks is not necessarily going to be the defining factor as to whether the country remains safe. To me, that is the problem with those questions.

I come back to this: is our readiness at a level that we are playing our part, with our NATO partners, and achieving deterrence with Russia? Are we really confident about that?

The problem with a micro example is that it skips over what is fundamentally our security construct. We are a beneficiary of a collective group of nations in Europe. Never mind our 50 tanks or our modest increase in the Army; they are increasing their armies by tens of thousands and they are increasing their tanks by hundreds.

We are playing our part. It might be in another part of the forest. It might be nuclear; it might be our anti-submarine warfare; it might be our fifth and sixth-generation jets; it might be an army that is embracing drone technology faster than any other. It has to be that compendium.



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Then we can link that micro point to, "Are we safe? Are we deterring Russia? Are we getting it right?"

Q42 Michelle Scrogam: Moving on to people again, the Committee continues to get really concerning reports about bullying and harassment, particularly against minority groups and women. What has been done in your time to try to put that right? Where do you see that changing? What has gone wrong?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: It is changing, but it is changing too slowly. You have always had senior leaders who have wanted to get after this, but you have a bunch of senior leaders who are really clear that we need to do more, particularly in terms of bullying, harassment and the gender, culture and racism issues that come up.

In terms of what has changed, we have got much stronger in terms of our visibility about, "This is wrong". We have made a massive effort to call people out and to encourage people to have enough confidence in the system so that they call it out. That is where you get zero tolerance for inappropriate behaviour. That has happened.

There was an anxiety that, if you called something out in your chain of command, you might feel uncomfortable or like you will be disadvantaged, so we have taken it out of the chain of command. We have the defence serious crime unit, which is completely separate. That feels like a much better way to approach it.

Our service networks are much stronger. We are having clearer conversations. They are very balanced. They commend us where we are getting some things right, but they are really honest about where things are too slow and so on.

The difficulty for us as senior leaders is that those ugly stories become more visible as we get more people coming forward and formalising their complaints, and then we have to get after it. This is going to be tough. It is going to go on for some time. That is how we are going to make the improvements.

In my time, we have tried different techniques. We have looked at different organisations. It is hard. We are really clear that it is unacceptable and that we have to get after it and do better. We are improving, but it is not fast enough. We have to keep reviewing it and improving it in order to ensure that our people are kept safe and can have a flourishing career without all this nonsense going on.

Q43 Michelle Scrogam: I met recently with Jaysley Beck's mum. She does not have any confidence that this is changing quickly enough, if at all. What would you say to her, faced with that? What would you do, in her position, to make this happen quicker and make sure that the people coming into this service are protected and they feel as safe in these services as they would in civilian life?



Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: First, I would reinforce the apology that we have given to Gunner Beck's mum. I would be brutally honest about the inquiry, the appalling things that happened to her and the way that we let her and her daughter down. It is shocking. I would be brutally honest about the 700 or so comments on Facebook where predominantly women came forward saying, "It is not just Gunner Beck. It is me. It is me. It is me". We have to respond to that.

I would then say that these are the things that we have done. These are the things that we are doing. We are being as open as we can be as to how we get after this. There is not a hint of sweeping stuff under the carpet. We are doing the opposite. We are trying to make it front and centre, so we can learn from it and stop these things happening again. That feels like the right approach.

I would then offer some reassurance. It would not be appropriate for Gunner Beck's mum because I imagine it is just too difficult for her. For you, the other side is that, when we ask women, "Would you recommend a career in the armed forces to your friends and family?" 85% to 90% of women say, "Yes, absolutely". That is the dilemma. There are lots of things that we are getting right. There are some shocking things that we are getting wrong. We have to get after them.

Q44 **Alex Baker:** Admiral, can I pass on my best wishes and the thanks of my community in Aldershot and Farnborough for your service? It will not surprise you to know that I am going to ask about homeland resilience efforts, given that home command is based in my constituency. How does the strategic defence review reshape defence's responsibilities for supporting homeland resilience, particularly in safeguarding critical national infrastructure?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: The SDR built on some things that SJC in Aldershot has been leading on. We are the beneficiary of the command in your constituency and the leadership of General Charlie Collins on Op Guardian. You might know about this, but I will explain it for the rest of the Committee. In the past, how did we go about homeland resilience? How did we go about the protection of infrastructure? It was all a bit regional and a bit ad hoc. We have now put that under General Charlie. That is part of Guardian. The 5,500 civilians in the MOD Guard Service, the MOD police and the other civil servants on the security side all come under the Aldershot command. We link that with how we are guarding all of our infrastructure. That is one of the biggest differences to have happened in my time.

We then have to respond to some of the additional threats, which might be cyber or physical threats. We are already doing some of that with cyber, but it is going to need more investment to protect our systems and to get the assurance that we want.

On the physical side, there is a whole range of things. You have some demands for the Navy. How do we protect cables? How do we protect our



infrastructure? That is not just, "We need more ships". Some of it is organisation. We are learning about some of this from our JEF partners, the joint expeditionary force. The fastest way to check your cables, pipes and so on is to have some protocols, to involve other nations and to do it with private industry, because it has lots of drones as well, and you can check that way. You can improve your surveillance to see where you might be vulnerable and what people are up to. That is some of the maritime piece.

On the air piece and the physical piece on land, we have £1 billion to look at an integrated air missile defence system. At one level, the risk is that that is entry money to start that process. We have to be much more demanding and say, "Hold on. That is £1 billion". We have seen some of the systems that Ukraine employs. We need to get that on contract quickly. That should be something that is sorted next year. We then need to look at the things we really must protect in a stronger way, whether that is our largest cities or some of our major bases, and at how we blend that with technology.

Technology is showing that you can have counter-drone systems and better surveillance systems. You do not need to have an uber-fantastic system that is going to cost you tens of billions. We can improve very quickly with the £1 billion that we have. Organisationally, does that all come under SJC as the homeland resilience command? That is very different from where we were a couple of years ago in terms of both what we have just done and what we might be able to do in the future.

Q45 Alex Baker: What do you see as the principal operational and strategic challenges that defence faces in fulfilling this evolving role, particularly when defence is often asked to step in as the last resort in times of national emergency?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There are probably lots of different levels. The UK philosophy, which we have to stay really close to, is to deter in the first place. We have a fantastic moat around the UK. It is even better than the Danube or the Rhine. Defend forward. That is what we are doing. Keep your deterrence really strong so that countries know they must not attack us. Then we work back so we are protecting ourselves.

We are fortunate to have these incredible intelligence agencies. Can we work really closely with them so that we can see what the threats are? Then we keep coming back. The piece that is much more demanding is the physical resilience. That might be integrated air missile defence. Those are the threats that are becoming prevalent and that we need to respond better to.

Then you keep working that back all the way through. Is your organisation able to cope with that? In the past, there have been myriad organisations. If you were to ask me who was in charge of what, it was hard enough in the Ministry of Defence, but it would be even harder when you are looking at it cross-government. It is not just the Ministry of



Defence that is going to have to bend to this. You are seeing that in the defence review and you will see more of that in the national security strategy. Improving resilience is a team effort across the whole of Government. It is all those layers and all those spans. That is what we are doing.

- Q46 **Alex Baker:** That was the point I was coming on to. The SDR refers to the home defence programme, which sits within the Cabinet Office, and says that Government must ensure this meets defence's needs. From your perspective, what specific support or co-ordination does defence require from the home defence programme to deliver on this expanded role effectively? How confident are you that current governance arrangements can enable that?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I am confident that we have the right governance arrangements and that they are in place. The piece that needs to follow with that is a much plainer and more assertive response. Our security is our health security. How do we protect the NHS and ensure that it functions? It is our energy security. We saw that with Spain and Portugal. It is much more. It is our democratic security and the risk of disinformation. That is the modern challenge.

You could give the Ministry of Defence the task of making us "fortress UK" but, if our energy supplies can be hit, we could be severely embarrassed. They could be hit either from space, given what you can do from space these days, or via cyber and so on. It has to be a whole-of-Government effort. Things about joined-up Government and the whole of Government are easier to say than to do. Again, how do you get after that?

Then you link it to your fundamental core philosophy. The core philosophy is to deter others. Be really strong in deterring others and prepared to take action so you do not get attacked. I am wary of us going in on ourselves, and just protecting ourselves more and more, as if somehow it is acceptable to have these threats and we could be happy as long as we can defend against them. We should be absolutely bothered that somebody wants to attack us and that they might even dare to do so. It has to be forward. Everything closer to home is the backstop.

- Q47 **Lincoln Jopp:** Just on resilience, Admiral, the Health Secretary and the Education Secretary said the other day that they were putting more funds into schools so that children developed much-needed grit. That is key clearly to part of national resilience. What is your experience? We met the captain of HMS Duncan when we went down to Portsmouth. He reported to us that he found sailors joining today more intelligent and more demanding. What is your take on our inherent national resilience and the individual resilience of the new generation who are coming through to join the services?



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: I do not think it has changed that much from when you and I joined up. The individuals are more demanding. We have brighter cohorts.

On the grit piece, I do not buy the “snowflake generation”. Whenever it is tested and whenever you look for people to respond—it may be that we are self-selecting—I see amazing men and women in our armed forces, who are committed, who still have the same camaraderie and who are still willing to do extraordinary things.

It is horrible, but I think back to the way that we were tested in Afghanistan. I can remember going to Sangin. You are going on patrol, and you put a tourniquet on the top of your leg in case you step on an IED because it will help to stop you bleeding to death. This is 19 and 20-year-olds doing that in the service of their country.

We have phenomenal people in the special forces. We need to give more assurance to them and really recognise what they are doing. We have people all the way through. We have submariners who cut themselves off from society and their families for months on end. The commitment that they make and the commitment that their families and friends make is extraordinary. We need to be much clearer about recognising that commitment, and less questioning of whether these people have that commitment.

Q48 **Derek Twigg:** CDS, most of us do not have any real problem with this document. Everyone thinks it contains lots of great ideas and should be the way that we move forward. In five years’ time, if certain things in this document have not been achieved and delivered—at the end of the day, you can have as many fine words as you want, but it is about delivery—what would most concern you? What are the top two or three things in this document that you would be most concerned about not being delivered?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: That is a really interesting and difficult question. Some of it is the language of transformation. That is badly needed. We have to change our process. Everything we have been having a conversation about has to happen.

The other bit that I would stress would be lethality: the 7,000 cruise missiles, the kill web and the investment in autonomy. It is the mindset change. We have to adjust to a much stronger approach to warfighting readiness. People scoff when we say we are going to have an Army that is 10 times more lethal. We are going to have an Army that is twice as lethal in 2027 and three times as lethal in 2030 because we can do that.

Q49 **Derek Twigg:** I am asking what would most concern you if it had not been delivered. What are the two or three things in this document that are absolutely crucial to making a practical difference on the ground?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: First is the 7,000 cruise missiles. We have brilliant people in our armed forces. We are not as lethal as we want to



be. If you go up the scale, you get to Storm Shadow and Tomahawk, and then you have a big leap before you get to a nuclear weapon.

If you are in a position like mine and you are trying to advise the Prime Minister, you want to have as many rungs on the ladder as possible before you get to the nuclear rung. The ability to have at least 7,000 cruise missiles and to launch them is on a different scale to what we currently have. Those are the types of things that we are looking to do very quickly. To me, that would be a crystallised example. Some of the other things are much bigger and slightly more enduring.

Q50 Fred Thomas: I have a quick question about how you see the role of UK defence. We know we are very NATO-first. That has been made clear by this Government and the SDR. There is a sense within the military, as you well know, that we are overcommitted and that we try to do so many things with a so far ever-diminishing force that what remains of that force is double or triple committed.

That has an effect on personnel, and we have spoken about retention problems because people are burned out. They come back from one overseas activity and are quickly required on another because there are not enough people and we are overcommitted. That is a sense that people have. The Committee had conversations at Army HQ that broadly matched that, without going into detail.

Are you able to give us a sense of whether a NATO-first focus will mean stopping some of the things that we are currently committed to and have been for the last decade around the world? Could you comment on what those might be?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: There are not many things that we are going to stop doing. We will make some adjustments. For some of the smaller unit-level exercises and so on, we will try to push those together to be part of bigger NATO exercises. The Army has been really good at that. We had Steadfast Dart earlier this year and Steadfast Defender with 16,000 people. The Army is lifting up its scale in terms of how it is operating.

The bit where I think we can get better is about giving people more stability in their lives. You make the point about people coming back from deployment and then suddenly going away again. The piece for me is when we did not give you notice that you might be going away again or promised that you would come back from deployment and would have four months to recover. We need to do the big things and get those right, and maybe deny some opportunities, but get a bit of a steadier approach. It feels like we have to do that.

The reason I am cautious about, "Are we doing too much?" and so on is that we will continue to be doubly committed in some areas because it is sensible risk-taking. With the size of our armed forces, we cannot be specialised for events that are unlikely to happen and not say, "While you are doing this NATO commitment, we can employ you to do something



else". That is going to continue, but we can manage better how we go about that.

The other piece that goes with that is a dilemma. I speak to people who deploy and are away. That is what they joined up to do. That is what they enjoy. That is how we get stronger. The bit that people get frustrated by is when they feel they have been messed around because they did not expect to be turned around so quickly or because they are being turned around for something that does not seem that big and significant. That is the bit where we can improve. We are still going to be doing some of the double and triple hatting that you are talking about.

Q51 Chair: CDS, the SDR sets out a vision for UK defence in 2035. How will the role of the Chief of the Defence Staff be different come 2035?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Some of the fundamentals will not change. The Chief of the Defence Staff's role is to advise the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary as their principal military adviser. That is going to be the same. The formality of taking command of the three services and strategic command should have bedded in and made it a much more cohesive group. I would hope that that will have been normalised.

The other bit that I would reflect on is that we will continue to keep joining up with other parts of Government. This thing called security is not just physical military security. It feels like that is a modern phenomenon that is going to get stronger.

I would also go back to the other conversation that we had. In my generation, it was maritime, land and air. On the space and cyber piece, the challenge for 10 years' time is going to be about autonomy, familiarity with autonomy, the speed at which defence is going to strengthen and the way that warfighting is going to get even faster. Can you be assured that your systems are going to be faster than your opponents?

At the moment we are faster and the time degradations are quite large. The risk is that the time degradations in 10 years' time are going to be tiny. If you are not ahead, you risk being wiped out. It is going to be tougher in 10 years' time than it is now.

Q52 Chair: Admiral, as I set out at the beginning of our session, given the announcement that you are due to step down from your role later this year, on behalf of the House Commons Defence Committee I want to thank you for your service to the country. I also wanted to give you an opportunity to highlight some of your greatest hits, as they say. During your time at CDS, what is the one thing that you are most proud of?

Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: First, thank you for those comments. Genuinely, I never expected to be Chief of the Defence Staff. I never expected to be First Sea Lord. It is an amazing privilege to be in this role. I have to thank the men and women who serve us. There is a sense that all these people have your back, when you have this enormous



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responsibility. You can see the quality of those people. It is not just the men and women in uniform. You link it to our civil servants, the intelligence agencies and so on. It is an amazing role and privilege to have. If you go to the NATO chiefs of defence, you are in a room with 31 other chiefs of defence. That is a real privilege. It is humbling. That is how we stay safe. There is an enormous thank you.

I do an in-brief for Prime Ministers. I have had four Prime Ministers, three Defence Secretaries and a change of monarch. It has been an incredible time with the war in Europe and the conflict in the Middle East. We have had challenges responding in South Sudan. We responded to a potential evacuation in Lebanon. There is a whole host of other things that our special forces do on a daily basis. They are incredible.

When I talk to a UK Prime Minister, I say that they should assume that the role of the military is to keep the country safe. If we get the use of the military instrument right, we give added agency and authority to the UK Prime Minister. That is clear on the international stage. If we get it super-right, the agency and authority of a British Prime Minister transcends the international stage and it helps them with their domestic agenda. That is what our military instrument has been doing. It has supported every Prime Minister. You have seen that in how we have responded with Ukraine and in how we have responded on everything that we have been asked to do. That is the proudest thing for me.

The challenge going forward is that we are going into a new era. The peace dividend has ended. We are shifting to a new era. There is a third nuclear age. There are geopolitical challenges. My message would be, "We are going to be okay". We are going to be okay because we have these brilliant people who support us. Our construct is nuclear; it is NATO; it is America as our principal ally. That is what we need to bind to at the same time as we reform, are willing to do things differently and are willing to test ourselves about how we change. That is how it feels.

I am not quite at the stage where I am about to walk out the door. If I am honest, it feels like I still have quite a busy day job and I have to get on with that. The bit that you always have when you are coming to the end of your watch is, "Can you make sure there is not a calamity as you are about to hand over?" I get slightly anxious about that—"can we make sure that does not happen?"

I come back to it again: it has been an enormous privilege, and I have enjoyed it. I feel lucky.

Q53 Chair: You are very right. It is a huge honour and a privilege to serve as the Chief of the Defence Staff for the nation. You have had an illustrious career, without doubt. If you had your time once again, is there anything that you would do differently?



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Admiral Sir Tony Radakin: Lots of things, I suppose. I would push the reform to go further and faster. I feel like I did that in the Navy and made some progress.

I have said this before. There are people who ask you, "Are you taking a bit too much risk? Are you doing too much? Are you trying to go too quickly?" I challenge the system. I would love us to be going too fast. Guess what? We would slow down. We never get to the point where it feels like we are going too fast. Go further and faster.

I look at some of the threats that are out there. I used to have calls with General Gerasimov. I saw General Gerasimov with the Defence Secretary Ben Wallace about 10 days before Russia decided to invade Ukraine. In a dangerous world, not having those mil-to-mil communications is a regret.

The other bit is a theme. I get criticised for being too optimistic. People challenge me that we are being complacent. I worry that we have a tendency to denigrate. Hold on. We are this phenomenal nation with phenomenal allies and incredible people. Let us grab that confidence. It is that confidence and facing down threats that will keep us safe. I would encourage us to celebrate some of the good while we are getting after the bad. We struggle to do that.

Chair: Thank you very much. That is some very sage advice. On that high note, I would like to bring today's proceedings to a close. Thank you so much, Admiral, for appearing before the Committee again.