



## Defence Committee

### Oral evidence: Introductory Session with the Secretary of State, HC 295

Wednesday 22 April 2020

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Stuart Anderson; Sarah Atherton; Wayne David; Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi; Martin Docherty-Hughes; Richard Drax; Mr Mark Francois; Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck; Gavin Robinson; John Spellar.

Questions 1-51

#### Witnesses

**I:** Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP, Secretary of State for Defence, Air Marshal Richard Knighton CB, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Military Capability), Ministry of Defence, Lieutenant General James Swift OBE, Chief of Defence People, MoD, and Paul Vincent Devine, Director of Security and Resilience, MoD.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [MoD response on repatriation of British citizens](#)



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mr Ben Wallace MP, Air Marshal Richard Knighton, Lieutenant General James Swift and Paul Vincent Devine.

**Q1 Chair:** Welcome to this interesting session of the Select Committee on Defence.

Welcome to the Secretary of State, Ben Wallace—this is an introductory session with you—and to Air Marshal Richard Knighton, Deputy Chief of Defence Staff; Lieutenant General James Swift, Chief of Defence People; and Paul Vincent Devine, Director of Security and Resilience. We are very grateful for your time and your patience in getting us set up.

It has been an incredible day, to see Prime Minister’s Question Time done in this hybrid format, as we are in Committee today. Bear with us with the technology—I am surrounded by an awful lot of cameras and many technicians—but I am sure we will get through this. We are very grateful, Secretary of State, that you have taken time out of what I know is your busy schedule to bring us up to date not just with what is happening in the immediate crisis but with the wider picture of the Integrated Review and other aspects of the Armed Forces.

I will begin with a request, if I may. This is an unprecedented time for the nation, and extraordinary demands have been placed on our Armed Forces. Any opportunity for us to scrutinise what the MoD, you or the Armed Forces are doing over and above what we normally do in Parliament would be very welcome. I will leave that open and would be grateful. We recognise that these are incredible times, and the role of the legislative to do its scrutiny must continue, even when we are unable to communicate as best we can.

That said, on behalf of the Committee—and, I guess, Parliament—I say thank you for what the Armed Forces are doing. We have an incredible professional Armed Force capability—arguably, the best in the world—so the bar is set very high. There is an expectation that when the nation faces a crisis our Armed Forces step in. That is exactly what they have done, with the COVID-19 taskforce that you created, the 20,000 mobilised and the Nightingale programme, which has been absolutely incredible. You stepped forward with your logistics and transport capabilities, and your local resilience forum input is second to none. Thank you very much indeed for all your efforts.

General Charles Krulak talked about the “three block” soldier, which you might be familiar with: the ability to advance from war fighting to peacekeeping to nation building. We are seeing that. The versatility of our soldiers is absolutely fantastic, being able to infill, bolster and support other Departments in what they are doing. With that said, I invite you, Secretary of State, to give us an update on your specific role and on the wider picture of the Armed Forces’ contribution to tackling the



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coronavirus.

**Mr Wallace:** Thank you, Chairman. I am conscious that this is my first appearance in front of you as the new Chairman of the Defence Committee. I welcome the scrutiny and our ability to engage with Parliament. As Secretary of State, I am not worried about scrutiny. It is helpful to have our plans and policies tested by anyone across the political spectrum. Indeed, there is the opportunity for us to be frank. Given the days of managed information, as a parliamentarian I welcome the ability to have proper discussions about what we do and how we do it.

At a time of national crisis, this is definitely where we see our Armed Forces at their best: versatile, can-do, willing to help our fellow citizens and, contrary to the media reports I noticed today, actually enjoying and proud to be serving alongside our NHS colleagues, our devolved Administrations and our local authorities, and to be contributing to making the United Kingdom strong against this virus.

It is important to recognise that the individuals we have deployed are making a difference. They are deployed right across the breadth of the public sector—whether we find them driving oxygen supplies around the UK or flying helicopters to the Western Isles to help evacuation, they are pretty much everywhere across the public sector. Indeed, they are even at the centre of Whitehall and in Skipton House, helping the NHS to plan and deliver on the challenges we face every day. I pay tribute to them and I pay tribute to our veterans community, who have stood up to Op Rubicon or, indeed, just made their case, like Captain Tom Moore, who led his own charge to recognise the work of the NHS.

As the Secretary of State, I am well supported by senior military personnel and civil servants in being able to deliver a response to this COVID outbreak. My main role is to be able to provide that generation of force to help the resilience of the country. The key word is resilience. Today, it is a massive pandemic; tomorrow, it could be a serious cyber-attack. Resilience is what we are there to provide. Often, the skills that people do not instinctively think the Armed Forces deliver are the skills that you and I know are actually at our core: command and control, logistics, moving at pace, and being able to see a way through—a clarity that allows us to crunch data and deliver for people around the country. My role has been, first of all, to make sure that that support is delivered to whichever part of the devolved Administrations, central Government, the regions and local authorities we can deliver it to.

One of the very early decisions that I took—the decision that I felt was most important—was to give up my authority and devolve it down as far as possible into the regions and the nations of the UK, taking it away from the centre. I have handed over the MACA requests, with which we are familiar, first to Standing Joint Command, and then determinedly pushed them into each region and into nations, so that the Colonel or Brigadier who many of our colleagues meet in each region are the ones with the sole ability to draw on military assets to deliver assistance. That is how we are going to get through this; we are not going to get through this if we



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clog it up with bureaucracy and try to centralise and control it from my desk or, indeed, from the desk of a general along the corridor. It is going to be mission command pushed downstream. That was the first thing that I sought to do.

On a daily basis, I liaise with Whitehall, the Prime Minister and the First Secretary to ensure that we are meeting their demands and, where we feel we can do more, offering more and leaning in to say, "Look, we think we can actually provide more help." The advantage we have is ground truth: because we are throughout the system, from local authority level all the way up to Whitehall. I get a pretty good morning assessment of what is going on in our LRFs, our prisons, our hospitals and our supply chains—when I say our, I mean the UK's—so I am able to anticipate what we think will happen next and see whether we can match that with demand.

I am also here to help to guide other Government Departments in respect of what they really want, because as you will know from your own experience of MACAs, they start off with one ask, but once you have interrogated it and gone along and helped the Department, you have managed to shape the ask in a way that gets the effect you are after rather than the numbers. That has been a really important process.

**Q2 Chair:** Thank you for that, Secretary of State. I understand you had COVID-19. It is good to see you back in your place. I am sorry you were affected by that, but it is good to see you back on parade.

You welcomed scrutiny, which I am pleased about, because we have some questions to ask you. You spoke about command and control and about logistics. There is no doubt about the enormous contribution of our Armed Forces, as we have just touched on, and the Government are to be commended on their clear mission to the nation to get these numbers down: telling people to stay at home, make the lockdown work, help protect the NHS and save lives, and putting in place an economic safety net.

I am concerned though—you touched on it just then—about command and control. Unlike every other Department, the Armed Forces—the military, the MoD—actually plan for crises. They actually work towards the rainy day and try to establish what to do—the strategic thinking required—when things go wrong. Is there not more that the Armed Forces could do to contribute to the strategic thinking? To put that in context, we seem to have a peacetime, traditional, Cabinet-led Government structure, when actually we need swifter decision making. We need to get to the action much, much faster. We have people who specialise in, and are very good at, creating policy but who are now expected to do the delivery. Do you believe that our Armed Forces and MoD—our thinkers, our strategists— could be making more of a contribution at the very top level to help co-ordinate behind the scenes?

**Mr Wallace:** Could we do more? I think we will be doing more. We will certainly shift potentially from command and control to more mass. Our role will change as the pandemic plays through. We often focus on soldiers in uniform delivering equipment from the back of a lorry, but much



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broader than that we are helping with DSTL and our labs, with the logistical supply chain, with the distribution and the warehouses, and also with procurement processes, because we have people who procure all the time, and people who charter aeroplanes. There are a lot of unseen contributions from the MoD and the Armed Forces that are not on people's daily media radar, because it is either less glamorous or done in places where people do not think about the Armed Forces in a traditional manner.

There is more we can do, but are we getting those demand signals? The answer is yes. We are helping to generate them if we think we can. The system has changed. At 9.15 every morning, there is a morning meeting between the First Secretary, the Health Secretary, me and other Secretaries of State at No. 10. We go through the daily numbers and the pressures in the system, we feed in the pressures—some of that will have been done before the meeting—and throughout the day we are constantly trying to meet demand and sort things out.

A lot of these demands are being met—just not from the centre. I will give an example: in Scotland, I have devolved authority to the one-star lead in Scotland to liaise with the Scottish Government and work on a daily basis to provide whatever the Scottish Government need. They might need it, they might not—it is entirely up to the Scottish Government. It does not come to my desk. I do not sit there making a final decision. I leave it to the professionals and the Scottish Government to deliver it. It might not get the attention or have the profile, but that does not really matter; what matters is delivering the support, either seen or unseen, to the rest of the public sector. Today, we have 2,857 military personnel deployed throughout the United Kingdom, and we have still on standby the remainder of the 20,000 to do more if needed.

**Q3 Chair:** I understand that. We recognise the enormous contribution that is being made through military assistance to civil effect, but I am talking about strategic thinking. Government in its normal guise—in peacetime—is reliable, but it is very risk averse. It is cumbersome, time-consuming and also siloed. The idea of Cobra and the National Security Council is designed to overcome those stovepipes, if you like. My question is whether there is a greater contribution that MoD thinking—strategic thinking—could offer, given that instead of using Cobra and the National Security Council, we seem to have created another model. We have a COVID-19 Cabinet and sub-committees as well. What is the role of Cobra and of the National Security Council? Indeed, when did the National Security Council last meet?

**Mr Wallace:** The National Security Council, at official level, met last week.

**Chair:** Not official—

**Mr Wallace:** No, I am just about to explain. The NSC of Ministers has not met since the beginning of the crisis. Cobra met last week. I was at that meeting. It would be wrong to say that these MIGs—these four sub-committees—are not helping to deliver. They are, and the four of them are: the public sector MIG, healthcare MIG, international MIG and



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economic MIG. They are chaired by the Chancellor; the Foreign Secretary; Michael Gove, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, for the public sector MIG; and Matt Hancock for the healthcare MIG. Those four chairs report every day to the First Secretary of State at the moment, and that does deal with the granularity of the challenges that are coming up.

The question of whether we could do more is, in one sense, really one for the other Departments. The question to the other Departments is: is there an unmet need, or do you, as parliamentarians, think that Department A is not meeting its obligations? Why have you not asked the Army or anybody else to help? That is a question. What I can say is that I readily speak to all my Cabinet colleagues. I spoke to Robert Jenrick only this morning about care homes and what more we can do with LRFs. It is absolutely the case that this next phase—community testing and support for the care homes—will be delivered more and more by LRFs and in the local community, and less from a desk in Whitehall. It is absolutely the case that we both feel that we could do more in that place, and that is what we are supporting right now.

**Chair:** This is my final point. I will ask John to step in in a second. My point is that we have the best strategic thinkers in the world. The Americans, the Australians, Five Eyes and NATO look to us because we are good at what we do. Those in uniform are the best in the world at working out what is coming over the horizon and getting ready for it. My concern is that we still have a peacetime model that is trying to work on a warlike footing. We have an incredible asset there that is not being utilised. Mark Sedwill spoke about the fusion doctrine in 2017. In the 2015 National Security Strategy review, pandemics were even covered. You guys were thinking about this way before this came about. I just encourage you—we will bat for you. The Committee is on your side in relation to seeing more of you at the top level in this thinking.

Q4 **John Spellar:** Ben, I very much welcome your comments, particularly the emphasis on the military mindset, but I question whether the Departments are using that—following Tobias's line—to best advantage. I am slightly surprised, I have to say, that Cobra is not meeting on a daily, or even a twice-daily, basis. One of my concerns, from your outlining of the procedures, is whether the military are involved at each stage of this, because, again, they bring a quite different perspective and mindset.

You say, for example, that you have experts in chartering aeroplanes, and I am very much aware of that from my time in the Ministry of Defence. But it does seem as though the Foreign Office requirements were very much just to engage with the airlines on their scheduled routes, with a few trips to one or two places, but nothing like the effort that most of our other allies have been performing in getting their people back home.

Again, I question whether the full capabilities of your people are being used. When we are talking about equipment and moving stuff around, the question is not so much whether troops are moving oxygen, although I am sure they are doing a very good job. The military are very good at



actually organising the contractors, and there is a large number of unemployed lorry drivers and unemployed lorries and truck companies out there who they would be able to contract and organise. I am sure that they would do a much better job in linking up these firms that most MPs are getting—desperately trying to get in touch with them to say, “How can we get into the Ministry of Defence bureaucracy?” I have seen this in previous operations, where they are able very quickly to contact suppliers and also to organise effective contracts. I am really concerned as to whether they are in fact using your capabilities as well as they should.

**Mr Wallace:** John, I have got some good news for you: that is what we are doing. For example, in the ventilator space we have taken over working through the list of potentially thousands of people who came forward on the ventilator challenge. We are part of the logistics distribution but, as you say, it is not us necessarily doing the lorry driving ourselves, but we are contracting the lorry drivers to deliver the ventilators. I think, if I am correct, yesterday when the PPE arrived from Turkey it wasn't military lorry drivers that then drove it from Boscombe Down or Brize Norton, where it landed—it was in fact those.

We are using, exactly as you say, either our existing supply chain, or contracting through the logistics network of the MoD, to use those other people to do it as well, even to the extent that in overseas territories—overseas—when people come forward with manufacturing, there will be very quickly a phone call between either DIT, the NHS and us to get to the bottom of whether actually there really is a factory at the end of the phone, or whether there really is product coming off the production line that we will be able to bring back.

We use all the network but, as you rightly say, we are not always using our own network. We are using things like the lorry drivers. I will give you an example of the Wuhan evacuation. The FCO chartered a jumbo 747 from Spain, but the NHS were unable at the time to put medics on the aeroplane, so we put military medics on the plane to fly to China in a civilian aircraft and bring back the people. That was a very good example of a mixture of both maximising where we could assist but also ensuring that we got the right plane, because taking a British military plane into Chinese airspace would create more barriers than just simply chartering a civil plane, which we did. That produced, I think, the effect that we were trying to produce, which was to bring people back.

Q5 **John Spellar:** I fully understand that, but haven't we really been behind the curve in repatriating our people from a whole number of countries and particularly, my concern, those in India—particularly the Punjab—Pakistan and Bangladesh? Shouldn't we have been actually replicating that model, getting charter planes in? As I have said, I know you are very good at doing that. Why haven't the Foreign Office been using that capability?

**Mr Wallace:** Part of that is a question for the Foreign Office. What I would say in defence of the Foreign Office is that we got involved briefly in the



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Cuba evacuation, and it very quickly sent a plane and evacuated, I think, a group of cruise ship passengers from Cuba and flew them straight back to the UK. I think there is quite a lot of repatriation that has gone on. I am aware of colleagues—your colleague asked me, “Should we use the RAF more?” What I would certainly say is that, wherever we have had an ask, we have had people. I think we have had 1,000 people in the command and control and planning parts of Government, right across the Foreign Office, DFT, the Department of Health, NHS England, Public Health England and MHCLG. We have had 1,000 of those planners embedded right across the system. They have been there. They go there with a can-do attitude, as you know. If there is something we can offer, we will offer it.

If there is more to do, the only challenge for all of us is to find the demand signal, and we will step up and deliver it. Sometimes the challenge in central Government is to identify for them the demand signal on the ground—getting what people are saying on the frontline up to the right people in the centre, which is always a challenge in any complex Government. Tobias’s point is correct: our job at the MoD is always what we call ground truth—military commanders want to know what is going on on the ground. It is slightly more complicated in civilian Departments, so to speak, but we are responding. We are delivering. It is a matter of scrutiny of others, in terms of how much you think the other Departments have done. I think they have really led in. This is an unprecedented virus, and I think they are delivering an awful lot of good service to people.

**Q6 John Spellar:** I detect a slight note of understandable frustration in your voice, Ben.

**Mr Wallace:** I’m not frustrated. I know how complex this is and how fast moving this virus is. There is no magic wand. It is very simple to say, “Send an aeroplane,” but when we send a military plane to China, for example, or a plane that has to overnight somewhere to get on a long-haul, it suddenly becomes less straightforward than people think. That is really important. For example, in Peru, the airport and the airspace are not controlled by its Foreign Ministry or civilian Ministry; they are owned by the Defence Ministry in Peru, so all the usual routes have to be changed, and we have to do Defence diplomacy to get permission for civilian airlines to get into Peru. It is not straightforward.

**Q7 Sarah Atherton:** Secretary of State, you spoke about demand signals from the bottom up. I am here in Wales, and I am being asked about this all the time. The military are doing a great job of distributing PPE, but it is that final mile where the equipment is not getting to where it is needed. What signals are you getting from, for example, the local resilience forums, feeding from the bottom up about what we need on the ground?

**Mr Wallace:** In Wales, obviously, the Welsh Assembly and the Welsh Government are our main interlocutors for NHS Wales about where the demand signals for PPE in hospitals are. In the LRFs, what we have done across Government is push deliveries. The care sector is fragmented; it is



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not the same as the hospital network. If we have not had a demand signal, because we know that there is a need, we will just make deliveries at some level. We will estimate and do a drop of PPE in the LRFs over a number of days. I can get you the exact figure of how many push deliveries have been made already. We then encourage or help the LRFs to deliver that.

In peacetime, an LRF is usually serviced by a resilience officer from a regional brigade. For example, in the north-west, where my constituency is, there are normally two resilience officers for the eight or nine LRFs in the north-west region. We have trebled that support, because very early on, we needed more. So we have people in each LRF. I talked about the ground truth. To cut through the Whitehall bureaucracies or the data, I get to see the reports from our people in the LRFs about what their concerns are—I get a morning chart, and MHCLG now has a similar type—and we can really see where the stresses are. I can tell you every morning where we think the PPE shortage is most and where the stress in the care homes is most in each region. At my 8.45 meeting with my logistics leaders and General Ty Urch, the General in charge of Standing Joint Command, I will challenge them to go back into those Departments and say, “What more can we do?” That is how we will do it—that is how we complete the circle.

**Q8 Chair:** Thank you, Secretary of State. I want to invite Richard Drax to look at the wider picture, but before I do, could I humbly ask you this? I commended you on your communications to the nation. Could I dare to suggest that that simple, straightforward communication is diluted when you come out with press releases monitoring the hourly movements of an A400M to Turkey? We are in a period of persistent uncertainty and we all know that things happen when you cross your start line, and the activity may not happen according to plan. Therefore, let’s not big up the micro; I urge the Government to stay on the macro, for strategic positioning.

**Mr Wallace:** I don’t think you will see that the MoD did a press release on the A400M.

**Chair:** Right. That is good to hear. Richard Drax, over to you.

**Q9 Richard Drax:** Secretary of State, it is nice to see you and I am delighted that you have recovered.

Of course, times like this engender huge vulnerability and our enemies tend to exploit that. I quite understand that, of course, this is a worldwide virus. Are our adversaries exploiting the situation, either militarily or via cyber? Is there any indication that they are using our vulnerability to exploit further any advantage they may get?

**Mr Wallace:** There are definitely indications that they are using the event of COVID for their own advantage; let me put it that way. Some are using it to exploit division or economic uncertainty, and some are doing it to further their own economic or security agendas, if you see what I mean. We are certainly seeing information that shows some people are trying to exaggerate our weakness in order to damage us, and some are just trying to exploit our situation to further themselves, so to speak.



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Q10 **Richard Drax:** Have there been, for example, any excursions by air to test us? There was a Russian naval excursion, wasn't there? Have they come into the west's waters yet?

**Mr Wallace:** Yes. I think the Russians are about to—or have been, or will do—continue their naval exercises. They have certainly—our adversaries haven't let up. Russia is continually engaging in its misinformation, and Russia and China continue on their sort of day job, which of course relates to the other part of my role in this. That is to maintain our Defence obligations. So it is not like we pause everything. We are maintaining our Defence outputs, whether that is Shader in Syria and Iraq, or patrolling the Strait of Hormuz with the shipping, or the continuation of key and vital training, because our adversaries are maintaining things as well. And the terrorist organisations, while some of them may seek to exploit COVID themselves, have not gone quiet either.

Q11 **Richard Drax:** Is there any reluctance on the part of China, which is an adversary, to send PPE to this country, which of course we understand at the moment they are doing in quite large quantities? Is there any problem in getting hold of PPE from China—any reluctance on their part to give it to us—or is all going swimmingly?

**Mr Wallace:** Certainly China is supplying this country with PPE. I have not had any feedback that orders are not being fulfilled because of some political interference, or anything. I think that what we find in Government with a lot of people who get in touch with offers of manufacture across the globe, and indeed in the UK, is that some of them turn out not to manufacture themselves—they are middlemen, and when you do a bit of digging, you discover that the same person is offering the same factory as three or four other middlemen. And in fact that takes up a lot of time that our officials would be better off, instead of having to get through that, trying to get right into the supply chain to deliver at pace. But no, I haven't seen any evidence of China or anybody else deliberately using this crisis to prevent us from getting access. Of course, we are buying it; we are spending an awful lot of money buying it.

Q12 **Chair:** Secretary of State, would you like to see an investigation into the origins of the outbreak from China?

**Mr Wallace:** I think I would like to see an investigation into the outbreak. I think the world will require transparency; the world will require co-operation; and the world, as well as our own citizens, will require our own Government to be as open and transparent about the things we all went through. This is more than a once-in-a-generation event. It is important for whatever Governments we are in to learn lessons and, indeed, for the wider British public to understand what we went through. So I support that and we will judge how people respond to that request.

Q13 **Chair:** Secretary of State, I thank you for your frankness. The Committee would very much welcome and support you on an international investigation in some form.

Before I turn to Tan, I bring to the attention of the Secretary of State a



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tweet from Donald Trump, who says: "I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea." So it seems that it is not just the adversaries that are taking advantage of COVID-19; our allies are upping the game, too. Do you have a reaction to what the US President said?

**Mr Wallace:** Well, we will defend our ships. If people are trying to seize or board our ships illegally, we will do that. That is why we have HMS Montrose and HMS Argyll patrolling the strait. The Committee might be interested to know that the Iranians recently boarded a Chinese ship—a Hong Kong-flagged ship—in the strait. Funnily enough, they very quickly got off the ship when they realised what they had boarded. That is the point. There are adversaries and people wanting to cause mischief and threaten sea lanes. That has not stopped. People are still engaged in harassing shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. But I will leave Donald Trump's tweets to Donald Trump.

**Chair:** We wish our service personnel in the Strait of Hormuz well. Tan, over to you, sir.

Q14 **Mr Dhesi:** Thank you, Chair. I would also like to place on the record first of all my immense gratitude and admiration for our Armed Forces personnel, who, like other key workers, in the NHS and beyond, are undertaking life-saving activities in an unprecedented scenario on the frontline.

Defence Secretary, I would like first to ask a couple of quick questions on testing. Given that our Armed Forces personnel are on the frontline, I would like to find out how many of them and our MoD civilian staff have been tested for COVID-19 and how many of them have tested positive? I would also like the stats for our overseas personnel, please.

**Mr Wallace:** One hundred and thirty-one have been tested—80 positive, 41 negative and 10 with no result as yet co-ordinated, as I recall it. When this outbreak happened, personnel not involved in essential tasks were sent home if they wanted to go home, and the vast majority have gone back to their family homes or whatever. If they are in the UK, they are effectively like you and me and any other citizen, and if they have gone to hospital or had a test, we won't be informed of the result unless those individuals wish to inform us. We would not normally speak; they would just do self-isolation and what everybody else would do. So the number of tests may be higher, but certainly the Defence personnel in that cohort I have given you would have shared the information or we would have done the test for them and got the information back.

On the overseas question, I don't think we have had any issue here, but I don't think we have had any tests done overseas of individuals who have been presenting.

What I would say is really quite remarkable is that in this building here in the Ministry of Defence, in standing joint command and in the units that I have so far visited or whose commanders I have engaged with, one thing comes back: the discipline that military personnel engage in, in washing



hands, socially distancing etc., does make a difference. It's quite extraordinary to see the absentee rate in standing joint command, where there are 250 people. They follow a very strict routine whereby, when you come into the building first thing in the morning, you go to segregated places to wash your hands. Social distancing is marked out. Even in the open-plan office, that self-discipline, imbued in their training, plays out, and we see a very low incidence of people catching COVID at work. That is one of the lessons—the Chairman was talking about what we can contribute next—to come out of this. How can we do this for the workplace?

In the case of overseas, I can write to you as soon as possible—magically, I have got it here. There have been two tests in the Falklands and one in Cyprus. We have sent an extra medical crew out to the Falklands to make sure that the ICU capability is enhanced.

- Q15 **Mr Dhesi:** Thank you for that precise answer. I want to delve into those in key positions. Are you routinely testing personnel in key positions such as our quick reaction aircraft pilots or the submarine crews? Also, what do you think the impact has been on the families of our service personnel?

**Mr Wallace:** We are not routinely testing at the moment, but we will see as the testing capacity increases. I made a direction yesterday that we should be proactive with some of that unused capacity and try to test as many people in advance. At the moment we are doing it in isolation. On quick reaction or submarine crews, pre-deployment isolation is one of the best ways. If we make sure that people have self-isolated before they deploy, they are hopefully free of infection at the time they start doing their job.

On families, it has been interesting. There are families of soldiers and personnel probably seeing more of their loved ones because they have all been sent home. To make sure that we keep any eye on each other, the commanding officers engage, often daily, with all their workforces through social media, or through the likes of the Zoom, and they also try to make sure that meaningful activity goes on. If people are away and families are worried, the officers on bases and families' representatives are the key conduit to the commanding officers, and we will absolutely make sure we keep an eye on that. General Swift might like to comment on his day-to-day and keeping an eye on his workforce.

**Lieutenant General Swift:** Thank you, Secretary of State. You have covered the main thing, which is that the contact through the chain of command is absolutely the first principle and the most important. Very early on in the crisis we made sure we communicated as much as we could to the families through all sorts of different mechanisms—not just through the chain of command, but through the families federations and various charitable networks—and I personally wrote to all the families just to reassure them and pass on as much information as we had got. We have continued to top up that information as it has come to light. That information has obviously covered both routine and Government policy,



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and also the key financial issues that they might have been worrying about. And it covers where they can go to for support and advice if they have specific questions that they want to raise.

- Q16 **Mr Dhesi:** Thank you very much. My last question, Secretary of State, is on repatriation. While the likes of Germany managed to bring back 16,000 of its citizens, we have not even managed 4,000 or 5,000 in that time. It is a similar situation when we compare our supposed global Britain with other nations such as France, Ireland and the US. Given the overall context, do you not agree that it is highly regrettable the Foreign Secretary did not utilise the extraordinary capabilities of our Armed Forces, particularly our RAF, with their large database and expertise in chartering flights? And given that tens of thousands are still stranded in various countries, is it not about time we called on the RAF and the Navy to head up the chartering of flights operation?

**Mr Wallace:** I have looked at the media around repatriation flights, and some of you have contacted me or my colleagues about people wanting to get home, but I also recognise that we have brought a lot of people back. We have deployed both military personnel and the military capability to help people come back.

At the same time, each country definitely does things differently. Looking at how they do that, and some of the constraints—early on in China, China would not allow dual nationals on our planes. They would only let British-only passport holders on to planes, so a lot of Brits who were married to Chinese people felt they weren't going to come back, because they weren't going to leave their families. There are all sorts of factors that affect who comes back, how they come back and how people are dispersed. If they are all on a cruise ship arriving in Cuba, that is a pretty easy lift. If people are travelling throughout the lengths and breadths of India, we will not find it as easy to bring everyone back. The scrutiny of whether we did enough is for the future. I definitely know that we did do a lot to enact and enable return. We did bring people back and the Foreign Office did a lot on the ground. Lots of Foreign Office officials have worked incredibly hard in places like Peru to get people in touch to get back. I think the Government has leant in and has delivered. I know some people do not think it is good enough, but I think it has been a competent and good use of resources to bring people home. We still stand by ready to do more and we will continue to do so if we are needed to.

**Chair:** Thank you for that. We have got lots to get through, so we will have to make some progress. Emma, can I invite you to talk about Armed Forces' readiness?

- Q17 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Secretary of State for your answer to my colleague just now. I want to ask a quick follow-up. Accepting that we don't have the figures for overseas testing, you said that 131 have been tested. How many of our Armed Forces personnel and MoD civilian staff are involved in the pandemic response, in total?

**Chair:** One second. We have lost the Secretary of State.



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**Mr Wallace:** I got to Emma coming in to talk about Armed Forces readiness.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Hi. Would you like me to repeat the question?

**Mr Wallace:** I haven't heard the question, so it won't be a repeat!

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Let's fire away again. Afternoon.

**Mr Wallace:** Hello.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I just wanted to ask some quick follow-ups to my colleague's earlier question. Accepting that we don't have the figures for overseas testing, you said that 131 have been tested. How many of our Armed Forces personnel and MoD civilian staff in total are involved in the pandemic response?

**Mr Wallace:** As of today, there are 2,857. That is the number who are deployed today. A grand total of 19,078 are earmarked for readiness. Of course, it is not the same 2,800 every day. We have used probably 3,000 to 4,000 soldiers and personnel, doing lots of work.

An example of what we are doing today is that we are starting to roll out and support mobile testing. One of our solutions towards getting care homes tested is equipping and deploying a mobile testing capability. We envisage a considerable number of military personnel doing that. We also have 76 medics at Harrogate ready for the need, should it arise, to be patient facing. Those are two examples. That is how many we have dedicated. Some are on 24-hours' notice, some on 48-hours' notice and some on longer notice.

Q18 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I think it is accepted that testing is vital—131 tests out of personnel of 2,857 is not that great. What steps are in place to make sure that testing is rolled out more across Armed Forces personnel and civilian staff?

**Mr Wallace:** Testing is vital. Testing the right people is even more vital. The most important people to test at the moment are those on the medical frontline—clinicians, hospital nurses, and military personnel who are patient facing and testing facing, those in care homes, and people who are vulnerable and the people who are most likely to suffer if they catch COVID in a serious way, and then key workers, all the way through.

It is not only testing that is vital but testing the key people, and therefore making sure that we do not currently test for testing's sake. It is really important that we test the right people. There is a testing challenge for the Government, as you can see every day. At the moment, the capacity is about 40,000 tests. We are doing about 20,000. It is no good for us to just say that there isn't enough demand. We need to get to the demand. The Chairman was talking earlier about how we can do more. We saw the gap in demand and said, "Do you know what? We could do mobile testing. Let's go and do it. We stand ready, and by the way, we will just get on and deliver these vehicles and the drivers and everything else."



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We are testing, but if there is an alternative to testing, such as isolating for 14 days before you go on a submarine, that is actually better, because testing only gives a snapshot of the day—the there and then. You could be tested on Tuesday and show negative, but then develop symptoms on a Thursday, by which time you are already on a submarine. Isolation is the best way to ensure that you are free of infection over a period of time, or lots and lots of testing, one after the other, but therein lies the resource question. That is how I would view testing. If Defence personnel need testing, they will get it, and we will deliver it to them. Where we get a case, we will isolate.

**Chair:** Thank you, Secretary of State. We will have to move on. Emma, do you have a final point?

Q19 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I suppose it is just about how all this impacts on Armed Forces readiness. Should there be some major outbreak on a Royal Navy sub or ship, or among a force deployed on operation, what procedures are in place?

**Mr Wallace:** Because ships often visit ports around the world where there are ranges of diseases or infections, they have pretty well-established isolation and quarantine methods. On top of that, so that we do not get into what we saw happening in America and France, I have been very clear that the captains of our ships have my full authority, should they have an outbreak and feel that the best course of action is to return to port, or come alongside, or to evacuate, that they have that authority to do so. I will not force them to go to sea with an infected crew or if it would go against the welfare of their crews, unless we have a very pressing Defence case, but even then, we will take those precautions before they get on the ships.

I think it is quite important to understand that the aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth is in the middle of becoming more operational and all the training. I have spoken to the Captain directly, saying, “We will not judge you, we will not think worse of you, if, when at sea, you feel the need to come back because of a crew outbreak or something.” I also said to the First Sea Lord, “You must justify to me in writing why it is necessary to put to sea”. Those two things together are—it is going to be in UK waters, the ship, so it will not be very far away; she will be within helicopter distance if we need to get someone back. That, plus well-worn, traditional isolating rules that ships have always had, puts us in a place where we can look after welfare while maintaining some of our Defence operations that we have to do.

**Chair:** Okay, thank you, Secretary of State. Sarah, can we move on to recruitment and training please?

Q20 **Sarah Atherton:** Secretary of State, the Committee has been told that overall recruitment targets were due to be met for 2019-20, except for female recruitment, on which you missed the mark by 4%. What impact has COVID-19 had on, first, recruitment, and secondly, training? What measures have you put in place to mitigate the spread of coronavirus?



**Mr Wallace:** I will hand you over to General Swift, but what I will say is that you are right. For the first time in a long time, we were on target to have a full pipeline—or over a full pipeline—for our training and recruitment into the Armed Forces. There is still work to do on retention, which I deeply—you cannot separate the two, in my book; you have to recruit people and then encourage them to stay for longer. We are concerned, like anyone else, that if we do not keep training, we are going to have a real problem, not just because our numbers will not be on target, but because we need that for the refreshing of our forces. Can I ask General Swift to reply on some of the details about how we are doing the training?

**Lieutenant General Swift:** Thank you, Secretary of State. First, I reassure the Committee that recruiting is still going; the Armed Forces are still recruiting, only we are doing it differently and remotely. There is only one bit of the process that we cannot actually do in that manner, and that is the medical examination, which obviously has to be done face-to-face. We are continuing the recruiting process to keep filling the hopper, but thousands of candidates are already through that assessment and ready to join training when there are places available. In the Army, for example, 326 candidates<sup>1</sup> have passed an assessment and are available to start basic training. Each of the services has had to react to the COVID situation appropriately, depending on the training establishment, and to balance the risks with the situations that they face. For example, places where lots of people were sharing the same room have had more of an interruption than Sandhurst, for example, where everybody has their own room.

There has been a bit of a hiatus in some of the phase 1 training, which is now beginning to get going again, as we can put the necessary safety measures in place. That means that we are running fewer courses and lower density courses so that we can continue instruction, but in a safe manner. If that is the picture for basic training, which is really important to keep people in, we are taking a slightly different approach to trade training. We are absolutely continuing to deliver the trade training for essential trades such as the submarines and for operational pinch points, but where we can or need to, we are pausing that training to allow for COVID and other regulations. There is a mixed picture, but where training has been paused, it is now beginning to start again where possible, so that we are balancing the two risks against each other.

**Chair:** Thank you. Is that okay, Sarah?

**Sarah Atherton:** Yes—thank you, Chair.

**Chair:** We will move on to recruitment. John Spellar, can you take this one?

Q21 **John Spellar:** Ben, what are the consequences of the crisis on the current major programmes, such as Dreadnought and Astute? I am sure that you would be disappointed and surprised if I did not also ask you

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<sup>1</sup> Note by Witness: The actual statistic is 3,026.



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where we are on restarting the contracting process for the Fleet Solid Support ships, preferably now to be built in British yards.

**Mr Wallace:** On the latter, John, we will reopen that competition very soon. Having looked at it, the last competition on that was effectively delinquent, which is why we pulled it. As I have said to you and others, I have absolutely heard what people have said. It will be—I think—in September, but I can correct that if I am wrong. We are hopefully going to reissue the competition sooner rather than later.

On the issue of how programmes are affected, the workforces across our Defence industrial base have the same challenge as everyone else. If you are building or working on a submarine, social distancing is a little harder than if you are outside working on a range, for example. That is a challenge. I have spoken to the head of BAE and to some of our colleagues who have raised concerns on behalf of their workforces, to make sure that PPE is in place. It is important that we continue some work—that is absolutely key—so I think we also need to help those firms get through the process, because for them, cashflow is really important for their survival.

For us, we need to carry on some of the drumbeat because—as you know, John—if you delay some of those programmes, as the National Audit Office spots, it causes a huge knock-on effect, either because we have to extend existing fleet capacity, or because that slowdown means that we are holding the pipeline back. The good news is that HMS Audacious was delivered to the Royal Navy from Barrow-in-Furness, and she sailed from there up to Faslane. Hopefully we will start, sooner rather than later, getting on to the next job. That is a challenge—I won't pretend that it is not—and we are doing lots where we can. It is important for the economy and industry that we try to keep it going, within reason, to deliver for our forces and also for our economy.

**John Spellar:** Thank you for that. I just hope you can accelerate the fleet solid support contract.

**Mr Wallace:** Okay. You can come and help launch it.

Q22 **Wayne David:** Secretary of State, I am sure that we all would agree that the response of the military to the pandemic has been extremely impressive, but we are all conscious of the fact that it has cost a lot of money. Have you begun to quantify exactly how much this is all costing the military and whether or not there is any extra money being provided by the Treasury?

**Mr Wallace:** I will give you an honest answer: I haven't. I have just turned to the right and done as we are asked. I will have the funding battle when the dust settles. As military personnel and civil servants, we are still paid. The cost to Defence will not be in the here and now; it will inevitably be in the tasks we are not doing right now, the consequences for the supply chain and the slowdown in the Defence industrial base. Our wonderful Armed Forces personnel get paid, and they will do what is needed. Maybe I am guilty of not counting every bean and every second in



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this moment, but I think there will be a time, obviously, when there will be a cost across the Government and the public sector. Don't tell the Chancellor, but it has not been foremost in my mind.

- Q23 **Chair:** May I suggest that this is raised and confirmed now? Everybody on this call very much supports an increase in the Defence budget, but I would hate to think that the excellent work that the Armed Forces are doing—in and above what they normally do—is actually going to come out of the existing budget, where things are already tight.

**Mr Wallace:** Rest assured that we are tracking everything we do. We have a record of what we are doing. We will have those discussions both with the Departments and the Treasury after the event.

- Q24 **Chair:** Would it assist you if this Committee were to write to the Chancellor, encouraging him to be aware of the cost of this and be minded that it should come from the emergency budget?

**Mr Wallace:** I would not want to foment sedition by recommending that the Chairman of the Committee or anyone else do that. To be fair, I think that the Government have said that they will do whatever it takes. All of us will hold the Government to that. That is important.

Going back to my point about the MACAs, shaping the ask is actually really important. You discover that it is really about shaping the effect that you want to achieve. We have helped Departments. Sometimes, they have said, "What we need is 1,000 or 5,000 soldiers." By the time you finish working with them, it is down to a few hundred or a particular request. We can do quite a lot to manage that. Also, we have brought into the system working practices that we have seen have made other parts of the Government more productive, whether that is the use of PPE or the use of data. We deploy military intelligence analysts into NHS London to help them collaborate on data to understand what they really are needing and facing and to produce the same type of intelligence product that you and I would see, so that they can at a glance make the right decisions.

- Q25 **Chair:** Thank you, Secretary of State. A final question before I ask Gavin Robinson to take us towards the Integrated Review. The Nightingale programme has been phenomenal—absolutely incredible—in building these hospitals up and down the country, but if we are honest, they are not full by any stretch of the imagination. My local hospital and all those hospitals represented on this Committee and, indeed, in Parliament are under pressure, because they have had to make space in existing hospital capability to meet the COVID-19 demand. Would it not make more sense for us to fully utilise those incredible hospitals that have been built by the Armed Forces and thus not close down non-COVID-19 concerns in hospitals, which ultimately may lead to additional deaths separate from the COVID-19 figures we see on a daily basis?

**Mr Wallace:** There is definitely a discussion to be had with local NHS trusts about need. In other words, these Nightingales could do lots of things. In defence of the Nightingale roll-out, all the clinical advice at the start of this pandemic was that ventilation was the key: ventilation is how



we treat people, there is a shortage of ventilation right across the world, and we need more ICU beds. We need ventilation.

As this virus has developed and treatment methods have matured, people have realised that some of it is not about ventilation; it is about forcing oxygen across the face in pre-ventilated treatments, or it is about slowing down the spread, which we have seen. The British public have been very good at saving the NHS by staying at home. The pressure of having to plan for the worst-case scenario—even if we do not end up there—has meant that, at the moment, there is not full utilisation of some of the Nightingales.

The next stage is to consider whether there is capability that we could use to provide step-down care for recovering patients, primary care patients and cancer patients. The advantage of some of the Nightingales is that they are clean at the moment. Harrogate, which has just opened, is a clean environment. You could use it, and there is definitely a discussion to be had with the wider NHS about whether you want to use the facilities for something else, or whether you want to decant COVID to there and go back to your day job elsewhere. That goes again to your earlier point. The Armed Forces think about resilience all the time; they think about the next steps. I am already having discussions about stepping down the level of command in some of our planning groups, so that the three-star general can get on with carrying out Defence planning on a day-to-day basis for the next steps—or, indeed, for Defence in the strait of Hormuz or whatever else—and leave it to a brigadier or a two-star general to bed in what is going on already. That is how we think, and that is what we can help the rest of the public sector to think about.

**Chair:** I hope that is taken forward, because we need to utilise the Nightingale hospitals as best to their capacity and as best as possible, and I am afraid that is not happening at the moment. Thank you for answering those questions on the current crisis. We turn now to the Integrated Review, which we understand has been understandably delayed. Gavin Robinson, do you want to open up this one?

**Q26 Gavin Robinson:** Thank you, Chair, and good afternoon, Secretary of State. On the Integrated Review, the Chair is right to say that you have, understandably, paused the process. We are keen to establish when it will recommence. Have you an indicative timescale in mind for the recommencement of that process? When it does recommence, will it continue to be in line with the comprehensive spending review?

**Mr Wallace:** On the last question, yes. The Prime Minister is still keen to make sure that it is in line with the review. My understanding is that it will recommence next year; I don't have an exact date. From my point of view, that is welcome news. I want a long period for the Integrated Review. I want us to examine our place in the world, especially post COVID. Again, it will be a different world, and I want us to have done lots of thinking about the threat, the future foreign policy of the United Kingdom, and all the challenges around the Equipment Programme and what type of Armed Forces we need. Although I do not have an exact



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date, it is next year. It is April now, so that already gives me eight months at least, and the Comprehensive Spending Review will be in time. If there is a silver lining to this outbreak, it is that we have a long time to consider a good Integrated Review. People are still working on it; it has not just stopped.

**Q27 Gavin Robinson:** So the people working on it at this stage—have they made an assessment of the work carried out thus far and how COVID-19 has impacted on it? Will the work done thus far need to be started from scratch again, given the changing dynamics both in our country and internationally?

**Mr Wallace:** I am not sure how far they will have to work from scratch again. It has certainly already influenced discussion about post COVID-19. The NSC(O) that I referred to at the beginning was a discussion about that, so it has started to refocus minds about the world we live in and the adversaries we face. We will see how that turns out. For what it is worth, I think we and the Committee both agree that an Integrated Review needs to be done properly and in conjunction with the CSR, but the longer we have, the better.

**Gavin Robinson:** Thank you.

**Q28 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** First, may I add my thanks to the Armed Forces, especially in terms of logistics and some of the construction of the hospitals, notably in my part of the world with the NHS Louisa Jordan and the Royal Regiment of Scotland participating in assisting with testing. Indeed, I also thank the Secretary of State for ensuring that that engagement happens across the four nations in relieving the stress on the frontline. We have heard that the global security environment is very uncertain and complex at the moment, due to individual and non-state actors. How will the Ministry of Defence ensure that the review assesses both risks and threats, and how can a review identify not only those threats, but the opportunities as well?

**Mr Wallace:** The first thing is that the Joint Intelligence Committee—the JIC—is constantly drawing together the intelligence for the event we are witnessing now, both to inform on what our adversaries are doing and, when the review gets back to full pelt, to feed in what the threat is. The most important thing we start is the process of having an honest and broad discussion about what the modern threats are. They are not the same as the threats 10 or 20 years ago. What we are living through right now is one of the No. 1 threats, resilience. Our societies are vulnerable to certain types of attack or event, and we should always think, in our Armed Forces and the rest of our public services, about resilience. Resilience has been one of those threats. I suspect that resilience was probably not as high up the agenda before this event, but it will now be much higher up the agenda.

It will be important for Defence to demonstrate it is not just about tanks and conventional forces. What this has hopefully shown to the wider part of Government is that Defence is more than just tanks and conventional



forces; it is about logistics, command and control, stopping disinformation campaigns and resilience. That will change the rest of the landscape about what the threat is and how we can contribute to it. This will be a vehicle for informing a better-Integrated Review, because we have also seen what our adversaries are doing while we are dealing with this problem, and it is quite interesting what they are doing in Africa and other parts of the world.

**Q29 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I thank the Secretary of State for that answer; maybe he has answered a bit of the next question I will ask, but briefly, before that, will the review also recognise the threats of non-state actors in the non-traditional sense in terms of the impact of using individual citizens' data as a threat to national security, as well as the traditional threats that we face from state actors?

**Mr Wallace:** Yes. We have the National Cyber Security Centre and the national cyber strategy that has grown and matured over the past few years. The next stage of that has all been brought together around Huawei and the 5G debate about who owns what with whose data and who is in charge of protecting data. That has all come together with that plus disinformation and the exploitation of people's data, and with our contribution towards defending against that, which is the establishment and growth of a National Cyber Force to defend through offence—in other words, stopping people doing it abroad. It is clear that data can be incredibly empowering, whether it is personal data or the state's data—the data that allows us to respond to this COVID-19 threat. Some of this has been learning on the job for some Government Departments.

Quick data from the ground to the centre to make really key decisions is something that we in Defence are used to, and we have lots of organisations, such as Defence Intelligence, to help deliver it, but my sense is that other Government Departments are not used to the advantage that good data analysis at pace can give you.

I hope that one of the lessons from this COVID is that we will make quicker, better decisions in government in normal, routine peacetime, because the data is available and if the Government protects it, but also harvests it for policy making, I think we can make some good decisions. At the same time, it shows how vulnerable we are if somebody else uses our data.

**Q30 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** To tease that out slightly, does that also include social media companies that are utilising citizens' individual data to their own ends, such as pushing people to think in terms of fake news?

**Mr Wallace:** Early on in this process, with assistance from 77 Brigade, the Government detected effort by foreign non-state actors—conspiracy theorists; all sorts of people—to pump out nonsense, and it has also detected some states being engaged in that. There is a really important role to play in making sure that our society is protected from it. But there is no easy answer, and I would welcome the Defence Committee looking at this question at some stage. It is quite easy when it is a bad guy in



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another country doing it; what happens when it is a non-state actor conspiracy theorist or whatever pumping out news that destabilises and frightens people? That is a much harder question, and what role can the security services and Armed Forces play in dealing with that? Maybe that does not belong with us; maybe it belongs just with the peer of the rest of the free media to condemn it. But it is definitely a place where we are vulnerable, because we are in a state of pandemic and people are worried. Worry is what these people exploit.

- Q31 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** We will move on. You have talked about resilience and Lord Stirrup told us that resilience, agility and adaptability should be the three key themes that run through any Security and Defence Review. Do you agree?

**Mr Wallace:** Yes.

- Q32 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Let me then, if you will forgive the analogy, zoom in particular into resilience. I am sure we all agree that a primary lesson of this pandemic, as you said, has been that our security is something that can be measured not simply by the size of a Defence budget but also by how well our societies react to situations such as this. I and other Committee members have been particularly impressed by the work done by RUSI and Elisabeth Braw in their modern deterrence programme, which demonstrates that many states, and particularly those in Northern Europe, have taken a more holistic approach—they call it an “all-society approach”—to security to build resilient societies. Has the pandemic changed your understanding of security? Could it be possible in such an Integrated Review to demonstrate how our economic and human security is just as important as the more traditional ideas of physical security?

**Mr Wallace:** It has not changed my view, because, having been Security Minister, I used to watch what our adversaries would do and see where they would target. It is interesting that the Scandinavian countries, who are on the edge of Russia, have quite advanced hybrid warfare defence—Helsinki hosts the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, for example. Those countries have a much broader experience of hostile state interference in non-traditional areas. Finland and Sweden have already seen the resilience of their civic society tested by an adversary on the border, so in one sense we should not be that surprised that they have been better at articulating whole-of-society resilience. I totally agree with your premise that economic resilience, security resilience, and cultural resilience in some ways—resilience to manipulation—is really important. A whole-of-society response is required, because the adversary does not go for the strong point; it goes for the soft point. That is why I think that, after this, it has to be key to an Integrated Review.

- Q33 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Briefly, and slightly off kilter, your Department published, again yesterday, a policy around how members of the Armed Forces engage with the media. Some within the media are saying that this is a slightly draconian implementation of a policy that



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was less draconian back in 2018. Are you seeking to quell the engagement of members of the Armed Forces with the free press?

**Mr Wallace:** All organisations have an information policy. In the Armed Forces, just like anything else, we seek to ensure that we are open and transparent. We communicate with the media, and we welcome a free press. What we don't like—and why should we?—is individuals who know the square root of not very much deciding that they are going to disregard confidentiality, or their obligation, and effectively engage with the media, who then write a total rubbish story.

It is absolutely not the case, as *The Times* has reported, that somehow there is angst in the MoD or the Armed Forces with the NHS. We could not be more grateful and pleased with the open engagement that we have received from within the NHS, from the frontline to the headquarters and the arm's length bodies. It is not a political relationship; it is a professional relationship. I do not interfere. I do not go along to the meetings. It is better without the politicians.

We have always had policies about engagement with the media. We have always been open. I have always said to Select Committees, "You can visit where you want." I do not prevent you from engaging with and scrutinising us, but of course every Government has rules about how it engages with the media, including for politicians as well, as I am constantly reminded by the Government communications department.

Q34 **Chair:** Thank you for that, Secretary of State. Leaving the Integrated Review, you spoke about the threats that we face and the role that Britain faces, but what COVID-19/coronavirus has done is expedite the danger in the world of the direction of travel in which we are going. We have seen the west exhibit further risk averseness, if you like, and a lack of cohesion. Normally, a crisis prompts a leader—usually a superpower—to step forward, but what we are seeing is a bun fight between the current superpowers, with no clarity as to where to go. Countries are actually retracting; they are pulling away from global exposure. Surely, we cannot delay what our role might be, given that there might be a more senior role for us to play.

I am very concerned about the strategic direction of China, which is taking advantage of this coronavirus to further its agenda of having greater influence, greater clout and greater effect over countries that have become subservient to it. Should we really be delaying that full Integrated Review? Shouldn't we be looking carefully at whether we need to rise to the occasion and not only show unity, as we have done in this country, but start to bring the west together to meet the challenges in the post-COVID world order?

**Mr Wallace:** What we should not do is rush in to make judgments and come to a rushed analysis of this COVID outbreak. As you said at the beginning, we should seek to have an inquiry. We should seek to get to the bottom of this. We should actually embrace the longer period of time that we will have to do the integrated review, rather than seek to do it more quickly. I would like to get it right. It has not been suspended; I



would say that it has been slowed down. There are still officials working on the Integrated Review. There are still people in the Department doing so. It is just not at full throttle. I think we should get it right.

We should get through this pandemic as well. Whatever the superpowers do at the moment, we should not let it distract from the obligation we all have to our citizens to get through this pandemic. First and foremost, we need our citizens to be safe and our economy to recover, and then to analyse what happened. We have plenty of things to get on with for now, but undoubtedly COVID will inform the Integrated Review.

**Q35 Gavin Robinson:** One of the consequences of the injection of a delay in the Integrated Review, Secretary of State, is that you will not be able to use that review to advocate with the Treasury the important arguments and strategic arguments around increased defence spend. We did consider, a number of questions ago, the role that our defence industry and our manufacturing base can and should play. Can you give us an indication of areas in the Equipment Plan or strategic purchases that you are currently considering advancing so that we can inject some stimulus in our defence industry?

**Mr Wallace:** As both the National Audit Office and, indeed, your own investigations spotted, our budget pre-COVID had a significant black hole that we were having to deal with. That is uncomfortable. That meant that despite getting a 2.6% real-terms increase—far higher than anybody else in the effectively one-year spending review last year—we will still have some decisions to make and some savings to find.

That of course has been slightly skewed by this event. It is the case, though, that the Government wishes to do the Integrated Review and the CSR in tandem as much as possible, which gives us the space to present where we need new money or money and why we need it.

It also gives us the opportunity to learn lessons from COVID about what we need to let go. Are there things? Has this resilience challenge taught us that we are investing in the right place or the wrong place? Has it changed the risk matrix about what is more important than we thought it was? There will be things in the resilience space that will go up that we will have to do more in, say cyber-defence, not less. It may be that we have to do less in other areas that we thought were more important.

We will have the opportunity to make our case to the Treasury. We will have the opportunity to do it in a way that reflects the 21st Century threat picture, and we will have time to reflect on the lessons from COVID. I am not worried at the moment. If I am worried, you will be the first to know.

**Q36 Gavin Robinson:** It is not so much about worry. It is about taking the opportunity to make sure that you are making decisions now that will inject the opportunity and economic stimulus into our defence space. In response to Mr Spellar, you indicated the Fleet Solid Support ships decision, hopefully in September, but the French have indicated that they are advancing between 30 and 50 projects at this time to support their



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industrial base. In the US, their \$2 trillion package includes a \$17 billion line that is effectively for Boeing. It is that sort of initiative that I am wondering whether you are actively considering the pursuit of, or whether you are bringing forward projects that would support our industrial base.

**Mr Wallace:** We are not considering bringing anything forward at the moment, but what we are doing—I will ask Air Marshal Richard Knighton to come in as well on the back of this—having spoken with the defence industry, is making sure that their cash flow is continuing. So, for example, there is a balance between continuing with the F-35 production line that is really important for BAE and their workers' cash flow and the COVID restrictions. There is an absolute balance that we have to strike. It is not an easy balance, but if we sent everybody home—the United States, Lockheed Martin and the JSF programme—that would be a real pressure on the cash flow of BAE. So it is important that we, as both I suppose the guardian of some of the working conditions of the nation at the moment and indeed the customer of F-35, do what we can to keep that cash flow going.

It is the same for our submarines, and it is the same in our yards. The yard absentee rate at the moment is among the highest, and that is a challenge. We have a ship sailing to Cammell Laird as we speak to start the propulsion improvement programme for the Type 45.<sup>2</sup> We would like to get that in as soon as possible, because it is really important to get the Type 45s back out doing the operations. So it is not straightforward, but as you say, there is a lot of work on the books, without bringing any forward, that we would like to keep going.

Q37 **Gavin Robinson:** Richard may want to come in on that, and I do not want to frustrate him from doing so.

Secretary of State, obviously we know the financial funding package for the Ministry of Defence is predicated on 2% of GDP, and we have politically always considered that to be the floor rather than the ceiling. If we understand that every month of lockdown is going to see a 3% reduction in GDP, that is going to have a consequential impact on what 2% of our GDP is. Are you strategically involved in discussions with the Treasury at the moment, recognising that even to proceed as planned is going to be significantly difficult and constrained in the immediate economic circumstances in which we live?

**Mr Wallace:** Yes, we are, and we will be making representations around all of that. We have 2% of GDP and when you have a pledge based on GDP, GDP goes up and down, and that is an issue. Our programme obligations are often for 20 years, and it is not as easy as just stopping the cash, so we will make clear representations to the Treasury around that.

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<sup>2</sup> Note by witness: On the date of the hearing HMS DAUNTLESS was at sea in preparation for sailing to Cammell Laird to undergo her Power Improvement Project conversion. However, the ship had not yet begun her voyage to Cammell Laird.



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Can I just clarify something for the Committee? On the Integrated Review, I thought it was next year, but I think it is the end of this year. My understanding is it has been relayed to you, but like you, I am seeking clarity on a more clear date.

Q38 **Gavin Robinson:** That is the end of the year for the recommencement, not the conclusion.

**Mr Wallace:** Exactly—I think for commencement.

**Chair:** Thank you, Gavin. Can we now turn to the Equipment Plan? Mark Francois.

Q39 **Mr Francois:** Secretary of State, it is good to see you back in the saddle and to know you are there. Like the Chairman and all the others on the Committee, I want to add my own admiration for everything that the Armed Forces are doing to assist in the pandemic. We are extremely proud of them. Thank you.

But they need the right kit. The NAO, in their analysis of the Equipment Plan that came out just at the end of February, said that it “remains unaffordable”. They put the gap at between £3 billion and £13 billion, depending on what assumptions you use. They pointed out that the MoD were using more optimistic assumptions than they had when they audited the plan last year—about £8 billion-worth, in fact. We go around this loop year after year, looking at the plan, which is consistently out of kilter. We are always being told that corrective action has been taken, but the NAO, as the national auditor, keeps saying that it is not working, so what is going wrong?

**Mr Wallace:** If you want my reflections as Secretary of State on why we get into these messes—I say messes because you and I have seen them come and go under lots of Governments—I think it is a combination of three things. I think it is over-spec, if you want my view. I think it is a regular beat of SDSRs, and I mean all the way back to Lord Robertson’s excellent SDSR in 1998—all the way back, and Lord Robertson’s was a particularly good one—and every single one ends up being not funded by the Treasury. So you have over-spec, an SDSR that is effectively the starting gun for our military to say, “Well, the SDSR says that”, and off we go—and we order this and we buy that because we need this type of air defence or this type of relationship with America. We have that, we have over-specing, and then at the same time we sometimes have political interference about favouring one or the other, and then we have a changing threat picture. I have to say, having gone through the programme list, there are things on there where I ask, “Why did we make those decisions? How did we make those decisions?”

I think it is fixable. It is going to take some pretty distasteful medicine, because it is not just about sums of money; it is about cultural change in Britain’s relationship with its allies and what Britain’s ambitions are going to be. Do we want to do everything? Do we want to do less? Do we want to let go of something? Do we want to bank on relying on an international consortium every time, or do we want to invest in our industrial base? All



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those are difficult questions. I think it is possible that the changing of culture is going to be as important, as you know from your time in the Department, as the sums of money. Whatever happens in the Integrated Review, what I would hope is whether it is uncomfortable or not, we have an Integrated Review where we start with a sum of money that is realistic to what the Integrated Review recommends, whatever that is.

**Q40 Mr Francois:** That is a really interesting question about changing the culture, because we have seen in the course of this evidence session how incredibly capable the Department is in responding to a national—indeed, an international—emergency. However, the greatest weakness of the Department for years, under Governments of both colours, has been its fundamental inability to manage contracts effectively. The NAO did a follow-up report that came out in March, specifically about equipment capability. It said of the 32 most significant programmes that they looked at, that they scrutinised, 10 of them needed “urgent action”—their words, not mine—to get back on track. Of the 32, only five were due to be delivered on time, so your point is not just about money; it is culture.

Everyone who has been on this call would rather see us spend 3% of GDP on Defence than 2%. That is a cross party argument, but the first thing the Treasury say is, “There’s no point giving this Department any more money, because they can’t even spend properly what we give them in the first place.” You know that as well as I do, so if you are talking about a change of culture, to save time, could I ask you a direct question? When the Integrated Review recommences around the end of the year, could you just give us a commitment, as a Committee, that you will ensure, as Secretary of State, that we look into a wholesale, root-and-branch reform of the procurement system in the Ministry of Defence, because it is clearly broken? Could you just assure us that you will absolutely focus, laser-like, on trying to put it right?

**Mr Wallace:** What I will commit to is that the Integrated Review that I hope to partly bring before you—because it will be the Foreign Office and No. 10 and everybody else, but the part I play in it—will be an Integrated Review that produces a recommendation that I believe is affordable and realistic. That discussion might not be very comfortable; it might not be everything that you and I want as soldiers or whatever, but it will be, I hope, within an envelope that is realistic.

On the procurement, there are absolutely some things that need reforming in the process. There are some things that need reforming about the customer—that is, us—about what we are buying and our optimism. I believe that if you look at nearly every big procurement—Richard Knighton might be able to reflect on this—if you look at some of these big 20-year programmes, look at the early cost and look at the real cost, I do not think I have ever seen one that has matched, if indeed there is one. When you start to think about how we came up with the original figure, it doesn’t bear scrutiny. How did we come up with a figure of x when this thing ended up being y?



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I think some of the work has to go into the optimism that we display at the very beginning about “Oh, we can get it for this” when we clearly can’t. That is our cultural challenge. I always say, if you are going to build an extension, add 20% to the builder’s bill and add 20% to time quote, because that will roughly be right. And that is when you are doing your own thing in your own home. I mean, that is true! I do not know of anyone who has ever had a builder’s quote that has come in exactly on time and on the money. So we should ask ourselves about our own culture. On that, Air Marshal Richard—I don’t expect him to answer the political questions, but he may want to reflect on some of this questioning and on the Equipment Programme.

**Air Marshal Knighton:** The only thing I would really add is to recognise, as Mr Francois points out, that we know we have to get better. The NAO report does show that the Department is improving in a number of areas and is tightening its grip on some of its forecasts, but it is not good enough. A fundamental part of winning any argument over investment in Defence through a review is demonstrating that we are able to spend taxpayers’ money wisely, and to deliver the best military capability we can for the money we are given.

The acquisition transformation programme will help us to improve the process, drive out bureaucracy and speed things up. Speed is going to be really important to our ability to adapt, deliver the capability we need and deal with the common threats that Mr Docherty-Hughes and Mr Robinson talked about. Also, time means money, and the quicker we can deliver these things, the better it will be for the overall costs associated with these programmes. Mr Francois is right that we have to do better, and that will be a key focus for us as we work over the next few months.

Q41 **Mr Francois:** Richard, I will have one last go because I know that others need to get in. The Secretary of State has spoken about needing to change the culture. I will take that as code for needing to change the system. It does not matter whether you have a Defence budget of  $x$ ,  $1.5x$  or  $2x$ ; if you can’t spend  $x$  efficiently, it is difficult to argue for a budget of greater than  $x$ . If I had the time I could reel off legions of programmes that have gone wrong, but you know them yourself, Richard.

So the plea—not just from me, but from the whole Committee—is to use the vehicle of the Integrated Review to take a fundamental root-and-branch look at our procurement system. It is not just about tweaking it a bit here and there. Everyone knows that it is broken. We must use this as an opportunity to reset it, so that it works and our brave Armed Forces personnel get the right kit on time and on cost. Is anything I have said there unreasonable?

**Air Marshal Knighton:** The only thing I would add, Mr Francois, is that if you look back at the history, I think there have been 13 reviews of procurement and acquisition in Defence over the last 30 or so years. That illustrates that it is a systemic, as well as behavioural, problem. It is not easy. If we are going to do it and make it stick, we really have to put the full weight of the Department’s effort behind it.



**Mr Francois:** Thank you very much.

**Chair:** Thank you, Mark—very helpful. Tan is back just in time for question 14.

Q42 **Mr Dhesi:** I would like to ask about the decision on the 5G network. Secretary of State, what input did you provide to the National Security Council's decision to allow high-risk vendors to continue to operate in the UK's 5G network?

**Mr Wallace:** I am not going to discuss the internal discussions of the NSC.

**Mr Dhesi:** Please do!

**Mr Wallace:** First of all, I satisfied myself with the technical recommendations by GCHQ and the NCSC. For me, it wasn't that hard because I had heard it over the previous three and a half years as Security Minister. As I said when I went over to Washington recently, when GCHQ say to me that they can manage the technical issues—GCHQ, which was born out of Bletchley Park and is probably the world leader—I cannot ignore that advice. If they told me that was their view—that they could mitigate this threat—and I said, "Well, I ignored it and decided to listen to country x", you would rightly say, "Hang on, don't you have any faith in GCHQ?" I do have faith in both Ciaran Martin and Jeremy Fleming. I satisfied myself with their technological briefings, and at the same time I asked in this Department, "Where there is secret communication, has Huawei been engaged in the process in any way—hardware or anything?"

The issue about banning Huawei from our secret core network is already there; it is perfectly achievable, so we could do that. I then asked about keeping them out of the core and capping them in the further network, and the technical advice to me was that it is possible in the medium term and the short term. No one really knows where we will be in 10 years' time. I get that.

It then really moves into a broader geopolitical and security question, to be honest: what assurances do you have in China that they will follow rules and engage properly with the process, or indeed that, having kept them out of these issues, you can work to make sure you are no longer dependent on any one nation's technology? One of the challenges has been that, unlike the United States, the United Kingdom has been quite advanced with its 5G network, so we already have Huawei incorporated in it in other areas. Some other countries do not have that problem; they haven't got there yet.

The realism of where we can go next is really important. That is why alongside the banning of Huawei from the core and their capping in the outer network is the ambition to cut them out of our network over time. I think that is the better way to go. Cutting out vulnerable or high-risk vendors from our networks over time, I think, is the right direction. The NSC took a decision. You have seen the Government's position, and it is going to go forward, I think, though some legislation. Obviously we will



reflect on COVID and what is going on at the moment to see what will happen next.

Q43 **Mr Dhesi:** I will take it from that that the decision was based all on expert advice. Did you express any personal opinion or preference?

**Mr Wallace:** Look, it is a collective decision. We all had a discussion, and it is a private, classified discussion. As I said, it was based on technical advice. What I have said publicly—I said it at RUSI during the election campaign—is that this is a bigger discussion, which is not about 5G any more than anything else, about who we let have access to our markets, our consumers and our intellectual property as a nation, and what we seek in return for that. I have always said I believe in fair play—I'm British. If you want to trade with us, engage with us and share our technologies, we should all sign up to a common set of rules of fair play and international standards. That is country-agnostic. That does not apply just to China; it applies to any country we do business with.

Q44 **Mr Dhesi:** While we are on 5G, I have been inundated by constituents sending lots of WhatsApp messages and making lots of posts on social media about the impact of 5G on the proliferation of the COVID-19 virus and so forth. Just for the record, to allay the concerns of constituents in Slough and elsewhere, will you please clarify the position with regard to 5G and coronavirus or other things? It has led to a lot of vandalism, as you can imagine.

**Mr Wallace:** There is absolutely no link at all with Huawei 5G infrastructure and the spread of coronavirus. One is a viral pandemic. What we have definitely seen is non-state actors and others using disinformation around this sort of area to try to stoke all sorts of illegal, criminal behaviour, as we have seen with masts being set on fire and so on.

Q45 **Mr Dhesi:** Lastly on 5G, given that some of our closest allies think very differently from the UK, what are the consequences of our decision for our defence?

**Mr Wallace:** For our defence, because the relationship and the communication we use with the United States and our secret network is without Huawei, in a very sovereign protected network, there should not be a consequence for sharing intelligence, and so on. Also, the way that we generate our intelligence is often so fused together—in the creation of it—it is not something that you just switch on and off, because you may switch your own intelligence off if another country stops seeking to share, because it has sort of been baked together, if you know what I mean. So I do not worry at the moment. It would be a political decision of those countries, rather than a technical decision, to take another step if they felt that they could not share with us.

**Mr Dhesi:** Thank you.

Q46 **Chair:** Just wrapping up on that, I heard you say that you listen to the advice, but ultimately this is a political decision. I absolutely respect that



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there is collective responsibility of Cabinet and therefore you cannot share your personal views—that is absolutely right and we will not press you on that—but I make it very clear that the reason why this Committee is doing its own inquiry into the security implications of 5G is that there are consequences of us continuing to work with China, given the absence of trust and the lack of transparency that has been illustrated during this COVID-19 episode, when they denied the world the understanding of what was going on for a good month before they came clean—they did something similar with SARS, by the way; it was 88 days before they opened up to the World Health Organisation.

You are aware of how the character of conflict is changing. It is very easy, instead of causing kinetic harm to us, to just flick that switch and cause economic harm by making our 5G networks experience problems in one way or another because we have, let's say, challenged Chinese expansion in the South China sea. This is the world we are now heading towards, so I say to you, Secretary of State, and to the Cabinet that this must be a political judgment. I think the mood of the nation has moved on from being a bit reticent about this to being absolutely firm in saying that we cannot trust China. That is what this COVID-19 experience has pushed forward. I understand that you may not want to answer that, but I just make it very clear that I think that the mood of this nation on our relationship with China is now advancing.

**Mr Wallace:** I hear what you say. I go back to agreeing with you at the beginning—that after this event there should of course be an open and transparent investigation into the COVID outbreak. We all in the world need to learn from it.

**Chair:** But there is a wider security question, which is why I am concerned about sliding the integrated view away. You have a country that is going to challenge the United States for global dominance, but with no interest in taking on the reluctant responsibility of a global superpower, because China benefits because it is able to exploit the current world order, or the erosion of the rules-based order, that we currently have. This is the big challenge that we face, but clearly, as you touched on earlier, that is for us to address once we are through the present crisis.

On the subject of overseas operations, I invite Stuart to ask the next question.

Q47 **Stuart Anderson:** Thank you. Like everyone else, I want to thank our Armed Forces—it is a huge honour to have such a great Armed Forces—but it would be very detrimental to forget the work that they have done in, say, 10, 20, 30 years. That leads me very nicely to historic allegations and supporting our veterans. Last Armistice Day, I was with the Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence People and Veterans—it was the day that we made the announcement about historic allegations. I have seen the first part of that, and COVID-19 can very quickly hide this, but it is a key topic for veterans. Specifically in Northern Ireland, what is being done about that to move this forward? Is progress slowing or are we going to get some definitive progress on Northern Ireland?



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**Mr Wallace:** First of all, on the overseas Bill—so non-Northern Ireland but the rest—the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill, which has been published, we are seeking a Second Reading as soon as we can, subject to Parliament. That has not gone away, and we are, as we speak, examining more measures to make sure that there are areas around where potentially the Human Rights Act has breached its extraterritorial area. So we are still working in the MoD on that, going forward. The only pause in that, if there is one, is simply how we get through the new parliamentary structure, given COVID.

On Northern Ireland, this morning I spoke with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on exactly this question. The Government made a statement, in tandem with publishing the Bill, about to what extent, and what they would do, to deal with the Northern Ireland veterans.

It is going to be equivalent, but in a different way, and the reason the different way matters is that the overseas deployment is about the future, and Northern Ireland is about past events, basically. We are dealing with the past in Northern Ireland and legacy, and the Overseas Bill is predominantly about future military deployments. You cannot ignore the past in Northern Ireland, full-stop. You cannot ignore the Belfast agreement and you cannot ignore the fact that there is a devolved Executive. So we have to work that through.

However, we have given a pledge—the Prime Minister has given a pledge—to stop vexatious and constant investigations into our veterans in Northern Ireland, to put measures in place to make sure that doesn't happen, and to make sure that the barrier is realistic about what new evidence is, etc., while at the same time recognising that there is a requirement for closure for victims in Northern Ireland, and indeed that there are issues to address around legacy, and to ensure that where, on those very, very rare occasions there has been genuine wrongdoing, that is still able to be dealt with.

Many of the recommendations from your own Committee and the previous report on veterans have been carried into the measures that we will examine in Northern Ireland and the measures that are being brought forward in that Bill about overseas deployment. So the momentum and the commitment have not gone away, and we have not closed our ears to the veterans' community. Johnny Mercer is still very much engaged and we are continuing to drive it forward.

- Q48 **Stuart Anderson:** I recognise the work that Johnny Mercer is doing, and striving forward in that. I would like to push for a timeframe. Also, you have told us that you have been speaking with the Home Office regularly about visa fees and minimum income requirements for overseas personnel who have served in our Armed Forces. Why is this still being discussed, and what progress has been made? We need to see this have closure and move forward.



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**Mr Wallace:** On both that and Afghan interpreters, I will press that with the Home Office. I wrote to the Home Office recently and I think I will get you a reply into exactly where we are on that.

**Chair:** Stuart, thank you. I call Mark Francois.

Q49 **Mr Francois:** Secretary of State, very importantly the Northern Ireland Secretary, Brandon Lewis, issued a written statement on the day that you published your Bill, promising equivalent protections for veterans who served in Northern Ireland to the protections that you have in your Bill for those who served in, for instance, Iraq and Afghanistan. Can we just make sure that the Ministry of Defence appreciates that from the Northern Ireland Office, and that the two Departments are working very closely to make sure that pledge is upheld?

**Mr Wallace:** Yes, absolutely. In the MoD we are determined to uphold that commitment. I have spoken to you and some of your colleagues, and I will continue to press that.

Q50 **Mr Francois:** The Bill is pretty good, but it has one lacuna, which is that the protections it affords do not apply in the case of sexual offences—or allegations of sexual offences. The risk with that is that someone who wants to make a false claim does not say, “This person beat me up”, but says, “This person tried to touch me in some inappropriate way.” It is therefore be a sexual offence and some of the protections in the Bill do not apply. I know we have discussed this before, but will you undertake to look at that again before we get to Second Reading?

**Mr Wallace:** I will look at that again and we can discuss it again.

**Mr Francois:** Thank you, Secretary of State. Thank you, Chairman.

Q51 **Chair:** Secretary of State, that concludes the questions we have on our side. There are a couple of minutes left, so if there is anything you would like to get off your chest or share with us, you are more than welcome to do so.

**Mr Wallace:** Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, members of the Committee. We are all going to be in uncharted waters, whether that is on post-COVID geopolitical discussions on China or on the Integrated Review. It would be exciting if it was not in such a tragic circumstance. It means that we are all going to need to work with each other to understand where we should go next, as Defence and as a country, and what lessons are learned. This is not a pandemic that is going to be solved any time soon overall; it is a pandemic that is going to decline, but coronavirus or its successors are going to come and go, and we definitely need to make sure that we have a robust and resilient society.

The point was made earlier about having a whole-of-society effort to defend ourselves. That is how we are going to see off our adversaries, whether it is through hardening society against intellectual property theft by getting the Department for Education or the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to engage in security in a way that they might not have traditionally been thinking about, or whether it is about



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the whole of government engaging in cyber-security to protect citizens' data in a way that they would historically have left for somebody else to do. All that is good—COVID has exposed that we all have to do it. The whole of society has to do it to improve our resilience; it cannot be left to the traditional military and the traditional intelligence services on our own. It is going to take a much broader burden share, and I hope that the lessons of this event will be that.

I also hope that after all this is done we are not like the pied paper or Tommy Atkins, where everyone says how much the military has lent into us but when it comes to "the band begins to play", we "serve no red-coats here" and we are all forgotten. I know I will play my part to make sure we are not, but the men and women in the Armed Forces deserve not to be. So we will work at that, and thank you for having me.

**Chair:** Secretary of State, may I, on behalf of the Committee, thank you and your colleagues for your time today? We have had a very constructive and effective discussion that has covered a lot of ground. We wish all those in the Armed Forces well, especially those involved in the COVID-19 taskforce. You are all doing the nation proud. We are very pleased to see what you are doing, and we very much stand behind you. There will be no exit from this until a vaccine is found—we all know that.

There is therefore every expectation that the duty and burden of responsibility will only increase for the Armed Forces, but you have heard it loud and clear that the one Department in Government that plans for persistent uncertainty, that works towards strategy, contingency and crisis management is the MoD. We would very much like to see that skillset advanced and utilised further within Cabinet. We are pleased to hear that the Integrated Review will continue. For your information, our study into how to conduct an Integrated Review will carry on. We will slide that across to you, in case it might be helpful in future.

Finally, let me say thank you once again to you, Secretary of State, and to Air Marshal Richard Knighton, Lieutenant General James Swift and Paul Vincent Devine, for your time this afternoon. This session is now concluded.