



Select Committee on International Relations and Defence

Corrected oral evidence: The UK and Sub-Saharan Africa – prosperity, peace and development co-operation

Thursday 12 March 2020

9.50 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Baroness Blackstone; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Smith of Newnham.

Evidence Session No. 11

Heard in Public

Questions 95 - 101

Witness

[I:](#) General Sir Richard Barrons.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

General Sir Richard Barrons.

Q95 **The Chair:** Today it is my pleasure to welcome to the International Relations and Defence Committee General Sir Richard Barrons. The General is a distinguished fellow of the Royal United Services Institute and a former Commander of Joint Forces Command. As I always do with witnesses who are here to contribute to our deliberations and give evidence, I remind you that this session is on the record, there will be a transcript and it is being broadcast.

The Committee is engaged in an inquiry into the UK's relations with Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on the African Union's Agenda 2063. Clearly, security is key to our investigations. I shall ask the first, overarching question, then I shall turn to my colleagues, who I will invite to ask more detailed questions.

Against the background of what we read in the newspapers today about the Sahel, Sudan and South Sudan, can you please tell us what you think is the extent to which the West has become more focused on security issues in Sub-Saharan Africa in the last decade? That has come more to the fore in the press recently, but it is not necessarily an area where the public have been able to get information very readily.

General Sir Richard Barrons: Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, has been in people's minds now for more than 10 years. The first thing it is presented as being is a conundrum. People will say that Africa has massive potential. It will be one of the remaining places on our planet that has the capacity for vast economic growth. Africa is a source of extraordinary humanitarian challenge. It has an exploding population at perhaps 2.5% a year. Eighteen million Africans arriving at working age every year with no jobs is one of the reasons why we are seeing pressure on strategic migration. Africa, particularly parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, is infused with a whole range of instability and security dramas.

Many people—politicians, academics and officials—say that Africa really matters and that we must do something about it. Then, almost in the next paragraph, Africa becomes the fourth priority, somewhere in security terms behind Russia, the Middle East and Asia, particularly with the rise of China. So, on the one hand people have set out the scale of the problem and the importance to our security and prosperity, and, on the other, they explain why they cannot do very much about it, despite the fact it really matters.

In the last decade, that sentiment has been amplified by two big factors. One is the strategic fatigue and reluctance to conduct intervention on the back of the perceived lack of success in Iraq and Afghanistan. That era has closed. That it is then amplified by the drama of austerity from 2008 onwards. We felt strategically fatigued and disinclined, and broke. For many political leaders in particular and, I have to say, some officials who should know better, there has been a sense that Europe exists in a world where harm is discretionary and only happens abroad, and that we can,

in the jargon, just chin these things off because we elect that they do not trouble us. We no longer do existential peril. The net effect of that is, although people have talked about the peril of Africa and the need to do something—it is really hard to help; I am sure we will go into that more—very little that is meaningful has actually been done. That is why the problems are not in any way under control.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: May I follow that up a little, because I agree very much with your analysis. However, is it not also relevant that Africa is, historically, a part of the world where the UK can make more of a difference than some of the other parts that you say come higher up the agenda?

General Sir Richard Barrons: I absolutely agree. In many cases in Africa you are dealing with societies that have many problems, but they are not that hard to resolve if you can overcome the challenge of coming up with a proper strategy, ends, ways and means—that is more than just a military instrument, as you are very well aware—and you can commit the resources to it. For the reasons that I described, my experience of, certainly, the last 10 years and longer is that we have been guilty of tokenism, where we absolutely could make a difference but we have chosen not to. It is not that we cannot afford to do it; it is that we have not chosen to make the difficult choices. As a result, things that, frankly, not only could we have fixed but our friends in that part of the world expect us to help fix have not been done.

Lord Grocott: That is very interesting. Do you have two or three examples to illustrate that?

General Sir Richard Barrons: The example that is most in my mind is Libya—although that is not Sub-Saharan Africa—because, as you know, in 2011 we participated in a campaign to remove Mr Gaddafi. We then decided as a matter of policy that, having achieved that, we would let them sort it out between themselves, despite the fact that everybody who had any sense of how that country existed in the past and of its struggles knew that it would not just sort itself out in any successful way.

In the context of Mali, where there was a big fuss in 2012—I was the UK Director of Military Operations at the time—there was a sense that Bamako might fall. It was actually never going to fall, but there was a drama in Mali. What was set out and led by France was a major security concern linked to our security here, counterterrorism and the spread of violent religious extremism, and the concern that that would grow within that part of Africa and that we would see the consequences on our streets. Yet the results, in the military lane, were tactical and small, which they remain now. The results in other dimensions of a strategy—politics, diplomacy, money, communications—were equally tokenistic. The net effect is that unless you can meet a problem like Mali on the scale and in terms of the nature of the challenges it presents, it will not fix itself.

The problems of Somalia could also be cast in that light. There are very substantial issues in Somalia. The UK has applied some very good people from the military, diplomats and development officials, but that does not constitute a substantive intervention that has really made a compelling difference.

Lord Grocott: Perhaps not now but in writing, I would be really interested to know, particularly in respect of Somalia, what kind of intervention you would have regarded as being the kind that would have solved the problem.

General Sir Richard Barrons: I can answer that question quite succinctly. Somalia is a deeply broken place. It has extreme poverty, corrupt and inefficient governance at a number of levels, significant economic shortcomings that partly led to and fuelled the problem of piracy, and a major challenge from al-Shabaab. Our response has been to help the African Union to deploy quite capable African forces to deal with this, but they were never big enough or good enough, in that they were not supplied with the sorts of tools and capabilities that a Western military would deploy. This was never supported by political strategy that meant that the population of Somalia could see a way out of their current impasse if they swung with the reforming government. They saw a half-hearted military operation and a government that preyed on them in many respects. Al-Shabaab offered them security and, in some cases, better governance locally. You could say the same about Mali. Fixing that is not rocket science, but we and the international community have elected not to do so.

Baroness Blackstone: As I understand it, Mali was a joint intervention with the French, but you can comment on how joined-up it was. Is that a model that we should use more: working with another country such as France, where we have quite close contacts in defence and where we could pool our resources together more effectively than doing it on our own?

The Chair: That question links into question 5, so to reassure you, you will have a chance to come back to it.

General Sir Richard Barrons: The first big point is that we, the UK, in as much as we still see ourselves as part of Europe, can tackle a problem like Africa only from the perspective of a collective security effort. Unless we choose to spend our national resources very differently, it is beyond our will and resources to do this alone, so we need partners. That means that we need partnering arrangements. The standard way of doing that is through the UN. The history of UN peacekeeping in Africa is pretty mixed. It is also very expensive. One of the reasons why people like an African Union solution is because it is substantially cheaper than a UN solution.

In the case of Mali, there was good news and bad news. The good news was that France responded to this challenge to the capital remarkably quickly. Anecdotally, the time from the President of France being telephoned to the first French bomb hitting a useful target was six hours,

not six weeks or six months—a UN military response would typically take six months. That was because they were on the ground in that part of Africa, so they were able to respond quickly. France then wanted help. We responded very quickly, but the very clear sense was that this was a French-led intervention. That immediately makes coalition partners wonder who is calling the tune. Off the back of Afghanistan and Iraq there was real nervousness about being drawn incrementally into something where we did not know where it would lead, we were not sure about the risks or the costs, and we knew that there was no public interest in it.

So, France responded very quickly and asked the UK to help with two big things. One is that we provided significant air transport support. It is very interesting that a country like France, which is a serious player in African affairs, does not have strategic enablers. It does not have the C17s and the A400Ms that the Royal Air Force or other nations have. So, we provided a major part of the airlift getting French troops and equipment into theatre.

The second thing they asked us to do was lead in training the Anglophone partners in that part of the world to provide troop contingents in order to get the French contingent out. When we first talked about this—this happens every time we do this kind of thing—it was all going to be done in six weeks. It clearly was not six weeks, and it still is not. It then became clear that many partners in that part of the world were going to take a long time to get ready and were not at all sure that they wanted to be there in the first place. That meant that there was going to be a gap in the force levels.

As you know, the French operation was concluded after about a year, I think. That was mostly a political device to say that they had come, they had conquered and they had finished, but then they stayed. They have just increased their force levels by another 600, so they are well north of 5,000 now. We have provided three helicopters and some staff officers, until, as I hope happens, this very small light cavalry force of 250 people deploys for three years later this year. However, this was clearly a French-led operation. I would not want to make too much of this, but anecdotally, when British officers asked to be included in the planning process in theatre and asked, “What are we going to do?”, they were not allowed in, because, they said, we were not on the ground and not doing anything. One sign of a collective response is that, within the headquarters that runs the operation, you have a mix of officers, in the way we multi-nationalised the intervention into Afghanistan initially.

So, the first point is that France wanted to do this. It needed help, but it wanted to set the terms. We were reluctant about getting drawn in and, frankly, very reluctant about servicing French interests when we had other concerns. Secondly, after the Lancaster House Treaty of 2010, there has been the creation of a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force with France that has gone through a number of training cycles to develop capability. At no point has the UK thought it would be a good idea to take

that nascent capability and deploy it in somewhere like Mali, because it would have been a French-led piece, just as the European Union Battlegroup has never in its existence been deployed.

We have not yet hit on a very good model of applying sound collective defence to these kinds of interventions outside the framework created by the UN. As a result, what we have done has been only moderately successful.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that very detailed introduction, which I think feeds very well into our further questions.

Q96 **Lord Alton of Liverpool:** General, good morning and thank you for the candour you have just shown. Maybe later in proceedings there will be an opportunity for you to talk about somewhere less dispiriting, such as Sierra Leone and the liberal interventionism there, which seemed to be relatively successful compared with some examples you have given us.

May I build on some of your very helpful introductory comments and ask how the nature and extent of the conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa have morphed and changed, in particular given the activities of transnational actors such as terrorist organisations—everyone from al-Shabaab to Boko Haram—and the linkage with organisations like al-Qaeda, especially in Nigeria, with the new ISIS and the caliphate being created there? How does that affect the complexity of the security situation and the nature of peacekeeping in the region?

General Sir Richard Barrons: The problem in that part of the world is very complex. It is also not new. As we talked about a little bit, it has very poor infrastructure, very weak economies, very low levels of education, poor, often corrupt and predatory governments and police forces, and a very varied application of the rule of law. In that sort of context, when an organisation like al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab or any of these other extreme Islamic organisations appear, much to our disappointment—and, I am disappointed to say, even now sometimes to our surprise—the local population thinks that they are not entirely a bad thing, because they provide order, security, sensible taxation and access to justice, and they remove the predatory effect of the police force, the army and the local government.

Now, there is a price that comes with that, which often people resent: perhaps the extreme application of sharia law. They do not get much choice and they certainly do not get a vote, but it is interesting how many people say, “What we had was terrible and what we have now is frightening, but at least I can go about my business with greater confidence than I did before”.

On our part, as the outsiders who intervene in these things, we do a number of things that make this hard. First, we align with the government, and we will then say that it is the legitimately appointed or elected government. Then we find that we are dancing with a broken doll. The public do not like them, they are not very good, they do not actually want to improve and, in some cases, some—not all, because there are

always good people in this mix—see us as a risk to their livelihood. So we become associated with something that is not well regarded by the population. At that point, you are not off to a gleaming start.

Then, in terms of what we do, there is often discussion about the military instrument. There is a basic strategic device here: in order to fix this problem, which is a security problem, you deploy your own forces and those of your co-travellers, and you yourself reduce the level of violence. At the same time, you improve the ability of the government forces in terms of capability and performance in order to be able to take over in due course. That is not a bad approach but then a number of things undermine it. The first is that the forces you deploy in order to substantially change the security situation are not good enough, big enough or there long enough to have a durable effect. You are then accused of mowing the grass: you turn up and have lunch in the village and it is all terrific, but then you go away again and the people in the bushes just come back. We have seen that in many other theatres. You cannot succeed in this by commuting to the fight, as General Petraeus would often say.

Secondly, in growing the local forces, again, there are some superb soldiers and young officers and they want to be trained. We are very good at training them, but we do not offer them equipment, pay, logistics, medical cover—the things that make an army durable. If you want to grow an officer cadre, that is about a 15-year programme, not a one-year programme, but we all want to do it by Christmas or the next election. So on the one hand we do not do enough to change the situation ourselves; on the other, getting the local forces to get up to the mark is not going well either. In the middle of it, you are still aligned with a government who are part of the problem, so we become part of the problem.

Generally, at this point, we ask the UN to take over. The UN will generally take a year to organise forces. The forces that it provides will, in the context of Africa, generally be forces from Africa and Asia, so now there are bigger Chinese contingents and many others from Asia. Often what they are good at is not making the problem worse, but they are not good at making the problem any better. Sometimes they become part of the problem; there is a long history of poor performance in some UN contingents. At the heart of it, we go back to the question of why we had this insurgency in the first place. It is because the infrastructure was poor, the economy and education were terrible, and the government were predatory. Unless you have a strategy that addresses those things, no matter how many military people you throw into this, you are not going to fix it.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: I would like to go beyond the overriding examples that you have just described to ask specifically about the situation in Kano and Jos in northern Nigeria. We had a delegation here only a week ago, including Rebecca Sharibu, whose daughter had been abducted, enslaved, raped and gone through terrible experiences from

the age of 14 to 16. There were Muslims and Christians together spelling out how they had turned against Boko Haram and the insurgency. You are absolutely right: initially they had been ensnared by the group because of the corruption and indifference of the government, but now all of them want out of this. They say there are crimes against humanity and that it is even unfolding into a genocide. It is going to take a year for anyone at the United Nations to take that seriously. Is there not a moral duty, let alone a legal one under the genocide conventions and the rest, for us to act?

General Sir Richard Barrons: I am not expert in northern Nigeria, but I have had some experience with it. The point that you are raising is important. We like to talk about our values; we are a rich and prosperous nation—our public sector is £800 billion a year, I think, or maybe a bit more, so we spend a lot of money on ourselves; we are a member of the Security Council and we have friends around the world; and the UK thrives and prospers as part of a successful global order. So it is at least open to us, when we see something that is appalling, to do something about it. The fact is that now we simply choose not to. I have described some of the reasons for that. We did not have a great experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr Blair's "right to protect" approach has been discredited in the eyes of many.

I am afraid this is going to sound a bit critical, but we have a generation of politicians and officials who think tactically and very short term. Their adult experiences are rooted in the comfortable experience of the post-Cold War era, which is definitively finished now. They believe that war intervention is discretionary, it is not our job either to police the world or to make it better—we might choose to make a contribution—and we feel poor and fatigued anyway. There is a failure of politics in the first instance. Let us say you describe something as an existential problem that is a risk to your vital homeland security—after all, Islamic terrorism can beget other forms of terrorism—and let us say you believe in the stability of an international order and in your own laws and values. When you have described what is going on as outrageous and said that it should stop but then choose not to do something about it, you should be asking why that is. It seems to be an act of enduring self-harm not to do that.

We recognise that some of the institutions established in the wake of the Second World War, particularly the UN, now fall well short in terms of timeliness, effectiveness and the struggle to find consensus to do anything, with the Security Council riven between China and the US, but we have not moved beyond that. At the heart of that, I have not encountered any politician in the past 10 years who senses from our population that this issue matters to them, other than to specialists and others who are interested in it. We are in this terrible place, and this applies across a whole range of issues in our time, where, because the British public at large show no interest in an issue, political leaders feel no need to make it a concern or a priority—yet, and this may be fanciful, I argue that if we are capable of having political leaders who can summon

a degree of statesmanship, they should at least be prepared to raise the debate and, if necessary, take a tough decision, saying, for example, "This is in the interests of these poor people in northern Nigeria but it is also in our long-term national interests, with others".

Having said all that about northern Nigeria, the problem with doing anything there is trying to get the government of Nigeria to ask for something and support it. Generally speaking, we have never found a way of making that happen.

The Chair: Thank you. I am afraid that I cannot take supplementaries. I had hoped to be able to do so but you have given us a really rich description of where action can be taken and where perhaps we are part of the group that does not take action.

Q97 **Baroness Blackstone:** You have mentioned the UN a number of times. Could you give us a general assessment of the role of the UN in peacekeeping in Africa, in particular how it co-ordinates its activities and co-operates with the African Union?

General Sir Richard Barrons: The UN has a very well-structured peacekeeping operation—after all, there are 14 or 16 live operations, half of which are in Africa at the minute—so it is very used to running large-scale enduring peacekeeping operations, but their mandate tends to be quite narrowly banded because it is driven by consensus. If there is a peace to keep, having an awful lot of quite basically trained soldiers doing interposition between armed forces will work, but it may only freeze the conflict for a generation; maybe that is okay.

In the context of Africa, there is a reluctance to see UN forces that are not African, hence the importance of the relationship with the African Union. That is both a good thing, in that it means soldiers on the ground have a better sense of what is going on, and a bad thing in that many African countries sustain their armed forces on the back of the fact that the UN will pay them to do peacekeeping, so they do not have a huge interest in that finishing.

More particularly, and this is a case that I have advanced for a number of years, there are things that we learned to do the hard way in Iraq and Afghanistan about peacekeeping, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. There are capabilities that we acquired, and since we are not terribly busy right now, if we were able to apply them to the problems of Africa, we would make a material difference. We might actually begin to change the security climate that led to changes elsewhere.

I am delighted to say that the UK has had modest experiments with that with the deployment of engineers into South Sudan. I understand that the Prime Minister is due to consider this week the idea that a tiny light reconnaissance force of 250, or perhaps nearer to 300, would join the UN effort in Mali. Two hundred and fifty people means that you can do one to maybe three things on any given day in a country of 1.2 million square

kilometres with a population of 19 million, so this is a token, but at least it shows the UK beginning to draw itself back into UN peacekeeping, which is a good thing.

There has been another dimension. Many of the major troop contributors to the UN, which include India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, have made it pretty clear that they are not going to be in a place where they provide the soldiers on the ground who are doing the doing and the dying while we provide the commanders and staff officers. It does not work that way; in order to command these operations and make them go better, there is an expectation that you have proper skin in the game.

So there is a machine in the UN that does peacekeeping, but it is very narrowly banded and very rarely decisive, unless the problem is essentially bored to death over a generation or more, but we have never found the right way of ingesting into UN peacekeeping the knowhow, equipment, training and effectiveness that Western armed forces are capable of at the scale required.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. As I say, this is not plain speaking but very clear speaking to make us think.

Q98 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I am required to make a rather elaborate statement of interests, including some points that you have referred to already. On Somalia, I was the British ambassador to the UN in the 1990s, and I have to say that I was mortified that we refused to play any part whatsoever in the first big UN operation, and that the collapse of that operation, which was not of course caused by the absence of a British contingent, has led to far more complex problems than I believe would have occurred if we had persevered. We simply refused to have anything to do with it then, which I think is the point you were making.

My second declaration of interest regards Anglo-French co-operation. I represented this Committee at the last Lancaster House parliamentary meeting in Paris. It was quite clear that from the French point of view British co-operation with them, of the sort that we are talking about in Mali now, was a pearl of great price. They felt that the task they were facing in the Sahel was beyond their powers on their own, and that therefore it would be hugely important to the future of Anglo-French relations if we were prepared to lend a hand.

Thirdly, I spent last week in Liberia, which was of course the scene, after much travail, of a very successful UN operation. It has sent a small force of peacekeepers to Mali, trained by the UK, for which Mali was enormously grateful, and it was looking forward to co-operating with us when our troops arrive there.

Sorry for that very elaborate statement of interest. I think you have begun to say what the challenges facing the armed forces of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa are. How can the UK best support them? To what extent, indeed, is the UK a military partner of choice for quite a lot of these countries?

General Sir Richard Barrons: I will start with your last point. Somewhat to my surprise, given the passage of the last decade or so, there are many anglophone countries in Africa that look to the UK as a source of guidance, wisdom, inspiration and money and as a military reference point. They do that because we are professionally competent, and we are not America; I say that simply because we are not quite as heavy-handed as a big American force can sometimes be. Our response to that warmth has been threadbare.

In order to make a difference with the armed forces of a Sub-Saharan Africa country, the good news is that there is no shortage of people. These people can be highly motivated, and in some cases that is the only way that they are going to get a job. In the West, you struggle to find the people, but in Africa there is no end of young men and women who want to be soldiers and are good at it. However, they often come from an extraordinary low threshold of education and training, and they work for a country that cannot afford to equip its own armed forces. Sometimes we have thought we are doing well if they are stood in a uniform with a pair of boots, one weapon each, and some sort of steel helmet, and have basic accommodation and basic food. Actually, many Africans think, "Well, this is a start. I didn't have boots before".

What we have done hugely effectively is to impart to contingents like that a really high standard of basic infantry skill, which is where you need to start. They shoot straighter, they can move effectively in the field and understand how to do company-level, about 100 people, or battalion-level, about 600 people, infantry operations. From a very low position, that is quite good.

Then we have done three things that are really unhelpful. First, we have never bought them any equipment. We have not given them the trucks, radios, ambulances, computers, buildings, logistics or ammunition that they need to be effective. We send them off in pretty threadbare condition. That is quite unlike the US, which has done a superb job of overequipping some contingents around the world with stuff that they cannot possibly manage. There is probably a happy medium there somewhere.

The second thing that we have failed to do is build institutions. We have done low-level training, but we have not built a ministry of defence or the command and staff capability that makes an army a thing that endures. If you just build the front end, when the army has had a hard day it does not get replaced, or what is behind collapses and the soldiers at the front say, "Well, there doesn't seem to be any great need to fight for this lot, because they've nicked all the money and run off with it". Capacity-building is doing more than teaching people to shoot straight.

The third thing, which is my particular gripe, is that we are good at "train, advise and assist"—we are happy to do that—but, for entirely political reasons, we do not do "accompany".

We will build a contingent—this is the same in Iraq and places like that—and then wave it off at the camp gate. We send them on a mission and say, “Let us know how it goes.” They ask, “What happens if I have a question on the way?” We reply, “We’re not allowed to go with you.” The US has set a very good benchmark with the security force assistance brigades that they have deployed to Afghanistan. They turn up as a coherent formation with a full span of capability, including access to air power. They train, advise, assist and accompany. They are just behind their proxy force when they go into battle and they provide advice, guidance, logistics and access to air power. We are capable of doing that with Special Forces, which we obviously will not go into, but we have never built a conventional green army capability that is allowed to accompany, outside of Afghanistan, where that was really successful.

In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, if it is worth providing military assistance, we will have to take the risk of accompanying, otherwise everything we have done might just turn to dust in the heat of the moment. I understand why politicians are nervous about this, but if it is worth sending military in the first place, let them do their job.

Q99 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Might I follow this up by asking whether we are constrained in our unwillingness to provide equipment, accompanying trainers and all that by the DAC¹ rules about overseas development aid, which are pretty rigorous in this respect? Were those rules to be somewhat more flexibly applied, we might lose some of our inhibitions. Is that fair?

General Sir Richard Barrons: It is fair to the extent that, in accordance with our laws, most of the money that DfID² spends cannot be spent on defence equipment. The MoD³ has no money beyond pennies—a few thousand here or there—to spend on equipping another nation’s forces. The MoD has no money but has many challenges. DfID has a lot of money but by law cannot spend it on defence stuff, even if it thought that that is what development really is—you can imagine that it does not. It is not as though there is not enough money, it is just that we have not spent it this way. That is a matter of grave disappointment to our Middle Eastern and African counterparts, where we turn up well-equipped and well-fed and give them very little—almost nothing in some cases.

On the “accompany” point, we are perfectly capable of doing this. We military people know that it is how you build around a proxy force. We see the benchmark of how we do this as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which, in three campaigns in the last 10 years, has built, accompanied, supplied and led proxy forces. We have profound disquiet about what they are doing, but it has nailed a way of doing proxy forces. We do not do that. That is an act of self-harm in delivering our

¹ The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Development Assistance Committee.

² The Department for International Development

³ The Ministry of Defence

objectives. Soldiers do not understand this, and it makes them angry that they cannot go out the door with the people that they have trained.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that very cautionary explanation.

Q100 **Lord Grocott:** This has been extremely informative and interesting. There are so many questions that we could ask you. In a sense, you have already answered a good chunk of question 5, about co-operating with other countries outside Africa, and you have talked particularly about France.

I am a politician, and you have had a few things to say about politicians. In the light of what you have told us, we undoubtedly have the skills and we are well respected. That is unarguable. You said that in many African countries there is a good deal of good will towards us in dealing with these kinds of issues. There is a "but" coming, as you might have guessed. Precisely what is it that you want the Government, politicians and people like me to recommend?

You have to prioritise. If the brief was simply to help conflict areas in Africa, where would you go first? Also, we need some sort of idea of precisely what would need to be committed and for how long. Speaking as a complete layman, it seems that quite a lot of military has been deployed across the world—I am not an expert in any of these areas at all, but take, for example, Cyprus or the Falklands—in areas where there seems to be less of a pressing crisis to be dealt with than there is in some of the countries that we have been talking about. I just want simple advice for a Secretary of State for Defence.

General Sir Richard Barrons: That is a very interesting question. I wish we had the rest of the day to answer it. In the world that we are now going to live in, this has to be underpinned by an understanding of risk. Most of our political assumptions are grounded in the experience of the last generation or so, and I am arguably no different. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the world we are going to live in over the next 30 years will be dominated by a combination of three major strategic factors. This is the Asian century; it is not a US-led century any longer, so there will be a different approach to the international order, with the risk of a Thucydides moment between the US and China. It will be quite complex; it will be very different. The way that we have relied on the US to provide European security, for example, will not happen. The way we might have expected the US to carry all the water in Africa clearly will not happen; Africom is doing less.

For the first time in the history of mankind, while we are moving into the Asian century, we will then bump into the limits of our planet's ability to cope with our demands, expectations and abuse. The conflict in Darfur arose out of desertification. We very nearly had a testy conversation with Brazil last year as it burnt the rainforest. There were people arguing 20 years ago that we should occupy Brazil to secure the supply of oxygen it makes for the rest of us. I have no idea how that plays out, but there are profound seeds of conflict in there as a result of population growth, resource shortage and climate change in the Asian century.

Then there is the AI industrial revolution in all its glory: data processing, autonomy, robotics, gene engineering and all these things. It will rip apart established economies and ways of living, in a world where the people who lose their livelihood and are displaced, unlike in previous industrial revolutions, have a vote and a mobile phone. With that combination, the UK will not enjoy the discretion that we have had for the past 30 years. There will be things that truly affect our security and our prosperity as the world becomes more unstable. I have served mostly in a world where I saw governments deciding to do tiny discretionary things and pulling public opinion behind them, reluctantly and sometimes not very successfully. We will live in a world where terrible things will happen—this pandemic is an example of the kind of thing that comes out of nowhere—where public opinion will demand that things are done because our way of life seems in jeopardy.

In that overall context, what are the risks that really matter? Where is the process of identifying what those risks are? When we have identified them, very few will be fixed if we resolve to stay at home. We will have to take a part, with our partners, in various types of intervention abroad—usually capacity-building—to prevent things becoming a crisis, or intervening where things have become a crisis. Those interventions will not be the one-sided Iraq 2003 intervention, or the one-sided original Afghan intervention. They could be against quite serious opposition, for which we are completely unprepared. We do not like to think in those terms, and our major military alliance, NATO, is prevented from thinking in those terms.

My first plea to you is to tell me where you think the risks to the UK's security and prosperity are. Then we can have a conversation about what strategy is needed to fix those risks. I use this description: ends—what is it you want to achieve?; ways—what are the pathways to achieving your objectives?; and means—what are the resources that you need to go down your pathway to deliver your objective? They all need to be in balance.

Quite often, the response from Her Majesty's Government has been to assert the ends as a magnificent outcome, talk about the ways of getting there and then send some soldiers in tiny numbers for not long enough to make a substantive difference. We need a better discussion about how all the levers of power that the UK has—military, public sector and private sector—can be fused to deliver the outcomes that we are after.

I see no capacity for that sort of thinking or planning in politics or government right now. What I see is a sort of collegiate, come-as-you-are party with tokens, and I do not think that is going to work in the world that we live in. When you come to commit the military instrument—and you will—we will need to know that it is part of a strategy. It will be a tremendous experience for them and they will really enjoy it, although they will take some casualties, but these minor contributions to Mali are not in support of a strategy of any kind other

than “We should do a bit more UN peacekeeping”. There is virtue in that, but it is not going to change the situation.

What is the application of international resources that really makes a difference here? It is more than sending a military band-aid. When you send the military, the military must go based on the scale and nature of the problem, with partners. That is a combination of how big a force you deploy, the way in which you allow it to operate—meaning rules of engagement—and for long enough, and we really do not do for long enough. When as a major and Chief of Staff I led the initial deployment into the Balkans, into Bosnia, in 1992, I was told that we would be there for six months and we came out 14 years later. When as a colonel I was Chief of Staff of the initial deployment into Afghanistan, into Kabul, at Christmas in 2001—it was jolly cold—we were told that it would be for 90 days, and we are still there. Northern Ireland turned into a 37-year campaign.

Unfortunately, if I say to you as a politician that this will take us 20 years, it will cost this much money and we will take some casualties, you will never start. That is a failure of strategic understanding. These things just take time. The difference in future is going to be that these things will really matter to our security and prosperity, so to some degree that political decision may be easier, but the costs will be higher.

The Chair: Our last question is again in the area of requiring politicians to make strategic decisions.

Q101 **Baroness Smith of Newnham:** I shall draw on several of your answers. I tried to intervene earlier, but I was not allowed to come in with a supplementary. I started off, before Lord Alton asked his question, wondering whether you thought the UK was trying to do too much. I was then going to ask whether you thought the UK was trying to do too little. At various points you have said, “We have a tiny force going in and we don’t leave people there long enough”. Then you said, “But actually we should be sending people to more places”.

How would you advise a Minister to decide whether we should streamline what we are doing? Should we spend more time training in Kenya, for example? Should we strategise more, following on from your answer to Lord Grocott, and say, “These are the areas on which the UK should be focusing”? Should we be doing more to link up DfID, the Foreign Office, the MoD and perhaps even the Department for International Trade to look at ways of strategising this?

General Sir Richard Barrons: My view is that in the world we are going to inhabit, we will not get away with deploying the tiny packets of military forces that we have applied to really big problems in the past, and that will really matter. In our own national interest, we should identify those things that matter to us. In many cases they will also matter to other people so we should be part of a collective response that is big enough and capable enough and endures long enough to make a difference,

which is not in our nature right now. That will mean that we do more and the costs will be greater.

That would also mean that we ignored some problems that were stable. Lord Grocott mentioned Cyprus. Occasionally it looks as if it is going to be fixed, and we send over a tiny packet of people—a few hundred people—who have quite a jolly six months, are highly regarded and do a good job. We should stop worrying about tiny packets of 200 or so, or whoever goes, when it is a good thing to do. We need a different sense of scale.

On the fusion of all the levers of power, a lot of nonsense has been talked about the evolution of grey-space tolerance or hybrid warfare where a combination of cyber and social media tinkering somehow replaces the need for military hard power. If you say that in Aleppo, they will just laugh at you. The truth is that all these things are a feature of modern confrontation and conflict. In March 2018 the Government articulated the Fusion Doctrine. They did a pretty good job of saying how in the world we live in we need to fuse all our levers of power. They then did a terrible job of doing that because they have failed to break down the stovepipes that exist in Whitehall—the ability to flex resources between, say, DfID and Defence. Our bureaucracy, and this is not a matter of neglect but a positive decision, has not enabled the Fusion Doctrine.

I would like to think that, in the review that is under way now, there will be a recognition that in the world we are going to live in we need a better articulation of the Fusion Doctrine where government—Ministers and senior officials—can get over, in some cases, their reluctance to use the word “strategy”. For a while we had a Government who just believed, and I am sorry for using the word, in the “shit happens” school of strategy, which did not go terribly well. We need to recognise how, in order to make our way in the world, we must fuse all our levers of power with those of our friends. The emasculation of the Foreign Office is a catastrophe. The inability to use DfID money to support national interests, as opposed to just general development, is a mistake, albeit a worthy one. Using Armed Forces that are at the bottom of a decline since the end of the Cold War in terms of mass, capability and purpose is a strategic shortcoming that we are perfectly capable of overcoming but at the minute we are choosing not to.

The bit that we have never done—indeed, no democracy has done this well—is to recognise that in influencing important places in the world, including in Africa, yes, the British Government have a lot to offer but our private sector, our law, our economy, our City, our Premier League and our entertainment industry bend the minds of millions. We have never harnessed that as a force for good in a way that was thoughtful, although occasionally it happens by accident. To make our way in the future, in accordance with the principles of the Fusion Doctrine, in our own interests we need to learn to do that. We are perfectly capable of doing it; we just choose not to.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I know there is one area that we have not been able to cover in our allotted time, so I wonder whether

I might invite you to write on the matter of how we co-operate with the United States on regional security issues. If you are able to submit that, my colleagues will welcome the opportunity to receive it. In closing, I reflect on the fact that you made the point that capacity-building is more than teaching people how to shoot straight. You clearly knew how to do that; I think you found your targets. Thank you for a very valuable session.