



Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two](#), HC 358

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Members present: Rory Stewart (Chair); Mr Julian Brazier; Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson; Mr James Gray; Mr Dai Havard; Mrs Madeleine Moon; Sir Bob Russell; Bob Stewart; Ms Gisela Stuart; Derek Twigg; John Woodcock

Questions 51-153

Witness: **Lord Stirrup**, former Chief of the Defence Staff gave evidence.

Chair: Thank you very much for coming. Particular congratulations to Lord Stirrup, who has just been made a Marshal of the Royal Air Force.

Lord Stirrup: Thank you, Chair.

Q51 Chair: Lord Stirrup, we are here following through on the second stage of our “Towards the next Defence and Security Review” report. We are very grateful that you are here. I want to begin with a relatively short question before handing over to colleagues. I want to focus on the statement in the National Security Strategy that “A conventional attack by a state on another NATO or EU member to which the UK would have to respond” was considered only a “Tier Three” priority. In the light of Russia’s actions in Ukraine, do you feel that the 2010 document underestimated the threat of such an attack?

Lord Stirrup: I think it did, but I think elsewhere in the document it stresses, as we were anxious that it should stress, that crystal ball gazing is a mug’s game and that if history tells us anything, it’s that what comes around next will always surprise us—that we hadn’t foreseen its nature, its timing, its locality or maybe all three. “Expect the unexpected” is rather trite, but it is at the heart of what one needs to think about when doing a security and defence review. The fact that things were even put in tiers was, of itself, potentially unhelpful. On the other hand, of course you can’t just put everything out there and say, “Well, it could be anything like this.” You have to try to do a bit of horizon scanning and a bit of structuring, but be conscious all the time that your review, like any plan, will not survive first contact with the enemy.

Q52 Chair: There have been some comments that the experience of Putin's actions in Crimea has exposed deficiencies in NATO in terms of planning, states' preparedness, response times, Article 5 and generic planning. Do you think this is a wake-up call to NATO?

Lord Stirrup: I certainly think it's a wake-up call to NATO. On the first part of your question, quite early on in my tenure as a member of the Military Committee of NATO when I was Chief of the Defence Staff, I did ask what our plans were for defending the Baltic states, and I got a rather embarrassed shuffling and looking down at the desk because there really weren't any. Some planning had been done on the accession of Poland, but certainly not for the Baltic states. The Baltic states, of course, were posing a much more difficult problem in terms of Article 5. Following this discussion, a considerable amount of contingency planning was done, but where NATO has, for understandable reasons, let things slide a little in recent years is in its practical application of the means of defence—in other words, exercising.

If I take one very simple but pertinent example, when I commanded a squadron in Germany during the days of the Cold War, we had something called exercise Ample Gain. Every so often, you had to send a couple of aircraft from your squadron to land at somebody else's base—another nation's base—to be turned round and refuelled. The ground crew at those bases had to certify on a regular basis that they had done that, so that they were practised at receiving and turning round other aircraft, so in the event of conflict, if you actually had to land at somebody else's base for whatever reason—and there could be many—everyone knew how it worked, and they would turn you round and get you back to base.

It was a very simple thing, but those are the sorts of standard procedures that NATO not only had in existence, but used to exercise regularly. I think that is extremely important, and if we are concerned about states on the eastern boundaries of NATO—if we are concerned about the Baltic states—we need people to be familiar with those locations, the structures there and how things work, and they do that through reasonably regular exercising. There is nothing malevolent, war-like or machismo about it; it is just standard military practice.

Q53 John Woodcock: Welcome, Lord Stirrup. Given what you said about there having been no real contingency planning for an attack on a Baltic state and then there was some, what do you think the UK could realistically have, or could, in future, contribute to such an attack—an invocation of Article 5 by a Baltic state?

Lord Stirrup: The first thing we can contribute is air defence capability as a deterrent and as a signal of commitment to those nations. With regard to the specific order of battle that we might contribute, that is rather difficult to say, because although one does contingency planning, in the days of the Cold War, one knew that one was going to face the 3rd Shock Army coming across the north German plain and all the rest of it, so you could have a general war plan. It is not really feasible to do that at the moment, because you do not know, if there is going to be an attack on NATO, where and how it is going to come, and what its nature will be. Clearly, the sort of things that people are thinking about are less a major armoured thrust, and more about cyber-attacks and things such as that, all of which have to be thought through very carefully, and all of which have been considered within NATO in recent years.

So, we could deploy a whole range of capabilities, but I cannot say to you, “The British contribution will be a brigade here and two squadrons there”, because that might not be appropriate for the threat.

Q54 John Woodcock: Do you think NATO is sufficiently prepared, given the attack on Ukraine?

Lord Stirrup: No, I do not think NATO, as I said, is sufficiently exercised. It was hard enough when you knew broadly the kind of threat you were going to face and broadly where it was going to come. In an age when you will know neither in advance, flexibility and adaptability are keys to your response. To have that kind of flexibility and adaptability, people have to be used to deploying to different places and to putting structures together. I come back to the point about exercising—not exercising against any one particular threat, but exercising the machine, if you like, so you can identify points of friction, oil them where you identify them, and keep the whole thing in good running order.

Q55 John Woodcock: Exercising is one thing. It is not unfeasible that there could be a real mismatch of capability within the Balkan states area, if an attack on Ukraine was repeated. Do you not think there is a case for NATO rebalancing and the UK making a contribution to that now, given what has happened?

Lord Stirrup: Well, when you say NATO rebalancing, I assume you are talking about things like the deployment of forces into the stationing of forces there. I am not sure that that is the right answer. I am not these days, of course, sufficiently conversant with the plans to be able to give you a definitive answer, but the chances are that if you did deploy forces, or station forces in peace time, you would be stationed in the wrong place, because as I said, what comes around next nearly always surprises you. I would prefer to have a system that is exercised regularly. For example, in my younger days, when I was a fast-jet pilot, I was on a squadron that was assigned to northern flank reinforcement. We used to deploy to bases in Norway regularly—not necessarily to the same base every time, but we were well used to going out to Norway and flying over there and finding out what the terrain was like and all the considerations that one had to take into account. Those are the kinds of things that one needs to think about, so that when one does have to deploy forces, people have a pretty good idea of how they are going to do it, the sort of terrain in which they are going to be operating and the sort of constraints that will apply to them.

Q56 John Woodcock: Most of the tactical weapons systems that allow that kind of flexible response have been removed from the area, have they not? Is that not a problem?

Lord Stirrup: From the area? You are referring to the eastern part.

John Woodcock: Yes.

Lord Stirrup: I don’t know that they have all been removed. They have certainly been reduced, because everyone has been reducing their defence capability. That is another story,

which you might want to come on to. You have got to have the wherewithal if you are going to exercise and have this flexibility, that is certainly true.

Q57 John Woodcock: You will obviously have closely followed the debate in some parts of the Government on changing the stance on our nuclear deterrent. Are you of a view that the resurgence or the fact that the Russia threat has become more apparent means that we should knock that on the head?

Lord Stirrup: I think—

John Woodcock: Not to put to fine a point on it.

Lord Stirrup: Was that a leading question?

John Woodcock: No, entirely—

Lord Stirrup: The fact that everyone who has been arguing for the retention of the strategic nuclear deterrent has done so on uncertainty over the future is demonstrably true. The uncertainty simply reinforces the risks that this country would run by removing that particular element of our security.

Q58 Bob Stewart: Lord Stirrup, my question is about flexible response, which is something that you and I and many others in the room will recall well. We understood flexible response and its usage. Bear in mind that last year the Russians exercised and demonstrably used what people now euphemistically call sub-strategic nuclear release, which presumably means tactical nuclear weapons in the Baltic. Sub-strategic nuclear release—someone has probably got an MBE for that phrase. Are our senior officers as aware as they were about the main usage of nuclear escalation or flexible response? I have not heard it being used at all for many years, yet the Russians plainly intend to use it as part of their war-fighting. We are signally silent on the matter. I know that we cannot do it ourselves, but other nations have got dual-capable aircraft that could load up tactical nuclear weapons, such as at American bases.

Lord Stirrup: I think it is all part of the thought process that needs to be gone through within NATO. You will recall only too well the Wintexes in which we were involved, where all these issues were practised, not just at the military level, but at the political level as well. NATO is a nuclear alliance, and it needs to think through carefully its concepts and procedures for nuclear weapons in a wide range of scenarios. Clearly the issues are much more complex today and, in a sense, flexible response has grown beyond simply the conventional military and nuclear arena and into many others—I am thinking of cyberspace in particular, but also the use of nationalities within other states, as we have seen in Ukraine and as one can see in other countries in eastern Europe.

There is a whole range of complex issues that NATO needs to think about. That is why we need much more exercising and war-gaming that introduce all these elements, so that people can actually try them out on computers—desktops—go through the thought processes, identify the difficulties and think about them in advance.

Q59 Bob Stewart: And we have to educate the public again—that we might have to use this sort of war-fighting ability—because I think the public should find it very difficult.

Lord Stirrup: I am sure that is right.

Q60 Sir Bob Russell: I wonder, Lord Stirrup, if I could take you back to what you were saying about the Baltic countries? The UK currently has a presence, in recent weeks, alongside other NATO countries, but do I understand that you are suggesting that, on a more regular basis, British forces should go on training exercises, either with our Baltic NATO colleagues, or the UK on our own?

Lord Stirrup: No, it is most important that it is done in a NATO context, because part of the benefit of all of this is getting used to operating alongside other people. Even if you are both long-standing members of an alliance such as NATO, if you have not actually worked together recently—if the people on the units have not worked with people on the units from other nations—then there is always a degree of friction at the beginning. So it is important that this is done on a regular basis—

Sir Bob Russell: On a regular basis—

Lord Stirrup: On a multinational basis.

Q61 Sir Bob Russell: Are you aware of whether that proposition has been put to the Ministry of Defence?

Lord Stirrup: I am not aware of it, but I would be very surprised if it were not being considered. It has certainly been aired in public.

Q62 Sir Bob Russell: How should the UK respond to the US “pivot to Asia”—I think that is the phrase? Is that of any significance at the moment?

Lord Stirrup: Well, I suppose it depends how you define “pivot”. One of the problems with any such approach—it is, if you like, a strategic response by the United States to the events in the world as they saw them unfolding—is that events in the world tend to catch you out. Inevitably, if you look at Secretary of State Kerry’s activities over recent months, have they been mostly in the Far East, as we would regard it? No, they have not; mostly they have been to do with the Middle East and, most recently, with Europe. So real world events will inevitably drive America’s foreign policy responses, just as they drive ours.

Equally, I think the notion that the United States focusing on the Pacific and Asia-Pacific is something new is, again, demonstrably false. The United States entered the second world war because it was attacked by Japan; it started off as a Pacific war for them, although a few days later it became global as well. They have always had two coastlines, one in the east and one in the west. Clearly the military-strategic thinking in Washington was that, for naval

forces in particular, the Pacific is likely to be a more demanding region in the future than the Atlantic. I think that that remains true.

Q63 Sir Bob Russell: So should Britain be in parallel, in tandem, or just watch?

Lord Stirrup: For my money, there are two key emerging strategic changes on the international scene that pose potential challenges to our prosperity and security. The first is clearly the rise of China, its growing economic might and its seemingly increasing willingness to use sharp elbows on the international scene. Now, of course, there are all sorts of opportunities with China's rise, just as there are challenges—but there are certainly challenges. If you look at the tensions over dotted lines in the South China Sea, for example, and elsewhere, these all pose risks to international security. Although they are geographically very far removed from us, in this globalised world the effects will almost certainly be felt here. That is the first thing, so in a sense we should welcome the United States' focus on those particular issues, because although they are important to us, these days we do not have the reach and economic power to do much about them physically.

The other key strategic shift is the unravelling of Sykes-Picot and the post-1918 arrangements that were intended to tidy up the detritus of the Ottoman Empire. They are all coming apart—we see it in Libya, Syria and Iraq. Quite how all this is going to shake out we do not know, nor do we have much control or influence over how it is going to shake out, but what we really ought to be doing and focusing on is trying to ensure that this does not degenerate into an all-out Sunni-Shi'a war, which looks very much on the cards at the moment.

Those are the two poles for us. There is a limit to what we can do about either of them. We can probably do a bit more about the one in the Middle East than we can do about China, but we can be supportive of people who are operating in the Asia-Pacific, such as the United States and Australia and other friends that we have there.

Q64 Sir Bob Russell: Given the diminishing size of Her Majesty's armed forces, should the UK pursue a regional strategy rather than a global one and, if so, what should that be?

Lord Stirrup: I do not think that the UK as a nation should pursue a regional strategy as opposed to a global one, because we are still a global nation. The fact that we cannot exercise military power globally doesn't mean that we shouldn't have a global strategy, but, for example, part of that strategy can be about—where our interests are concerned in the Asia-Pacific, we are supportive, as I said, of our friends who can operate in that area, and we contribute what we can.

I think that we should be global in our approach, but we should recognise that we are limited in terms of the hard power in particular that we can exercise and we should focus that where it can do most good. But there are also, of course, a lot of areas of soft power that are open to us, which we can deploy as well.

Q65 Sir Bob Russell: We are a United Kingdom of four nations and we may be going towards the exit door of the United Kingdom—whatever it will be called—of three nations.

What are the biggest regional security concerns for the UK, both as a United Kingdom of four nations or minus Scotland?

Lord Stirrup: As I say, I think the two principal ones are the ones I mentioned: the emergence of China and the potential risk that poses and the unravelling of the post-1918 settlement in the Middle East. Clearly, there are also a whole set of risks associated with the most recent developments in Ukraine, but I put those at a slightly lower level than the other two, because those are major strategic shifts. I think what we are seeing in Ukraine, while extremely important, is not actually a strategic shift in world affairs, if you like.

Scotland is right next door to us and it has the same sort of livelihood that we do; it relies upon international trade and a degree of global security and predictability, so the concerns are absolutely aligned, which is one reason why it would be much better for us to stay together.

Q66 Mr Havard: Given that semi-permanent deployments have been proposed, you seem to be suggesting that more rotational activity through a number of countries might be a better approach, to bolster our defence engagement posture. Who, then, are these most important allies that we should be establishing these things with?

Lord Stirrup: The most important ally is still the United States. Securing the United States' engagement in such a programme, I think, is absolutely crucial. Clearly, the UK, France and, particularly given its location, Poland, would be major players, but everyone could and should contribute. In particular, we would want to see Germany playing a significant role.

We all recognise that there are difficulties for Germany, which are all understandable, but if NATO is to shift its posture somewhat, in the ways that I have suggested or, indeed, in any other way, it has to be done by NATO as a whole. This is an alliance of all nations: you cannot have some participating and some not. I would expect even Belgium to be making a bit of a contribution as well, along with everybody else.

Q67 Mr Havard: Maybe now is not the time to tempt you about our withdrawal from Germany and what you think about that.

What about configuration? The south-east Mediterranean basin could potentially become a disturbed place, so our relationships with Turkey might be important, and we are in Cyprus. What does this say about our capabilities, our posture and our lay-down—where we are going to put these things?

Lord Stirrup: For some time, we have pursued a more flexible, expeditionary-type posture, and I think, from everything I have said, that that is clearly right, because we will no longer be focusing on a slice of the north German plain in a predictable fashion. We could have to send forces to Poland, Hungary, Turkey, the Baltic states or anywhere, so it is right that we should have that kind of flexibility—we who are more in the rear area of NATO these days.

Mr Havard: Yes, we are the north.

Lord Stirrup: Clearly, the Baltic states, given their size, will be focusing on their own locality. Poland is a bit larger and can be more flexible. I think it depends on the size of the forces involved and on their locality, but everyone should be a player.

Q68 Mr Havard: I scrutinised the treaty with the French. That is a treaty, not an agreement: it is a 50-year Lancaster House treaty. How do you think that plays in relation to all these other combinations? The future seems to be called “JEF” at the moment; there is a joint expeditionary force for this and that. If you are called JEF, you seem to be the future. What does the French relationship mean for all this?

Lord Stirrup: I think it’s important. This is not really a digression; it is an important point. One of the arguments I always make to people when talking about defence, the United Kingdom and Scotland’s coming decision is that even if Scotland remains within NATO, it is still a challenge within NATO for nations to do things together. More and more nations try to do things together, but national boundaries are a real obstacle to this. We in the United Kingdom do not have that problem. We have an inbuilt advantage in that we already operate across the national boundary between England and Scotland.

Building on that, it is still important within this overall alliance that you try to form particular relationships and exercise particular processes between two and maybe three nations to try to operate better across those national boundaries. So when you have two nations of the military weight of France and the United Kingdom within NATO, it makes sense for them to seek to do things together, not as an alternative to NATO but actually to strengthen NATO from within.

Q69 Mr Havard: But their objectives might be slightly different from ours, in the sense that the first thing they will say to us is, “Pre-position forces in Africa.” They are determining where the priority will be. Does it not distort our difficulty in terms of collaboration with others?

Lord Stirrup: As I say, operating across national boundaries even within NATO is still extremely difficult. The major difficulty that we have always had in forming any sort of military partnership with the French has never been on the military-to-military side; it has been on political objectives.

Mr Havard: Absolutely.

Q70 Ms Stuart: On cross-nations operating, you have just reminded me that the German forces in Africa operate with Russian planes crewed by Ukrainians. That makes up the mission.

I want to try something else on you. I had a conversation with a French defence analyst last week concerning Trident. I said, “What’s the French debate about renewal of continuous at-sea deterrence?” His answer reminded me of that “Yes, Minister” joke where Hacker is being told why he can’t sign up to CND. He says, “Is it about the Russians?” and they say no. “Is it about nuclear threat?” “No. It’s all about the French.” His argument was that if the UK makes this decision, it cannot really do so without saying, “And how do the French operate?”

What does it mean in relation to the French and our place in the world?” Is that an admission that we no longer think that we are big players? I wanted to have your thoughts, particularly just on nuclear, about whether France and Britain ought not to work much more closely together as we come to a point where, in honesty, neither one can go on with what it is doing in terms of cost. Or do you think that that is a rabbit hole into which we should not go?

Lord Stirrup: I don’t think your final proposition—that neither can go on with its independent nuclear deterrence—is correct. They are independent, despite the fact that the missiles are American and all the rest; nevertheless, the decision making is independent. But I think what is important is that NATO is a nuclear defensive alliance. That is at the core of its being. I don’t think it would be at all wise on that basis for the nuclear element of this alliance to be held by one nation, the United States. Nor, I think, does the United States. I think it is better for it to be held by as many as possible. Clearly, at the moment we are down to three. I think bringing it below three would be very risky. So it is not about the French; it is about being part of a nuclear alliance and us contributing this absolutely crucial element to the alliance along with other things.

Q71 Ms Stuart: Even if in future Trident is financed out of the defence budget rather than the Treasury reserves.

Lord Stirrup: This is just bookkeeping. Look, the Treasury could say, “We’ll finance it out of the reserve,” but then they would just reduce the defence budget by that much. I do find these arguments a bit circular, as I do arguments about whether we should be spending money on international development or defence. Of course we should be spending money on international development: it is a huge soft power tool for us. You could argue about whether we are spending it in the right way, but we should be spending it.

The issue is: do you want to invest in sufficient hard power to give you comfort in the future security and prosperity of this nation within NATO? The answer for any responsible Government should be yes, and so you must make that investment. The rest of it is not, “Well, yes, but you could do this or that.” Of course there are always opportunity costs, but the security of the nation is the first and most important task of any Government. It needs to make the necessary investment in that as a first step.

Q72 Ms Stuart: The argument is that once you start financing Trident out of the defence budget, the percentage of defence spending that goes on Trident suddenly looks disproportionately high and the other services start arguing that we really should not spend that percentage on that. To which, our answer should be: this is just bookkeeping. Get back in the box, this is what we need to do.

Lord Stirrup: The first part of the answer is: this is a crucial part of our security and part of NATO’s bedrock. The second part of the answer is: if you imagine that, if you decide not to do this, the Treasury will let you keep all that money and spend it on something else, frankly you are from another planet. You might get to keep some of it, I suppose, but it will be quite a struggle, I assure you. I think we need to argue this in terms of security, not bookkeeping.

Chair: I am afraid that our time is relatively limited, so I would encourage short responses.

Q73 Mr Gray: Short questions, short answers—short everything. First, remind me—I have forgotten—at the time of the last National Security Strategy you were CDS—

Lord Stirrup: Yes, CDS.

Mr Gray: So you played a pretty central role in the NSS and the lead up to the SDSR. What is the purpose of the National Security Strategy?

Lord Stirrup: The National Security Strategy is to set out a framework of national objectives that need to be secured to the application of sufficient resource across the range of available tools, which are: hard power; soft power; diplomacy; and everything else.

Q74 Mr Gray: But in an earlier answer you said that crystal ball gazing is a mug's game, and another time you said you have to expect the unexpected. Surely that makes the National Security Strategy pointless.

Lord Stirrup: I don't think so. You can say we are a nation with global interests, but clearly we are not a nation that can apply resource to every single one of those global interests, because we are just not big enough and we do not have enough—in fact, neither can the United States; it can just do a lot more than we can.

So your strategy can be: we will focus hard power predominantly in this area, with the ability to do a little bit elsewhere; we will have a much wider application of soft power; and we will support friends and allies in these particular important regions. You can develop a strategic approach on that sort of basis.

Q75 Mr Gray: So the National Security Strategy should be a document that lays out our vision of Britain in the world over the coming few years, broadly.

Lord Stirrup: Yes.

Q76 Mr Gray: In that case, were you very disappointed when the SDSR that resulted from the NSS became entirely fixated on cutting the cost of Government, and therefore clearly did not take account of the wider security vision?

Lord Stirrup: Clearly, as a military person I was unhappy about any cuts that we were going to have to make. On the other hand, as a military person I am only too well aware that the fundamental prerequisite for strong defence is a strong economy. It is quite hard to argue with a proposition that says that we must first of all rebuild our economic strength as a prerequisite to doing anything else. That was the argument. If rebuilding economic strength required a degree of financial retrenchment, then, taking the long view, it was difficult to argue with that from a strategic perspective. The issue was: okay, but is the nation prepared to

do the strategic rebuilding that will be necessary as we emerge from that period of retrenchment?

Q77 Mr Gray: But would you not therefore agree with me that confusing the three things in one document—effectively, being produced within 24 hours of each other, if I remember correctly—muddles the ways, the means and the ends? You are no longer having a broad strategic vision of our role in the world. You are getting the whole thing down into the fairly basic politics of what we can pay for, how much money we have and what troops we have. Using that as our constraint, in that case, our vision had better be that one.

Lord Stirrup: That is implicit in any sort of policy review. The question, which I regard as fairly meaningless and which always surfaces when you are approaching a defence review, is whether the review should be policy led or resource driven. The answer is both. A nation could decide to spend 100% of its GDP on defence or 0%. Both would be insane. But it is a political decision where you strike the balance in the middle. Of course, it has to do with the degree of threat that you feel—you are likely to spend more if you feel more threatened—but it is nevertheless a political decision. NATO has a defined floor for defence expenditure of 2% of GDP. Traditionally, we have kept above that. I am afraid we have now come below that. I think that is wrong and we need to move very quickly to rectify that. That gives us a minimum aiming point. But you will always have to vary your policy and your resources together to try to get the best match you can.

Q78 Mr Gray: Except, wouldn't you agree with me that what you are describing is really the process of SDSR? We would love to have a huge Army but we cannot. That is an interaction between the MOD and the Treasury. But does that argument really apply to the National Security Strategy? Isn't there an argument to say that we should have a vision as to who we are as a nation and what we intend to do in the world as a nation, and that should be entirely separate from the filthy realities of money and all of that? Our vision as a nation is here in the NSS and that should be an entirely separate document, produced at a separate time and thought through separately from the SDSR.

Lord Stirrup: But even with the National Security Strategy, if you create it with no concern for resource, it is not a strategy. A strategy must bring together objectives and resource in a balanced way. I could have a vision that I would like to live in a 26-room mansion in the country, but I cannot possibly afford it. So clearly, you've got to put the two together. In terms of security strategy, I think where this drives you is where I was indicating earlier: we are not going to be able to afford to do too much along this particular front, so we need to try to leverage our friendships and our alliances elsewhere to the maximum extent possible. So in a sense, taking account of the resources drives you to strategic conclusions.

Q79 Mr Gray: Indeed so. You are eliding the NSS and the SDSR. You are saying they are the same document for the same purpose. They are a question of working out what we want to do and how we are going to do it.

Lord Stirrup: No, because the SDSR is about delivering the hard power element that is required to support the objectives and the National Security Strategy. But there are many other forms of power that can be used nationally to pursue the objectives and the National Security Strategy.

Q80 Mr Gray: So you are broadly content with the process.

One final question on the last NSS before we get on to the next one: do you think the Government are right in their response to one of our recent reports that the NSS needs a little bit of tweaking here and there but that broadly speaking, it is absolutely fine and will do for the next SDSR?

Lord Stirrup: One of my difficulties with the previous iteration of the National Security Strategy was the bit that said we reject the notion of strategic shrinkage. I would have preferred it if it had said that the source of all power and influence is at root economic, and it is therefore crucial, given our global ambitions, that we rebuild our economic strength; in the short term that will require a degree of strategic retrenchment, but that is for the purpose of rebuilding our strategic position in the long term. I would have preferred that. If we are to go through more years of austerity, I think that is where we will still be.

Q81 Mr Gray: On a final procedural matter, do you think it is right that the next SDSR and National Security Strategy should occur straight after the general election? Incidentally, while you are answering that, could you tell us what the role of the National Security Adviser and the National Security Council is? Is the process right, looking forward to next May-June, or should we, for example, delay the whole thing by 12 months?

Lord Stirrup: I think that the National Security Strategy and the SDSR need to be done at the same time scale as any spending review is done, because otherwise the resources would just be set for you in advance in a complete strategic vacuum and you would be much worse off. So if there is going to be a comprehensive spending review soon after the next election—I suspect that is almost certainly going to be the case, whoever forms the Government—then the National Security Strategy and the SDSR have to be done at the same time, unless a Government are prepared to say, no matter what it comes up with, “We are prepared to resource it”. Frankly, I can’t see that happening.

Q82 Mr Gray: If what you describe is correct, and if it is the same what happened as last time around, do you agree that the big thing that happens at that time is basically an argument between the Foreign Office, who say, “Here is what we want to do,” the MOD, who say, “Here is how we can do what the Foreign Office wants to do,” and the Treasury, who say, “Ah, but you can’t.” If you do it all at the same time, that powerful argument by the Foreign Office and the MOD is weakened. If the Foreign Office had said in advance, “Here is our great strategy,” and the MOD had said, “This is how we are going to achieve it,” quite apart from the Treasury, surely you are in a much stronger position to argue the case for maintaining or increasing defence spending?

Lord Stirrup: Everybody tends to say that the model is the 1997-98 defence review. In policy terms it was extremely well-constructed. Then, after it had been constructed, the financial discussions were had and the consequence was that the policy was underfunded by between £500 million and £1 billion a year, every year, depending on how you count the sums. Within five years the MOD was engaging in massive and strategically incoherent cuts exercises to deal with the aftermath. Had we adopted the same procedure in the last defence review and done it more slowly—the starting position of the Treasury was that the defence budget had to be reduced by between 10% and 20%. I don't know what figure they would have settled on, but I suspect it would have been between the two. As a consequence of doing the policy review at the same time, the damage that would have been caused by such a level of savings became so apparent that in the end, we wound up with reductions reduced to 7.5%. Now, your reward—being punished a bit less—may seem slightly odd, but in a period of austerity, that is not a bad outcome.

Q83 Mrs Moon: I should briefly declare an interest, in that Lord Stirrup and I co-chair the Lords and Commons Royal Air Force Association Committee. Lord Stirrup, can I ask you about responsibility to protect? When the UN drafters were looking at the world summit in 2005 at its responsibilities to protect, they were looking at the term “unable and unwilling”. A state would step in if a Government were unwilling or unable to protect the population. They dropped that phrase and put in instead, “manifest failing.” However, in 2008 our National Security Strategy started using the phrase “unwilling and unable”. Do you remember why we moved away from “manifest failing”?

Lord Stirrup: I am sorry, I cannot shed any light on that. I do not recollect at all.

Q84 Mrs Moon: In terms of the impact and any decision in relation to Ukraine, “manifest failing” would be very different from “unwilling and unable.”

Lord Stirrup: All I can say is that before any such intervention, it would have to have been ruled legal. The Government Law Officers would have taken a very close look at this. It would not have been within the purview of the Ministry of Defence to decide whether or not something fell within in ambit of right to protect, as defined by the United Nations.

Q85 Mrs Moon: But we were not using the term as defined by the United Nations; that was the point I was making. I will move on.

During your time at the MOD, you also felt there was a need to revise strategic thinking. Do you think you were successful in doing that, and is there cross-Government alignment in thinking strategically?

Lord Stirrup: It is too early to tell, is the answer to the first question. My point was not that there was no strategic thinking, but that we did not have the inbred habit of strategic thought; that people did not default automatically to strategic considerations when they thought about things. Therefore, they tended to get distracted by the tactical, even when that distraction forced them further away from the strategic objective.

The response was to try to train and grow generations of military people—military thinkers—who would have that as the default. That is a long-term programme and certainly by the time I left, I was starting to see some effects, and as far as I am aware it has continued to grow. So I think that, yes, it has had an effect, but time will tell.

With regard to the cross-Government question, it varies tremendously.

Q86 Mrs Moon: What about the MOD? Is there a conflict in its role between being a strategic headquarters and a Department of state?

Lord Stirrup: No, I don't think so, because the grand strategic level is where the political and military objectives come together. The military strategic headquarters is setting the military strategic objectives, which have to derive from those grand strategic objectives. So there is a great deal of synergy between the two. If you were to try to separate them, then I think you would be running greater risks than you do now.

Q87 Mr Brazier: In the light of your last answer, Lord Stirrup, I am just a bit puzzled that the Advanced Research and Assessment Group was closed down just before you finished your tenure. How did that fit with your commitment to strategic thinking?

Lord Stirrup: The Advanced Research and Assessment Group was always somewhat controversial in some quarters in defence. Not for me—I rather liked its output—but what I was concerned about was that we could still do the work, no matter what the organisation was called and no matter how it was structured. Indeed, one of my aims was to broaden that sort of thinking and that approach well beyond the bounds of what was then a relatively small group. So, it was a toss-up as to whether the Advanced Research and Assessment Group should continue, and continue to attract the resources that it did, or whether those resources should go elsewhere.

Q88 Mr Brazier: But who owns the collective memory now? You say, “go elsewhere”, but where? Where is it pooled together now?

Lord Stirrup: Shrivenham is still responsible for that. In fact, let me take a step back; I cannot really answer questions about present arrangements. The arrangements, as they were when I left, were that Shrivenham was still very much the centre for this. Shrivenham and the joint doctrine centre were the organisations that were drawing together all the development of strategic thinking and future strategic leaders.

Q89 Mr Brazier: And they have got it. But they are separate from the historical branches, so the forward-looking stuff is separate from looking at where we have been—

Lord Stirrup: They are separate from them, but they still have access to them.

Q90 Derek Twigg: What additional role do you think the armed forces could play in improving national resilience?

Lord Stirrup: I think they have a key role to play, and they always have had—national resilience at times of things like foot and mouth, and we have seen the response to recent flooding in the west country. I think it is a key role for the armed forces. It is not their most important role, but they are a national resource and there are always people available in this country who are training for operations or for something else. It would be silly not to use such a valuable, trained and disciplined resource.

I do not think they should be replacing the emergency services. The emergency services are always the first responders and they always should be controlling these situations. But if the scale of a national emergency is such that the routine response of the emergency services starts to become overwhelmed, then this is a resource that could and should be drafted in.

Q91 Derek Twigg: Given your experience in dealing with the various emergencies in this country over the last 10 years or so, do you think there is an additional role for the armed forces to play, or is the situation about right as it stands?

Lord Stirrup: I think it is probably about right as it stands. If you look at the responses in the sort of situation I have outlined, they have been good, and the military has been used quite extensively. I think that is right and proper.

Q92 Derek Twigg: In your answer to an earlier question, you mentioned concern about the fall in the percentage of GDP spent on defence. Could you elaborate?

Lord Stirrup: The defence budget is made up of a number of parts. One third of it goes on pay. In normal times, the average pay of people in this country goes up higher than the rate of inflation—I know that it has not in recent years but it does normally. The Armed Forces Pay Review Body looks at comparators across other sectors in making recommendations for armed forces pay. It therefore follows that, in normal conditions, armed forces pay is going to go up at higher than the rate of inflation. One third of your budget is going up at more than inflation, so a flat real-terms budget is not going to take account of that requirement.

We all know that inflation in the defence equipment sector is higher than the average rate of inflation, just as it is in any high-technology capital-intensive industry. So the prices there are going to go up faster than the rate of inflation. So if you have a flat real budget you are automatically going to have a year-on-year squeeze. You need to have real-terms increases each year to take account of those cost increases. Probably the best way of measuring that is in terms of GDP, because prices tend to go up, not exactly but much more closely aligned with GDP increase than retail inflation increase.

Q93 Derek Twigg: So what are the consequences for our defence capability if that continues?

Lord Stirrup: The consequence, if we have a declining percentage of GDP, is that they will be reduced, and this country will be less secure. We will be able to do fewer things and we will be able to do them less well in fewer places. You only have to look at the record of the past 20 to 30 years to see that that is what has happened.

Q94 Chair: Lord Stirrup, thank you very much for your efficient responses to our questions. In your initial remarks, you talked about the sense that NATO is no longer exercising appropriately in order to deal with the kind of threats posed by Russia, potentially. You hinted at a capacity issue. Do you think that NATO has the capacity and resources at the moment to conduct the kind of large-scale exercise we were accustomed to conduct during the cold war?

Lord Stirrup: No. It has the resources to conduct some. I just commented on the reductions in our real-terms defence budget; in other countries it has been much worse, and they have much more rebuilding to do than we do if they are to contribute appropriately to NATO, including doing the kind of exercising that I have mentioned. It is all very well having in the shop window a certain number of squadrons, but if you are actually going to use and exercise them you need to have everything in support of them. You need to have all the support personnel, the spares and the necessary resilience, and that is what is increasingly missing from a number of NATO nations.

Q95 Mr Havard: The NATO summit is in Newport in the first week of September and we are trying to make some contribution in July towards that. It clearly has a big agenda in front of it. It is not going to change everything by then, but it will set its own work programme. What are your expectations and what do you think they should be doing?

Lord Stirrup: The first thing is that the political leaders in this country of all parties should commit themselves, so it would be irrespective of who wins any election, to staying above the NATO floor for percentage of GDP spent on defence. That is the first thing, because if we are to give a lead within NATO we have to set an example. That would be a very powerful opening to the NATO summit in my view, and that would be the most important thing.

Q96 Mr Havard: What do you think the summit will do? What do you think it needs to do?

Lord Stirrup: It needs to focus people's minds on the need to invest appropriately if you are to be able to make the right responses. The danger is that people will talk in tactical terms about whether we should deploy a few things here and a few things there when the real issue is about overall capacity and the level of investment.

Q97 Mr Havard: So it is not a new strategic concept? What is it?

Lord Stirrup: The new strategic concept should be that everybody spends at least 2% of their GDP on defence.

Mr Havard: I've got it.

Bob Stewart: One of the big problems, of course, is the Russians are spending 4.7% on their defence, which is well over twice our spending in the West. This is going to cause us enormous problems, because they are really equipping very fast indeed, aren't they?

Q98 Lord Stirrup: They are, and this is a very long, complex subject, which we can perhaps discuss another time, but I do not think the disparity is quite what it would appear to be from the numbers, for a variety of reasons.

Chair: Lord Stirrup, thank you very much. A model witness—we finished within our time. Thank you for your responses, your wisdom. Now General Lord Richards has arrived.

Lord Stirrup: Thank you.

Witness: **Lord Richards**, former Chief of the Defence Staff gave evidence.

Chair: Lord Richards, welcome. Thank you very much indeed for coming back to the Committee. We have, I am afraid, a possibility—this is a purely procedural issue—of a vote at 4.15.

Lord Richards: Oh, good.

Q99 Chair: But, I'm afraid, we will reconvene, if that is okay.

Today we are really focused not so much on the past, or Afghanistan, but the future, and, in particular, moving towards the next SDSR. So just to fire off a very big question to begin with, Lord Richards: what do you think the biggest threat facing the world, facing us today, now is?

Lord Richards: It is what I have been saying for a number of years: it is militant jihadism and non-state actors.

Q100 Chair: And do you think we are adequately equipped to respond, for example, to the situation in western Iraq at the moment?

Lord Richards: You say “we”; I see this as something that all capable states need to do together. If they cohered, coalesced and agreed some means—a strategy first of all and then some means of implementing that strategy in a military sense, if that was part of the solution: command and control, and all those sorts of things—then no, nowhere near it. It is a sleeping giant, this problem, and we need to wake up to it.

Q101 Chair: So we are nowhere near ready, a sleeping giant; we need to wake up to it. Specifically in terms of the UK, where would you say our deficiencies are in terms of responding to this new environment?

Lord Richards: Actually, the problem is scale, which is a massive problem that I think people have not really understood. I understand why—it is not an easy one, and the implications are huge—but actually Britain, to play her role, as you know well, Chairman, is pretty well versed in how to do these things, having spent a lot of time in Iraq and Afghanistan, having learned a lot from our errors and all the things you and I have talked about in the past. But it does not matter how good Britain is; this is much bigger than Britain. It means all the major powers, for want of a better term: America, most importantly, obviously, but the Arab states, west African states and now, sadly, east African states. Kenya's tourist industry is collapsing because of the perceived threat to tourists.

This is coming up on us fast and it needs a sort of global response. Who is going to lead it? I don't know. There is an obvious contender that does not seem that interested or that keen to do it. I understand the reservations—by the way, this is not all military, by any means—but I do not know what our strategy is; I do not even know what our policy is towards it. So there is a long way to go, to answer your question.

Q102 Chair: So—not to put words in your mouth—would you feel the National Security Strategy now, given these kinds of threats, requires simply a minor refresh, or is it time for a complete overhaul?

Lord Richards: The last one, which is five years old, now, isn't it—or four years old—has this, but it is not a strategy. It is a load of foreign policy goals. There is no plan to implement. My definition of a strategy is a means of implementing policy. You can have a military strategy, which is using battles to decide outcomes, or you can have a defence strategy, which is higher and bigger than that and usually—almost invariably—with other countries. I do not see a strategy. So that is the next thing that it should be tasked to do. The NSS, as is, is not a bad starter, but it is not a plan.

This is way beyond Britain. I would say that our political leaders—British and other key leaders—need to decide whether it is the risk I perceive it to be, and if so, they need to pull their fingers out and start doing something about it.

Q103 John Woodcock: Can I ask you about Russia? You state unequivocally that militant Islam remains the biggest threat. Has Russia's attack on the Ukraine changed that view at all?

Lord Richards: I am contrary on this one, so you will have to bear with me.

John Woodcock: Contrary is good.

Lord Richards: What drives Russia is her perception of her vital national interests. It is what drives our policy, often. We have done things that are surprisingly similar in the past—from our perspective, entirely justified—and I think we need now to look at it from Russia's perspective. The Crimea, which was, I think, what really triggered all this was always going to remain Russian. It was gifted to the Ukraine by sleight of hand in 1954, but, if you think about it, back in the 1850s we fought a war against Russia over the Crimea. It is essentially Russian, so Russia could not—I don't think it could—see that vital strategic interest slip to an unrepresentative body in Kiev.

A democratically elected president was ejected by force, which is sometimes forgotten. That is no longer the case, which is great. They have a democratically elected president and I hope he succeeds, but if you go back to when this started, actually, that president, however autocratic he was and however much we might not have liked him, was nevertheless democratically elected. It was not Russia's design to do what is currently happening. They had a deal, funnily enough, which suited them fine, persuading the Ukraine and the president to basically stay neutral between Europe and Russia, and they gave him a jolly good economic arrangement as part of that deal. They did not want this to happen: I am absolutely clear about that.

It then happened, as a result of the uprising in Kiev—we do not know how representative that uprising was of the majority of the people in Ukraine; we are just assuming it was and it might well be, but there was no proof of that at the time—we saw a democratically elected president deposed. I said at the time that I knew Russia was not going to allow the Crimea to remain Ukrainian. It was too vitally important to it.

I do believe strongly that we need to draw a clear line down the eastern Ukraine border and I think that is now effectively being achieved, but there may be more we should do.

Q104 John Woodcock: That is the key, isn't it?

Lord Richards: Yes.

John Woodcock: And maybe more. Are our NATO allies who are on Russia's borders right to feel as insecure as they are and do they need greater reinforcement?

Lord Richards: I do not know the answer to that. I would like to know what are our—and, the West's, but you are looking at it from our perspective—long-term foreign policy goals with Russia. Do we see Russia as a perpetual foe or a state that, over time, we are going to draw into the body of nations, as we should have done in the 1990s, but neglected to do? If we had done that, then we might not have had some of the problems we have today. But we are where we are. I often say to people, "Look, it's easy to analyse what could and should have happened. We have a problem today."

Is Russia intent on some new form of the Warsaw Pact in countries like Ukraine? I don't know the answer, but I would oppose that very strongly. If, having had a proper discussion with the Russians, we think that really is their aim—I am not certain it is, as I have probably made clear—we are going to have to draw the necessary conclusions. I would rather we and Russia joined to confront what I think is the bigger threat: non-state actors, particularly militant jihadism.

Q105 Bob Stewart: Which is what Putin suggested several years ago. He went straight for it and said, "The West should combine with us against jihadist revolution." In a way, you have just repeated that call, which I endorse. That is what he has asked for, and I agree with your assessment.

Lord Richards: We need to wake up to this threat. It will be confronted in all sorts of different ways, but it would be jolly helpful if Russia was part of the team, rather than seeming to be in the other camp.

Q106 John Woodcock: I am sure that is absolutely right and that we all agree on it, but if we do not achieve that, can the UK and its allies do both? Is it feasible on our current trajectory both to contain an expansionist Russia and adequately to secure ourselves against the rise of militant Islamism?

Lord Richards: NATO on paper has huge military capability. Most of it is not at what we would describe as high readiness, but it is good on paper, with some very good equipment and relatively large armies still. If you are talking about defending, in some article 5 sense, NATO countries—by which I mean the whole lot now, Poland and so on—against what I understand is Russian military capability today, it could probably do so, don't forget. I just can't envisage and I see no rationale or sense in Russia invading NATO. I don't buy that. That is not how modern wars will be fought.

One of the problems is that we tool up for mass armies, navies and air forces, but actually we will be defeated by the media or cyber or something like that. We really have to understand how a future war will be fought. I wouldn't fight a war like that, so why should my Russian pal? Only if we have really weakened ourselves does it become an asymmetric advantage or attraction to use old-fashioned means of war. If you do denude yourself, then yes it becomes possible.

Q107 John Woodcock: Finally, on a crude level, in that traditional way, theoretically if you get to that situation and Russia can mobilise 150,000 people and NATO effectively has no troops in the region beyond a few thousand, there is a—

Lord Richards: We have hundreds of thousands of troops in NATO, so I'm afraid I do not recognise your description. They are not high readiness, but they are there. As for the Russians, I just don't buy it as a possibility. I think we are really in danger of convincing ourselves to do something that, potentially, we will all regret—the start of another cold war. As I have tried to explain—I do not want to sound like an apologist for Russia because I am not—what she did over Crimea was highly predictable, because her vital national interests were at stake. I have yet to see personally evidence that I am totally convinced by that what is happening in eastern Ukraine is all being orchestrated from Moscow. I think there are people inside eastern Ukraine who are probably doing things that Moscow would prefer was not happening. It is not really in its interests and it does not want a new cold war. Who would?

We must be careful not to misinterpret what is happening in Ukraine in a way that we will regret. I would like to know what our long-term aim for Russia is. Good guy or bad guy? If it is bad guy, let's tool up and have another cold war. If it is good guy essentially, as I hope it would be, let's find a route, a strategy, that allows us to work with it over time? That is my view, but I am just a retired general.

Q108 Bob Stewart: You used the term “old-fashioned”, retired general—I say that as a retired colonel. Is flexible response old-fashioned, and did your generals, admirals and air marshals, when you were CDS, ever think in terms of having to brush off that old concept—it might not be old-fashioned—mindful of the fact that the Russians do actually envisage war-fighting with tactical nuclear weapons?

Lord Richards: The answer is very much yes. As you know, I was commander of the ARRC, which is charged with working with the Army, although it works very closely with the Air Force and to a degree with the Navy here, to keep those traditional war-fighting skills—I think that would probably be a better term—alive and well. That is at a core level of command and theatre command. I am not certain that everyone in NATO is up to what the ARRC is able to achieve, but there are now seven or eight High Readiness Forces (Land) Headquarters that, at least in theoretical terms, are the equivalent of the ARRC, which is why NATO has reorganised its command and control system to allow a much more versatile and devolved form of conventional warfare through those headquarters.

As to standards of training—going back to the previous question about readiness—I cannot say that every one of those headquarters and the troops that they, in theory, have allocated to them and would command in war are at high readiness; I’m sure they are not. But although Russia—I still have some problem even contemplating this—is good tactically, I don’t think they are much, if at all, better at that operational, theatre level. I visited Russia twice when I was CDS, and I think there is a risk that we are bigging them up—quite a lot actually.

Q109 Bob Stewart: They practise tactical nuclear weapon use on exercise. Do you think they might not actually do it, or what they practise they would do?

Lord Richards: I think that they are bound, particularly within that tradition, to practise using all the weapons in their armoury, like any soldier does. You go through the system and make sure you can use it, just in case. That does not mean there is political intent to use it.

Bob Stewart: I think that is what I was getting at.

Q110 Derek Twigg: Lord Stirrup said that he was concerned that the defence spend as a proportion of GDP had fallen and that, if that continued, he would be concerned about our ability as a country to secure ourselves and about our defence capability. Do you share that concern about the level of expenditure continuing?

Lord Richards: Yes. I know that the Prime Minister intended—it was a personal commitment, and I know he is not bound by it—to see at least an increase in expenditure on equipment after the next election. I do not know where that stands at the moment. I am quite clear that the world is a very unstable place, and given our discussion, we obviously all think that. The 2% of GDP is the bare minimum to be confident that we can play not necessarily even a leading role, but contribute our fair share in the challenges we could be confronted by.

It is very easy to get rid of capability. You get rid of it like we got rid of the Harriers—we sold them to the US Marines overnight. It is going to take years to get that capability back through the rather large new carriers. That will take many, many years—eight to 10, and probably 12 years—from the time we got rid of the Invincible class through to their replacements being equally competent, in the early ’20s.

I have just come back from Singapore. Clearly, we have to think about China, although, rather as with my pacifist views on Russia, I don’t buy yet that they are intent on great

expansion, but we don't know. We have then got militant jihadism and all that too. So I think 2% is barely enough, to be frank.

Q111 Derek Twigg: If it continues, it will cause us significant problems in terms of our security.

Lord Richards: Yes. Each year you are actually getting less for your money.

Q112 Derek Twigg: Absolutely. I think Lord Stirrup explained that as well, which is very helpful.

Coming back to the last part of your answer, which I think relates to my second question, we of course have to keep a global eye on the world. Where we can get involved, we need to get involved, whether it is on peaceful or on military terms, if that is absolutely necessary. You mentioned jihadists and Islamic fundamentalists as being the biggest threat. Do you think we still have enough capability to focus our attention on the Middle East and, say, southern Europe and possibly wider Europe, to the extent that is needed to meet the threat you have outlined to us?

Lord Richards: First, we would never do this by ourselves.

Derek Twigg: No, no, but you said our fair share.

Lord Richards: Yes. I think it is with allies.

Q113 Derek Twigg: Do you have any concerns about it?

Lord Richards: Right now, yes. There is a difference between fighting a conventional war, or the sort of things we did in Iraq in 2003, and playing a role in a containment strategy against militant jihadism. I think I would like to see the strategy.

The first thing I'd do is try to contain it. We haven't talked about that, but if people accept that, that is largely political and economic assistance to countries that have populations—particularly, say, in west Africa—40% of which are Islamic. You only need a few, as we see in Nigeria, to take agin their own Governments and you have a problem. So I would like to see non-military support as part of a containment strategy around those countries that we know we have a problem in, and then I would, in bite-sized chunks, start working on those countries, probably looking after the easiest ones first—you are going to have to do an analysis—rather than trying to take on Iraq right now.

I think the key thing is containment. I should also add that, in my view, the great lesson that has come out of Iraq is that if we don't simply honour our pledges to Afghanistan, there is a risk that Afghanistan goes down the same route. I think we can manage it, but I don't detect too much political appetite for the honouring of pledges that were made in good faith in Lisbon in 2010, in Chicago in 2012 and later in Tokyo on the economic side. We must do the right thing by the Afghans. I am not advocating bringing boots back on the ground—I buy all that—but the strategy we had will allow them, God willing, to just keep the status quo as is.

Andrew Parker, head of the Security Service, rang me when, very sadly, Drummer Lee Rigby was murdered last year, to find out how the armed forces felt about Drummer Lee Rigby's death. He was worried that we might misinterpret it as some failure on the part of the Security Service. I said, "Absolutely not. We know how many lives you save." But what he then said to me was, "Can I say something to you?" I was surprised, and said, "Yes." He said, "Since the armed forces went into Afghanistan, not one terrorist incident has been planned or executed from Afghan soil." For me, that was why we always went in there. The methods of achieving our strategic aim you can debate, but nevertheless, that is something we should hang on to. If it returns to what it was, there is every risk that that is gone.

Q114 Derek Twigg: Just one quick question, just to make sure that I am clear about what you are saying. Do you think that the jihadist and Islamic extremist threat can be contained solely by soft power?

Lord Richards: No, I am afraid not.

Q115 Derek Twigg: Do you believe that our strategy for the whole process of dealing with that is at the moment a problem?

Lord Richards: Yes. It is a combination. You pull lots of levers to deal with these things. The first thing I'd do is look at the countries at risk and make sure that they don't fall. That is largely non-military. And then we have to get into how you regain those that are going to threaten us if we don't do something about it.

Q116 Sir Bob Russell: Lord Richards, I am grateful for your perspective on Russia's view on Crimea. For what it is worth, I concur with those thoughts.

Moving on to eastern Ukraine, the view from the two Baltic countries that the Defence Committee visited last week—Latvia and Estonia—is that they are very fearful that what is happening in eastern Ukraine could come on to their borders as well. What is your take on that, bearing in mind that unlike Ukraine, the three Baltic countries—Lithuania being the other one—are not only NATO, but European Union countries?

Lord Richards: I am unequivocal: don't try it, Russia. We have to make sure that is a line over which there is no temptation to cross, but I do not think there is a temptation. I do not see that as their grand strategy. If you go back to February, what is happening in Ukraine now was not by their design. They had a perfectly peaceful way of doing it and it was upset by a coup d'état, effectively.

Q117 Sir Bob Russell: In terms of the memories of the Baltic states and what is happening in eastern Ukraine, do you understand that the Baltic countries have anxieties?

Lord Richards: Yes, I do, and that is why I was very clear that we have to reassure them, but I would not exaggerate the risk to distort NATO's strategy. It is there within the current

approach and it is simply a matter of making sure we can live up to our pledges to each other under Article 5.

Q118 Sir Bob Russell: As we speak, there is a UK presence currently in the Baltic, but do you think that it might be of reassurance that regular training takes place between NATO forces, British forces, and Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian forces?

Lord Richards: Yes. Quite a lot goes on already. I had Estonian forces under me in Afghanistan and we have very good links with Estonia, so I think it is a matter of making sure that the world knows, Russia knows, and the Estonian population know that we have it under control. I am no longer in charge and I cannot tell you—I am worried about readiness; I think NATO needs to wake up in terms of its ability to do things quickly, but I also know the Secretary-General of NATO, for whom I have a very high regard, and SACEUR understand all this, so I have some confidence that the post-Afghanistan NATO has eyes on it. I know a lot of the chiefs of defence staff and they are all of the same mind. They do need to get their command and control improved. That is a big thing, because you can have wonderful troops, wonderful aircraft and wonderful ships, but if you do not get your command and control right, it all comes to nothing. Although I know you are not, Sir Bob, a lot of politicians are focused on the kit. What they have to focus on is whether you can use the kit, and that means command and control, and we are not so good at that.

Q119 Sir Bob Russell: Thank you for those observations. Can I now move on to what I understand is described as the US “pivot to Asia”? How should the UK respond to that and is it of any significance?

Lord Richards: It came up a lot at the conference I was at in Singapore—the Shangri-La dialogue. It is significant—there is no doubt about it—and I think it is quite right that America should focus more on that. They were under-focused on it. I do not, in practice, think—as is clear from President Obama’s response to what is happening in Iraq—that it necessarily means they will not be engaged this side of the Indian ocean, so I am reasonably relaxed. I would watch their defence expenditure as far as a military response is concerned, because they can only do so much as they start to cut their own forces.

Q120 Sir Bob Russell: Looking at our military expenditure and our cuts—which I do not agree with, but we are where we are—should the UK therefore pursue a regional strategy rather than a global one?

Lord Richards: In practice, we probably do. If that is your view, I am sort of in your camp. I remember people wanting me to go to South America, to visit and start building relations with them, and of course, in one sense, I wanted to, but in another, I said, “No, I am afraid South America is not for Britain in a strict military sense.” You could say that in a very limited way, south-east Asia is an area that may be beyond us today, but we have the capability if a situation developed perhaps to resurrect it.

Q121 Sir Bob Russell: My final question, Lord Richards, is, what are the biggest regional security concerns for the UK, and linked with that, what effect would an independent Scotland have on the regional security considerations?

Lord Richards: You've got me there, haven't you? Are you talking regional within Europe, Africa—

Sir Bob Russell: Yes.

Lord Richards: I think the biggest threat is the potential for much more instability in the Arab world and the Muslim world in sub-Saharan Africa, which will affect us all. The Mediterranean is not very big, and anyway you don't even have to cross the sea—a lot of this stuff can now be done through the ether. People who live in this country and don't like their lot can be fired up by looking at the internet. It is a very connected world—you all know that.

It is up to the Scottish to decide what they want for Scotland. I don't mind how they vote; it is for them. There are some very fine Scottish regiments, and I would be disappointed, from the British Army's point of view, if they were to go Scottish, so to speak. However, I have spent all my professional life trying to help people have the freedom to choose their own futures, and I see no reason why I should interfere with that one.

Chair: Lord Richards, I'm afraid that we are going to be voting quite soon, so can I ask you to co-operate with a lot of colleagues who want to get in? I am going to bring in Gisela and then Julian.

Q122 Ms Stuart: I was listening to your analysis of Russia. Isn't one of the worries that they increasingly act by using proxies? Whether it is Russia or Iran using proxies, are we equipped to deal with an aggressor who is not obviously the aggressor?

Lord Richards: Very difficult. It is akin to an insurgency. We use proxies, too. This is a new trend: you don't put your own boots on the ground; you find another country to do it. Libya was a classic. Our proxies were Libyans, orchestrated by some Gulf allies. I see the use of proxies as something we and our protagonists will use, so we have got to get our minds around it. The answer is that on the ground it doesn't make much difference tactically whether they are proxies or from a state army. They are using the same tactics; they are not using terrorist tactics. The Ukrainian army, if it were capable of doing it, should be able to fight and defeat proxies or whoever.

Q123 Ms Stuart: By proxies I meant the guys who are wearing a uniform, but you can't tell who they are—guys who aren't Ukrainians but may be Russians.

Lord Richards: Okay, I misunderstood you. In other words, they are practising maskirovka. I don't think it matters tactically, because they are still soldiers who can be defeated by military means. Politically, it is a big problem, but for the soldier on the ground in the slit trench, it is a soldier he is confronting and has to defeat. I don't think it is a military issue; it is about how good the friendly army is. Clearly, the Ukrainian army, as brave as the

individuals are, needs some help in dealing with them. Their command and control, the higher it gets, is a bit delicate.

Q124 Mr Brazier: Lord Richards, how much do you think the UK's global strategic influence has declined as a result of the shrinkage of our armed forces since the last SDSR?

Lord Richards: We are living on the fumes of what we were. I travel a lot to places such as the Gulf—I have just come back from south-east Asia, and Burma in particular—and there is a huge regard for the armed forces, and one reason is because we fight. A lot of nations' armed forces talk, but the record is that we fight. We might not always win our battles, but we fight. That, funnily enough, is a precious asset in terms of influence, because they know we can pull it together, in crude terms.

Post-Afghanistan, that reputation will start to go—it will be forgotten. Our influence will decline if we are not around, but right now I don't think we are losing influence because of military decisions. It is more because of political decisions that appear to make us less good friends to our friends than they might have hoped. For example, the Syrian vote—it is not my job to judge whether it was right or wrong—undoubtedly knocked confidence in Britain in the Gulf. There is no doubt about that at all.

Q125 Mr Brazier: Thank you. On the subject of the size of our armed forces, I am bound to touch on what has been the story of the past week. You were Chief of the General Staff when the bulk of the negotiations took place with Capita for the new arrangements about which so much has come out, and you were Chief of the Defence Staff when it started.

Lord Richards: No, I wasn't. It was nothing to do with me—I make no reservations about that—unless it happened without me knowing. Peter Wall came to me to tell me about it when I was CDS, so it wasn't on my watch, guv.

Q126 Mr Brazier: Well, we were told that the negotiations started three years before the contracts started, and that is almost exactly half and half of your roles as CGS and CDS.

Lord Richards: I didn't know that. That is very interesting. Thank you. I am educated. These things go on. I can tell you that there was never an agreement of the Army Board when I was CGS that we would commit to that. Whether civil servants or people under my command started to look at it in that period, I don't know. If you say it happened, it happened. But the decision to do it was not taken when I was CGS.

Q127 Mr Brazier: I am a little puzzled. The building was talking about it in 2011, which was just after you took over.

Lord Richards: No, I was CDS then.

Q128 Mr Brazier: There was no great secret about it. People were discussing it and were concerned about it.

Lord Richards: I was very concerned about it. I think we may be at cross purposes.

Q129 Mr Brazier: We signed it and actually started the contract in the middle of your tenure.

Lord Richards: As CDS.

Mr Brazier: As CDS, yes.

Lord Richards: But what you don't realise is the limited power of the CDS. That was a decision made by the CGS, working with Ministers. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: Thank you very much. We are going to reconvene, we hope, in 10 minutes.

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.
On resuming—*

Chair: Lord Richards, welcome back.

Q130 Mr Havard: Right, the question about how we do things is important in terms of how we configure: how we deploy and where we deploy. As part of that, there is this question about our partnerships: who are our real strategic partnerships of the future? There is a lot of discussion about where we are going to configure as well as who we are going to configure with. Have you any ideas about who you think the most important people are that we should develop these partnerships with?

Lord Richards: Despite some scepticism about NATO, I think it absolutely remains fundamental. Are we talking about outwith NATO?

Q131 Mr Havard: Certainly within NATO, but some people are in the EU and not in NATO. Some are in NATO and not in the EU.

Lord Richards: The EU potentially is a very powerful collective security organisation, because it brings together political, economic and potentially military means, but it is not able to do that at the moment, so I am very clear that NATO remains vital to our national security, and we must do everything we can to play a leading role and set a good example within NATO. There is lots of work to do over NATO, particularly in terms of its ability to deploy effective military force quickly and efficiently.

Q132 Mr Havard: Yes. Confidence measures, or whatever you might call them, are currently being taken in the Baltic and elsewhere. We visited Estonia and Latvia recently, and

NATO. We are going to do a bit of a report on that in advance of the summit. A lot of the discussion is about semi-permanent placing of people. There is a lot of talk that we are not doing training well and that we should do it better. There has to be a new system of people being able to work together in a way they haven't before. We are configuring our forces to be adaptive-reactive, and there is the whole question of defence engagement. What do you think we should do in terms of placing people, as well? Cyprus, Kenya, Estonia—where are we going?

Lord Richards: We have forces in Cyprus. Kenya is a big training set-up. I wouldn't want to see that denuded. A peacetime armed force is essentially a contingent armed force. Just as you have moved to some particular country and set up your firm base, you find that the threats come from somewhere else. I quite like the idea of regular active and demanding training exercises, because even as a battalion commander you have then to go through the whole performance, even though it is only for training, just as you would if you were deploying on a live operation. So it gets people into the mindset of travelling light, moving, packing kit, getting on ships, getting in planes, and that is a good thing. So I think the current process, or assumption, of regular training exercises in places that must include Estonia, certainly, is a good thing. But I am not that keen on permanent basing, other than in areas where you know that you are always going to have a problem. There is a good case for saying that the Gulf is one of those places. I think Bahrain is a very important naval facility for us and I would like to see us definitely taking full advantage of that, for example.

Q133 Mr Havard: So is that the language? It is not basing but it is facilities and developing partnerships. You will be aware of the work that General Mayall is doing in the Gulf—it is not just military, but across other Government Departments as well—for this defence engagement argument. Is this where we should be putting our money or is there somewhere else?

Lord Richards: It is part of a mosaic of activity that a contingent armed force should go to. Simon Mayall got that. I created that job for him. I am delighted that it is being successful. But that is just in the Gulf—well, the Middle East, but essentially the Gulf. I would like to see equivalent effort in, say, Africa. You could have an officer who is charged with doing that in south-west Asia, potentially. I think it has been a great success and it is part of being properly prepared for the unexpected. A lot of these things are developed on the back of personal relationships, which are key, and they are very good investments for the future. I also quite like the idea of using the Army's brigades in a way that allows each one to be committed to particular regions. I was instrumental in encouraging that. Sorry to bang on, but I think on balance our current approach is quite a good one. It just has to be resourced properly and there has to be plenty of money to go training and do all the things that are inherent in the concept.

Q134 Mr Havard: We saw some very useful relationships between American reserve forces, the National Guard and people in Estonia. Long-term relationships are being developed. Maybe there are some lessons we can look at in relation to how you develop longer-term relationships. We now have a 50-year treaty with the French. I am one of the people who help to scrutinise it. The French would say to us, "Pre-position forces in Africa

are much better.” Arrangements, partnerships, engagements, treaties, different things—how do you think the French treaty and our deployment with the joint expeditionary force will go? As I said earlier, the future is JEF. There are lots of joint expeditionary forces now. What do you think the French relationship does for our strategic view?

Lord Richards: I think it is vital. France is another country that these soldiers fight, so if we go on operations with the French we know our flank will be protected—metaphorically. My first event as CDS was the summit at Lancaster House that decided the creation of the CJEF, so I am a big fan of it. It is a good thing. I do not buy, necessarily, that we have to go as far as basing in Africa, although I would like to see footprints, so that when you do—if you do—have to deploy, you can do it efficiently and quickly; but you have got to be very careful that you do not deploy to fight the last war and find it is on over there and you cannot get to it easily.

Q135 Mr Havard: So footprints, facilities which you rotate training and other things through, seems to be the argument that is developing. What do you think all that says for us in terms of our capabilities?

Lord Richards: Well, I think it enhances the capability; because it is one thing having it sitting here, but if you cannot deploy it efficiently and quickly—

Mr Havard: Does it have to shape them, or change their arrangements?

Lord Richards: No, I think it facilitates them. You need a good strategic lift; good wide-bodied aircraft—all the things that we are investing in. So, although I think people are critical of the point at which Future Force 2020 will actually be fully up and running, actually what is in it is good. We should not forget that the British armed forces, in or around 2020, will still be the second most capable in NATO—unless something has happened since I left; but I don’t think it has. It will not be in 2020 that we will have it all, I fear; nevertheless, the kit is there and on order and we have still, thankfully, got soldiers, sailors and airmen who know how to use it.

I think I have said to you before, I go round the world seeing the most fantastic equipment tied up alongside jetties or unused on airfields, or tanks that cannot be used, because they have not got the people to use them. The great thing about the British armed forces is that we have still got quality people in our armed forces, and they are the most precious asset. That is why you need to put more money into defence—to make sure the cutting edge, which is our people, are retained and made effective.

Q136 Mr Havard: Out of all of that, what should we take into the NATO summit in the first week of September, and what should the NATO summit be saying about how it configures itself, as well, to address those sorts of needs?

Lord Richards: I think the Secretary-General of NATO has been on the money for a number of years now. NATO is as good as the nations that comprise it allow it to be. It is like the UN. Mr Rasmussen has been trying to tell us to do things smartly, come together, all that sort of stuff, accept that the risk of individual nations’ cuts can be mitigated if you come together sensibly and compensate for each other’s; so we do not have maritime patrol aircraft,

so we can by arrangement perhaps work with another country. That is what I was trying to do with the creation of the British JEF, which included other nations.

I do not think nations have yet responded to Mr Rasmussen's logic. They continue to cut their defence expenditure considerably and they are not making the correct deductions, which is that if you are going to reduce absolutely then together you have to somehow compensate. I think the NATO summit should look at positively implementing the proposals that Mr Rasmussen has had on the table for two or three years; but it has got to be politically-led, top-down, and no more messing around, folks.

Q137 Mr Havard: So it is not a new strategic concept; it is more an engagement with a concept and more practical application of the concept.

Lord Richards: Yes, do it properly; because people are worried about Ukraine, and there are plans within NATO that deal with it, and you have seen, in a very embryonic sense, some of that, in the air patrol activity that has been ramped up. But could you do it on any scale, if that was required? There is a question mark about that. I am less worried about it than some because I knew the ARRC very well and I know they have retained the capability to function at the core level, which is very demanding; but I suspect they will need to brush up on some of it.

Q138 Mr Gray: Am I right in interpreting from your remarks before the break a kind of wistful, nostalgic wish that we had a grand strategy, and that we are lacking a true strategic vision? Is that a reasonable summary of what you said? For the sake of *Hansard*, Lord Richards is nodding. If that is the case, isn't that what the National Security Strategy ought to be?

Lord Richards: Yes. As I said earlier, the National Security Strategy is not a bad publication at all, but its foreign policy and defence goals do not really turn it into a plan of how to deliver it. There are lots of definitions of strategy, but, to me, it is a plan in its simplest terms and how you meet the goals you set yourself. I do not really view the National Security Strategy in that light.

Q139 Mr Gray: Is that really correct as a plan? Surely the SDSR in military terms, whatever the details, is the plan? Surely the National Security Strategy is the vision that then drives the plan?

Lord Richards: The SDSR is a very narrow MOD interpretation. If you are talking about a grand strategy, or a national strategy—

Q140 Mr Gray: As it applies to the MOD, though. As it applies to defence, the wider context?

Lord Richards: The defence bit of the NSS, which was translated into the SDSR, is very narrow. It is about equipment, timings and all that sort of stuff, but it does not actually tell us

where this country should be trying to go and how it goes about doing that across the strategic sweep. That is what I would like to see.

Q141 Mr Gray: That was what I intended to ask. Would you not agree with me that the NSS ought to be laying out a grand national vision, which the SDSR, and indeed other departmental similar type plans, then implement on the ground? They are the implementation vehicles for a vision.

Lord Richards: I think we are in a very similar place. The worry that I have with the way I have interpreted what you have just said is that you would have a lot of siloed activity, whereas I would like to see, at a grand strategic level, that being synthesised to make sure that we can deliver a proper strategy in which the ends, ways and means are properly linked up. That, of course, is what the National Security Council Secretariat should be doing, but I do not think they are yet in a position to do so.

Q142 Mr Gray: What I am really getting at is this: is there not an argument that the NSS and the SDSR should be entirely separate, unrelated, unconnected documents produced at a distance apart so that one drives the other? If the two are produced, as they were last time round, on the same day—I think on subsequent days there were two statements in Parliament, and the two documents were absolutely interlinked—does that not bring the National Security Strategy down to the level of the SDSR? If so, what is the point of having it?

Lord Richards: Yes. I think there is a lot in that. It should be clearly nested above the sub-strategies, of which one is the SDSR, but I do not know what the foreign policy or the Foreign Office equivalent of the SDSR was; I do not know what the Department of Trade and Industry's is. That is where I would like to see it knitted together in what I think you and I would call a grand strategy. So I am with you.

Q143 Mr Gray: I have a final mechanistic point on this, or two mechanistic points. First, do you think it is right that the NSS and the SDSR are produced shortly after a general election? Is that correct timing? Presumably, it is simultaneous with the spending review.

Lord Richards: That's a commitment made by this Government. I think there should be, as is the case in America, regular reviews, because things change, but that is the difference between an NSS and an SDSR. I would like to think the National Security Strategy could be agreed across the political spectrum, so that it is owned by a country, and you could have an SDSR every five years. It is unfortunate that it is within the space of a few months of a new Government—particularly if it is a new Government—because they will not have had time to understand the situation properly, but I am happy with regular reviews of the SDSR.

Q144 Mr Gray: Of course, you were very much actively involved with the last SDSR. Do you not think that even it became less of an SDSR than it should have been and became simply a money-driven, Treasury-driven way of making savings, making cuts? It wasn't a strategic defence review at all; it was a defence review to satisfy Treasury demands.

Lord Richards: Certainly, we had to have it because of the economic situation. At the time I was, sadly, of a view that defence had to play a part to ward off the biggest, grand strategic risk to us at the time, which was economic collapse. We ended up losing I think 7.8% of our budget. I think some Ministers would have taken more off us. We fought a good battle. The Prime Minister came down with the figure we got and I think we have a lot to thank him for: he was an ally to the armed forces during that process. Then we had another three-month review that took more as the economy looked still in bad order.

There is no doubt that it was driven principally by the need to save money, but actually out of it came Future Force 2020, which, although the armed forces are smaller and less capable than I would like, there are historians among you who know that this is not new. What is most important is that, as the economy picks up, we now commit ourselves to spending at least 2%, and actually, there are some very good things that we could spend that money on. I would like to see maritime control aircraft come back, for example. The trouble with those big carriers, which I personally would not have had—I was very comfortable with the existing sort of size—is that, as capable as they will be, they will be very vulnerable to high-speed long-range missile systems in 20 years' time, so we have got to think that through: how do you protect the carriers of the future, let alone deal with cyber-attacks and so on? Because everything will be based on them.

So I think we have got to have a look now at the base of Future Force 2020, which was not a bad outcome. I should say—sorry to bang on—that my fellow Chiefs of Defence were extremely envious of Future Force 2020, because if you look at what they have got compared with what the British armed forces will have in 2020-ish, it is a shadow of that, almost without exception—sadly, including the French too, who are very envious of what we have managed to do. The reason, interestingly, is that, tough as it is, under our laws we are able to shed manpower and get the balance of technology, equipment and manpower about right. But I would like to see it grow again.

Q145 Mr Gray: I would not disagree with any of that, but bearing in mind that we are talking about the next SDSR in a year's time, am I being naive in thinking what we should have in a perfect world is a grand strategic vision for the nation, agreed across parties, that would last indefinitely, although it would of course change over the course of time; and then, underneath that, we should have an SDSR as a way of delivering that, which gives a nod to, but is not intimately connected with, the Treasury? Are you not concerned that as we are going to have the SDSR, the NSS and the spending review a month or two after the general election, we are asking the Chancellor of the Exchequer of whatever political party it may be to come in and say, "Do you prefer hospitals or tanks? Defence is taking another 10% cut."?

Lord Richards: I absolutely share your view. I think it is too important to be left to normal political process, but with respect, sir, I think this is a conversation you ought to be having with the Prime Minister.

Mr Gray: I do all the time.

Q146 Chair: Lord Richards, thank you. Just to bring you back to the centre of what you have been saying about a demand for grand strategy, do you have an exemplar? Is there a nation you look and say, “That is an example of good grand strategy.”?

Lord Richards: Singapore and China. I have had these debates over many years. How do you think Singapore is as it is today? It is because they had a very clear national strategy—we call it grand, the Americans certainly call it national strategy—and they stuck to it.

Sir Bob Russell: They locked up their political opponents.

Lord Richards: I couldn’t possibly comment on that—that is your view. Nevertheless, talking in principle, China has a grand strategy. Same comment.

Sir Bob Russell: They are communist.

Lord Richards: Quite, Sir Bob, but I am just answering the question. They do have a grand strategy. Democracies tend to find it difficult, but that is a quick answer to your question, Chairman.

Q147 Chair: At the beginning, you said the major strategic threat facing us is militant jihadism. So we have obviously focused on that kind of threat in Mali and been encouraged to do so in other parts of Africa and Yemen. Now we are looking in western Iraq and eastern Syria at that kind of threat at a much, much larger and presumably more dangerous scale. In the kind of doctrine that David Petraeus was laying out in 2008, this is the sum of all our fears, the very worst case scenario. This was the justification for the surge and the reason that people said we should have stayed in Iraq longer—and now it has happened. Were people correct in 2008 to see this as an existential threat to global security? Were people correct to say that doing nothing is not an option; failure is not an option; this is a generational fight we have to win? If so, what are we doing about it?

Lord Richards: It’s a very good question to ask because we can all analyse what has happened. We should now be focused on what we need to do about it, which not many people do. I see lots of stuff about what happened in 2003 and so on. It is a huge problem and I don’t know the answer. I do know why I am confident that, if the right people got together with the right levels of commitment and resources, there is an answer. It will take many years; this is not going to be won overnight as you know as well as I do.

The one thing for me that comes out of it is from people such as David Petraeus—and even modestly myself—who were warning about getting out of Iraq too early. If you go back to 2008, things were not bad in Iraq then. They have left and this is what has happened. Would it have happened without Syria? I think you have got to factor that in. If we had done the right thing in terms of intervention in Syria, this may never have happened. The one thing we have to avoid is making sure we do not do the same trick in Afghanistan.

Q148 Mr Havard: Can I ask you about capacity? We see stuff across the whole of the 16th parallel and we are also talking about Estonia. The processes are more dynamic than they have ever been. You cannot configure for one war, and when we have finished that one,

we will come and fight you. That world is gone. What do we say to ourselves about our intellectual capacity and tools to be able to plan and respond against that background of uncertainty? My concern is where the capacity is for doing that in the military, Foreign Office and other places. It is about corporate history but it is also about intellectual capacity and deployment. Have you any observations on things we should do?

Lord Richards: Yes. It's a very good point about preserving intellectual capacity. When the German army went to virtually nothing after the first world war, the one thing they retained was their ability to think and plan. They used to exercise on bicycles, but the one thing they did not get rid of was their general staff, with all the talent that was in there. I think right now in Britain, as I said I hope with some passion a minute ago, there is plenty of brain power still in the Army or armed forces. There is a risk that you lose a lot of that because you are not looking after them properly.

Q149 Mr Havard: We are not investing in them.

Lord Richards: We are not investing in them. You will always have an Army, Navy or Air Force, but it won't be a British Army, Navy or Air Force, because you haven't got the quality people. It will be an undisclosed but many, many nations armed forces, sitting there unused because they cannot even put it together at a tactical level, let alone at the much more sophisticated level that we are talking about. Quality people become really vital. The one thing I would do without doubt now, if I were to increase defence expenditure or even within the current pot, is look after our people better. Why do we want to risk seeing some very talented, experienced people go?

On your question on capacity, your Committee is so important because you can help to wake up people who do not want to spend more on defence, for all the reasons you as politicians know. What I am saying to them—and I think you are, too—is, actually, it is time you did, because the world is in a very bad shape. The idea that history has been rewritten and we are all going to living in nirvana for the rest of our lives is clearly no longer the case, but we have cut our defences, we have cut Foreign Office staff, we have cut all this stuff, and it is time we reversed it.

Q150 Mr Havard: So it is everything from DIS to the World Service—and then some?

Lord Richards: I would say yes. That is what makes this country great. It will want to play a responsible role in helping, with many other nations, resolve the challenges that are confronting us. It is time we find some more capability in the round.

Q151 Mr Brazier: That last point, I think, every member of the Committee would strongly endorse. We are going to have an opportunity to say that tomorrow in the debate on defence spending.

Can I just take you back to an intriguing point you dropped a moment ago, about if we had done the right thing in Syria? The only proposal that came anywhere near Parliament was

punitive strikes because of chemical weapons. Presumably, that was not what you had in mind.

Lord Richards: No.

Q152 Mr Brazier: What did you mean by the right thing in Syria?

Lord Richards: If your end is the removal of Assad, there was a clear military strategy for doing that, which was more than the market would bear, which saw the creation of a new Syrian army. It would probably take a year to train it up, but you would extract people and train them in neighbouring countries. At the point of committal at a time and place of your choosing—so you lose strategic surprise, but that is fine, and you can retain tactical surprise—you would use allied, including Arab, air and maritime forces to give them the thing you couldn't possibly grow in a year.

The great thing about this was that it would be based on the inevitability of Assad's defeat. The world would say, "Right, that's it. We are not messing around. You are going to go." I think the psychological effect of that certainty of defeat—I know it could have happened, by the way; I am confident that we could have done it if we do it properly—would have meant that there would have not been much opposition left, because most of his army would have fled. Combined with that, you would have got to make sure that the Syrian opposition knew that unless they coalesced—as well as the Arab nations, which were supporting different elements—around this, they wouldn't get any help.

I knew, when this was being proposed, that it was most unlikely that that would be adopted, because it was too demanding. It was more than the market would bear, in which case you had to question yourself, as the sole basis for our intervention or any role at all was humanitarian, whether we should be in there at all. It was a stark choice: do it properly, or don't do it, because, funnily enough, doing a little is enough to keep the war going but not enough to allow your allies to win. The only losers are the population.

Mr Brazier: Absolutely.

Chair: Lord Richards, thank you very much. I am sorry that the session went on so long. I know that you are very busy. There are a couple of related questions that have just been raised, which perhaps you could put in writing if you had a second?

Lord Richards: I have to catch a train at half past five, so I have five minutes.

Q153 Chair: A very final question. You have referred to having limited powers as Chief of the Defence Staff. To what extent do you feel that you had sufficient influence in the MOD, the National Security Council and NATO? Should the post of Chief of the Defence Staff be given more emphasis?

Lord Richards: Within the armed forces, the post is very important; I didn't have any queries about that. I think the problem is that he does not have, under command, the three armed forces. People think that the CDS does, but he doesn't, as Jock Stirrup has said before. I don't know if you asked about it, but he saw himself as *primus inter pares*. The CDS does

not command the Army, Navy and Air Force. He only commands them when they are deployed on operations. So Ministers can divide and rule—this is a big attraction to them—the armed forces. Whereas if they came under the CDS, then he would ensure a united front.

When I explained this situation to the Prime Minister, actually he did not realise—to be fair, why should he?—that the armed forces were not under my command. But I do not think that the civil service wanted them to be under my command, as it would have made the CDS the most powerful military figure since Cromwell. No one knew what the hell the chap who said that was talking about, but it worried people and it was very clever. I think Ministers liked it because they didn't have to deal with what would have been seen to be an all-powerful CDS. The reason there is often division between the three services is because they are not told what to do by the CDS.

Sorry to bang on, but I think Mountbatten intended in his reforms for the armed forces to come under the CDS. That didn't happen then, and it didn't happen when I tried it through the Levene reforms. I did create something called the Armed Forces Committee, which made sure that the subordinate committee to the Defence Board is chaired by the CDS and that was not a bad outcome. It certainly gives the armed forces a little bit more clout within the Department. The Permanent Under-Secretary is on that committee and it seems to work quite well.

So that would be my answer. He doesn't necessarily need more status, but the real issue now being confronted, which may be an SDSR issue, is: should the armed forces, like in virtually every other nation—other than America, where they still have political appointments for the Army, Navy and Air Force, which is quite different—come under the CDS? That is quite right, in my view.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Lord Richards: Thank you, and congratulations on your appointment, Chairman.