

Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

Oral evidence: Societal resilience: a national conversation, HC 1841

Monday 27 April 2026

4.20 pm

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Members present: Matt Western (The Chair); Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom; Lord Boateng; Dame Karen Bradley; Liam Byrne; Sarah Champion; Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi; Lord Godson; Lord Hutton of Furness; Lord Jack of Courance; Baroness Kidron; Edward Morello; Lord Sedwill; Andy Slaughter; Lord Tunncliffe; Baroness Tyler of Enfield; Lord Watts; Sir Gavin Williamson.

Questions 16 - 23

Witness

[I](#): Dr Fiona Hill, Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution; Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, former Secretary-General, NATO, and Chair, Lords International Relations and Defence Committee.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Fiona Hill and Lord Robertson of Port Ellen.

Q16 **The Chair:** Welcome to today's sitting of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy and our inquiry into the national conversation on societal resilience. Thank you to our two witnesses for joining us. Can I ask you just to very briefly introduce yourselves?

Dr Fiona Hill: I am a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC. As some of you are aware, I am also the chancellor of Durham University here in the UK. Along with Lord Robertson, I was one of the members of the strategic defence review last year.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: I am a Member of the House of Lords and Chair of the International Relations and Defence Committee of the House of Lords. I was the lead reviewer of the strategic defence review last year. I am also chancellor of the University of Dundee. We have this pairing arrangement with the academic side of things. I was previously

Secretary-General of NATO from 1999 to 2003 and Secretary of State for Defence from 1997 to 1999.

Q17 The Chair: Perhaps we can start with you, Lord Robertson. I had a meeting with the Latvian speaker and Latvian ambassador just last week, and they talked about Latvia being, in essence, at war with Russia. There was a tone and urgency in their voices that suggested that this was very real to them. Why do you think that we are not having this national conversation? Given your remarks on 14 April, I think it was, what needs to happen for us to have that conversation?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: The strategic defence review recommended a national conversation about defence and security. The Prime Minister has himself spoken about having a national conversation. There is a great necessity to share with the country the kinds of threats that we face at the moment. The Prime Minister made a speech at the Munich Security Conference, saying, in essence, that we were at war. He quoted NATO as saying that we could expect an armed attack before the end of the decade, which is in only three years' time. Therefore, you would have thought that it is a matter of some urgency. However, despite me reminding the Prime Minister on a couple of occasions about his commitment to it, the Government have not started this conversation.

The Chair: What has to happen? What is stopping this from taking place?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: We were reviewers of last year's strategic defence review; we are not part of the Government. It is really a relevant question for Government Ministers. I understand that there was a conversation about a conversation recently inside the Ministry of Defence, but there are no signs of it outside it. It may well be that other things are preoccupying the mind of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence and that that is postponing it, but it is regrettable none the less

The Chair: You are both extremely well connected. In conversations you are having with other nations, what is your experience of how they are going about this and how quickly they are addressing it?

Dr Fiona Hill: I would be happy to jump in here because obviously during the strategic defence review last year, we looked at what other countries were doing. Latvia was one of those countries, as were Finland, Norway, Sweden and Poland, for example. A number of our allies and partners from around Europe and other NATO members offered submissions for the strategic defence review. We also had representatives from Germany, France and the United States embedded with us.

Proximity to Russia is obviously a major factor here. Another one is history. If you are Poland, you have a long history of antagonism with both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. In fact, if you are Poland and Finland, you were part of the Russian Empire at one point and, of course, have experienced periods of invasion in the interwar period.

Certainly, in the case of the Finns, you think about the Winter War there; they have never actually let their guard down. What is interesting about the Finns and now the Latvians and the Poles is that they have always expected there would be a threat from the east, from Russia; that had never rescinded. If you think about the Finns, Swedes and Norwegians, they have maintained conscription or some ability to be able to call people up. They have maintained standing armies and never actually let their guard down.

What we have experienced here in the UK but also in the United States and other countries—the further away you get from Russia, for sure: France, Spain, Portugal and Italy—is that sense that after 1989 and the end of the Cold War, we were indeed going on a completely different trajectory. Of course, that period after 1989 is when you have seen defence spending really in dramatic decrease.

The Chair: Dr Hill, there is the physical remoteness, and we are an island. I get all those sorts of cultural and geographic reasons. However, when you look at all the statistics about the number of cyberattacks we have had, the scale of them and the damage they are doing, the public or the Government do not seem to be waking up to this.

Dr Fiona Hill: You have put your finger exactly on the problem there. When you say that Russia has declared war on Europe, people think that war is actually only something kinetic in the sense of missiles flying, ballistic missiles, the kinds of things that we are seeing in both the case of the US and Israel's attack on Iran and Russia's attack on Ukraine. They are not thinking of those very things we are already facing. That is honestly a fault of the narrative about the kinds of warlike and wartime scenarios we are facing. We are much more likely in the United Kingdom already to be getting it.

There are tens of thousands of cyberattacks on a daily—sometimes weekly—basis, risks to critical national infrastructure, undersea cables and the gas pipeline from Norway to the UK, for example. As we are now seeing from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, there are risks to bottlenecks of supply. Most of the things we rely on for our daily lives here in the UK come from outside the country. As we thought about in the strategic defence review, it would be very easy to have most of daily life brought to a halt, but that is not being explained to the British public.

The Chair: Lord Robertson, what does the UK currently have that should enable us to go about this conversation? We were just saying that we have this cultural difficulty and this sense of remoteness, of being an island far away from these borders. What has to happen? What is it within us that should say, "Look, we need to address this urgently"?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: In the speech you referred to on 14 April, I talked about a complacency. It is not just in Government; I have to say that it applies throughout society as well. There is a belief that we are safe. We have a moat around the British Isles; we are a long way from trouble; we do not think that we could possibly be attacked. That

was why, in the 1998 review that I did when I was Defence Secretary, we talked about going far, hitting hard and staying long. That is why the aircraft carriers came out of that particular review.

Inside the United Kingdom, there is a view that we are safe. We do not notice what is happening elsewhere. Yet, day by day, cyberattacks and attacks on undersea cables are happening. All these things are ongoing. That is why the Prime Minister made that point in his speech in Munich that, on the last occasion—we are presumably talking about the 1930s—we did not prepare until the crisis was actually on us. It would be horrible to think that it would take an actual crisis, an actual attack on the United Kingdom, before we woke up to the kinds of threats that are facing us.

The Chair: Let me just move the conversation on slightly to you, Dr Hill, and really to thinking about our nearest and strongest ally, the United States. You served under President Trump during his first term. What do you think has changed in terms of the national security strategy that was published at the end of last year, or early this year, by the United States? How does it differ from the one that may have been in place in that previous term? What do we have to be thinking about here in the UK?

Dr Fiona Hill: Thanks very much for that question. I actually served under Barack Obama as well, and before that under George W Bush, but as a national intelligence officer covering many of the areas that we are discussing today. Many of you are already aware of that; Lord Sedwill and I crossed paths on different sides of the equation during the first Trump Administration. I heard a lot said by President Trump that first time around that people should have been paying more attention to.

There has been a long trend in the United States of thinking that the UK, along with other European allies, should be doing more for their defence. We could take that back to the 1960s and 1970s, frankly. But in the 1990s and 2000s, when the UK was still part of the European Union, there was that idea that the European Union was becoming more of a political and geopolitical actor, let us say, with the Lisbon treaty going back to 2009, 2010. We lost the plot of thinking about this. You might remember that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates made this point pretty strongly in meetings with his UK and other counterparts—that this was really the time to see more defence spending. Of course, it was Barack Obama in the world summit of 2014 who was the most insistent on pushing for the agreement to spend 2% of GDP on defence.

That is really the precursor to President Trump, who, frankly, just has a very different attitude from all the people who went before him about the transatlantic relationship. He was saying the first time around that he thought that this was a “rip-off” for the United States, literally, in his words. Once you had economic and security policies diverging, the UK—along with the European Union at the time, but then later separately—was an economic competitor with the United States. So why was the United States footing the bill—in his view—for security? On the one hand, he believed that NATO was some kind of protection system, and if people did not pay their dues they were not worthy of the protection. He said

this all very clearly the first time around as well. On the other hand, in actual fact, NATO was to some degree more of a support mechanism for the United States.

The first time, it was more contained, let us say, because he had so many people around him who were still really committed transatlanticists. Now we see this as unconstrained and uninhibited. He is now saying things that we might have heard him say in private before very publicly, but we were already on a trend. We actually factored this in during the strategic defence review: irrespective of who was elected in the United States in 2024, we were going to see a shift in the way the United States was going to interact with the UK and with other European allies, with it no longer wanting to take the lead in providing for defence. President Trump has simply ripped off the Band-Aid here and gone basically to dark in terms of support for the transatlantic alliances, just much quicker than one might have anticipated had he not been re-elected in 2024.

The Chair: Do you think there is some substance to the comments over the Falkland Islands that have come out or do you think that they are just posturing?

Dr Fiona Hill: It is a bit of both. It is classic Trump. Greenland was obviously a major shock to the system, and he meant every bit of that. From his own perspective, he still would like to see Greenland as part of the United States. He is just basically pivoting from that because he has developed a close alliance, from a political perspective, with President Milei of Argentina. This has obviously been something that the Argentinians have been pushing since the 1980s to varying degrees. He is basically saying that, as far as he is concerned, the whole set of geopolitical arrangements is up for grabs—not from the US perspective, but certainly from the perspective of others.

The Chair: We should take it seriously and we should be more assertive on some points.

Dr Fiona Hill: Yes, one should engage directly on this. Certainly, behind closed doors would be better initially, but we should certainly take that seriously and do not let it just pass by.

Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom: Dr Hill, it seems that NATO has become a victim of its own success. Looked at from your point of view, and then from the point of view of the United States Administration, has United States support for Europe infantilised Europe?

Dr Fiona Hill: From the US perspective, absolutely. I just want also to say that it is not just Republican Administrations, but also previous Democratic Administrations that have talked rather derisively in private, but sometimes also in public, about Europe and allies in Europe. They have referred to Europe as an unwashed mass—Europeans this, Europeans that—and not really fully appreciated, certainly at the political level, the contributions that European allies have made both to US security and towards Europe.

George can speak to this as well, because he spends a lot of time going backwards and forwards to the United States and engaging with security officials. On the operational level, when you are dealing with counterparts in the US military—again, we interviewed a lot of people during the strategic defence review—you see a lot of appreciation for what the UK and other Europeans can bring to the table.

However, there is still that sense that there has not been sufficient effort of Europeans—that includes Canada, frankly—going back to 2014 for sure and the commitment at Wales of 2%, showing sufficient commitment to providing for their own defence, until now. Certainly, there is that feeling that they have been taking a back seat. Again, when President Obama was talking about leading from behind, he was really also trying to say, “Look, this is time for the UK, Europe, and others to step forward”.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Indeed, the report by the House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee that was published last week made that point: that a lot of European countries, by relying on the United States of America for key capabilities, have in many ways infantilised themselves. That is the worrying aspect. Now they are having to wake up to the prospect that a lot of that American support that was taken for granted may not be available for every crisis. Therefore, much more is going to have to be done by the Europeans themselves, in their own interests.

Q18 Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: Lord Robertson, on 14 April, you questioned the sustainability of welfare spending due to the need for greater defence spending. Is the choice really that binary? There are others—for example, our German friends, who are renowned for their fiscal prudence—who have loosened the fiscal rules for defence. Other political parties have suggested that we should be looking into defence bonds. Is it really a case of cutting welfare spending? Is that the only way that we can increase defence spending or is the situation not a bit more nuanced than that?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: That is a fair question, and I did not actually make that point. I made the point that welfare spending is now five times the defence budget, and that should make us reflect very carefully on whether that is the right choice for public expenditure. However, there are other ways in which the Government could raise money for defence. After 9/11, the German Government put a levy on every insurance policy in the country at that time, as a special security levy. There are various proposals floating around at the moment: Mr Mark Carney, the Prime Minister of Canada, has proposed a universal bank.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: The defence, security and resilience bank.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: There is another European-based one, as well. People have proposed a levy of a penny on income tax that would be reserved for defence and security. The Treasury is against hypothecating revenue, apparently—when it suits it, because it has done

it in the past; the National Lottery is one crucial example of that. There are different ways in which it can be done. There are different and difficult trade-offs that would be necessary if you were going to keep within existing financial constraints.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: Do you think it was a mistake for the Government to have embarked solely on that multilateral mechanism, the MDM, rather than—as the Defence Committee suggested—looking into other avenues such as the defence, security and resilience bank? They do not seem to have met the moment in terms of how they are properly financing defence.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: There is a reluctance to think imaginatively about it, especially if it adds to the debt burden that we already have in this country. There is a Treasury fixation on that and on the idea about hypothecating, but we have to look at it imaginatively. There are people within the Government who are beginning to think in that way, if they could find a way through it, but they can find objections to pretty well every suggestion that is presently being made.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: Armida van Rij gave evidence to our committee before. She noted that we should not really be having a “guns versus butter” debate, because the situation is a lot more nuanced than that. If I may also quote Ben Paxton of the Institute for Government, he suggests that “deep cuts” to the state pension and health and disability benefits would have “knock-on effects on wider public services” and commented on what that will “inevitably mean for the tax burden”. Within the trade-offs that you mentioned, how can the Government actually do that hard sell to the public when the cost of living is high and potentially set to increase because of the Iran war?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: There will be no butter if we do not have guns.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: That is agreed.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: It is as simple as that. In the speech I gave in Salisbury, I reminded people of what Denis Healey had said in 1969. He said, “Once we cut defence expenditure to the extent where our security is imperilled, we have no houses, we have no hospitals, we have no schools. We have a heap of cinders”. You have only to look at eastern Ukraine today to see vividly that that is not something purely theoretical. The guns versus butter, defence versus welfare, argument is not a good argument to make, because the responsibility of Government is to the defence and safety of their population. That must come first, then other items of public expenditure come later.

Andy Slaughter: Just pursuing that line, you have to win hearts and minds, do you not, if you want to advocate for what may be initially unpalatable decisions? I understand what you are saying; you were not making a direct comparison. None the less, as Tan said, big areas of Government spending are benefits—health and pensions. At least by

implication, you are asking for sacrifices there. You are asking for an expansion in defence budgets and for people to do more for themselves and not leave everything to Government. That is a pretty unpalatable message to get across. How do you sell that to the public?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: The only way you can get that message across is if people recognise what the threat is. That is why we called for the national conversation. A bunch of politicians or expert reviewers simply saying, "The country's under threat, there is a problem and here is what we are suggesting about it" is not enough.

The Prime Minister made a very good speech at the Munich Security Conference. It articulated exactly that argument that is necessary to put to the people, but that speech should be made in other parts of the country and not just in Munich. It is a very good speech and, if you read it, it logically leads to the point where he could say at the end, "And therefore, we are going to commit X amount", but it stops short of that. Unless you actually have the population on side, the trade-offs will be more and more difficult to make.

Andy Slaughter: It is not cutting through, is it? Opinion polling—if you can trust it on this issue—is about 50:50, in terms of people who think that you should cut other social welfare budgets to promote defence or the other way around. Part of the problem there is that people do not feel that their public services are of a high quality now. It is not as though you are asking people to make some sacrifice from a high base. This is a difficult situation, is it not? Yes, we could all agree that the public need to be persuaded, but there is little sign of that happening.

Dr Fiona Hill: Part of it is the lack of a narrative. On Wednesday, I am giving a lecture at the Imperial War Museum Institute here in London. I do not know if any of you have visited the Imperial War Museum recently, but it may be a good place to start for a national conversation. What is it that the United Kingdom had to do in the past in both World War I and World War II? As Lord Robertson just said, there were attempts at preparations anticipating that there could be a war in the 1930s, but they were not up to the actual level of threats and the experience of World War II. However, in World War I, there was no preparation whatever and everything had to be improvised.

That is actually a part of UK history of not just improvisation and surviving, but actually thriving as a result of the exigencies of wartime. All the voluntary services that we expect and look to today were set up during both World War I and World War II. Government ministries got into action. It is quite incredible what the UK did when it was put under pressure. I am not suggesting that we go back to rationing, though we might have to if, in fact, most of the foodstuff gets cut off. See what is actually happening: people in Asia are having to ration right now, as a result of the lack of fuel supplies.

We have actually done this before, and it is not rocket science in many respects. We can go back and look at the way people got mobilised and

encouraged to start thinking about things in a different way. It was all about having a narrative. It was all about engaging and telling a story. In part we can tell the stories, as we all have some kind of connection back to that period.

Andy Slaughter: Was there even a narrative about that in the 1930s?

Dr Fiona Hill: There absolutely was.

Andy Slaughter: "Peace for our time" was a very—

Dr Fiona Hill: No, there was much more of a public narrative because people actually went across the country, using everything from the Red Cross to the Women's Institute to the Rotary clubs. You had a whole network of organisations on emergency preparedness already across the United Kingdom. A couple of weeks ago, I virtually participated in a hearing at the National Resilience Committee. We had Stephen Arundell speaking, who is the vice chair of the Emergency Planning Society here in the UK. He made it extraordinarily clear that there are people all over the UK who are already thinking about all this. The problem is that they feel there is no green light from above, basically, and that they are being locked in instead of being able to move forward on discussions because there is a sense of inaction here.

There is a whole country out there of people who are actually doing things and who are prepared to have a conversation. We did some of this during the strategic defence review. We had focus groups, polling and citizens' assemblies. We pulled some people together asking them what they thought about defence. We were struck by how informed people and articulate they were about the threat. They saw us as not being sufficiently insured. They thought that our people-to-people connections with the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces were not as they should be. They wanted to see more opportunities to interact with the armed services as well.

Q19 Lord Jack of Courance: I just have a couple of questions on one point. Between 1955 and 2020, we know that health and defence spending inverted: 7.5% to 8% of GDP back then was spent on defence spending, and that is what we have on health spending now. Yet we know that the public are struggling to get around the idea; maybe during Covid they got used to being reliant on the Government to pay for lots of things and that has not stopped.

Lord Robertson, I know you said in your report that welfare spending is something that could have been reviewed in relation to defence spending. I am just wondering whether there is an argument that, for people to understand and see that they are getting something for it, the military should be more visible in the UK. I have to declare an interest: I have a son who is a serving soldier. I remember during Covid that the military stepped up and delivered the vaccines, and they did the Nightingale hospitals. I also remember being in Cabinet at the time and being told by Ben Wallace that it could not go on for very long. It was not sustainable;

the military did not have the resources to carry on doing this for much longer and there was much pressure from the MoD to stop it.

Is the answer that, in peacetime, knowing that we have to increase our military, that we have a shortage of soldiers and that we do not fill all the spaces available, we come up with a better way of deploying them. This may upset a few people in the committee, but if we were to deploy the military on the south coast, for instance, we might stop some small boats. We might see some resistance to the small boat crossings if they knew that we had a strong military presence on the south coast. We could use them for other purposes, such as border control, as we see in other countries. We could just have more awareness and visibility of the military as we increase defence spending, so that people understand that there is a need to increase defence spending.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: You are wrong in respect of lining up soldiers with guns on the White Cliffs of Dover—

Lord Jack of Courance: I did not say guns; I just said a presence.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Yes, but they normally go around with guns. Leaving that aside, you are right in one respect, in that we need a greater degree of visibility of our Armed Forces. At the same time, we cannot allow the idea that it is purely for the Armed Forces to defend the country. It has to be an all-of-country approach. Everybody has to be involved in it. There is a lot that defence can do, and we actually outline it in the defence review. We make proposals about Army cadets; we talk about reinforcing the reserves; we talk about the provision of defence academies being open much more to the public; we talk about involving the Department for Education to try to get over this idea that young people are opposed to militarism.

There is a whole series of ideas here, but we need to get away from the idea that the Armed Forces, which are inevitably going to be small, are the only way in which we can defend the country. I recently spoke at an event near your old constituency in Wigtown, in the south-west of Scotland. I said to the audience, who had paid 10 quid each to come and hear me, "Do you all have candles at home? Do you all have a wind-up radio? You will need it if the electricity goes off. Do you have money? Do you have water? Do you have cans?"

There was a little publicity, but the point of that speech was made because that was on a Friday night and, by the Tuesday, 26,000 homes in Scotland were still without power. The lesson here is of resilience—national resilience in communities, and not simply to do with the Armed Forces being used other than what they are supposed to be used for, which is war readiness.

Liam Byrne: I just want to slightly rephrase Tan Dhesi's question. Talking this question through with our German colleagues, the way they explained the perils of the guns and butter debate was like this: they said, "Look, if we present an argument for greater defence spending

alongside sweeping cutbacks to other aspects of spending, it's going to make it pretty difficult for us to mobilise a whole-of-society approach to defence", which is the approach you just said was necessary. Therefore, when they announced the relaxation of the debt brake, they also announced the €500 billion investment in infrastructure alongside it. Just give me a sense of the dynamics that you think are going to be necessary, to both maintain a total-society approach to defence and present perhaps some hard choices that might be needed on trade-offs.

Dr Fiona Hill: Can I just jump in because of Germany? I spent six months in Germany in 2023 looking exactly at how the Germans handle this. Your reference to infrastructure gets to the heart of the matter because the Germans, like the Scandinavians, believe that everything is interconnected. They have a very different structural approach to this. They need their Länder to be self-sufficient in many respects, for each region. It is not just the federal Government that is taking responsibility for paying for everything.

They believe that their critical national infrastructure is part of their defence, including transportation, bus routes and tram lines. They look at mobilisation: if they have to send tanks or other heavy equipment, are their roads strong enough for that purpose? When we were doing work for the strategic defence review, we had the picture of the Typhoon taking off from a Finnish highway in our offices the whole time. They need to be able to use their infrastructure in an emergency. We made a joke that obviously it would be very hard to imagine that on the M4 or on any of the major roads in the UK, although we were assured that you could actually do that somewhere.

They think about infrastructure, their health services, as also part of defence. The Germans have more hospital beds than any other country. It is the only country that actually could deal with a mass casualty event. In fact, when I was there, they had 70,000 Ukrainian casualties from the war spread up and down their hospital system across the whole country. It was not visible to most Germans. They were actually treating them because they were trying to take the burden off the Ukrainians.

The lesson from the Germans is that they prioritise and they think of everything through a security lens. They look at the different levels, from the federal Government all the way down to the Länder and the local level. They organise that appropriately. They think of health, infrastructure, including transportation and education, because just like in the UK, they have a lot of military education through their universities and colleges.

We have the military education committees here in the UK in all the universities. We have UOTCs, cadets and reserves. The Germans also have a system of both voluntary and conscription for public service. Again, it is organised at all these different levels. That is missing in the UK. We might have it in Scotland and devolved authorities in Wales and in Northern Ireland, but we do not have that capacity for England within the UK context.

Liam Byrne: That sounds like a much more profitable way of framing the debate and strategy. Ultimately, if we are having a national conversation, we are trying to win political consent for some difficult choices, which needs to be a durable consent over potentially two to three Parliaments. Lord Robertson, what is your perspective on Dr Hill's framing?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Last year, the head of the Federal Intelligence Service of Germany, Martin Jäger, made a speech to the Bundestag, the federal Parliament. He said, "Russia could switch from hybrid operations to direct military confrontation" at any time. It was a fairly stark warning. He said, "Russia is systematically testing Europe's resilience using a wide range of means: acts of sabotage, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and espionage are just as much a part of that". He actually went on to say, "At best, there is an icy peace in Europe, which could turn into heated confrontation at any time. We must prepare for further escalation of the situation".

That was the head of the Federal Intelligence Service talking to the federal Parliament. In a way, we need to give a starker warning to our people, to people in this country, and maybe to Members of this Parliament, that is as stark as that because that is what the reality actually is. The Prime Minister said it in his speech in Munich, actually. He said, "Time and again, leaders have looked the other way, only re-arming when disaster is upon them. This time, it must be different. Because all of the warning signs are there".

Liam Byrne: I do not demur from the absolute necessity to give people the full picture of the threat we now confront, but my constituency is disintegrating after 15 years of austerity. If we are to mobilise the total-society approach to defence that we need, I fear that presenting people with a stark trade-off in the way we often frame guns versus butter may not lead to the durable consent that is needed to raise resources in the medium to long term. I am just interested in your perspective on how a more win-win approach to framing—like that of the Germans or the Finns, by the sound of it—might be presented. Ultimately, it seems that at the core of the national conversation there has to be this question: how are we collectively going to raise the money to pay for this?

Dr Fiona Hill: From the many interviews we did during the strategic defence review—remember we got 8,000 submissions—part of the thrust from people was, "Stop telling us what we can't do, and tell us what we can do". That is part of the framing problem, which is what we were trying to do with the strategic defence review. We have a very hard budget constraint, but how can we mobilise the resources that we already have in that frame for security? We tried to lay that out. We did it fairly effectively in the strategic defence review, but just as you are saying, it is about translating it into a broader narrative.

If you remember in 2022-23, Chancellor Scholz said that Germany was at a critical turning point. This was a massive crisis, when the Russians invaded Ukraine. The Germans said it was their "Zeitenwende"; basically for them it just upended everything. We have never had that moment.

That is part of the problem in the UK. We had the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, which turned him into a dirty bomb spreading polonium all over London. There was the poisoning of the Skripals with enough Novichok to take out all of Salisbury. Even that did not have an effect.

Obviously, at the political and military level, the UK has taken the invasion of Ukraine very seriously and the UK needs to be commended for that. However, there is a failure to then make that jump into what that could mean for the UK in terms of the kinds of attacks you see on Ukrainian infrastructure or the kinds of things that we are now seeing as a result of the war in Iran. They have to come together. The Germans were able to frame it in guns and butter; all this is necessary because they had the proper reckoning of the sense of the crisis of the moment.

Liam Byrne: That is incredibly helpful. Did the SDR surface any research on what were the most successful ways of financing this rearmament? We ultimately have three choices. I will take transforming Ministry of Defence efficiency as read, but we need to make some difficult switch-spend choices: either we can borrow more—but we are already borrowing a couple of trillion, and our term rates are going up—or we can tax more. I suspect it is going to be a combination of all three, but I would just be interested in whether there was much economic study of what worked best and where.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: No, there was not because we were not allowed to do that. We might as well be frank about it. We were told at the beginning that we had to work within the 2.5%, and the Government's commitment to 3% at the beginning of the next Parliament. It should not have been within our remit in any event. It was not in 1998 when I did the first defence review because, at the end of the day, we said it would be foreign policy led. When it came to the bit, the then Chancellor decided to take a chunk of our money away from us, and some Ministers had to tell the Prime Minister of the day that we would not countenance that, and we would resign in that case. We still got it.

The then Chancellor is now championing the idea of more money for defence, I am glad to say at the present moment. We therefore operated within that. Quite frankly, that was what the Government did. However, what we said very clearly was that, depending on circumstances, the proposals in the defence review can be accelerated and increased depending on what the Government want to do. But we were not the Government; we were there to look at the wholesale transformation of defence. That is what we did and what we delivered.

Edward Morello: To follow up on Liam's question, I accept that the SDR was given a tight framework but, looking back at the policy options available to you, I wonder whether something such as defence bonds would allow the rapid increase in spending needed while decoupling it from the political risk of having to make difficult decisions. That solution has been mooted and the Chancellor has indicated she may be open to it; do you have any particular view on its effectiveness?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Inevitably, that was not in our remit. We might have personal views about it, and various reviewers have made public statements about the need to move more quickly than we were allowed during the review. But you would have to ask Government Ministers about this; our personal views do not matter terribly well.

Edward Morello: They do, Lord Robertson, which is why I am asking whether you have a personal view.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: We need to spend more on defence; that is quite clear. Given the nature of the circumstances that we face at present, much more needs to be done in order to achieve war readiness earlier than the 10 years that we have speculated on. We clearly need to move. If our Prime Minister is talking about a military attack on the alliance by Russia within three years, we clearly need to do more at an earlier stage to create a degree of war readiness, including an integrated force and all the other recommendations that are in our review. That will require more resources than are available at the moment.

Dr Fiona Hill: There is another element to all this, which is the private sector. In the case of Germany, for example, there is much more discussion now about the role that big industry should play in hardening their critical national infrastructure. Some obvious companies such as Rheinmetall are already in the defence sector; you may remember that the CEO of Rheinmetall was reportedly on the Russian assassination list. Norway, Finland and Sweden all think of their big companies as part of their national security establishment to varying degrees. Legislation is key here; this is something that you are all deliberating and debating.

In the strategic defence review we anticipated that a whole array of national security-related legislation would be looking at the critical national infrastructure and the role played by the UK's major companies and anchor institutions—from the NHS all the way down to universities and major public entities—as part of this national security perspective.

Right now, Sweden's big companies are doing a stress test, thinking about where they want to create their own sovereign capabilities and how their leadership, their CEOs of big companies, can train along with the heads of the national security establishment and be briefed on intelligence. There is a whole array of things that the UK could be doing and that, frankly, the United States needs to be doing as well. There is some deliberation about this in the United States, but not to the required extent. It is not just a question of what the Government do in the public sector; it is how these public-private partnerships are set up, and that involves you as well.

Q20 **Lord Watts:** We all generally agree that Russia is a real threat and that we need to increase defence spending. The problem is how we pay for it. A number of us think it is very difficult to see how you can pay for that out of welfare benefits, when there are already high levels of tax, low growth, high levels of temptation and demographic changes. Fewer people are paying tax and there are more pensioners; pensioners already

receive 50% of welfare benefits, which is going to increase, so just keeping the welfare budget in line will require benefit cuts anyway. To add defence spending to that problem is going to be politically difficult if not impossible. Is that not a weakness in this report? I understand your remit, but it leaves the question of how we are going to pay for what we all want to see achieved. How can we increase defence spending?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Well, if you have a war, it costs a lot of money. We finished paying for the Second World War in 2016; that was a war that we won, never mind the war that Putin is now waging in Ukraine. War is a much more expensive proposition than deterrence, and that is the dilemma that we all face. At the moment, we are going through a crisis over the decision by the Americans to attack Iran and the Strait of Hormuz, and how we are going to pay for that. The military costs are already high; we are paying for the diversion of Typhoon aircraft to the Middle East, never mind anything else. But the danger of a peer competitor is much greater. At the end of the day, when the attack comes, we will have to pay: it is much better to pay for deterrence than to pay for war.

Lord Watts: Someone has to start to work out how we are going to pay for it. Otherwise it has no credibility. My worry is that none of the political parties will want to do the detailed work of how we pay for increased defence spending when we are working on other problems. That is one of the reasons we are not having a national conversation: no one wants to do that.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: We are not the Treasury; you need different witnesses, frankly, to tell you about that. You have a number of Treasury Ministers on this committee. All we can do is to say how the defence of this country can and should be transformed in order to deal with the kind of threats that we will see in the future. We might have personal views about how that could be achieved, but it was not the job of the reviewers to deal with that. We had to operate within the constraints.

Dr Fiona Hill: One aspect of the strategic defence review was that we did not look at doing everything alone. We talked about the risk of a peer competitor, but we did not envisage that Russia would randomly single out the United Kingdom for an attack and send tanks up the Suffolk Downs or a massive amphibious landing somewhere along the North Sea coast. We are not in that scenario, but there are real risks to critical national infrastructure.

We have already had an announcement from John Healey and the Ministry of Defence about the maritime operation detecting Akula-class submarines that were operating around undersea cables. The gas pipeline from Norway to the UK is massively vulnerable, but Norway is with us on that. During the strategic defence review the Norwegians kept saying, "Come on, how about we organise all of this together?"

We have had a whole host of meetings, for example, with the Joint Expeditionary Force—JEF—which brings together all the Nordic and Baltic countries, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Canada is now very interested in joining. We are looking at that as a way of creating a platform for pooling resources, not just of co-ordination and leadership, but creativity, which is part of what George was talking about. Could we all work together with our nearest allies to start thinking about our critical national infrastructure? We could begin with one point and say, “That is the mission; how can we work together with others to think about how we can tackle this”? It may be that we do not need new resources but a reallocation of existing resources. The point is that we have to start somewhere in looking at critical threats.

Part of the problem lies in trying to tackle everything at once. Before we came in the room, we were talking about a similar problem in the 1930s; Governments at that time were worried about tackling everything at once and did not prioritise. As a result, they tackled nothing and, of course, war eventually came. If we can pick a key set of issues where we have collaborators such as the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Finns, the Danes, the Dutch and others, where we have a shared infrastructure and a shared problem—such as the operation in the High North against the Russian submarines—then that might be a starting point.

The Chair: We are going to have to suspend the session while there is vote. We will return shortly.

Sitting suspended.

The Chair: I am sorry for that interruption with the votes; we return to our sitting.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I wanted to pick up this issue about a nuanced, joined-up narrative in any national conversation, and the difficult trade-offs between defence and other key public services. We had a report out this morning about our enormous health inequalities and our ageing population, emphasising the need for preventative work in health, et cetera. Do you see a link between a conversation on national resilience and preparedness and the need to have good public health and a focused approach to health inequalities? Would such a link be a way to get people to engage with these issues, rather than refusing to get involved because we do not want to say, for example, “We should be spending less on health”?

Dr Fiona Hill: Absolutely, yes. Part of our review was on defence medicine, which is entirely dependent on the National Health Service. Obviously, the military in every country recruits from the population; in countries without conscription, those recruits tend to come from the most deprived areas where there are limited opportunities for advancement and training. When we were doing this research and reviewing the material we received, we found that health was one of the major complaints or determinants in recruitment and retention into the United Kingdom’s Armed Forces. That includes dental health which, of course, is

a major issue in the UK, but also frankly, in the United States. One of the top complaints of people in the Armed Forces was about dental deserts: places where they were unable to find a dentist. That was also a barrier to recruitment; we saw figures showing that around 25% of would-be recruits had such poor dental health that they were not fit for recruitment.

As you are saying, Baroness, this is the nexus. I do not want to make a quip about guns and butter, but all aspects of healthcare—including dental healthcare—are important right from the very beginning. If we have problems with our teeth, we will have problems overall. Everything is linked when it comes to the issue of national security. The Germans, Finns, Norwegians and Swedes think about their public health sector and medicine; they think about how they would deal with a mass casualty event, how many hospital beds they have, the overall health of the population and so on. We tackled this in looking at defence medicine, but as I say, that is inextricable from the issue of the National Health Service overall.

Q21 Sir Gavin Williamson: This is a national conversation; do you feel that departments such as the Treasury and Department for Education are engaging with it?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: We are not having a national conversation, but we should, and that will have to involve other departments. For example, every year the Swedish Government issue a pamphlet to every household in the land about preparing for civil emergencies or a military crisis. It explains what everyone is expected to do, including having candles to prepare for when the lights go out. Frankly, when the lights go out, the hospitals close and the data centres melt because the air conditioning has gone, the traffic lights are out and the ATMs are closed down, people are going to shout at politicians—the political class—and say, “Why do you not do something about it”?

If people think that that is a remote possibility, just look at last September when Spain and Portugal—two advanced industrial European countries—lost power and suddenly realised just how difficult that could be. We are under attack at the moment: cyberattacks, sabotage attacks and all these things are happening. This eventuality is possible, and that is why a national conversation that encompasses both civil and military attack is absolutely essential and highly palatable, as well.

Dr Fiona Hill: Going back to your education portfolio, this is embedded throughout other countries’ education, with a lot of preparation and planning in Scandinavian universities. In the United Kingdom, for the most part, universities are public institutions. If you did have to mobilise reserves, it is highly likely that many of those would be students and faculty members at a university or college including, for example, ROTC cadets and, as I mentioned before, the Council of Military Education Committees. Universities, FE colleges, schools and sixth form colleges all had to have plans for Covid. It is that kind of planning at different levels

that we should be thinking about, including places for disseminating information.

The Scandinavian countries distribute information to supermarkets; they have a plan for all the big supermarket chains, and the Germans have the same. You see this to some degree in the United States, where states have to have their own plans because of the propensity for natural disasters such as wildfires, tornadoes and hurricanes. This is something that the United Kingdom already does; we have that level of emergency preparedness in the London boroughs. As George says, preparing for one set of disasters enables you to prepare for another. We should be engaging with emergency preparedness through the Red Cross and other institutions, and the educational system would be one area to look at.

Sir Gavin Williamson: Do you think departments such as the Treasury almost want to avoid the conversation?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: I do not know whether it wants to avoid it. It tends to say no to pretty well everything that is going on; that is part of its very nature, and therefore it needs drive from the top.

At number 26 in the recommendations we say, "We welcome the Prime Minister's launch of a national conversation on defence and security. This should be centred on a two-year series of public outreach events across the UK, explaining current threats and future trends, the role wider society must play in the UK's security and resilience". So we have plotted how it could and should be done, and that all the Government departments should be involved at the same time. Remember, the Prime Minister himself accepted all these recommendations.

Dr Fiona Hill: Part of the problem is in thinking about doing everything from the top. If I were sitting in the Treasury and I had to think about doing this on a countrywide basis, it would be very daunting. But the Treasury already has a devolved centre: its economic campus in Darlington. Devolving the authority responsibility for planning to other parts of the United Kingdom is key, not just for fiscal issues.

We should be leaning into the new combined mayoral authority structures and thinking not just about the reconfiguration of police boundaries but about how we might also lean into the creation of new mayoral authorities. Obviously Greater Manchester has a lot of experience, and there are combined authorities for the West Midlands, east Midlands and the north-east, but these structures are not all the way across England yet. Scotland has the Safer Communities Directorate, which is a layered approach, and Wales and Northern Ireland have to be considered too. We need to think about whether authority and responsibility can be devolved down through those structures so that London is not driving everything because that is part of the problem. You could set some questions about how we could do this to the regional authorities for, say, the east Midlands or Teesside, for example, or any other area, though obviously not at the council level.

Sir Gavin Williamson: Dr Hill, you mentioned the Salisbury poisonings. I recall that at that time the clean-up was meant to be led by Defra; in reality, there was no capacity within that department, so it fell to the MoD. Do you think there is a risk that, in moments of crisis such as we all feel we are heading towards, there will be an expectation that the MoD can plug the gaps?

Dr Fiona Hill: We addressed that in the strategic defence review because there was exactly that fear that the MoD would be burdened with tasks that could not possibly fall within its remit during wartime.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: The Armed Forces are there to defend the country; they should not be expected to perform a wider role. That is why the whole-country approach is so important. We have to make sure that every element of society is involved in the defence and safety of the population and does not rely solely on the Armed Forces, whose job is to do something completely different.

Lord Boateng: Lord Robertson, you talked convincingly about a whole-country, whole-systems approach; Dr Hill, you referred to the European example where everything is “interconnected”. You have both indicated that there are real challenges in terms of getting different government departments to work together, and that different regions are not joined up, so I wonder if you can help us. Lord Robertson, you are a veteran—as am I—of the comprehensive spending reviews at the beginning of this century; you will remember the conflict pool. If my memory serves me right, when you were in NATO, you were a beneficiary of the conflict pool in terms of the Balkans. What role do you see for pooled budgets in responding to and fuelling this national conversation? In the course of your work, did you come to any judgment about how useful the UK integrated security fund has been?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: You are right that other government departments are going to be involved, and we made that clear. The strategic defence review preceded the national security strategy, because the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary felt that we needed to focus on defence as a matter of some urgency. But we had people embedded in our team from the Home Office, the Foreign Office, and the Treasury; those departments would and should be involved in national security as a whole and would clearly have to be involved in any overall strategy. I see no reason why that should not be the case.

The point that you make about pooling is a good one because there are other responsibilities. When I was in NATO, I told Ministers of Defence that they should be involving Ministers of the Interior as well, because most of our military assets are available for civil emergencies. For instance, helicopters may have a very negligible military role other than in conflict, but they are very useful in a civil emergency. In fact, Gordon Brown said to me in a private conversation that, when the Secretary-General of NATO got an eye-watering 5% agreement from the Heads of State and Government, he should have immediately called a North Atlantic Council of Finance Ministers and said, “Your Prime Minister has

agreed to 5%; how are you going to deliver it?" I passed that idea to Mark Rutte because, at the end of the day, that is what is going to be required; you have to get the Treasury involved. You were a Treasury Minister at one point in your life; it needs to be involved in this whole exercise if it is going to take off.

Lord Boateng: Dr Hill, are there some good examples, whether from Germany or Scandinavia, of Finance Ministers working with interior Ministers? I can well remember that, when I was Police Minister, Kent Police was deployed in the Balkans; funding was made available to enable that to happen, so it can be done. Are there any examples you can draw upon to help us in this regard?

Dr Fiona Hill: Finland and the Scandinavian countries in particular try to cut across all the silos. But they also do everything from the bottom up as well as the top down. In terms of thinking about resilience and preparedness, they take everything down to the smallest local and community level possible and there is constant co-ordination. The Swedes are doing more of that now, after doing a national—

Lord Boateng: Then why are we failing?

Dr Fiona Hill: It is partly because we are doing everything from the top—with all due respect, from London—and not thinking about the rest of the country. Coming from parts north, George and I had a few of these problems during the strategic defence review; we were alarmed that at one point our focus groups went only as far north as Lincoln. We do not want to be rude, but there is a lot of country beyond Lincoln; it is a lovely place, but it is not very far north. It is a failure to think about the rest of the country as a non-existent hinterland. That is not the way in Germany, which has a very sophisticated and somewhat complex federal system; whatever happens in Brandenburg has to happen in Baden-Württemberg. It has all these different layers, which can be cumbersome and bureaucratic at times, but there is always an imperative to think about the individual constituent parts.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: We designed it, remember.

The Chair: I want to move us on. We have three areas to explore, and we have less than 15 minutes.

Q22 **Lord Sedwill:** I want to pick up on that last point about the active citizen and civil society. It is clear that, if people are engaged in this set of challenges, they are more likely to be open to having those tough conversations about choices that we were exploring earlier. We know from the early days of the pandemic that, if something is not mandated, people do not take it seriously. I regret that, but it is a fact of our political culture in the UK. In Sweden, every resident aged 16 to 70 has a legally defined role in civil resilience. Should we do that?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: There is a case for that. It might go against the grain and the way in which we think of ourselves but, given the nature of the threats that we now face—both in a civil and a military

context—there would be a case for putting that forward. In our review we talk about a defence readiness Bill, which would involve society as a whole. It appears it is not going to be in the King's Speech in the week after next, which is a pity because it is a crucial part and parcel of what we promoted, but ideas such as that should certainly be on the agenda.

Lord Sedwill: Can I ask about civil society? During the pandemic, we had the vaccine programme; local Rotary clubs did the car parking, students got engaged and all the rest of it. What thought did you give in the review to engaging those small battalions of civil or civic organisations in this exercise? They may not be established for that purpose, but they are composed of active citizens.

Dr Fiona Hill: We flagged that, but not in the detail that we would want to see, precisely because it was not within the remit of the Ministry of Defence. But the whole intent was that you would want to be mobilising civil society, as you went forward with this legislation and engaged in a national conversation about defence and threats. I referred earlier to World War I, World War II and the Imperial War Museum; many voluntary entities such as Rotary clubs, the Women's Institute, and the Royal Voluntary Service—the Red Cross obviously precedes all these—were activated and in some cases created in response to World War I or World War II and during the Cold War. We do not have a dearth of institutions. We also saw some amazing volunteerism during the Covid pandemic; it is just about how we mobilise that.

Again, as the National Resilience Committee has heard, people would like to see more engagement and more active planning and preparation. They are waiting for that demand signal from the top. I do not think the UK has any shortage of civil society entities; right now, it is more about the need to set the right tone and prioritisation of effort.

Lord Sedwill: Last year I was in Copenhagen, where I spent a morning with the Ministry of Civil Resilience. It asked me how we had communicated the need to have three days of emergency supplies without alarming the public; I had to say that we had not. Last week I was at the Stockholm Civil Defence Forum, which is run by IISS; to declare an interest, I am their chair. I was on the platform with its Minister of Civil Defence, and I asked him the same question. He said, "If you mandate things, then you can have this conversation with the public without alarming them".

Lord Robertson, you have spoken in this hearing about emergency supplies and so on, and you have used that example yourself. Is this something the Government should do? You have spoken approvingly of it, but do you think the Government should have that as part of our public information message?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: The public information message must include not only the military and kinetic but the civil responsibilities that we all have. Under the chairmanship of Lord Arbuthnot, the House of Lords committee report of 2021, *Preparing for Extreme Risks: Building a*

Resilient Society, made some very substantial recommendations about the national risk register, which we discovered was not particularly well-known or well-resourced at the time. Although it was not part of our remit—we focused on what defence would do as part of that national conversation and part of national resilience—it was very much in our mind that all these things fit together. If you do not have a resilient country, your country is not going to be properly defended.

So in terms of defence's contribution to that national campaign, we talk about the Department of Education developing an understanding of the Armed Forces and the cadet forces being expanded quite dramatically through partnerships with the private sector. We also talk about the Defence Academy being more open to industry and commerce. That was our contribution. Had we gone further into other departments then the famous write-round that was the subject of our final conclusion would simply have eliminated all that, "It is not your business; it is our business". It is everybody's business now.

Lord Sedwill: You have both talked with approval about the Nordic examples; we all recognise that. Dr Hill, you talked about not just doing things from London. Is there anywhere in the UK that is doing this well and from which others could draw lessons?

Dr Fiona Hill: There are examples of communities that are doing this at all different levels; the problem is that we do not have the co-ordination mechanisms for swapping best practice. Again, there are networks across the UK on emergency preparedness: the Red Cross, for example, is very well positioned. Scotland has a programme of safer communities at all different levels. Our risk is that we do not have the intermediary organisations for co-ordination. When you think about disaster preparedness, we have a lot of examples: for instance, Mountain Rescue. There are plenty of people who are looking at this, and we have an incredible array of professionals, but we have not brought them together to deal with these issues in a focused manner.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Regarding the point you made about mandating, in this country if people are mandated to do things, they do them.

Dr Fiona Hill: They will do it.

Lord Sedwill: So are the local resilience fora not doing the job?

Dr Fiona Hill: They are, but not enough attention is being paid to them. For example, in Teesside there are big chemical works at Wilton. They are very worried about the effect of a literal meltdown at the facility, so they are trying to get themselves organised to deal with it on an independent basis; Teesside University has been putting together a series of workshops under the rubric of Target Teesside, focusing work on satellites and GPS. Lord Arbuthnot's report four years ago stated that each region in the United Kingdom should do something similar. We could very easily be mandating across the country on the basis of the existing

risk register. Again, universities and colleges could play a very important role there too.

Q23 Lord Godson: As you have both observed, in the 1930s we did not deter aggression. We successfully did so during the Cold War through NATO. One of the forgotten articles of the NATO treaty is Article 2, the public education dimension. Obviously, public education was provided successfully during the Cold War, maintaining public support—with one or two bumps—for the necessary defensive measures that NATO employed. On the basis of that experience, what lessons would you draw at the highest leadership levels? You have talked about the Prime Minister's remarks, but the efforts made during the Cold War were about much more than just a prime ministerial speech. There were a whole set of mechanisms and organisms in Whitehall to maintain that particular level of support.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: I remember the civil defence organisation; there was a lot of ridicule, especially from the left, in which I probably took part in the early stages. There was a national campaign at that time to express worries about what the enemy might do to this country. I lived close by the American nuclear base at Holy Loch, where there was a heightened sense of emergency, and I remember my father being involved in giving lectures about civil defence. We did a lot during the Cold War, but we do not do anything now, really.

Dr Fiona Hill: Popular culture played an important role. You may remember TV shows and films in the 1980s such as "Threads" and "The Day After." Seeing Sheffield being hypothetically blown up in a TV series concentrated the brain; that was what motivated me to study Russian. If you think about it, most of 1980s music, one way or another, was about Armageddon and the prospect of nuclear war. Anyone in their 50s and 60s will remember thinking that at any moment something was going to happen. In 1980, my parents bought a horrible yellow handbook about preparing for nuclear war; it was filled with descriptions of what you would have to do if you were hiding in the cupboard under the stairs for several weeks. It was not super-helpful, but I still have it.

We are not suggesting that we go to those lengths, but there was much more awareness. During the Troubles with Ireland, we had a public campaign to alert people to cars left parked on the street and bags left unattended. We removed all the trash cans from major streets. People were encouraged to be vigilant; the threat was evident and well explained. At this particular point there is too much of a worry that people are going to panic, when we have not even tried to test the proposition of talking to them directly.

Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom: If the Government are saying, as they seem to be, "We will be ready, but not until 2035", are we increasing the risk that Russia might say, "We'd better get in early, then"?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: I would have thought that that would be a temptation for the Kremlin. We should be very conscious that in the

Russian domestic press, the United Kingdom has become a proxy for the Americans. An almost hysterical approach is being taken towards the UK—the Anglos, the English—as the major opponent in the war in Ukraine. We should be very wary, therefore, about the vulnerabilities in our critical national infrastructure and our military.

Dr Fiona Hill: Part of the problem is also on the societal level; increasingly the UK looks like a soft target rather than a hard target. As we all know, modern war is fought with many different methods now, including propaganda. The UK is extraordinarily vulnerable through the election system and money coming from different sources that can be given to political candidates and parties. That is also part of the legislation. The Scandinavians, particularly the Swedes, have this idea of psychological defence, which is about training people to deal with information warfare so that they can recognise when they are being manipulated. We have internet harms; I know Baroness Kidron has been working on this. There are many different ways in which British society can be weakened and exploited, so we should be thinking of how we can make the UK less of a soft target for all kinds of different operations.

Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom: I agree.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Deterrence is cheaper than war.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your points are very well made. You said that we should think imaginatively when it comes to funding; we need a narrative and some actions. While listening to you I thought about the Volkswagen plant that was about to close and how Rheinmetall has worked with Volkswagen to take it over. That kind of thinking is interesting and urgently needed. In the year since you published your report, am I not right that the Chinese would have built a ship, a frigate, in that same period?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: They would have built at least one, probably many more than that.

The Chair: Maybe 10.

Dr Fiona Hill: You also have to pay attention to what the Chinese are doing beyond building ships. It is no joke that they are using pigeons for passing on messages, as we had to do in World War I and World War II. Obviously, the Chinese do a lot of this from the top down, but they are looking at analogue systems, thinking ahead to what might happen if there were an attack and all their systems went out. Other countries are thinking about this. It is a point that George makes all the time: our adversaries are always one or two, if not three, steps ahead of us in thinking about how they would protect their own systems, not just how they might attack ours.

The Chair: I thank you both for your time and for informing us on such an important topic. We may still have one or two questions that we did not manage to get to; if you would not mind responding to those, it

would be greatly appreciated. That concludes today's session.