



Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two, HC 1067](#)

Wednesday 7 May 2014

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Members present: Dai Harvard (Chair); Mr Julian Brazier; Mr James Gray; Sir Bob Russell; Bob Stewart; Ms Gisela Stuart; Derek Twigg; John Woodcock

Questions 1–50

Witnesses: **Sir Hew Strachan**, Chichele Professor of the History of War, All Souls College Oxford, and **James de Waal**, Senior Consulting Fellow, International Security Department, Chatham House, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: As you will understand and appreciate, our Chairman has left us and we are in the process of appointing—electing—a new Chair. The House will elect a new Chair next week, so I am standing in to perform the duties for today.

Thank you for coming. Certainly, Professor, we have had some discussion with you about some of these things. Some of the arguments are not new, but clearly there is a new context in the world and we are having to think about how we order our priorities—as a Committee, never mind other people ordering their priorities.

We have the usual thing of Parliament being Parliament and are likely to have votes just after 4 o'clock. I am hoping that we will not be disturbed until then. We will see how we go. If we still have a bit of time—we will be able to gauge that by who is speaking and so on—we may drift a bit beyond 4 o'clock, but we may have to finish earlier, because we might have a series of votes and there would not be any point in interrupting and returning. I am sorry if that limits the time, but that is what we have available. Without any more announcements, I will ask you the first question.

In January, the Prime Minister said that the national security strategy just needed a refresh, rather than a complete overhaul. Do you think that this is right?

Sir Hew Strachan: How do you want us to play this?

Chair: You can fight it out among yourselves.

Sir Hew Strachan: I think we will get on fine.

I do not agree; we need something more fundamental than a refresh. I would hope that there will be a recognition of two things since 2010. The first is procedural, which is that if you go ahead with certain changes and implement them, there are second or third-order consequences. You have to think what the strategic effects of those second or third-order consequences are. So the restructuring of Reserves, Army 2020 and all this creates a new environment in terms of Britain's capabilities, which does feed back into where you want to go with SDSR or the national security strategy.

The second reason is simply to take stock of what seem to be very significant shifts since 2010 in Britain's external relations and where it stands. You are perfectly familiar with those issues—such as the Arab spring, the intervention in Libya, the US pivot to Asia, what is happening in Ukraine or the issue of Syria—and there are connections between some of them, but I do not see how you can address either an SDSR or a national security strategy for 2015 without considering what the consequences are for the United Kingdom's position, and then beginning from that point.

James de Waal: I have a slightly different perspective. First, my perspective on the national security strategy is that, as a document, it is rather more a presentational tool than a definition of what Britain's international strategy is. If you are looking for how Britain's national strategy is articulated, it is a much more complicated matter, which is presented in speeches and debates here, and in changes of policy that happen throughout a Government.

To my mind, the national security strategy—the document that we are talking about—is really an artefact at the end of a political process, which was the strategic defence and security review. In that sense, I would note that in a lot of these documents there is a long list of potential things that might happen—such a long list, in fact, that pretty much anything that happens is included there. Indeed, if you look at the national security strategy document, among the tier 1 risks identified by it were, “An international military crisis between states, drawing in the UK, and its allies as well as other states and non-state actors”, which is potentially a definition of what might happen in Ukraine, or what might go on to happen in Ukraine. So I am a little sceptical about seeing the document itself as the primary way of refreshing Britain's national strategy.

Where I agree with Sir Hew is that there have been some obvious developments in the world, not only the Arab spring and what is happening in Ukraine, but the general improvement in the international economic situation and in the United Kingdom's public finances situation, which will need to be factored in when you next have a strategic defence and security review. How big the change is—whether you can describe it as a refresh, or as something fundamentally new—we will have to see after the election, but at the moment I am inclined to think that, looking at the document itself, one can imagine some sort of shift in the emphasis placed on the various issues perhaps, rather than a more fundamental working through.

Q2 Q2 Mr Gray: Mr de Waal's conclusion was that the national security strategy was somehow the product of SDSR, but surely, if there is any value, it must be the other way around. The SDSR must be based on some form of document that says, “Here is what Britain

is for. Here is what we are doing, here is what the world is doing, and now here is what we are going to do to achieve that.” If the national security strategy is the product of the SDSR, surely that is rather back to front, isn’t it?

James de Waal: I think an SDSR ought to be the product of a particular strategic vision or a set of strategic priorities. To my mind, the Government at the time did have rather a strategic vision. I know that is not a view that is widely shared. To my mind, the national security strategy, and perhaps even more the SDSR, was the articulation of that vision. It was what was put together after that vision had been worked through with all the rather difficult nuts-and-bolts issues, including the financial aspect. It was something that had emerged almost to encapsulate what had gone into the SDSR process and what had survived after it.

Q3 Mr Gray: As a supplementary, in that case, you were acting on the presumption that it was indeed a strategic vision rather than purely a Treasury-driven, cash-driven strategic defence review, which is not something that I would agree with, I have to tell you. I am sure that it was quite the opposite of that. Looking forward to the next time around, surely we have to have a document—a foreign policy baseline—on which the SDSR in 2015 will be based. Surely the national security strategy should be that document, and surely the way to do it is by producing it a month or two in advance of the SDSR so that you can see that what we are proposing with regard to defence is securely based on an appreciation of foreign policy.

James de Waal: I agree that would be a very good way to proceed, but I am not sure it is essential. I would say that, for example, the manifestos that are produced in the run-up to the election ought to be quite a good way for the various parties to express what it is they want to achieve. That is what goes to the electorate, after all, and what they will decide on. There are also the various statements that are made when you are presenting the outcome of something like this. The Prime Minister’s statement in the House on, I think, 19 October 2010, was actually quite a good presentation of what went into that. I agree that it would help matters enormously to have a document like that. For one thing, it would reduce the opportunity for inter-service rivalries to dominate the debate. It would reduce the opportunity, just as you say, for it to be purely financially driven. But I do not think by any means that it is essential.

Sir Hew Strachan: The heart of this, of course, is the relationship between the two documents—between the national security strategy and the SDSR. There are many arguments for going top down and saying that you do an NSS and then an SDSR. There are arguments for saying that it has to be an iterative relationship; that you draft the NSS and the SDSR says that it is not deliverable, and you have a debate between the two. It seems to me that the worst of all worlds is an SDSR that leads to the extent that a great deal of potentially redundant work is done with many work streams, which may, in the end, prove to be work streams that the NSS does not endorse because it comes in after the event. Because the natural inclination of the Ministry of Defence is to plan and to think one stage ahead of the election, at any rate, in terms of what its options are: that is effectively what happened in 2009-10 and, it seems to me now, what is happening in 2014-15. There is work going on, some of which will not be appropriate. Some of it is

totally appropriate preparation, but there does need to be more in terms of direction, it seems to me.

James and I have talked about these issues over some time and on many occasions, but I think that if you do not have a sense of guidance, you are in a bad place. The NSS of 2010 was fuller in this respect than many others, and to that extent I see it as a cup half full rather than a cup half empty. Everybody would be better off if there were a clearer sense of what the priorities would be, rather than trying to parse documents that have come out and glean what you can in a fragmentary way.

Q4 Q4 Chair: We have questions later on that bring together the argument, particularly about what the role of the NSC will be and this whole tension between what is SD and what is SR—the “and” bit—and how you make it a coherent strategic position. We have made our own comments in our own reports about strategy, and we have the Joint Committee’s version. We will come back and ask you questions about these aspects a little later.

Can I just take you back to the NSS? At the moment, it is the immediate document against which reaction is made. What about current events in the Ukraine and around that? Let us be clear: does this mean some recalibration of that national security strategy? What are your thoughts about those events and what that says for our assessment?

James de Waal: I am thinking of not just the NSS, but also what has happened to British military capabilities as result of the SDSR, and of what the implications of that might be for Ukraine. I am one of those who are quite pessimistic about what might be happening in Ukraine, and the implications of that. Before one then jumps to the conclusion that somehow you need some radical change to the SDSR settlement and the expression of priorities in the NSS, a number of things must be taken into account.

First, despite a lot of the negative reception of the SDSR, it has still preserved quite a significant military power for this country. Secondly, whatever happens in Ukraine or in the states on the borders of Russia, it must be an alliance issue. Britain’s role in that is partly national, and partly to do with how Britain can influence the rest of the alliance. It is also a matter of what NATO as a whole can do. Thirdly, there is the risk of using Ukraine as a stalking horse for an internal UK defence debate, which often has a strong inter-service element. It could be said that because of the situation in Ukraine, and because the Russians have still got lots of tanks, therefore we need a bigger Army, for example. I am caricaturing that, but there is a risk that we see the situation purely in domestic British terms. Fourthly, if you are looking at what might change in terms of changes that you might need in British defence capabilities, you need a certain element of specificity, in particular about what you want to use them for. You need a plan: what is it that Britain and other countries are actually trying to achieve, and therefore what are the defence capabilities that you might need?

To speculate to some degree, I imagine that you might need an element of reassurance for and defence of NATO states around Russia. What you might want to do in Ukraine is another issue, because that is still quite a long way from implying that British military forces be deployed there. It might mean consideration of things such as intelligence, logistics support and advice. You might think, “Okay, how do we deal with Russia in the

long term? What does Putin's recent behaviour say about a long-term relationship with Russia?" There might be a military element there.

The military threat in this situation seems to be quite a long way from traditional cold war, conventional military force. It seems to be this odd mixture of unidentified, but organised armed men, who everyone assumes are Russian; nationalist militias, to some degree organised, to some degree not; and spontaneous demonstrations. The military capabilities that you need to deal with that are quite different from conventional forces, and also they must be embedded in the broader political and information campaign. It seems to me that in all these areas, there are some capabilities that Britain retains that are potentially extremely useful—certainly the new focus on defence engagement. My immediate reaction to thinking about how British defence capability might need to shift is that I hope that a lot more people have been trained in the regional languages, moving away from Arabic, Pashto and those that have been focused on. Britain has intelligence assets, such as the strong advisory track record. One needs to look at what the specifics of the plan might be, and what capabilities there are, before necessarily jumping to the conclusion that some radical change is required to the British defence posture.

Sir Hew Strachan: I do not radically dissent from any of that. There is a tendency in the aftermath of what is happening in Ukraine—I realise that it is still going on, but given the advent of the crisis—to look backwards rather than to look forwards, particularly for me as an historian. One of the things that I find most surprising is the sense of just that—the shock that this could happen, rather than a sense that it was quite predictable in terms of Russia's interests in near abroad and Putin's behaviour. For me, that raises serious questions about whether we were looking in the right direction, at the right time. James made a very clear case for this being covered within the NSS as an eventuality, and yet we seem to have been genuinely surprised by the event. I still do not fully understand why we should have been surprised. So there is a lessons-learned process to be done here.

Secondly, far be it from me to sing the praises of the First Minister of Scotland, because on most things I would not agree with him, but on what he said about Putin, and the way in which he has been reported, the point that I think he is trying to make, if I can gloss what he said, is that Putin actually sees strategy—if I can be boring about the subject—in a way which is reasonably coherent and, when an opportunity arises, sees that opportunity rather than interpreting strategy as something to do with threats. There is an object lesson for us there, too, in terms of how we understand what we are doing with our own security profile.

The third thing is that, if we were not paying attention, is it because we have assumed that some of our own rhetoric is true, and that Europe is an inordinately secure place, which it still remains by any historic standards? But is that actually something which we should question in our own minds? I did question that, before all this, simply because it seems to me that as Europe faced the eurozone crisis there were, of course, concerns raised by east European countries, to which we were not disposed to pay attention, because we were inclined to say, "This is crying wolf. The cold war is over." We see NATO, from this side of Europe, as something to do with out-of-area operations, rather than about the security of the Atlantic alliance—

Q5 Q5 Chair: Was the whole debate just collapsed around energy security and law and order?

Sir Hew Strachan: A lot of it was around energy security and energy dependence, absolutely. It also goes back to the argument about why eastern central European states wished to join NATO in the first place: precisely because they have a very big neighbour to their east and they wanted the security that that provided. I think that is part and parcel of a bigger issue for the NSS to address, which is where geopolitically and where geographically should it focus? Countries nearer to us seem to be more important to me than countries further away.

Finally, if we are thinking about military capabilities and what they are for, we still have Armed Forces that assume that one end of the spectrum is occupied by major conflict of some sort or another and they should have the capability to engage in that. Now, this is not a warmongering statement, because obviously that is not a position that any of us wish to be in, but it is a statement about how serious we are about that. If we are serious about that, do we need to take it into how we think strategically, in a more coherent way? Or is that simply a sort of yardstick by which the Army, Navy and Air Force judge their own professional competence, rather than something that has any meaning?

Of course, during the cold war we had a vocabulary for this, which was deterrence; this is where we slotted it in. We have lost the capacity to think, when we say these things, what they mean and where we are putting them.

None of what I have said is about a recipe for dealing with the crisis now, but it is about what I think it says about our own approach to security and strategy.

Q6 Q6 Chair: You have both partly answered some of the sub-questions that I had here, which I had not yet asked, which are about capabilities and about the whole of business you have just raised—how you put them into a defence and security review. Clearly, they will need to go in somewhere—at what time and how, and so on. You raised most of those things.

One thing that interested us is whether this presages some sort of change in strategic focus. You mentioned that phrase. If there is to be more instability across Europe, what does that tell us? The strategies, you seem to argue with some confidence, have effectively stood the test of time; it is just that we have not been looking at the right things within them. So you could have seen some of these things about Ukraine, but we did not see them. They may well have already been in the strategy, but we did not look at the strategy—is that what you are saying?

James de Waal: My perspective on it is perhaps a little crude, in that I am not sure that the difference is one of strategic approach. It is just that for Putin, Ukraine is close by. It is a strong, clear, national priority, for which he has strong domestic support. He has lots of tools that he can use there, which he has long experience of deploying. All those things do not apply to us.

It seems to me that the national security strategy, perhaps inevitably given Britain's situation in 2010, is a long list of potential things. For Putin, it is a very narrow list of things that have a direct political impact on his future. It seems to me that that is not the

case for our national security interests. In a sense, that is a good thing, because Britain is in a relatively secure position, certainly historically. The challenge is perhaps more difficult for Britain because it is partly about working out what is important and partly about arguing to the public that that is important. I think that is a really important issue: if the public is not convinced by the various things that are coming out of the pundits, the Government or Committees such as yours, it makes life much more difficult.

Chair: We will come back to the issue of public understanding and consent a little later.

Q7 Ms Stuart: I want to return to the national strategy and the definition of Britain's role in the world. How can you have a national strategy and decide, arising from that, what kind of Ministry of Defence and what kind of Armed Forces you have, without a definition of your role in the world? I have not been able to discern that. Mr de Waal, I think your 24 years in the Foreign Office, the diplomatic service and the Ministry of Defence were showing early on, when you said, "Well, it is out there in all sorts of speeches", so help me. To go back to Tony Blair, if I ask the question about our role in the world, I can go to his Chicago speech and there are logical consequences from that statement. Where would I find an equivalent of the Chicago speech now?

James de Waal: I would hope that I am speaking as an independent commentator. Part of the problem of having been in the Foreign Office is that people assume there is some sort of institutional hangover that you retain for the rest of your life.

Bob Stewart: Of course you do. You're blinkered!

James de Waal: My answer would underline what I have been arguing, which is that I hope this is not an argument that you would get from a Foreign Office person or from someone in government. To my mind, it seems to me that the argument for Britain to play an active, intervention role internationally now is not one that you can easily prove through some sort of objective assessment. It is an assertion that is as much political as it is practical. It is based on a particular view of what Britain ought to be doing in the world. That distinguishes Britain—

Q8 Ms Stuart: You misunderstand me. I do not want one speech that justifies intervention. I want one speech by the Prime Minister that tells me what the current Prime Minister thinks Britain's role in the world is. For Tony Blair, it was a force of good, which included intervention, which he outlined. For us, it would be, for example, that we continue to be members of NATO. We are key players of NATO, but of course, is our relationship with the Americans that we do what they tell us to do or do we fill in the gaps they have left? That would be an example—a speech by a Prime Minister that gives me a sense of what role UK plc plays in the world.

James de Waal: To give you a very short answer, I do not think there is one. My arguments—I do not mean to sound disingenuous—are first of all, that the absence of such a speech is important. To my mind, that gives the impression that international intervention of that sort is a lower priority for this Government than perhaps it was for

Tony Blair, which is not to say that it does not exist, but it exists in parts of this Government. I think one has to decipher it through other things—for example, the decision to give support to the French in Mali and the various comments the Prime Minister made at that time about how instability there and the links with international terrorism were an existential threat to this country. On the Libya campaign, it seems to me that that decision was a sign.

It does make it frustrating for me, and equally for you, to work out quite what the Government position is. It is dependent on trying to look at a combination of actions and comments that are made ad hoc rather than centrally. I do think, nevertheless, that that position exists. Part of the problem, though, is that in this world one often confuses a lack of clarity or of ambition or of a statement, with the notion that something is not a high priority. I don't think any Prime Minister is going to make a speech to say, "Actually international relations are not so important to me now." Or, "We have got lots of other priorities and we are going to focus on those."

Q9 Q9 Ms Stuart: You could. President Havel became the first President of the Czech Republic and the first thing he did was to say, "We are now a pacifist country." In a sense, he ruined the entire Slovakian industry, but was content with that statement of principle. So you could make it.

James de Waal: This is more an area where you are the experts rather than me, but would it be politically possible?

Q10 Q10 Ms Stuart: What I am trying to get at is how you can have a national security strategy without having somewhere defined and articulated what you think your country's role in the world is. You seem to think that is possible.

James de Waal: Yes, I think it is possible, through judging by action, as I say.

Sir Hew Strachan: It is possible but, of course, it is very difficult to communicate. That is precisely what you have been discussing. It is that lack of capacity to communicate that is part of the difficulty, because it is not just that you are failing to communicate to your public, but there is also uncertainty in Government Departments about intentions that arises from that as well.

To take the Libyan example, precisely because there was never a clear indication, beyond the notion of humanitarian intervention—and there was a moment when the Prime Minister clearly said that that was what was driving him—it became possible to put all sorts of other constructions on it: serving the Anglo-French relationship, because after all the Lancaster House agreement had just been settled; the notion that refugees from Libya crossing the Mediterranean would come into southern Europe and might have a destabilising consequence. There are all sorts of ways in which you can construct an argument and try to understand a strategy coming out of that action, but it remained opaque throughout.

Is that an advantage or disadvantage? It depends crucially on the situation you are in and with whom you are trying to communicate. In some cases, it is very important to be

opaque; there is an advantage. Coming back to James's point about you being the experts, from a political point of view I can see there is an enormous advantage in not nailing your colours too firmly to any particular mast at any one moment, because it still gives you flexibility of manoeuvre. Any politician naturally might find himself or herself in that position.

On the other hand, when you are dealing with a "threat" and you wish to have a deterrent effect, or when you are communicating with your own public and you wish to mobilise them in your support, it seems to be very clear to make such a statement. Circumstances do matter. This is absolutely germane to the national security strategy itself. If it is not in essence the national security strategy—as James would essentially argue, you have to construct that from other documents—its primary function is public communication. Therefore, it seems important to me that it conveys a clear sense. Of course, there is a statement in there, which is essentially about no loss of global influence or whatever as an aspiration. This Committee and others have criticised that simply because it does not seem to be consonant with the delivery. There is a statement, but it just seems to be one that is quite hard to accept.

Q11 Q11 Ms Stuart: So, help me: I fully understand the essence and the need for creative ambiguity. However, how can I tell the difference between a national security strategy and a strategy that defines our role in the world, which is however not articulated in a single document, and a Government that are simply reactive to events? How can I tell? You keep assuming there is one. I suggest that we could also be faced just with machinery that simply reacts to events.

James de Waal: My argument would be that I agree with Sir Hew that this would be a very good thing to have: a national security strategy that actually did what it was supposed to do, especially to communicate and articulate. It may difficult to find one, in any country actually, because of the political processes that exist. If you are looking for Britain's national security strategy, you have to find it in the process, in the debate. It is more than an iterative process. It is what goes on in this House, as well as across the road in Whitehall.

The other thing—again, I am not trying to make a political point here—is that it is more than just a problem for this Government. It strikes me that, actually, there is a fundamental lack in the political debate in Britain about these very issues. If the main differences about where Britain should intervene, why, how and how much money it should devote to that are within parties rather than across parties, and we still have a system that is basically based on an oppositional system, where are you going to get that debate? Where are you going to get those answers? Where is the incentive for Government to say things? It strikes me that a lot of the defence debate at the moment is either based on very narrow, specific interests, which is natural and fine, or based on the efficiency of the management of the defence project. I detect a lack in the political debate about some of these big, strategic issues. That is my perspective; you may disagree.

Q12 Q12 Mr Gray: You touched on money. Surely, if the national security strategy is as diffuse, obscure and opaque as you describe, the Ministry of Defence has lost one of its main

weapons in the five-yearly battle that we have with the Treasury. The Treasury will just say, “Well, that’s how much you’re getting, guvnor, you can make of it what you will.” Only if you have a clear definition of what we are about and what we are for can the MOD say, “Well, if that is what the Prime Minister wishes us to do, that is the amount of money that we are going to require.” If things are as vague as you describe, you have lost that powerful weapon.

James de Waal: You describe the dynamic very clearly. The problem is that if one comes out with a national security strategy or a foreign policy baseline—which is not a consensus document across Government, and the Treasury has not signed up to it beforehand—it will immediately be perceived by the Treasury as a lobbying exercise. It will lose power as a result. That is what concerns me about some of the preparatory work, which is already under way for the next SDSR—in reality, it is either a lobbying exercise, or will be perceived as such.

Q13 Mr Gray: It’s a funny old world, where you cannot lobby for fear that you might be seen to be lobbying. It is a funny old business really, isn’t it?

James de Waal: It depends whether you think that the role of Government Departments, or individual parts of Departments, is to lobby, or is there some opportunity to have a more consensual, iterative, give-and-take process?

Sir Hew Strachan: Going back to the Chicago speech, in the end of course it is only one line of policy that came out of that speech. The other point about the Chicago speech, which is true of any of the major speeches that you might think of—the Asia pivot speech or the strategy statement of January 2012—is that they have simply become vehicles for debate, as much as indications of intent. In a democratic system, that is what will happen, isn’t it? You are making a statement—even if delivered by a Prime Minister or a President—and what you are inviting is discussion. You are shifting the argument to a place where you want the argument to be at, but the argument is actually a very big part of how you engage with national strategy, because by having the argument, people are thinking about the problem. That is back again with the communication issue, and back again even with its dissemination. I do not think that an unequivocal statement, probably in most democracies, is what you will get at the best of times.

Chair: In deciding what our intent is, we have got to draw on our recent experience. I am going to ask Julian Brazier to ask a question related to that.

Q14 Mr Brazier: The defence industrial base, which we have seen as being crucial in recent operations, is of course moving further towards the sharp end, rather in the way that it did in earlier centuries. What should SDSR say about it?

Sir Hew Strachan: I would like to make two points. The first issue is that of urgent operational requirements. That has been the mechanism by which the adjustment that you have just described over the past 10 years has been implemented, with of course the consequent downside for defence spending, because urgent operational requirements are Treasury funded in the first instance, with the running costs falling to the Ministry of Defence thereafter. The question mark, I suppose, after 2014 will be how far you will have

a procurement process and a defence industrial base that is conditioned by urgent operational requirements. Will that still be the name of the game and the high profile feature of defence procurement? Or are we moving into a more steady state, where it is long-term procurement; where you are thinking 20 to 30 years out; and where you are looking at the big-ticket items coming back much higher in your thinking? The aircraft carriers never quite got away, but there are other big-ticket items, particularly on the Army side, that dropped off. FRES is barely mentioned at the moment, even if it has not gone away entirely. Are you thinking about those items?

Those big-ticket items have the capacity to shape the structure of defence for a much longer period. Implicit in that is the question of the country's own security. Is the defence industrial base to be shaped by the security needs of the country? If it is—I would hope that most of the time it was, but I realise that there are other considerations that bear on it—then you would want to retain, within the United Kingdom, the capacity to respond to urgent operational requirements, because you would assume that the United Kingdom will be better able to respond internally in an adverse security position.

On the other hand, urgent operational requirements may force you to buy very quickly off the shelf, because you need something urgently. But the urgent operational requirement carries with it a bespoke need, which has a security dimension to it.

I have not given a coherent answer, but I think that that seems to me the core question, if and as the operational tempo comes down. I think we will be thinking long term in terms of how we think about procurement. I think the natural, long-term tendency—this relates back to the SDSR—will be to allow that to shape our defence policy much more than it did in 2010, for example. In 2010, in the middle of Afghanistan and with the high operational tempo, although there was big concern about defence spending and bringing defence procurement under control, and that was a main commitment of the Government when they came to power, that was not high in the public's calculation in quite the same way. The concern there had been about meeting urgent operational requirements—the response to IEDs, the armour on vehicles and so on.

James de Waal: This is not my area of expertise, so treat what I am going to say with a certain amount of caution. I would make two points. The first is about the defence industrial base in general, and the second is about contractor support to operations.

Regarding the defence industry in the UK, it is worth taking a critical approach to a lot of the arguments that are made. It is not to say that one needs to be hostile to it, but it is one of the few areas where it is still respectable for the Government to ignore market forces and take decisions about high levels of investment and procurement for reasons that are not purely based on the market. That, to my mind, means that one needs to take a critical approach to it and examine some of the assertions that are made about how important this is for national defence, for example, quite carefully.

My instinct is that in some areas, particularly in terms of information technology—this is an impression—the degree of development and progress in this area is such that there is a benefit for there being a national restriction on some areas of IT, where you do want a close national relationship.

Q15 Q15 Mr Brazier: I think I know what you mean, but could you just spell that out?

James de Waal: I am thinking particularly in terms of intelligence gathering technologies, IT security systems, secure information technology—those sorts of thing in communications.

In terms of contractor support for operations, it is again an area worth examining, to the degree of dependence that British Armed Forces now have on services that are provided by the private sector. That means not just physical dependence, but also the decline in knowledge in the MOD in how these sorts of relationships might work. I know that that was an issue in the whole GoCo discussion.

Of course, the argument is always going to be about a trade-off between the cost-benefit you can get but the increased level of risk that you might have. To me, the question is: to what degree do you depend on the UK national character of the industry to be your basis of reassurance? Can you achieve the same level of reassurance through having a good, strong contract and working with a company that is interested in developing a long-term relationship with you?

It is a question of balance. My own instinct is that the balance is shifting away from there having to be a strong UK character to the company—although often that is quite useful presentationally—simply because that is the way that the dynamics of the industry are going. It seems that you now have to have a multinational character if you are going to be a company operating in this area. You can sell yourself as a British company in the British market, or as an American company in the American market, if that will help you, but essentially you are going to be part of a multinational industry for economic reasons. To my mind that provides a kind of almost Darwinian solution to the question of how much this has to be British or not.

Q16 Q16 Mr Brazier: Let me just press you a little harder on that. Do we think that merchant navy ships manned by people who were not British citizens would necessarily have responded in the same way to, for example, the Falklands campaign? I want to focus on British ownership for a moment. One can envisage circumstances in which the owner or country concerned—I am thinking about the fact that at one point, if I remember rightly, we were using Ukrainian transport aircraft—might have a rather different perspective on things compared with our own. Do you not see ownership as being a critical factor in any area?

James de Waal: My instinct—and it is an instinct—is that there is a difference between the sort of logistic support that you provide up to and including the combat theatre, and actions that you might want to take as part of a combatant force, rather like in the Falklands. I fully accept that, given modern warfare, it is often quite difficult to draw that distinction, but it strikes me that there is evidence of that working in that way in Afghanistan, for example. A lot of the NATO logistic support via Pakistan was, of course, in the hands of private contractors. It produced a lot of problems, of course, but worked out hugely cheaper. Perhaps the cost of that would have been prohibitive given the resources that Britain was willing to commit.

I am going to dodge the question slightly by saying that you have to be examining this all the time, but commercial and financial pressures are going to mean that the default

question is going to be, “Can we contractualise this?” You will have to have a strong argument as to why you cannot do that or why the contractor cannot be British—perhaps a stronger argument than in the past.

Q17 Mr Brazier: I have a final, brief question for Professor Strachan. I completely accept that the default has to be contractualisation, particularly the further away you get from the front line. Nevertheless, on the question of ownership, is there no other area, apart from certain security systems within IT and the very limited field you mentioned, where you would say we need a British-owned requirement?

Sir Hew Strachan: There is absolutely a security concern about ownership. What struck me about the discussion we have just been having is that the distinction between ownership and employees—if you like—has not been made clear enough, because very often what you are talking about, particularly in relation to a merchant navy example, would be ownership: is this British-registered tonnage, owned by a British company that therefore sees itself as a potential part of a national asset in time of war? Of course, many British merchant ships in the past were crewed by non-British nationals, just as many private military companies or companies providing contractual support in theatre now are not being staffed by British nationals. We can have people acting in British interests on behalf of the British Government in theatres of war or very close to active operations—certainly in vulnerable positions—who will not be British.

That set of questions is different from those about ownership of companies, which is, I think, what you really want to get at. On that I would say that yes, I think there are vital national interests, and we must recognise the fact that there could be special circumstances. The convoluted and somewhat confused answer that I gave just now—for which I apologise—perhaps did not make it clear enough that it is not just a question of whether a company that is owned by a company that has other national roots is able to support Britain if it is engaged in operations somewhere in the world; there is also a question of time. Is that company ready to react as quickly as we might want?

Throughout much of the past year’s debate about what is going on, one of my concerns has been what our potential reaction time is. As we discuss Syria, Ukraine or any of the other issues that might affect the national strategy, one thing that is very clear is that we tend to be behind the loop in terms of what we are doing, and we are structuring our Armed Forces to be behind the loop in terms of capacity to react. That seems really quite significant to me. The contractorisation is part of that, just as the reliance—as it seems to me—on foreign military companies is potentially a part of that.

Q18 Chair: So these are matters for a strategic review, but matters that also look at sovereignty and speed of activity—is that what you are saying?

Sir Hew Strachan: Yes, exactly.

Sir Bob Russell: When we expressed our concern that in the 2010 NSS and SDSR the overriding objective was perhaps reducing the budget deficit, the Ministry of Defence argued that the 2010 SDSR “was about how we should configure our defence forces, given Britain’s place in the world and our foreign policy and security policy objectives. This was

not driven by spending, but of course it was informed by what the Government believed was affordable.” If the MOD said that, it must be true. In your last answer you talked about Britain being behind the loop. Does that contradict what the MOD was saying in that quote?

Sir Hew Strachan: It probably does. The argument about Treasury versus MOD—cost versus strategy—is in danger of setting up a false dichotomy. Nothing comes free. There is a cost, and if we do not confront the cost, we are not going to produce coherent strategy—abundance is the enemy of clarity of thought. To that extent I have no difficulty with the argument that in 2010 there was a need to think about defence spending and where it was going, and that that was one important factor. My difficulty is with the argument that a strong economy is always the essential underpinning of strategy—it is entirely appropriate to our circumstances. I do not think that we are confronting an existential crisis such that we would wish to prejudice our economic position in order to pursue what we might see as strategically necessary. But in 1940 we would reverse the argument and say that it was probably worth going bust in order to save the country, and we would recover from that in due course.

There can be a moment when you are going to have to make a choice, but in the end we are talking about a balance. The MOD statement in itself is misleading in the sense that the need to address the economic issue was the paramount objective of the Government—that was the context within which the SDSR and the NSS came out. I would agree that I am contradicting the MOD, and I would also say that there are things that we will now struggle to do that we might have been able to do in 2010. People also regularly make the comparison with 1982, and argue that capabilities are going. Alternatively, and perhaps more accurately, there are capabilities—particularly, for example, in ISTAR—that we are not necessarily acquiring and that we probably need in the current operating environment.

Sir Bob Russell: Do you believe that the UK’s global strategic influence has shrunk since 2010?

Sir Hew Strachan: When I go to the United States, I am struck by the conversations that you have in the margins of a conference or the corridors of a think-tank in which people will tend to say that it has. Publicly, Americans, always being very polite people, do not say that to you. They tend to want to reassure the United Kingdom of where it stands and of the closeness of the relationship. Many of the Americans I speak to—this is anecdotal—would say that Britain is getting rid of capabilities that it badly needs.

Q19 Sir Bob Russell: That has been said publicly by an American military leader. I cannot remember who it was.

Bob Stewart: Bob Gates.

Chair: Bob Gates, the former DOD Secretary.

Sir Bob Russell: If I can just name drop, I actually put the point directly to the Prime Minister a few weeks ago at Prime Minister’s Question Time that Britain does not have the capacity or capability that it once had. Do you think that is fair comment?

Sir Hew Strachan: Yes, I do think it is fair comment. The corollary of that is the assumption—we are not quite fully open about this, but I think it is probably a standard operating assumption—that there are now very few things that we would aspire to do on our own. In a NATO context, that means we should be thinking in terms of smart defence much more coherently than we are. We should be thinking about how we can integrate what we do with other states in order to maximise effect. We are doing that with the French, and we obviously think about it in relation to America, but we don't do it in a coherent way.

Q20 Q20 Sir Bob Russell: Not in a coherent way?

Sir Hew Strachan: No.

Q21 Q21 Sir Bob Russell: Can you give any specific examples of how our global strategy has influenced your discussions with the Americans?

Sir Hew Strachan: Are there things that we haven't done that we might have done? That is what you are really asking. It is a counterfactual question.

Sir Bob Russell: You answer how you want to answer.

Sir Hew Strachan: What haven't we done that the Prime Minister aspired to do? I suppose Syria is an obvious case in point. You will all have taken part, of course, but I don't understand the debate in the House of Commons in terms of a loss of strategic influence through a reduction of capacity. It seems to me to be much more of an issue to do with will and appetite than with capability. If we had acted—to use another counterfactual—it is very hard to see what we actually would have done. What capability would we have used in order to deal with this problem?

Q22 Q22 Sir Bob Russell: Do you have any thoughts on that, Mr de Waal?

James de Waal: I am going to disagree slightly. I don't disagree that a lot of people, particularly in the US and other parts of the world, have looked at the reduction in British defence capabilities and, perhaps even more so, at the debate on the reduction in British defence capacities. Language is thrown around about, for example, moral disarmament. You hear people talking about that, and they deduce that somehow Britain is less important. I agree with Sir Hew that that has an impact, but I think such military calculations matter more to people who are interested in military things.

It is also important in this context to look at what Bob Gates actually said in that BBC interview. He was very careful to calibrate his remarks. He said—I am paraphrasing here, and it goes against what I just said—that Britain would not be such a valuable full-spectrum partner but would still be a full partner. He was talking mainly in terms of what a shame it was for the Americans that the British would not be there. He wasn't saying, "Therefore Britain has lost influence."

I think British prestige, to use an old-fashioned word, is about lots of other things, as well as its military capabilities, which have actually been quite small for quite a long time compared with some countries. It is particularly about Britain's diplomatic presence, soft power and, above all, economic power and how Britain articulates its economic power, particularly through organisations such as the WTO or the EU. I would say that Britain's strategic influence or prestige will rise and fall with the British economy, not necessarily with particular defence capabilities. In fact, I think it has always been quite difficult to prove the international non-military impact of a capability such as aircraft carriers. How do you actually prove that an aircraft carrier is delivering strategic influence? Many people have them, including many members of the Security Council, but does that necessarily mean that they are important for maintaining your position on the Security Council? That is difficult to prove.

Q23 Q23 Sir Bob Russell: Has the physical reduction in the size of the UK's Armed Forces affected its global influence?

Sir Hew Strachan: The issue, of course, is that part of the problem is the adjective "global". Whom are we trying to influence in this? Much of the debate has been about influence with allies, rather than influence with potential opponents or threats. We've got sort of used to that since the end of the cold war, because we have been concerned rather more about whom we are operating with and whether we are an attractive partner than about whom we are trying to operate against. I suspect, when we talk about loss of influence because of a loss of capability, that we are actually talking much more about whether we can buy into alliances. For me, part of the answer to this conundrum is what we understand by "global", because if we are really trying to exercise influence through a military capability—James, quite rightly, points to all sorts of other areas where we would try to do so, and that's of course what the NSS also does: point to areas other than military capabilities by which to exercise global influence. There is not a presumption in the NSS—at least this is the line, I think, that the Government produced—that you are using military capabilities to produce global influence. You are using other things as well as military capabilities to produce global influence.

The real question I think we are trying to get to is this: do we have military capabilities that potentially have global applications? We don't seem to be having that discussion, and that is actually the more informed discussion to have. There are certainly weapons systems that we can deploy globally, but do we wish to do that? Do we aspire to do that? As we are reducing our capabilities, are there areas to which we would wish to restrict ourselves? In other words, should we, given the capabilities we wish to have, be thinking regionally rather than globally? There seems to be reluctance to engage in that discussion.

Q24 Q24 Sir Bob Russell: Let's move on from the global influence. Have the reductions in the size of Her Majesty's Armed Forces affected the ability to carry out the military tasks identified in the SDSR?

Sir Hew Strachan: Yes, because if you think of the sequencing—James is actually much better placed to answer this than I am, so maybe I should stop—the SDSR did not

actually spell out what the reductions to the Army specifically would be, because they were held over for a later stage. The focus was on the Air Force and the Navy at that point. Then the Army was affected—that came later. There is still a disjunction. This is going back to what we have now compared with what the SDSR expected us to have. There is a difference. The SDSR did not spell out what the consequences of the review of the Reserves would be, because the review of the Reserves had not yet happened, and it did not set the current strength of the Army.

Q25 Sir Bob Russell: Well, here we are in 2014. We have looked back and we have come to where we are now. My final question to both of you looks to the future. How would further reductions in the MOD's budget affect the UK's strategic ambitions and this nation's ability to protect its national sovereignty and wider global interests? We are moving ahead to potential further cuts in the MOD budget.

James de Waal: I will answer that partly by trying to give you an answer to the previous question, which is that I am not aware of an instance in which the reduction in British military capability has prevented the Government from doing something it wanted to do. Libya is the case in point. There were various concerns that, given the reductions, Britain would be unable to do something or unable to do it without reprioritisation. In fact, it was able to do it. A certain amount of luck was involved, but it was able to do it.

There is another category of areas where Britain is accepting more risk because it does not have the capabilities that it had. Maritime patrol is such an area. But we haven't had anything that has come up and punched us and said, "Actually, this is a problem." If there had been something like that, it would have been a very good answer to your question—a good illustration. Alternatively, you could say that actually the MOD was right to bear risk in this area—that bearing such risk was acceptable given that nothing has happened.

I would also say that, in general, I am not aware of an instance in which the actual reduction in the British Armed Forces, as distinct from the debate about them, has led to Britain not being able to do something internationally that it otherwise would have wanted to do. There is a general sense, which you and I have both alluded to, of decline, but it might be reversed if the economic situation is better or other levers emerge. So, again, I think it is very difficult to answer those questions that you have raised with a clear, "This has gone wrong as a result of that."

I am bit more sceptical looking forward. That is not related to particular capabilities, but more related to the whole viability of the British military model at the moment, which is basically an expeditionary one, which is dependent on protecting our own forces and causing low levels of collateral damage elsewhere, and which is inherently expensive. There seems to be, again, an inherent trajectory, which means that these sorts of capabilities become more and more expensive as you go on, which inevitably leads to a reduction in the size of the Armed Forces that you can afford for the same sort of money. So, unless you want to increase your defence budget probably quite significantly to preserve those, it seems to me we will come to a situation in which we will be faced with a continuing reduction, with a similar sort of model of Armed Forces—Army, Navy and Air Force—with the same sort of spread of capabilities that we have at the moment, unless

there is some more fundamental change in how you actually structure the British Armed Forces. That, to me, is the real problem.

Chair: We have to move on now. John Woodcock is going to ask about how we relate to NATO.

Q26 Q26 John Woodcock: What do you think should be the priorities for the summit?

James de Waal: I would say Ukraine. There is a lot of frustration among NATO watchers, because there are lots of other things on the NATO agenda that need to be looked at, including things like smart defence and the various ways in which the member states can get more from their investment by doing more together. It has really got to be dominated by Ukraine and by what NATO then does. It is an opportunity to have a very practical summit. The fact that you have got a summit will drive a lot of the policy processes to produce deliverables, to produce initiatives, and to produce some sort of step change, perhaps, in NATO policy.

There is a risk that some of the other important issues on the agenda may have a lower priority. One of the things that was always going to be difficult to discuss was the question of what went wrong in Afghanistan over the last 10 years. It would be difficult to have a summit that is supposed to have a good profile—

Q27 Q27 Mr Brazier: Sorry—could you speak into the microphone?

James de Waal: I think it would have been very useful to have a debate about what went wrong in Afghanistan and what went wrong in NATO operations in the last 10 years. But, as I say, I think that would have been a difficult discussion to have at a summit. It would be useful, which is perhaps more likely to happen, to have a discussion about one of the key issues that had been on the NATO agenda before Ukraine blew up, which was whether this organisation is turning into an organisation that is less an integrated security alliance and more a framework providing the software for those members of the alliance that want to operate as part of coalitions of the willing.

Q28 Q28 John Woodcock: That leads on to my next question. Perhaps you will come in on this, Sir Hew, or go back to the initial question. In Ukraine in particular, do you think that that move has happened, and do you agree with the widespread assessment that the response to Ukraine has shown deficiencies in the NATO alliance at present?

Sir Hew Strachan: I agree that Ukraine is the first question. What it raises is an ambiguity that has crept in about article 5 and what it means. Not that we have any article 5 commitments to Ukraine, but of course there are question marks that have been raised for those to whom we do have an article 5 agreement. In particular, is a cyber-attack an article 5 moment or is it not? One of the issues that has concerned a number of people over the last few years is what we would have done if Syrians had engaged in hot pursuit of Syrian rebels across the Turkish frontier and Turkey had invoked article V. Enough

ambiguity has been created at the margins of where we stand in terms of our alliance commitments for it to be important for this summit, if it values the alliance, to put weight on that. When I think in particular that the 1994 guarantors of Ukraine were Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom, and that neither the United States nor the United Kingdom saw it as important to stress that obligation, I as a first world war historian could not but think of scraps of paper and their role in causing international crises. Of course I think article V needs proper addressing and some clarification. I think the east European states will require clarification.

What that leads on to is an observation that the Partnership for Peace—this relates to what James said—was seen as a diplomatic process, from the point of view of the western powers, of including those countries rather than thinking about their security. For NATO, the challenge of the last 10 years has been “Can we do Afghanistan?” It has been about looking out of Europe rather than within it. Now, those countries that essentially paid their dues by sending national contingents to Afghanistan are asking what the meaning of that is.

That is why the point that James makes about Afghanistan is so important, for two reasons. One is that it is important to think about what the implications are for the alliance. In 2006, people were saying, “If NATO doesn’t get this right, then NATO is out of business.” Actually, NATO is not out of business. The second observation that comes out of that is that it is not yet clear whether it got it right or wrong. Currently, given that the elections have gone better than anyone might have expected and with two really credible candidates in the frame for the presidency, this may turn out better than what many of the doom merchants have peddled. But in that case, too, NATO has a communications business exercise to undertake at the summit, which is precisely why it has to think about Afghanistan as well as about Ukraine and what it is doing. Afghanistan is not over. There is a question of how it is read, and that is very important in terms of NATO’s capacity to sell itself.

Q29 Q29 Bob Stewart: Twenty years ago, I was chief of policy at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. Totally following up your point and endorsing it, I argued, along exactly those lines, that because Partnership for Peace was a political arrangement and NATO was a military alliance, how would we guarantee the security of our eastward expansion? Eastward expansion did not make sense in a NATO context, particularly in somewhere like the Baltic states, which actually go around Ukraine, and other nations as well. All I am doing is agreeing with you.

Guess what? I was told to get back in my box, write the papers for the expansion of NATO and ignore the fact that it was a military alliance. I was deeply hurt, of course, but being a good military officer, I did what I was told. However, I resent that, and now the flipping chickens have come home to roost, because we are in an awful pickle about what to do in Ukraine. With Ukraine, we have got to guarantee the security of the Baltic states, because of article V, however you define it now, and it has been eroded. Am I saying anything you would disagree with? I am waiting for you to challenge me back.

Sir Hew Strachan: No. There may be something that Mr de Waal might disagree with, though.

Q30 Q30 Bob Stewart: The fact of the matter is that we are in an awful pickle, and we can do nothing.

James de Waal: I will try to be brief, but I will make one point about NATO and whether it is an organisation in disarray. One reason why NATO, in recent years, has had a lot of these difficulties is that there has not been a clear common threat, where you have a consensus among the members that it is important and they need to do something about it. That, it seems to me, has always been the key thing that drives NATO to work well. Now it seems that there is a threat—perhaps not common in the same degree to all members, but an obvious apparent threat, so I am expecting a sudden revival of NATO. I would be very interested in that.

Coming out of the summit there are a couple of things I would like to see. One is a very strong reassertion of article V doctrine. It is not just about military deployments. It is about statements: so again, a reassertion of the validity of article V for all the member states of NATO.

Q31 Q31 John Woodcock: Just on that, do you think the summit needs to make clear what would happen if there were a Ukraine-style attack on a NATO member?

James de Waal: I think this is an area where it helps to have a little bit of ambiguity. But there are ways in which you can demonstrate credibility by things other than a summit statement, for example through the sort of military deployments that the Americans have already been making to Poland and some of the Baltic states and through things like the British commitment to Baltic air policing. I would like to see a little bit more of that. The other thing I would like to see—again, this is a personal view and this is where I am rather more on the side of the people who would have said, “Get back in your box”. The expansion of NATO played an extremely important role in providing those countries, which had been unfree for nearly 60 years, with a mechanism to recognise their national sovereignty, to express themselves as independent nations, to show a clear breach with the past and to provide some sort of guarantee against history turning back. I absolutely take the issues about the military defensibility of some of these countries. But at the time the sort of threat that we are seeing now was not immediately apparent, let alone a return to the cold war. Again, the focus was on the disarray of the Russian Armed Forces. As a footnote I would say that the Russian Armed Forces at the moment have nowhere near the capability of the Soviet Union’s Armed Forces during the cold war.

Bob Stewart: Professor, John and I went to NATO a few weeks ago and we asked exactly that question. We asked what was the military plan for the defence of the Baltic states. They looked at us as though we had come from planet Og. There is no thought about what can be done.

Sir Hew Strachan: Part of the issue here is that we are imagining—we are still imagining despite the evidence in front of our eyes in Ukraine—that what we will deal with is a classic invasion. What we are actually dealing with—you belong to the generation as I do—is exactly the sort of Spetsnaz operations that we were told would precede any of that and which would so confuse the situation on the ground that what

NATO was planning to do, even in the height of the cold war, would have been very hard to implement because it would not have been clear who was friend or foe.

Q32 Q32 Bob Stewart: A proxy attack.

Sir Hew Strachan: Exactly. Who is friend or foe?

Q33 Q33 John Woodcock: Is it that uncertain?

Sir Hew Strachan: Well, it may not be that unclear, except that on the ground it becomes very hard. You think it is hard to engage in Afghanistan in terms of distinguishing who is Taliban from who is the local population. I cannot imagine it would be very easy in eastern Ukraine at the moment to make that distinction.

Bob Stewart: Especially as it could be a cyber attack.

Chair: Don't give them ideas. They have enough of their own.

Q34 Q34 Ms Stuart: Would you expect to have some statement or some articulation of what expectation the United States has from its fellow members of the alliance? Today in Prime Minister's Question Time the Prime Minister essentially was invited to commit a future Conservative Government to stick to the 2% target. It was interesting that he kind of declined that invitation.

Sir Hew Strachan: It is interesting what the United States have done as a matter of practice. They have tended to speak—we have gone round this a bit by talking about what Gates said—about what they expect the alliance to do in collective terms which, of course, can be understood by individual nation states, rather than what they expect of individual nation states. One of the great demands in 2010 was that it would all become much easier if only the United States would tell us what they wanted of us because then we would know what to prioritise. Ultimately the United States were prepared to say something to help. But the initial reaction was, "It is not our job to tell you what you should see as your priorities for your own defence." That is a sensible response. First of all it is not the United States' job. Secondly, we should be capable of making our own decisions about what we think is important for our own defence, even if we are seeing it within an alliance context. But it does highlight the bigger question, which is: how do we see our relationship with the United States and where is it going? Of course, that is related to the pivot to Asia argument, and whether we are pivoting with them or whether we are taking up the slack that they are leaving if they really are pivoting to Asia. It also comes back to an appetite for us to think through who are the allies we wish to have a relationship with, in our interests rather than in the interests of those allies. Certainly in the run-up to 2010, I do not think that we had a discussion along those lines.

James de Waal: I would just add that I would expect there to be a certain amount of private pressure from the United States about, perhaps, the 2% target. Whether they go public on that will depend on the responses that they get privately.

Q35 John Woodcock: May I just draw you further on the pivot? How significant do you think it has been so far? I do not know whether you can pivot back, or whether the pivot has actually happened, but is this an opportunity to reassess again, and what should the UK response be to this? Does it encompass the need for a new strategic concept?

Sir Hew Strachan: It is absolutely beholden on the United Kingdom to think what its reaction is, and we need to be clearer about that. It is very difficult because the initial statement, which was very clear, has become much more muddled in its subsequent interpretation and recalibration. Obviously, the use of the word rebalancing rather than pivoting helps you cope with this. The United States has commitments in the Pacific and commitments in the Atlantic, and since 1917 its interest has been more Atlantic first, Pacific second, even allowing for the war with Japan. It seems to me that they were making an announcement that it was more Pacific first and Atlantic second on the basis that, as the President said, many European states are now net exporters of security. There are those who will tell you that that has all passed now, and that Ukraine has changed things—Syria may have changed things, but Ukraine has—and the need to address the NATO issue requires that of the United States. That is not the message if you look at documents coming out of Singapore, the Philippines or Australia—the countries to which the United States is making a commitment—because they see that very much as their bread and butter and they see the commitment as firm.

I think the question for the United Kingdom is a very straightforward one. Are we following—there are some elements in defence that seem to be following—if the United States is going? If this is our principal ally, we should go there, because not only is it a question of where the United States is, but it is a question of where our other five eyes partners are. They are all Pacific powers, apart from us. Or is this the moment when we think that our commitments are European, north African, Mediterranean, Gulf states, so that is our area of interest and that is where our focus should be, and we should be thinking about our European partnerships? By doing that, we would be servicing the alliance with the United States at the same time because we are stepping into the breach that they are leaving.

For my money, that is the more coherent response, and that is exactly the sort of discussion that I would want this next NSS to engage in and make a statement on. I do not see that as difficult. There are some areas in terms of strategy where you want ambiguity and you want to play your cards close to your chest, but actually I think we have reached a point where we need clarity on this. Apart from anything else, it has a direct effect on procurement.

Chair: I am going to have to make a bit of progress here. Derek wants to talk about partnerships.

Q36 Derek Twigg: Before I get to that, something struck me during the questioning. Could you just tell me what you think about this question: is security likely to continue to be state and military-centric in the future?

Sir Hew Strachan: It is certainly not exclusively that now. It is neither exclusively single-state nor exclusively military. It is made up of a number of other component parts. When you are talking about national security strategy, you are positioning yourself in a place where both the military element and the state component are more important than the other elements, just by virtue of the document you are producing. If that leads you to assume that, therefore, the United Kingdom in many of the situations in which it finds itself will be able to behave in an independent way, then you are probably fooling yourself. But I will be one of those who will say that both the national and military dimensions within a national security strategy are what help to bring clarity, if that is what you wish to seek. I would argue on that side. James, being more favourable to ambiguity, may feel that that is not what you are trying to achieve.

James de Waal: I would say that security is not specifically military, certainly not for the United Kingdom, where we do not see an imminent military threat. The economic aspect of this is fundamental. I know that it is not fashionable, but I would say that, for example, the contribution of the European Union to European security has been fundamental. Whether it continues to be in the future is another question.

National security strategies and the like really ought to be about the contribution of the military, the intelligence agencies and some of the diplomatic activity to that broader concept of security. There is a shortcoming in the way that Britain thinks about this. In particular, in the way that, for example, the discussion of how the Armed Forces can support Britain's open trading character tend to be more focused on things such as maritime choke points and whether anyone will attack the sea lanes rather than perhaps the broader senses. This great phenomenon of globalisation has been helped by the way in which there is not a great sense of instability around the world. There is basically an international rules-based system which is supported by countries such as Britain, to some degree by using their Armed Forces. That is a lot wider and bigger than just worrying about maritime choke points.

Q37 Q37 Derek Twigg: Do you think that we should be pursuing a regional, rather than global, strategy, or should we be doing both?

James de Waal: I do not think that we have a global strategy.

Q38 Q38 Derek Twigg: Should we?

James de Waal: It is quite ambitious for the sort of resources that it seems this country is willing to give. It is quite ambitious to expect that, for example, we should have bases in every part of the world and Armed Forces of the size that can provide permanent or semi-permanent deployments of any real power in all parts of the world. I do think that we need to prioritise which regions should be the focus. Those priorities may change, but I do not think that Britain can be everywhere.

Sir Hew Strachan: I absolutely agree with that. We have to make choices. Particularly, when we are thinking about issues for the Armed Forces such as language competence, cultural awareness and regional knowledge—all sorts of things that have been put high in the list of priorities for the Armed Forces in the last few years—you have

to make choices. This is where the numbers matter. We have not got the capabilities to sustain a global aspiration in that sense.

There is another real issue. If much of the vocabulary of current defence is about upstream engagement, prevention and dealing with fragile states before they become failed states, we still have to choose which ones we wish to engage with. We cannot possibly aspire to cover all of those and have a serious commitment to make a difference. We have to decide which are the important ones, and in which we are prepared to make an investment. This notion of upstream engagement is likely to be protracted and, therefore, costly. Certainly in political terms it will stretch into the medium and long-term future and it will seem indefinite.

Q39 Q39 Derek Twigg: I know that James mentioned the importance of the European Union, but what should strategic partnerships be for us? For instance, what are your views on the Anglo-French partnership?

James de Waal: Inevitably these will change, but, at the moment, recent events in eastern Europe have got to put a premium on our European relationships. That seems to me to be the overall priority.

Q40 Q40 Derek Twigg: Over the US?

James de Waal: Including the US, because it is very important that the US should remain engaged. I think that it will. The idea that the pivot to Asia is somehow a pivot away from Europe has probably been rather contested by recent events. Within Europe, there is a lot to be said for continuing this close relationship with France. It is perhaps more difficult than people might have imagined, because it is always more difficult to have a relationship between equals than perhaps the bigger one with the US. Those would be my priorities.

Sir Hew Strachan: I agree entirely with that. We are getting more on the front foot in the relationship with France, but we can do much more. It comes back to languages once again. Most French officers will now speak English freely and fully. On the occasions when I have been to St Cyr to lecture recently, they want me to speak English precisely to ensure that that happens. If you flip the coin, it does not happen much the other way. If it is a relationship between equals, it has to be a relationship between equals.

Q41 Q41 Chair: As someone who is helping to scrutinise the treaty with the French but does not speak French, I take your admonition. I had better get on with that. What should the role of the Armed Forces be in strengthening our national resilience, which is of growing importance? You make the point, Mr de Waal, about security and defence and the nexus between the two. What role do you see for the Armed Forces in contributing to national resilience?

James de Waal: It makes sense. You have the resources of the Armed Forces based in the UK. You have a number of trained people, who are disciplined, aware of their relationships and have access to communications. You also have a common planning

culture and a certain amount of plant, in terms of transport equipment and other things, such as engineering equipment. It makes sense to give those people a role in dealing with natural hazards or national security issues or problems, such as industrial disputes that might threaten certain aspects of the economy. It also makes sense for the Armed Forces to plan for that, to see that as a role and to develop the relationships they need.

I am a little bit cautious about overplaying this, because it is an expensive way of generating a civil defence corps. The Armed Forces are a lot more than a national emergency service. There is also a danger that having the Armed Forces in this domestic role might lead to them being used by Governments not because they are essential, but for presentational reasons, or as a potential threat, for example, to force parties to an industrial dispute to reach agreement, because the threat of the Armed Forces coming in and doing the business instead would be there. There is a risk that the role of the Armed Forces in domestic security might be exploited for political presentational reasons, which means that whenever the question of using them domestically is raised, it should be subject to a lot of scrutiny.

Sir Hew Strachan: May I say on that that at the moment we are in a position where we emphasise the risk to the expense of effectiveness? We should move to a position where we are much readier and have an understanding as to how this can happen. On each occasion where the Armed Forces have been used to aid a civil power, it tends to be belatedly and without any cumulative wisdom from the past. We should move to a situation where, not least because of the dangers that James outlined, we have a clear set of procedures and we know where we are going. I do not feel that we have that at the moment.

Secondly, I am struck, in all the debate about the Reservists and how they are being restructured, that the use of Reservists in cases of civil emergency and to enhance domestic resilience has never been put as centre stage, even before this Reserves review, as you would expect. When they were first formed, they were designed to deal with issues of home defence and civil contingency. That is where they find their roots. One of the arguments for using local units is that they should, presumably, have some local awareness. If you are concerned about reintegrating the Armed Forces in society, it is the most obvious way to do that. They may not be Regular soldiers, but they still have that capacity and that presence, quite apart from the fact that they might have some more of the skills you need in a civil application, rather than a military one. The military might have the discipline, the organisation and some of the equipment you need, but in some of the civil contingencies, you are calling on civilian skills, which some Reservists might possess. In trying to think what the Reservists can do for the Regulars, we might be forgetting what the Reservists can do for society.

Q42 Q42 Chair: That is very interesting, and I agree with a lot of it, but there are capacity issues. Some of my colleagues were talking about dealing with explosives, bomb disposal and so on; I am not sure whether any police forces beyond the Met Police have a capacity, so you are immediately into the Logistics Corps. There are relationships that can be immediately

called upon to do these things and there is a willingness to do that, but there seems to be an institutional barrier to doing it.

Sir Hew Strachan: There is a capacity issue, but there is also a sense—you will be much more aware of this than I am—that if the Government have to call in the Armed Forces to deal with a problem, they have failed to deal with it.

Chair: Yes.

Sir Hew Strachan: It is a sign of failure, rather than of using a resource that is in the Government's control that they can readily use. I have just come back from Australia, and although we did not have a serious discussion, we certainly went round the areas thinking of some of the problems that they have had in terms of fires, floods, drought and so on. They have a much clearer mechanism for being able to do this without it therefore being a big issue for either party.

Q43 Mr Brazier: I think that Professor Strachan has more or less answered the questions that I was going to ask, but as someone who thinks that if we do not get this right, we will lose public support for defence altogether, I will just take one narrow example. Search and rescue has not figured very much, yet for 30 or 40 constituencies, that is the only contact that the public have with the Armed Forces. Do you think that we should be looking at a model whereby these people, nearly all of whom are ex-Regulars anyway, are part of some sort of Reserve, so that we can continue to put service markings on them and, indeed, bring them back if they are needed in a military context?

Sir Hew Strachan: I think that we can think much more imaginatively about this on both counts: capability and engagement with society. We are not doing it at the moment. One reason why we are not doing it is that the MOD, for perfectly understandable reasons, has said, "Where are the population centres?" Where there are population centres, there are possible recruits for the Reserves or, indeed, for the Regulars, which is an entirely logical way of thinking, but it does not reflect the land mass or the distribution. What you are actually doing is drawing defence into certain parts of the country and away from other parts. As a Scot I would say this, as we have been on the receiving end of some of this, but there are large untouched swathes of the remoter rural areas of this country that could be touched and where the presence is disproportionate in its effect. I understand the MOD argument that says, "If you have a drill hall at which three people a week turn up, it is not cost-effective to run." I completely accept that argument, but there is a danger that in addressing that problem they may be throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Q44 Ms Stuart: I want to change the subject to the National Security Council and the national security adviser. What is the role? If I give you the broad envelope, it may be helpful for you to think about. Should that role actually be filled by a civil servant or by someone else? What is the engine room of that role? What is the architecture? If you think that the current system is perfect, just say so. If not, could you give us your broad thoughts?

Sir Hew Strachan: I think when the Prime Minister is an active chairman of the NSC, which is the position that we have now—a Prime Minister who very much identifies with the NSC and who chairs it regularly—the need for a national security adviser who is a

Minister is less pressing. If we had a Prime Minister, as we might well have, who is less interested in chairing the NSC, the NSC will wither unless there is some ministerial responsibility and identification with it. It follows that we do not necessarily have to have a national security adviser who is a Minister. I think you could perfectly well have somebody who is either a civil servant or a member of the Armed Forces or a member of one of the other agencies involved with security. I do not understand the notion that it has to be a diplomat—somebody from a Foreign Office background—which is where we have been so far. I have to say that I would like to see it as a much more proactive appointment, where you have a national security adviser who is in post for some time, who has the capacity to generate an agenda and to perhaps use his NSCO and the body that that represents in a more active way.

I hope that what would happen from that is that you would have Departments, particularly but not just the Ministry of Defence—it is important here that we think about the Foreign Office and DFID, self-evidently, but probably the Home Office as well, because one of the arguments for having the NSC in place was that it was an opportunity to draw domestic and foreign policy together, to bring all the components of national security together. Sorry, that was a very long subordinate clause. I hope that it would generate the capacity for Departments to steer their agendas according to where they thought the NSC was going, rather than seeing it as it is now: at the moment it is about co-ordination; it should, I think, have a more initiating capacity than it has at the moment and, if you like, a more directing capacity than it has at the moment.

It has to be a two-way relationship. The whole purpose of generating an engine which has the capacity to join together different parts of Government should be to produce better government as a consequence. If all it is doing is parcelling things out—I am not saying it is doing that exclusively, but it could do more. It is in a position where we have created an institution and an office which could be much, much more. There is a danger of the historians saying this, isn't there?

Somebody like Hankey, who was at the heart of the Committee of Imperial Defence and then of the War Cabinet for a very long time, acquired a wisdom and expertise which essentially put him in a position of a Minister, even if he was functioning as a civil servant. You may have felt he had too much power and he may have been there for too long, but the UK valued the expertise that came with that, which came from, essentially, creating somebody who in many respects, of course, defined how much of Cabinet Government has proceeded since.

James de Waal: I agree with Hew that what sort of national security adviser you have depends on what sort of Prime Minister you have. I am a little bit more sceptical about whether, if you have a Prime Minister who is uninterested in this sort of area, you could have a big figure who could themselves generate an agenda. I think if you have a big figure who is generating an agenda and the Prime Minister is not somehow driving or directing that, to my mind that seems to be a recipe for problems. In that case, the problem is not so much with the national security adviser and the national security architecture, but with the Prime Minister—you need a different sort of Prime Minister.

As far as the National Security Council goes, one of the things that struck me was that, actually, as an outsider, it is quite difficult to know what has been going on, partly because there have not been many leaks. To my mind that is evidence that it is working

quite well; that no one is sufficiently annoyed with how it is going to try to distance themselves from it through leaks. What one does hear supports Hew's argument that it has been functioning more a crisis management organisation, as a mechanism for regulating the political-military relationship, for discussing some of these issues and thrashing them out and for authority being exercised. From what one hears also, like a lot of Whitehall, the influence of the various different people and the various different institutions that make it up depends very much on the skill they use and how they approach it. So to some degree it is an institution and a structure, but its ability to get the most of Whitehall institutions and structures outside it still depends almost on the personal inclinations or the institutional inclinations, or the institutional skills, of those bodies. To some degree, it is still functioning almost as a collection of personal skills, rather than as a strong organisation.

It would be great to have this as the generator of some sort of strategic thinking. I am a little sceptical about the ability of any Government really to raise its sights above the immediate, but I think the fact that you have something called a National Security Council—you have this now orthodoxy that is supposed to be this great new thing which is distinctively different from previous Cabinet Committees—helps generate support and understanding for the sort of arguments that Hew is making about the need to have a bit more of a strategic approach. If it can also help to spread the skills within Government—the skills of strategic thinking, strategic planning, and co-operation with other Ministries—by its very existence, that seems to me to be a good thing.

I would very much agree with Hew that, ideally, this ought to be the centre of Government that helps the rest of Government to raise its eyes above the immediate priorities and to work out how individual policy initiatives might fit in with the broader range of things, but, again, I am a little bit sceptical about the ability of a structure to do that if the political will, particularly among the key Ministers, is not already there.

Q45 Q45 Ms Stuart: Let us turn this on its head. If it is not the home of general strategic thinking, what is the point of it?

Sir Hew Strachan: Crisis management would be the answer.

Q46 Q46 Ms Stuart: Isn't that what Cobra does?

Sir Hew Strachan: That is essentially what it does, but—

Q47 Q47 Ms Stuart: If it is crisis management, we already have that. When a crisis happens, Cobra convenes—

Sir Hew Strachan: Cobra convenes. I think there are real issues, too, which are that it would seem that certain aspects of what we would see as national strategy or national security are not included within its business. Europe, for example, has not been within its business, and that seems strange. Although Europe has many other dimensions in terms of UK policy—and I realise Europe is a particularly difficult issue for this Government to

address within a Cabinet context—that seems strange because it clearly has a security dimension to it.

I think James and I are both saying the same thing. It is a step forward, but it does need to raise its game in terms of what it can do, although it is very hard to judge what, precisely, it is doing some of the time. Do you judge it by the frequency with which it meets? That suggests it is operating in a crisis-management way—that it is dealing very much with operational matters. Do you judge it rather by the infrequency with which it meets, and the length of its meetings, which are assessed as getting to grips with a really serious issue and thinking it through in the long term? That is essentially the level at which we are having to have our discussion, because there is not much more that enables us to pass judgment on it.

Q48 Ms Stuart: I am staggered, because these are times when security in defence is really quite high. We have all been in and out of government. The idea that just because you don't hear anything, that means it must be working well—it could just be that it is not doing very much. In those few years I would have expected at least a couple of snap, crackle and pop moments when something comes out, so I am inclined, rather than saying it clearly must be working, to think it may be working, in a gentle civil service way—having meetings and producing agendas—but if ever there has been a time when this role should have created a bit of fireworks, it would have been in the last 12 to 15 months.

Sir Hew Strachan: One of the reasons I suspect this might be the case is that what has intrigued me constitutionally about it has been its relationship to Cabinet; because the Committee of Imperial Defence—if that is the precursor to which one can most obviously refer—was a Sub-Committee of Cabinet. Formally speaking, the NSC is, I suppose, a Sub-Committee of Cabinet, but I do not get any sense that Cabinet ever revisits its decisions or looks at what it does, but actually the NSC acts essentially as a cabinet in its own right, in the way in which it behaves.

Where that matters is in particular in relation to the advisers—to the intelligence chiefs, the Chief of the Defence Staff and so on—and their presence on that Committee. They are there—clearly if it is Cabinet and if it is acting as a cabinet—as advisers. In the days of the Committee of Imperial Defence they were effectively members, so they were as much implicated in what came out of that, and they sat round the table in a much more equal situation, than seems to be the case with the NSC at the moment. This matters in terms of what we think we are doing, or what the Government think they are doing, with this Committee, and whether it is a sovereign body, which is effectively how it is behaving, as opposed to Cabinet being the sovereign body.

Q49 Chair: As you know, there is a Committee of Committees that deals with the NSC, as would be the usual thing in Parliament. It has produced a report recently about whether it looks strategically or can look strategically. We have made some comments in the past. One thing we talked about was the base it has to discuss things.

Given the situation in Ukraine, can I be mischievous and ask if there is some sort of need to reinvent Russian studies, in the old sense, but more importantly is there a role for a

conflict studies research centre, of the sort that was abandoned in 2010? This Committee made comments about the old ARAG group, which was an extended research group at Shrivenham. Where is the engine room—you described it as an engine earlier—that provides a base for quality information for the decision-making process? Should we be reinventing some of that?

James de Waal: A long time ago I was the head of the Foreign Office's Russia unit, so I saw a lot of this.

Ms Stuart: So it's all your fault!

Chair: He can make an application; we'll consider it.

James de Waal: To my mind, this is a good example of a wider issue. There is sometimes a problem with basic knowledge, which is often related to resources. The Foreign Office has this excellent organisation called the research analysts, who do a lot of the work that the ARAG conflict studies research centre used to do. In fact, when I was working on this, I used to receive the Conflict Studies Research Centre publications as well. The benefit of the research analysts is that they are plugged into the policy machine, so they have their expertise but they can make it useful to policymakers.

Often you have a very good embassy, which is full of people who know a lot about the country. There is a resources issue to the degree to which, given the reductions in Foreign Office presence around the world, people still have the time to develop that sort of real understanding. I think there is a resource issue, but I don't think it is necessarily the dominating factor.

I think the factor is often about this. Because there is a whole range of issues coming across the agenda, what is it that forces something to come to the top of the heap? What bubbles it up? There are a lot of mid-level bureaucrats like me thinking, as I was, about a lot of these issues. What is it that somehow not only causes Ministers to start paying attention, but causes the machine to start saying to Ministers that they need to pay attention to it? That is an issue that is worth looking at.

Again, I would ask questions about Whitehall. Is this just a natural thing? If you are focused on Afghanistan, on Syria and lots of other things, then there just isn't the time. How do you raise that sort of alert? My instinct is that this is a machinery of government issue, rather than a failure of analysis issue. I am always quite sceptical about this Cabinet Office exercise in particular—about whether you could forecast crises, countries at risk of instability and that sort of thing. You can generate lots of data on that, but how do you then convince? There is a very high bar for convincing Ministers in particular that they have to do something about it. You can have all the analysis you want in the world and all the understanding; it is how you then translate that into priorities.

Q50 Chair: So the NSC should be the mechanism that decides the strategic priorities, or prioritises the strategic necessities.

James de Waal: I think it is a mechanism. You are never going to get away from the world where it is the “Today” programme or the *Daily Mail* or the “News at Ten” that fixes that.

Q51 Sir Hew Strachan: I would also say that the NSCO has the capacity to do some of that triggering mechanism that James was talking about. Going back to the question you asked about conflict studies research and ARAG and so on, there are two separate functions here. One is whether you are looking for policy-led advice, which is what think-tanks will do, and what in many ways Ministers will want. Or are you looking for a wider educated base in terms of understanding some of the issues that we are talking about?

James de Waal: It is the same thing, though.

Sir Hew Strachan: Well, I don’t think they are the same thing. He is sitting in a think-tank at the moment; I am thinking in a university. What is the difference? I think there is a difference, partly because I am given the luxury of not having to respond to demand. This is an argument for blue-skies thinking. A think-tank does have to respond to demand, particularly when it is thinking where its income is coming from. If a subject is not attractive for the moment, you are unlikely to get money for it, so it becomes very hard to do some of the things that you might want to do within the framework of the sort of issues we have been talking about today. This isn’t high enough up the agenda, whereas within a university context you might do it.

Let me put it another way: is it about asking questions or is it about giving answers? On the whole, Governments want answers. They don’t want questions. If you produce an answer before you have asked a question, it may not be an adequate answer. Certainly, even if you’ve got the question, if you give the answer before you have given it some thought, it may not be an adequate answer. There is a relationship here. I am not saying one over the other, but I don’t think we have necessarily got this relationship quite right. We have many of the mechanisms to do this—this is light-touch stuff, not something that requires an enormous investment—but there is an issue, and you will recognise that many bodies have addressed it in the last five or six years and been concerned about it. I think the fact that it keeps recurring suggests that we feel we have not got it quite right, especially as—coming back to the NSC and NSCO, if that is the apex of what we are talking about—there is a question of how that apex relates to the base. I do not see what the relationship is at the moment.

Chair: Thank you very much. We have entitled our work “Towards a Defence and Security Review” for obvious reasons. We are trying to inform the whole process as well as understand it. Your help is gratefully received. We plan to report some time in July, which will take into account where we are with the change in Ukraine, NATO and so on. Then we will try to do something more discursive before the end of the calendar year and we all move into the election period. If anyone has any extra contributions they would like to make to that debate, they would be readily received. Thank you very much for today. Doubtless we will speak to you again before we get to the election.