



Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [TOWARDS THE NEXT DEFENCE AND SECURITY REVIEW: PART TWO: NATO](#), 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

Questions 213-255

Witness: Sir Andrew Wood, former UK Ambassador to Moscow and Associate Fellow, Chatham House, gave evidence.

Q213 Chair: Welcome, and a particular welcome to Sir Andrew Wood. He is a very distinguished British diplomat who has had three postings to Russia, with his final posting being as ambassador to Moscow. The Committee is working towards the next defence and security review. This session focuses on NATO, and particularly on the actions of Russia towards Ukraine and the implications that might have for the United Kingdom, NATO and our future planning.

Ambassador, what is your sense of what Russia was trying to achieve in Ukraine? What are their motivations? What is driving them? Are there things that we can learn from that for other theatres?

Sir Andrew Wood: Thank you for inviting me. I look forward to the discussion. I know you have already had some lively discussions with friends and colleagues, so I am sure I can probably leave out some of the things that I might otherwise have said if I was giving just a general introduction.

The essential motivation of the Russians, and for that matter the Ukrainians, lies in the evolution of the post-Soviet world. The Ukrainians have made two attempts to go through to a new phase of transition towards what was originally thought of as a “normal” country, which they all wish to get to. The Russians made some progress in that direction and then reversed. Essentially, I see a difference of view between Russia and Ukraine as to how a country should properly be governed, which is the bedrock of the difference between them. I can elaborate on that if you wish.

A lot of the rationalisation for Russian action, such as in relation to possible Ukrainian membership of NATO or in relation to what they think the West has done to

Russia and so on, is rationalisation rather than first-order priorities. The real threat from Ukraine, as the present regime in Russia would see it, is that Ukraine might succeed in becoming a more credible democracy than Russia currently is. That is a familiar threat in Russian history. In fact, outside I was just reading an interview that Yegor Gaidar had in 2000 with Slovene colleagues, and he said that he was “pretty confident” that Russian politics were slowly moving in the right direction—that was in 2000. He said that the understanding that Ukraine really is an independent state and should exist as such was critical to that and that, in general, the less that Russian policy was imperial the more it would be pragmatic, oriented to Russian interests and humanitarian—that is, protecting of one’s human rights, including the rights of Russian-speaking people—and the better it would be for Russia.

Russia has over the last several years moved rather steadily in the opposite direction. Particularly since the return of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in May 2012, it has moved in the direction of refusing two options. One is proper reform of the economy, which would necessarily mean devolution. It would necessarily mean an accountable rule of law and independence of businesses from state control, all issues which were discussed under Medvedev but which have essentially been rejected by Putin. The second thing is that it would mean a greater freedom of the population to discuss options. Any country that cannot discuss options freely is bound to be in trouble in formulating proper policies.

Indicative in that regard, to take one example, is the way that history is taught in Russia. One of the first things they did when coming into Crimea was to replace their history books and produce the more official Russian one. The way it treats Stalin is to my mind extremely indicative and important. The official version describes Stalin’s Terror as, “the price of the great achievements of the Soviet Union” and the textbook presents, “the utmost efficiency of the ruling elite” as a result of the Terror.

Q214 Chair: Just to be absolutely clear, this thing that you are reading to us from is the textbook produced by the Russians—

Sir Andrew Wood: It is a quotation from the text, yes.

Chair: And this is the textbook now being taught in Crimean schools?

Sir Andrew Wood: Yes. It goes on to say that Stalin’s purges shaped “the new managerial class which was adequate to the task of modernisation... This class was unconditionally loyal to those in power. Its executive discipline was irreproachable.” It omitted that there had been some difficulties for the population in that but the outcome was as stated there. That seems to me indicative.

A further example would be the way that the access to the internet—we always assume that there will be ready access to the internet—has been steadily reduced. Milestones would include the following: in November 2012, extra judicial blacklisting allowed for websites promoting child pornography, suicide and illegal drugs to be blacklisted. You might think that is fair enough. None of us here are in favour of that but data indicate that 97% of websites on the blacklist committed no offence. In July 2013 extrajudicial blacklisting was expanded to websites accused of posting possibly pirated films. In October 2013, the Pirate Party of Russia, which campaigns for freedom of information, was denied official registration

for the third time over its title which the Government claimed promotes robbery on the high seas. In February 2014, extrajudicial blacklisting expanded to websites accused of promoting riots, as well as extremism, a charge frequently applied to critics of the Government, of course.

Q215 Chair: Ambassador, I am going to have to interrupt you and move swiftly on to my colleague, Madeleine Moon. Many apologies. We have a lot of colleagues to get in so if we could keep to crisp, short answers.

Sir Andrew Wood: I shall be much shorter. I just thought I would give you some background.

Chair: That is wonderful, but perhaps in written evidence we can supplement with some of that.

Q216 Mrs Moon: Does the UK Government have a deep enough understanding of Russia, Putin and their motivation?

Sir Andrew Wood: That is rather hard for me to say. When I was ambassador we had very deep understanding of the whole thing. It is the case that the resources devoted to Russia have been decreased. The career structure of the Foreign Office is no longer such as to safeguard and promote that expertise. So your suspicions are quite possibly right.

Q217 Mrs Moon: So they lack enough people with an awareness of Russia and of Putin. What about an awareness of asymmetrical warfare?

Sir Andrew Wood: That would be more, I suppose, in the Ministry of Defence and I am not an expert on that. However, my sense is that asymmetrical warfare is comparatively recently understood to be an issue that needs studying, so I suppose there is not that much understanding, although there was warning in Estonia and other places like that and, after all, it is coming from the Chinese as well so you would think—if that is what you meant—

Q218 Mrs Moon: Yes, I did. When you were the ambassador, were you aware of asymmetrical warfare operating—disinformation systems operating, false news items placed and refusal of access to the internet—at that time? Was that happening then?

Sir Andrew Wood: To a very limited degree but we did not have an inimical relationship for most of the time at the end of Yeltsin's period in office. It got worse because of Kosovo but I was not aware of deliberate disinformation in that sense.

Q219 Bob Stewart: Sir Andrew, can we talk about the perception of NATO—obviously, it is a political perception of NATO—from a Russian point of view? How did the

Russians view NATO, bearing in mind that the Warsaw Pact has gone? I presume they think that NATO should shrivel on the vine too but how do they view NATO in threat terms?

Sir Andrew Wood: They have a very strong emotional perception of NATO in threat terms. When they say that NATO is inimical to their interests, they are perfectly sincere. If you look at it objectively, it is rather hard to back that view up. NATO has not actually done anything in particular to Russia, other than exist. NATO has made some effort to reach out to them so I think there is an emotional problem with viewing the West, of which NATO is a part.

Q220 Bob Stewart: They were an adjunct to partnership for peace in NATO, weren't they? They did have an office—indeed, an ambassador—in NATO headquarters, didn't they?

Sir Andrew Wood: Yes, they did but they were not a member of NATO and their understanding of how NATO works is somewhat flawed. They assumed that it was totally under American control. Obviously, America is very influential. They further inherited an assumption that their natural partner in the world would be the United States and that if they were more associated with NATO or, even, in NATO, they would act as a sort of tandem between—

Q221 Bob Stewart: So they never had any intention of joining NATO if NATO was to offer them that option?

Sir Andrew Wood: I'm not aware that NATO ever did offer them that option.

Q222 Bob Stewart: They didn't offer them the option but there were voices suggesting that they should, within NATO.

Sir Andrew Wood: There have been and Putin said that he would be willing to consider it but it is, to my mind, beyond belief that NATO would act as an equal partner in an organisation that essentially depends on consensus.

Q223 Bob Stewart: There's political consent, I presume, in the Kremlin, for the use of nuclear weapons to fight a war—

Sir Andrew Wood: As part of the military doctrine.

Bob Stewart: As part of the military doctrine, which is evident. Does the political side in Moscow consider that we would actually be prepared to do something? Do they believe that we would retaliate?

Sir Andrew Wood: With nuclear weapons?

Bob Stewart: Yes, with nuclear weapons. Do they believe that we would actually get it together, as it were, in NATO, to do it?

Sir Andrew Wood: I think it is highly doubtful they do, because I think they think that NATO is a rather weak organisation. Although they find its existence alarming, I do not think they have much respect for its military prowess or more coherent action.

Q224 Bob Stewart: Not to put words in your mouth, but presumably they would assume the Americans would act unilaterally, if necessary, in that regard. Would they make that assumption?

Sir Andrew Wood: They would make the assumption that the Americans would dictate whether there was action or not, for sure.

Q225 Bob Stewart: Can I finish by asking about conventional deployments? Clearly they did not like the idea or the implication, at the 2009 summit, that Ukraine might, in the future, become a NATO member. They didn't like the European Union agenda, which actually had a protocol that said, "Perhaps we will exercise our troops in Ukraine." How worried would they be by the fact that there were western troops, or NATO troops—they already have NATO troops in the Baltic states, and that is the border—close to the border? How worried would they be about these ideas and was this one of the spurs for their action?

Sir Andrew Wood: There had actually been NATO exercises in Ukraine so, in theory, they should not have been concerned about it. I think they viewed NATO membership as a theoretical possibility, but it was more an assertion of western control, as far as they were concerned, over Ukraine that they feared.

Q226 Bob Stewart: And Ukraine had military exercises as part of Partnership for Peace?

Sir Andrew Wood: Yes.

Q227 Bob Stewart: My final question is, in your view, should we consider positioning troops in places like Belarus, given the opportunity, or Ukraine? On a permanent or rotational basis? Would this be stinging Russia too much?

Sir Andrew Wood: I can't actually see that that is going to be a possibility for some considerable time. I think it could not be a realistic possibility absent of a complete reversal of Russian attitudes.

Q228 Bob Stewart: I totally accept that; it was just a thought. So we have actually got as far as we can go now that we have NATO troops positioned in Latvia, Lithuania and so on? If you were the ambassador you would say, "Don't do it" if you were given the option.

Sir Andrew Wood: Well, where would I be the ambassador in this case?

Bob Stewart: In Moscow.

Sir Andrew Wood: I would say be extraordinarily careful, but if I was in Ukraine, I would say that the best recruiting sergeant for NATO is Russia.

Q229 Mr Havard: Can I just follow that? I have had things said to me like, “We shouldn’t have permanent basing because it disturbs the NATO-Russia council,” this Act between NATO and Russia, but persistent presence is apparently different from permanent presence. What is your take on that relationship through the NATO-Russia council and the Act that was established between them? Do you think he just thinks that it is dead anyway and he doesn’t really care about it and it is our problem trying to disassemble ourselves from it?

Sir Andrew Wood: I would certainly agree with your last comment. It is a dead letter. We undertook in the 4+2 negotiations about the reunification of Germany not to base forces. However, the situation is rather different now so I think we could feel liberated if we wish to. To the degree that it is necessary to reassure the current countries of central and eastern Europe, it is certainly something we would have to consider.

Q230 Mr Havard: You have written, along with others, about some of the things we should do about the way we communicate in these areas, particularly broadcasting and what sort of soft-power options we should invest in. I am interested in the way in which you write about those sorts of capabilities. You talk about the BBC Russian service at the moment and call it a “mere internet-based thing.” It is the language used there. You talk about broadcasting, which is interesting having recently visited Latvia and Estonia. They talk about broadcasting and about social media, the internet and all the modern ways in which people can receive information. What do you think we should invest in? Clearly we should invest in more Russian language capability of some fashion. What should that investment be? What shape should it take and how should we deploy it? Through the BBC or some other method?

Sir Andrew Wood: The BBC has a fine record and it is a familiar channel for Russians. Therefore, it is an obvious option to consider. The BBC themselves maintain that they have good digital access and I don’t question that, but my purpose in reading at interminable length what the Russians are doing about the internet is precisely to say that that channel is getting more difficult. Television is also quite effective, but almost nothing can compare to the sheer weight of Russian Government propaganda as it now is in influencing how Russians view the world. We have to explore every possible option.

Q231 Mr Havard: People were talking to us in Latvia and Estonia about Radio Free Europe and there used to be all these different mechanisms, supported financially by various interests. What do you think the combination of investments should be? The Brits are not going to do all this, are they?

Sir Andrew Wood: No indeed. It is a pity that was allowed to lapse. I do not know how easy it would be, technically, to revive it, but we have to find some means of talking to the Russian people as opposed to just the Russian regime, which is our primary point of contact. Radio can play a part in that.

Q232 Mr Havard: What do you think about our capabilities in terms of being able to speak to and deal with Russia in Russian, and the understanding of the language? Should we invest more in that internally?

Sir Andrew Wood: Again, that has declined and it is a pity. It declined because we tended to assume that Russia would become, as we hoped, a more normal country. I think our communication is actually improved by the number of Russians we now have living and going to school here. In a general way, that has improved quite a lot. Our businesses have also been quite effective in trying to introduce new ideas and practices into Russia, but that needs supplementing as far as we can. It is beyond my expertise, apart from talking about radio, to look for channels where we can communicate our point of view—by “our” I mean a general western point of view—to the Russian people.

Q233 Mr Brazier: Ambassador, what can or should the west do to help Ukraine to restore the international order and international agreements overturned by Russian annexation of Crimea and the continuing campaign there? In terms of deploying forces, the Americans have obviously done something, and we have with NATO countries, but no one is suggesting putting troops there at the moment. What should we be doing? Do you think we have the will to do anything?

Sir Andrew Wood: In a way, your second question comes before the first. The Russian calculation is almost certainly that we do not have the will. I think we will continue to make their occupation of Crimea difficult in the sense that banking practices and other international regulations will have to be adjusted to take account of the fact that we do not recognise it and that it is illegitimate in our eyes. There are consequences in that way. What they are doing in east Ukraine is of a rather different outcome and order at present, which is to create anarchy there, and that will damage Russia as much as anything else. Russia will remain dependent on close co-operation with western and international financial organisations. They also depend on us ultimately as part of the world economy. They are vulnerable to sanctions. If we have the will and we see the need to impose further sanctions, that will have a significant effect on the Russian Government and population. Whether it will make them change their minds is a very different question.

Q234 Mr Brazier: To be blunt, can any of that be taken seriously when the French are selling them warships and, indeed, training the crews of the warships?

Sir Andrew Wood: Getting EU or western countries to work together in a consistent, coherent fashion is extremely difficult. Those warships are dangerous instruments and they would be particularly dangerous in the Black Sea. I leave my answer by implication.

Q235 Sir Bob Russell: Sir Andrew, the Committee is looking towards the next defence and security review. History is obviously of great interest to both of us and I frame the question this way: Russia, from the days of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, has seen several of the Warsaw Pact countries join NATO and, indeed, the European Union. It

has seen three of its former Soviet Republics—Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia—become independent countries right on the doorstep and join NATO. Could it be argued, if you are looking at it from a Russian perspective, that the west is being provocative?

Sir Andrew Wood: The Russians do so argue and they do so find it because in their minds they still have rights in these areas, which the countries of those areas do not acknowledge. So there is a necessary tension there. If you were a Lithuanian you might be rather grateful for the protection of NATO because you would see Russia as a threat. You could be wrong about that, but they do see it that way. There is a real psychological problem to be addressed there.

The original argument for including those other countries of central and eastern Europe in NATO was the need to help stabilise them and the need to provide them with reassurance against a possible Russian threat. My recollection at the time was that, yes, the Russians didn't like it but they were not that upset about it. This is something which they have become increasingly obsessed with because they tend to see their failures as the result of western plotting. They tend to see, for example, the riots or demonstrations in Moscow in 2011 and 2012, as the result of western plotting which they were not. I am not sure that I have answered your question exactly.

Q236 Sir Bob Russell: I think you have. The point I was trying to make is that Russia from their perspective is responding to what they see happening on their borders to territories and countries which they either had total control over or had massive influence over and they no longer do. Therefore their defence is being geared towards that and we are now having to respond to the Russians increasing their defence.

Sir Andrew Wood: Yes, they accepted—I am very glad they did—the independence of these countries. They accepted the break-up of the Soviet Union. It was the Russian leader at the time, Boris Yeltsin, who signed up to it along with the leaders of Ukraine, Belarus and eventually Kazakhstan. One cannot really have it both ways. I know that is a Russian perception. I don't suggest they are insincere in their perception but in terms of logic and what they signed up to it is a mistake.

Q237 Mr Donaldson: Following on from that, there was the Russian intervention in Syria and now they are offering aircraft to Iraq. Where does that fit into their overall strategic approach, especially in relation to the Middle East?

Sir Andrew Wood: I think the questions of Ukraine, NATO and the Middle East are better treated as separate questions. Their perception of the Middle East would be twofold. One, they tend to attribute a lot of the disturbance there to western interference and specifically to the way, in their eyes, that we have deliberately tried to overthrow particularly authoritarian leaders. They tend to discount the domestic reasons behind—*[Interruption.]*

Chair: I am afraid I shall have to adjourn the debate. Some colleagues may not be able to come back after the vote, but I will certainly be back and we will reconvene in 10 minutes' time.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: Apologies for the delay because of the Division bell. There are, apparently, no more Divisions expected in the foreseeable future, so we should be able to get through.

Q238 Derek Twigg: Do you think there is a chance that Russia might take some action against Eurasian countries? If so, what can be done to predict it?

Sir Andrew Wood: You mean countries like Kazakhstan?

Derek Twigg: Yes. Well, let's put it another way: countries that are surrounding Russia—to protect Russian speakers.

Sir Andrew Wood: First of all, Russian speakers are not under threat and were not under threat in Ukraine, so one would be supposing that Russia might look for an excuse and manufacture an excuse. I think, at present, that is extremely unlikely, because it would add to the already considerable troubles that the Russians have manufactured for themselves in Ukraine. But, certainly, their partners—both Belarus and Kazakhstan—in the Eurasian union have become considerably more wary of Russia.

Q239 Derek Twigg: So you think it is highly unlikely Russia will do the same again in any other country outside of Ukraine?

Sir Andrew Wood: I could make up a nightmare scenario and say it is possible—

Derek Twigg: But your judgment is that it is not?

Sir Andrew Wood: My judgment is that it is not.

Q240 Chair: Our job in the Defence Committee is to look at defence and security threats. The response we tend to hear from people is, “It's never going to happen.” But, presumably, there is an argument for saying that if there were, say, a 1% chance of some kind of action happening, we would still have a responsibility to try to deter it.

Sir Andrew Wood: Yes.

Q241 Chair: That, of course, goes to our priorities. We are working towards a defence and security review; we are trying to work out how to allocate our resources. Would you say that the threat from Russia towards other states in the region is so infinitesimal that it is not worth our putting additional resources into countering it, or that, although unlikely, it is sufficiently significant for it to be worth our upping our game and focusing more on it?

Sir Andrew Wood: I think we have to focus on the possibility of Russia itself beginning an internal collapse. In that context, you can see the possibility of a leader or leaders trying to look for another distraction, such as trying to grab a piece of territory from Kazakhstan or something like that. So my answer would be that we need to do is to increase our ability to interpret possible developments in Russia as the first step. The Baltic states perhaps come in a slightly different category, in that they would, in the context of an East-West confrontation, make a more logical place for Russia to try to put its armed forces. But, again, I do not really see a direct military confrontation arising—a proxy one possibly.

Q242 Chair: I am sorry to be so literal about this, but there is obviously a great difference between saying there is a 1% chance of something happening and a 0.01% chance of something happening, and that really matters for planning. We fully understand that you think these things are extremely unlikely, but can you give us a sense in terms of planning and resource allocation whether, when you are saying they are extremely unlikely, you are saying there is a 1% chance or a 0.01% chance in the next three or four years for us to plan for? I know that is a very unfair way of putting it.

Sir Andrew Wood: No, not at all. If I were to make it relative, there is a higher chance of something getting out of hand in the Baltic states than in Kazakhstan, but that is because I think Kazakhstan is a relatively stable country. If you are asking in percentage terms, you could probably say there is 5% of some sort of trouble in one of the Baltic states. You have spoken to them already, and they will have given you their own views. If you are talking about Kazakhstan, as I said, I think you are talking about a situation where, essentially, Russia is trying to overturn, by force, the whole of the post-Soviet dispensation, which is probably beyond their capabilities. So I would say 0.5%, if you like.

Q243 Chair: Just to pin you down one last time, you think that there is a chance, although a low probability, that, at some point in the future—the medium term; in five or 10 years—there could be Russian involvement in some form of unconventional disturbance of the Baltic states, or at least a significant possibility that is worth the MOD thinking about that Russia may try to destabilise some parts of those regions?

Sir Andrew Wood: That is correct, because I think there is at least that sort of percentage chance of Russia itself getting into deep internal trouble. There is no succession mechanism to Putin. Therefore, when there is a succession to him, there will be in-fighting of some sort. The Russian economy is in trouble and so on, so forth.

Q244 Mr Havard: To be honest, that last question, I have been asking for some time. The capabilities that he is creating for himself that we have seen in Crimea could be useful internally as well, for some of his own internal frozen conflicts, as they are commonly called. Do you see that as being something he would use, as it were, as a convenient opportunity; that, when he needs a diversion, he would re-excite one of these frozen conflicts, such as south Ossetia, or take a different attitude towards Moldova?

Sir Andrew Wood: Yes. I think that is a higher probability than trouble with the Baltic states. It would be, as you say, more of a distraction against a feared disorder internally.

His popularity has obviously soared because of what has happened in Crimea, but his real interests have not been served by what is happening in Crimea. It is going to be hugely expensive. He has created, on the borders in east Ukraine, anarchy. He is going to find that, if he ever tries to quieten that down, which he shows no particular sign of doing, it is not something he can turn on and off. These are armed and dangerous men he is promoting. Some of that anarchy is now going to spill over the border. Most Russians see an apocalyptic end to their present state.

Q245 Mr Havard: Yes, that is the way it is played back. You said that this current duty to protect Russian ethnic and Russian-speaking groups was just a convenient excuse. It is almost like an echo of this responsibility to protect. He plays it interestingly. He says that he has acquired this responsibility, that he has a duty to do that. Do you think that that is just a device currently, and he would just find other devices? If we are going to invest a lot of money in addressing all sorts of questions with broadcast media and this, that or the other, if that is the argument in Estonia, and that is his excuse to protect the Russian-speaking and Russian ethnic people—well, that is one thing—but that is not really something we should pin our hopes on in having defeated that, and that is his real reason gone. That is just a device currently to promote his broader interests, is it?

Sir Andrew Wood: It is a device in the sense that it improves, in the short term—I don't think in the long term—his internal position. It is also a sincerely felt belief that the Russian state is threatened by outside forces. The Russians have always felt that way, partly because Russia itself, if you think about it, has no geographical shape. So there is always a good reason, in their eyes, to have another buffer state.

The reaction of the Russian population to the way they are governed is also important from the point of view of the narrow circle around Putin. They saw the way that the Ukrainians treated Yanukovych as being a threat to them. They saw what Gorbachev did to the Soviet Union as a lesson for them, to learn not to do anything like that—not to reform; it's dangerous territory.

Q246 Sir Bob Russell: Sir Andrew, you have painted a grim picture of modern Russia in the closing era of Putin and post-Putin. Is there not a danger in that period, that perhaps either in the last few months of Putin or whoever takes over, they might want to focus attention on raising popular support at home, as has happened with Crimea, by nibbling away at neighbouring countries—the Baltic countries, for example? If that happened, do you think that there would be public support in the UK for response on Article 5 under the NATO convention?

Sir Andrew Wood: It would take time to lead up to that situation. I think that if you asked the UK public now, “Do we wish to fight the Russians?” they would say, “No,” and they would be right. If this was as a result of a declining sense of safety for us all, expressed through action against the Baltic states, things would be different. If you look at the way the British population and most of the European population now think about Russia and compare

it with the way we thought five or 10 years ago, I think it has got considerably more distrustful and hostile. That is what the Russians have provoked themselves. Do I think that anybody wishes to go to war? No. Do I think that people could even imagine war? Probably not.

Q247 Sir Bob Russell: Of course, you and I can remember 25 years ago.

Sir Andrew Wood: I can beat you there.

Sir Bob Russell: Well no, it is very sweet of you to say, but we can go back to the days of the Soviet Union. Do you think that in modern Russia and modern Britain, indeed, NATO generally, there is a generational gap because we have had 20 years or so in which we have not had the Cold War? We have had the ending of the Cold war and now it looks as if we might be moving back to another Cold War.

Sir Andrew Wood: I have an aversion to the words “Cold War”. I am not correcting you. I just mean that it conveys a situation of two opponents. I think it is more complicated that.

Q248 Sir Bob Russell: I was just using it as a shorthand term.

Sir Andrew Wood: Of course you were. It is a shorthand that is built into most of our brains and it means that we often look at something such as what is happening in Ukraine not as it really is—an internal, if you like, difference between various different members of a changing Soviet bloc—and accept too much the Russian narrative that this is a contest between the East and the West for Ukraine. Ukraine or Kazakhstan or whatever it is are independent states and they can manage—they ought to be able to manage—their own affairs. It is not up to us and the Russians to try to dictate how to do it—hence, my aversion to the phrase “Cold War”.

You are absolutely right—I can remember the Cuban missile crisis and what it felt like then, thinking that we are all going to get incinerated; that was a different proposition but we had had plenty of time to build up to that rather terrible expectation. People do not expect that now. People have got used to the idea that somehow Russia will, of its own account, mature into a viable democracy and have not absorbed the fact that it is doing precisely the opposite at the moment.

Q249 Sir Bob Russell: So you don’t think that public opinion in Britain would tolerate an Article 5 defence, of the Baltic countries, say, by Britain?

Sir Andrew Wood: I think it would but then we would have to imagine the situation when we got there. It is impossible to tell.

Q250 Mr Havard: We are currently discussing something that is more collective security than collective defence—more Article 4 than Article 5 as far as NATO is

concerned—and we oppose Putin and his activities but we need him in other respects. Whatever the transactional arrangement is going to be with Putin in the future, what do you think the NATO summit in the first week of September should be concluding? What sort of paths of work do you think it should be putting in place to deal with this event?

Sir Andrew Wood: I think a key moment is the degree to which participants have some common understanding of where they think Russia is headed and what its purposes are. Without that you are not going to have any unity of action. I imagine it would be relatively simple—“simple” is perhaps not quite the word but it is the only one that occurs to me right now—to agree that the priorities should be to assist Ukraine to re-establish a viable state. Where the difficulty would come would be our view of how far Russia is guilty at that time of continuing to try to destabilise that state and whether they are doing that because they wish to overthrow the Government in Kiev or create another Trans-Dniester in the shape of Donbass, that sort of thing.

Without common understanding of that, I don’t suppose there would be great unity of action. Some member states are going to be more apprehensive than others. Some are closer to the action than others. So I think, first of all, a common understanding is needed. Secondly, the degree to which we help the Ukrainian security forces and armed forces to improve their cohesion and their ability to act must come for consideration. That would seem to me to be a reasonable thing for Newport to consider. Thirdly, rather further down the track, perhaps there should be some material assistance in the shape of matériel to help them.

Q251 Mr Havard: And you think these are NATO tasks—given that Ukraine is not in NATO—rather than for similar forces but used through Europe.

Sir Andrew Wood: NATO has an interest in Russia and every other country following some sort of known rules of the game. Do I think we should do anything which implies that we see Ukraine as a proxy member of NATO or a future member of NATO? I don’t see any purpose or need for that. I strongly doubt whether there will be consensus in NATO for steps as far as that.

Q252 Derek Twigg: It is obviously in our best interest that we have a stable Russia.

Sir Andrew Wood: Yes.

Q253 Derek Twigg: What do we do in the West to help that come about? You mentioned Putin’s successor. If he dropped under a bus tomorrow, what would happen? What do you think the west hasn’t done which it should be doing?

Sir Andrew Wood: On the dropping under a bus scenario, or drinking the wrong cup of tea—

Derek Twigg: Generally—

Sir Andrew Wood: That is one rather easier scenario as there would be—

Derek Twigg: I am not as well versed in Russian politics as you are.

Sir Andrew Wood: What I meant was that there is a mechanism for replacing him if he is not there. That is one reason why in all probability he will stay there until he is not there. If it is a messier scenario than that and the Russian population become increasingly discontented with the way he is ruling their country, which is a strong possibility, then the inner circle will be the first to try to decide things. That is a possibility but I think it would be just as bad as what we have now. What they need is to resume the sorts of discussions they were having, even under Medvedev, about how to make their economy work more effectively, how to get away from dependence on oil and gas and so on.

If there is anything we can do to encourage them to have a dialogue among themselves as opposed to trying to clamp everything down and keeping it internal, then we should certainly do it. We should certainly not do things which they would automatically interpret—this is easier said than done—as being directed against them as a nation. We should in that context try to differentiate between the effect of what we say and do on the regime and on the population at large. There is rather little we can directly do until they possibly get in the position of wanting us to do it. Then we would be back doing the sorts of things that we tried to do when things looked rather brighter in Russia, such as helping them and talking to them about ways we think the police can act better, or ways to deal with bribery and corruption, how firms should ideally run themselves and so on. But I don't have a magic answer to your question.

Q254 Derek Twigg: Are there any circumstances in which President Putin would believe the West would use tactical nuclear weapons? And vice versa; are there any circumstances in which you think Putin would use tactical nuclear weapons?

Sir Andrew Wood: It is in their military doctrine and they have done it in their exercises. That doesn't prove anything, but there is a possibility that they would. Whether we would then respond, I simply do not know. I do not believe that we would use tactical nuclear weapons without that sort of situation. I am not an expert, but it doesn't seem to me that we need to have the direct fear of the power of their military weapons and their military in general as to make it necessary for us to resort to that. Our equipment and troops are more numerous, they are better, we are richer and we have very good intelligence material and so on. They have other advantages—I think they are better at cyber-warfare than we are, though I don't think we have done it. It is easy to underestimate ourselves in that pure sense, as I am sure you are better aware than I am.

Q255 Chair: Finally, in the final minute remaining, you said in answer to Colonel Bob Stewart about prepositioning and a troop presence in the Baltic, Belarus and Ukraine. Do you believe that increasing the number of troops significantly from the current number—which is about 100 American soldiers and about 100 British soldiers on exercise—in Poland, Latvia or Estonia would be a reckless and provocative act that would create a new Cold War, or do you think there is scope for NATO to increase its presence as a deterrent in the Baltic states?

Sir Andrew Wood: I think there is a case for doing it, particularly in Poland, perhaps with a slightly less permanent presence in the Baltic states. Reviving the idea that we can forward-base troops would seem to me a perfectly sensible and defensible move. Of course, the Russians would shout “provocation”, “Cold War” and so on, but I do not think they would have reason to be surprised now and we would have a good case to do it.

Chair: Thank you very much, that was very clear. That was terrific and it has been a great honour to have someone who knows Russia so well. Thank you.