



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 James Gray, Mr Dai Havard, Mrs Madeleine Moon, Sir Bob Russell, Bob Stewart, Ms Gisela Stuart, Derek Twigg

Questions 256-313

Witnesses: **James Sherr**, Associate Fellow, Chatham House, **Chris Donnelly**, Director, Institute for Statecraft, and **General Sir Richard Shirreff**, former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, NATO, gave evidence.

Q256 Chair: Order. Welcome to our witnesses. We are now in the concluding session of our expert witnesses on “Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part Two: NATO.” We are privileged to have with us today General Sir Richard Shirreff, whose most recent job was as Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe in NATO, Chris Donnelly, who works closely with BDI and is a great expert on the Soviet Union and Russia, and James Sherr, who is also a great expert on the Soviet Union and Russia. Welcome to everyone and thank you very much for coming. I will begin with James Sherr and then move on to General Shirreff. Could we have been better prepared for the Ukraine crisis?

James Sherr: Thank you for your question. I think, to a large extent, we are here because of what we knew and pretended not to know. For 22 years, Russia has openly and officially equated its own security with the limited sovereignty of its members. For at least the past 10 years, they have been assiduously reconstructing the whole spectrum of power—economic power, energy, soft power and particularly, with renewed effort after the Georgian conflict of 2008, hard power—in order to have effective capability, conventional and unconventional, in its neighbourhood. For all that time, Ukraine’s future has been equated in the Russian mind and in Russian policy with Russia’s future.

The problem over all this time has been—I think this is the general impression of all people from NATO countries who have served and worked in Ukraine and know the country—that Russia profoundly misunderstands what makes Ukraine and Ukrainians tick. All those things were pointing to a very serious crisis, once President Yanukovich’s position became endangered. In December last year, when he signed up to everything Russia wanted, Russians openly said, “Ukraine is now ours.” Once he left, they found they had no influence in the country at all. I think most of those things were eminently foreseeable.

Q257 Chair: Thank you. General Shirreff, is NATO currently in a position to defend the Baltic states from attack? In the unlikely event that there was an immediate Russian attack, is NATO, as of today, in a position to defend the Baltic states?

General Shirreff: I think NATO would find it very difficult to respond sufficiently quickly if, for example, Russia decided to attack and mount an airborne desant operation, for example, on Riga, Tallinn or Vilnius. The fact is that there is a Russian aviation base within 40 minutes' flying time of Riga so, unless NATO has stationed forces in the Baltic states, I think it is highly unlikely that NATO could respond quickly to a sudden, surprise attack. That said, if there was a build-up of tension and relatively clear indications and warnings—which is, I think, highly unlikely—NATO could begin the process of preparing to defend those Baltic states against Russia. However, the honest answer, as we speak now, is that NATO would be very pushed to respond sufficiently quickly in the event of a sudden surprise attack.

Chair: Julian Brazier.

Mr Brazier: I think that has answered my question, too. Shall we go on to Gisela?

Q258 Chair: General, can I just pin you down on this? In terms of the command structure, the flexibility, the response time, can we have a little more detail on why it would be difficult for NATO to respond and what it would require to respond?

General Shirreff: NATO has plans and operational instructions and has thought this through. It has regional plans against a number of eventualities, a number of contingencies. Clearly, one would not want to go into the operational detail of that. Anyway, I am not sighted on that and I have been away for three months. I am not aware of what has happened since I left.

That said, there is a standing command structure. The command structure is exercised regularly but there is quite a significant difference, as you will appreciate, between conducting a pre-planned exercise—which is good as it is important to develop and exercise that muscle memory—and having the means and the wherewithal to conduct the sort of defence that we are talking about here.

For any sort of operation, NATO has to go through a force-generation process. NATO owns no troops of its own, less a small airborne warning and control system detachment and some control and information system capability. For any sort of operation, NATO has to go through a force-generation process, which means going to the nations and that means taking time. The other point, of course, is that NATO does have the NATO response force, which is a force by land, sea, air and special forces. That is at readiness and is trained, though again, relatively small. In the sudden surprise attack scenario that I assume we are talking about it is highly unlikely that the NATO response force could be stood to sufficiently quickly.

The other aspect of the NATO response force, and where it has come up against problems again and again, is that it lacks credibility, because the North Atlantic Council has never been able to agree on its deployment. It depends on a consensus agreement for all 28 nations before it can be deployed.

Q259 Bob Stewart: If you, as a general, wanted to defend a place how would you exercise an Article 5 responsibility towards the Baltic states, assuming you could start from a clean slate? By that, I mean would you put some troops permanently on the ground there? Or would you exercise troops there? Or would you have contingency plans to go in there within 24 hours? How would you, as a general, actually defend somewhere that is very difficult to defend?

General Shirreff: All of the above. It starts with a credible Article 5 conventional—and indeed nuclear, potentially—deterrent capability. It begins and ends with deterrence. Deterrence, as we all know, requires capability and the ability to communicate that capability to a potential adversary. I think NATO is now in a position where, in order to adequately defend the Baltic states, to send a very strong signal to any potential adversary—obviously, if Russia’s behaviour over Crimea is anything to go by, I think the Baltic states are standing into danger—NATO needs to think through very carefully, not only deterrence; it needs to think through the issue of stationed forces in the Baltic and the issue of regular training in the Baltic. That is in a sense, coming back to your question, all of the above.

Q260 Bob Stewart: And flexible response.

General Shirreff: I think flexible response is a part of deterrence, exactly.

Q261 Bob Stewart: Tactical nuclear weapons, sub-strategic nuclear weapon usage, as well.

General Shirreff: The concern I would have is that in the absence of credible conventional deterrents, the only option immediately at hand is to ramp up to nuclear, and nobody wants that.

Q262 Mrs Moon: Britain has no ice-enabled capability—

General Shirreff: Sorry?

Q263 Mrs Moon: Britain has no ice-enabled capability ships. Does NATO? If we needed to go into the Arctic sea, is that a weakness?

General Shirreff: You catch me on a point of detail. NATO has no forces of its own, but I am pretty certain that the Norwegians would have some sort of ice-capable ships. That would be an issue going back to the point I made to the Chairman about force generation. If NATO required the ability to operate in the Arctic it would depend on those nations with Arctic-capable forces to provide the means with which to operate.

Q264 Ms Stuart: Capability and money. The whole debate is about 2% spend on NATO—it is an arbitrary figure, but is nevertheless a good benchmark. Can you say a bit more about how NATO could build up its capacity in terms of actual monetary requirement?

General Shirreff: The 2% of GDP spent on defence is the NATO agreed minimum. As we know, up until recently there were only three nations that were spending that minimum 2% of GDP on defence. I think they have since been joined by Estonia. You put your finger on one of the major Achilles heels of NATO, which is the European and Canadian under-spending on defence and the dependence on the United States as a result. The fact is that if you look back 25 years at the balance between the United States and the rest of the alliance, spend on defence was pretty much 50/50. It now sits at something like 75% United States and 25% Europe and Canada.

How do you build up that capability and put that situation right? The obvious answer is that you get the European nations to spend more than 2%, or spend more, on defence. There are a number of large European nations who are well below the 2% figure. That is clearly a political issue for the nations concerned. NATO is working very hard and the Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, is very consistent on this with Defence Ministers and chiefs of defence that Europe needs to put its house in order. There has been a succession of American Secretaries of State who have, rightly I think, criticised Europe for not stepping up to the mark.

There are a number of measures and we will see what comes out of this year's summit. Smart defence has been tried—that was very much the watchword three or four years ago—and there are other ways of skinning this particular cat. Options include, for example, bilateral agreements, such as the UK-French defence agreement, whereby groups or like-minded nations pool and share resources and build up capability that way. But the bottom line is that it is about percentage of GDP spent on defence.

Q265 Ms Stuart: May I press you a little bit further? If it is a political question, which it is, there is a narrative that we have to put to our voters as to why they should spend it. Would I say to them that we need to spend more on soldiers, intelligence or hard kit? What do I tell my voters that we ought to be buying more of?

General Shirreff: I would precede the detail by saying to your voters that we live in a new defence and security paradigm in Europe now. The fact is that since the invasion of Crimea, the situation has changed. Russia was a strategic partner for NATO, but I think is now a strategic adversary of NATO. We need to send a very clear signal to Russia, “Thus far and absolutely no further.” We need to ensure that the alliance is locked and solid, has the capability to defend it and sends a strong deterrent message.

As far as capabilities are concerned, I think it covers a broad suite—particularly, I would suggest, those critical enablers that join up warfare, which NATO is particularly lacking and on which it depends principally on the Americans for. For example, in the Libyan campaign, the critical shortage was tankers, EW, and other forms of enabler capability. The nations were prepared to produce fighter planes, and some were prepared to produce bombers as well, but it is the capabilities that join these together to produce a coherent force that are in shorter supply.

Q266 Ms Stuart: Do the other witnesses want to add to that, because the question of what they need to buy is quite important?

James Sherr: May I add one point? I would be surprised if Mr Donnelly did not wish to add a point as well. If the NATO members simply spend more, but do not reconsider priorities and defence roles, the effort is unlikely to be directly relevant to the problem we face. When Russia attacked Georgia in 2008, its best brigade was in Iraq. This was because NATO insisted that they, at great cost, reprofile their forces away from territorial defence and towards supporting us in our expeditionary activities. The same thing has happened in the Baltic states and in Poland. There has been a lot of concern about this in many NATO countries in Europe, so this is an issue that I think we really have to reconsider.

Chris Donnelly: Bringing together those two previous points, for 20-odd years the UK and NATO European partners have based their force structuring, and how they have developed their armed forces and how they have spent their money, on the premise that we will not use force in Europe and we will not use military power for political ends. All our structures were based on that, and they were based on having Russia as a partner in that agreement, and Russia has just overturned that agreement. Russia has sanctioned the use of force to destabilise neighbouring countries and to change borders. As General Sir Richard said, that has changed everything.

The second point is that Russia has done this in such a way that, although the individual elements of Russian strategy can be traced back 100 years in many cases, there is nothing novel. Putting the package together as it has, has presented us with a new form of warfare to deal with. It is a form of warfare that integrates the use of conventional and unconventional force; integrates the use of force with non-military tools of war—cyber, economic, political; integrates the whole with an immensely powerful information warfare programme; and is backed up by an ideology. This is a change in the nature of conflict. The aim of the whole operation is to break the integrity of the state—in this case, Ukraine—before there is any need to cross its borders with an invasion force and trigger an Article 5 situation, were it a NATO country. So we are seeing a form of warfare that is operating under our reaction threshold.

James made the point that our force structures have been designed to persuade all NATO countries to develop forces capable of out-of-area operations—small, highly competent, deployable, regular—so they could go to Afghanistan and do a useful job. That has denuded countries of the ability to have a mobilisable territorial defence capability on the grounds that they were never going to need this again, were they? Well, unfortunately, that is not now true.

Q267 Bob Stewart: Chris, I have to challenge you on that. It is not so different from subversion and conventional warfare in the Second World War; it is just an extension of it. It is not new.

Chair: Chris, sorry, I'm going to be a bit bossy for a second. I will bring in Julian and then Bob, just to keep the sequence.

Q268 Mr Brazier: Both halves of my question come straight out of that last answer. What should we be doing about our intelligence and our own information warfare structures? Actually, I will give you the second half, too, to think about. Within the information warfare aspect, what should we be doing about our own populations? I doubt if more than 1% of my constituents know that the Baltic states are part of NATO. Whether the British public see our interests as engaged there at all seems to be a key question too.

Chris Donnelly: In my opinion, what is happening makes it more and more important to increase our intelligence capabilities—and within NATO, I would say increasing the indicators and reviving the warnings process—and to do it for new concepts of warfare. We are no longer just interested in the kinetic—the tanks, ships and planes—but in how Russia and other countries are using these new tools to achieve their political objectives. It is warfare below our threshold of attention.

In terms of our own population, NATO's policy has always been that its information programme is designed principally for its own countries' populations, and NATO has always been critical of many of its member nations' failure to broadcast internally information about NATO and about the situation. Spending 13 years in NATO, I was very alert to that situation. But that puts the ball firmly in the UK's court on what to do.

Mr Brazier: I thought James Sherr was going to say something on that.

Chair: Sorry, Julian, may I just give Chris an opportunity to answer Bob Stewart? Then we will bring in James.

Chris Donnelly: Bob, you are absolutely right. It isn't new as far as the Russians are concerned, but I think it's new to us. I think we have forgotten the experience that you have just pointed to. I think historians are aware of it, but if you walk around Whitehall today, you don't get a sense that we understand how important this is. I think we have lost our collective memory about it.

Bob Stewart: I think I agree with you. It is the same with the collective response too, and all the writings of the '60s. We seem to have forgotten that. I spoke to the Commander ARRC the other day, and he said that they don't practise it. They are not practising it.

Chris Donnelly: We have lost our expertise.

James Sherr: May I briefly come back to the point raised by Mr Brazier? I am speaking very subjectively now. One thing I don't see today in most NATO member states is what we used to see in the Cold War, which is political leaders making an effort to educate the public about the kind of world we live in—what these things mean, or what the consequences would mean of something like this—and explaining to them what happens if your reputation is damaged and what global actors take an interest in that.

One thing that has impressed me is the concern expressed by the Japanese, the Saudis, the Israelis and other significant players about how we respond to this. It is about reputation. As I think this Committee knows, the UK is one of those countries that have given Ukraine a solemn undertaking that this would never happen in the Budapest memorandum as result of

Ukraine unilaterally disarming what was then the world's third largest nuclear force. Politicians and national leaders used to invest the time in doing this. My perception is that we have got out of that habit, so the public's response is perfectly rational.

General Shirreff: I have three points. First of all, on intelligence, I absolutely agree with everything that Chris said. But I would also highlight the fact that what the crisis during and immediately after Crimea demonstrated, particularly when Putin was massing large troop numbers on the Ukrainian border, was the extent to which we have lost that granularity and ability to identify, track and follow specific formations.

This, in a sense, goes back to the world that I knew as a young officer—the Cold War—when we were able to do that. We were able to understand what was going on. That capability, as well as the ability to understand and sense that irregular side of the house, is important.

My second point leads on from that, which is training. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of training. It is not just exercising soldiers; it is top to bottom. It is politicians to troopers. It is going back to the days, for example, when, on a regular basis, NATO would exercise Wintex and Governments got involved. Mrs Thatcher got involved, although I do not think that her officials particularly liked getting involved. If we can do that, we can develop a muscle memory of political leaders who have to make some really tough decisions.

I go back to the point about what Article 5 means in the 21st century, because we still look at it through Cold War spectacles. Where is this irregular capability? At what point is a threshold being crossed? Is cyber a threshold? I am sure that the way to think this through is by setting up proper exercises and proper training, which trains not only forces at the sharp end but the political leadership as well.

In a sense, the third point follows on from that. Again, I absolutely reinforce James Sherr's point about informing and educating the public. I do not think that people understand what collective defence means. We are told on a regular basis that NATO is the cornerstone of our defence. The implication of that is that the defence of the UK starts on the Latvian-Russian border. I do not think that people really understand that, and they need to.

Mr Brazier: Absolutely.

Q269 Mr Gray: We have been ranging quite widely. Can I bring you back to the Latvian-Russian border and your earlier remarks, General? You were very plain in saying that you felt that we should have a permanent basing in the Baltic states somewhere as a deterrence measure. Why has NATO not said or done so before now? That was the first time that I have heard anyone say that that was a good idea.

General Shirreff: Let me be clear: my answer was, in response to the question of how you deter, that from a military perspective, the only way you can absolutely guarantee deterring is to have troops in place. That means some form of permanent basing. Whether that is rotational—I do not see us going back to the days of BAR garrisons in Estonia or Latvia, but some form of presence must be there. Why hasn't NATO said so? Because the nations of NATO have not agreed it.

Q270 Mr Gray: But is it something that we should be pressing for? This Committee will produce a report eventually, so should we, possibly, head towards a conclusion recommending some form of basing, whether permanent or rotational or barracks-based or possibly Germany-based?

General Shirreff: My view is that, to be absolutely credible and send a strong signal to Russia that NATO means what it says by collective defence, NATO has got to have some form of permanently stationed forces in areas of threat. I would not include Germany in this, because frankly, moving troops from central Germany to the Baltic states is as much of a challenge as moving them from the UK to the Baltic states. I do not think that stationed troops in Germany does anything for this at all.

Q271 Mr Gray: So you would not go along with General Lord Dannatt, who suggested that that was a logical conclusion to Ukraine.

General Shirreff: I think it makes no strategic sense at all.

Q272 Mr Gray: Tell me one more thing. On the other side of the border, what do you make of the Zapad 2013 division-level exercises that the Russians have been conducting during the past couple of years? Are they sending messages, or are they preparing for invasion? What are they doing?

General Shirreff: Zapad 2013 last year sent some pretty strong signals. To mount an exercise, claiming that it is a counter-terrorist operation, and then to land an amphibious division is a pretty large hammer to crack a pretty small nut.

I was in Latvia in September on the back of some other NATO training that we were doing, during Zapad. The Latvians were extremely worried by the very high levels of Russian air activity that was taking place on the Russian-Latvian border, which was nothing short of intimidation. There were fleets of Ilyushin-76 troop-carrying planes approaching the border, veering off, coming back and veering off, just to rattle the Latvians. It highlighted the fact that this was Russia sending some pretty strong signals about its ability to deploy forces, should it want to.

Q273 Mr Gray: A final question. We will come back to Article 5 in a minute in perhaps more detail. Would you not agree that there is a very sharp difference between the kind of force deployment that we need in the Baltic states if we believe that there is going to be a proper, conventional Article 5-type invasion—if, for example, they try to build a passageway through to Kaliningrad, which is fairly obvious and straightforward—and the kind of force deployment that we would need if we had Ukraine-type men in green uniforms of platoon strength sitting in a wood somewhere, which presumably would be much more difficult? That makes it much harder. How do you deter that? Supposing we had a division that we were going to deploy on exercise in Latvia, that would not affect the little green men in green suits in the wood, would it?

General Shirreff: I think you need a complete suite of deterrent capability, recognising that the bottom line is that you have to be able to fight, and that requires hard-edged conventional capability, recognising the potential for the infiltration and building up of militia. But that is where support to Latvia, support to the Baltic states by its allies and a strong show of resolve and any assistance that we can give are needed, because ultimately it remains an internal matter for the Baltic states. But to prevent and avoid the sort of scenarios where we see the build-up of what you might call Russian linguistic imperialism, using the pretext of stirring up discontent among Russian-speaking minorities and the like, clearly requires a rather more subtle and multifaceted approach than just the capability to deploy conventional weapons.

Q274 Mr Havard: We have jumped around all over the place. We are collapsing things together. Can I just be clear? We are talking about Article 5, but a lot of the things you are talking about are more related to collective security than they are to collective defence. The nation state which perceives itself under a threat of whatever description makes a claim for help and then there is a response. Ukraine is not in NATO, so it didn't happen under NATO. So we are asking what NATO should be doing. What should NATO be doing at the summit in the first week in September to address that question? Wouldn't information operations be part of that collective security call rather than a collective defence call?

General Shirreff: Focusing on the summit, there is a requirement for a very strong signal from NATO about Article 5, which remains the foundation of NATO—an attack on one is an attack on all—and that NATO is committed to collective defence and is prepared to do whatever is necessary to ensure that it has the capability to defend all the members of the alliance, should that be required.

Q275 Mr Havard: All the members of the alliance?

General Shirreff: Fundamentally. Absolutely. Because at the end of the day, NATO is a club, and NATO can do a certain amount to support, assist, encourage and advise Ukraine, which is a valued partner of NATO and has conducted operations in Afghanistan, the Balkans and, indeed, the Indian ocean, but Ukraine is not a member of NATO so it clearly does not qualify for collective defence under the Washington treaty.

Q276 Mr Havard: But what about its aspirational additional membership? What are NATO's responsibilities there?

General Shirreff: NATO remains an alliance open to all, but any nation who wants to join NATO clearly has to satisfy certain preconditions and pass certain tests, and that remains an issue between NATO and the nations concerned. But the bottom line remains that NATO must demonstrate strong capability as an alliance and ensure above all that the alliance is protected first and foremost, because that is the purpose of the alliance.

Q277 Mr Havard: You have said that Russia is now an enemy. You have said that the permanent or persistent—or whatever it is going to be—basing should be in the NATO countries and, presumably, possibly in aspirational additional countries too. There is the Act between Russia, NATO and the Northern Council, isn't there? So effectively are you saying that that is already in the bin, as it were, and is not worth revitalising—it should just be formally put to the sword? What is NATO supposed to say here?

General Shirreff: The first thing I am saying is that Russia is a strategic adversary, which is slightly different from saying it's an enemy.

Mr Havard: Okay. That's good. The language is important.

General Shirreff: I repeat what I said. I am saying that NATO has got to be capable of defending itself—that is absolutely the purpose of the alliance—and that NATO should remain open and will, I am sure, remain open to new members seeking to join. We may or may not get decisions at the next summit about that. I am absolutely not saying that NATO has any duty to defend or to station forces on the territory of aspirational members, because if they are not in the alliance, if they are not in the club, they don't qualify for the benefits of the club. It's as simple as that.

Q278 Mr Havard: That is a really important statement. I think we have to be clear about what the differences are—

General Shirreff: I think NATO is very clear about that.

Q279 Mr Havard: Simply because the Budapest thing was not a NATO agreement.

General Shirreff: Exactly. The Budapest memorandum, as you say, is a separate agreement between different nations on a bilateral basis.

Q280 Mr Havard: Could I ask you to say yes to this question? Should we be investing more in the intelligence capacity that we have? We seem to be disinvesting in the Defence Intelligence Staff. We seem to be disinvesting in psychological operations. The Strategic Effects Branch seems to be—what should we be doing to address the question about information warfare and information operations?

General Shirreff: The answer is—you will get a yes out of me, but yes to everything. Yes to an increase in capability across the board, in which, of course, intelligence and information is very important.

James Sherr: May I briefly deal with the points in reverse order? Mr Havard, irrespective of whether a European state is inside NATO or not, we do have a *prima facie* interest in principles that even the Soviet Union accepted in the Helsinki Final Act and which Russia co-authored in the Paris charter and a whole host of other international treaties and commitments. These define the post-Cold War system. If we now say, "Well, it's over; we shouldn't take it seriously any more," I am far from certain as to whether NATO will hold

together as an alliance. This is an article of faith in Europe. So there is a direct interest in what happens in Ukraine and Georgia, from my point of view, although obviously not, as the General has said, any kind of direct military obligation.

The second point, which I think one of your own colleagues made, is that what is demonstrated in Ukraine is Russia's investment in a model of force and of war that can effectively cripple a state and achieve key strategic goals before we even register what is happening. That is why the Baltic states are so apprehensive.

Finally, if I may come back to the question about Zapad 2013, which was the third exercise of this kind, the reason why the Russians make such an investment in these exercises is that they believe in the scenario. This is a scenario involving escalation, dominance at all levels—conventional as well as nuclear—and it is designed to achieve decisive results in such a way as to discourage any meaningful NATO reaction. It is as much a deterrent as it is an offensive response. It is more than a signal.

Q281 Mrs Moon: We seem to have very clear ideas of what Article 5 implies if it is traditional warfare, so if the exercise actually came over the borders, we would recognise what was happening. Do we need to perhaps use the Newport summit to look at how we write into Article 5 and make very clear what would constitute an attack if it was cyber, fomentation of civil unrest or psychological warfare? Do we need clear guidelines? The alarm bells start ringing. The attention that seems to have been totally around our economic and financial relationships with Russia moves into a different realm.

Chair: May I, General, bring in Chris Donnelly for a second and then go back to you?

Chris Donnelly: I would have something to add to that, but perhaps General Shirreff should go first.

General Shirreff: As I said earlier, it is important to think these issues through: to understand the complexity of them and develop that muscle memory so that our leaders—our political leadership—understand and recognise what constitutes a call on Article 5. I would be leery about writing things down in a prescriptive way because, if you do you can be absolutely certain that the one thing that will happen when you are faced with it is something you have not thought about in the first place. It is much better to talk, think, exercise and discuss around the problem rather than try to second-guess precisely and write it down because that is too prescriptive.

Q282 Mrs Moon: My worry is that it will just be missed. It will go under the radar again and we will not see it being ramped up.

General Shirreff: The beauty of Article 5 is its simplicity. The more you water that simplicity down, the less strength it has as a foundation on which NATO is based.

Chris Donnelly: I would like to add a nuance to what the general has just said. It may be a time to ignore Bismarck's advice to never look too closely into the contents of treaties and sausages. If you look at the Washington treaty—an admirably simple document—and

you look at Article 5, what it says is “armed attack”. All we need to do is remove the word “armed”. It does not change the simplicity but it creates ambiguity, and ambiguity is the essence of deterrence.

Bob Stewart: That is exactly what you want.

Mrs Moon: Yes, that would make me a lot more comfortable.

Q283 Ms Stuart: May I return to something more specific: the Black sea and the kind of security environment—the new one—that we have created? Our colleague, Gerald Howarth, reckons that we ought to have a Type 45 destroyer permanently parked in the Black sea to say, “We’re here and we’re not going.” Could you address two things? The security environment in the Black sea has changed; how do you think we should respond to that? Does the way Russia has dealt with frozen conflicts over the past few years give us any indication of what might happen next?

James Sherr: I think we first need to enhance awareness about just how radically the strategic environment has changed in the Black sea. The Russian Black Sea fleet has, in the past, been constrained by various agreements about what it could and could not do as far operation, modernisation and the kinds of weaponry—nuclear and conventional—deployed there. Those constraints no longer exist. A massive modernisation programme has been announced. That includes, in short order, the deployment of Russia’s most advanced long-range area denial weapons, which affect a large part of Turkish air space and extend right out to the Bosphorus and, perhaps, beyond. It raises new questions about the vulnerability of any surface assets that we send into the Black sea. Turkey is gradually beginning to understand that it is the big loser in this crisis—as if it did not already have enough problems of its own on its southern borders. Therefore, it is a major sea change that plays out into the greater Middle East as well. Iran is one of the winners in all this, and there is an extra-European dimension to it. I don’t know whether the General or Chris Donnelly want to follow that up.

Q284 Ms Stuart: Coming back to Bismarck, it always used to be that Turkey is on the side of whoever protects it from Russia. Does that still hold?

James Sherr: That is what is extraordinary. For 20 years, Russia successfully invested in changing the character of its relationship with Turkey—it had become a very friendly relationship. But between the Syria conflict and this, they have become completely rattled, and a number of people are starting to revisit questions, just as we are, that we thought were part of a bygone era.

Chris Donnelly: To reinforce what James just said, not only has it completely changed the strategic balance in the whole of the Middle East region, but it is inherently extremely destabilising. In the same way, when Russia has held snap exercises with more troops than we have in the British Army, that, too, is inherently destabilising. It forces us to acknowledge that the post-Cold War assumptions that we made have been overturned. Those assumptions underlined the previous strategic defence and security review and might underline the next SDSR if we don’t do something about it.

Mr Havard: I couldn't hear that.

Chris Donnelly: We must remind ourselves that the post-Cold War assumptions, which Russia overturned by creating this instability, underlined the rationale for the previous SDSR, and, unless we do something about it, they will underline the rationale for the next one.

Q285 Ms Stuart: Should we send a Type 45 into the Black sea?

James Sherr: I think if you did—

General Shirreff: I am going to duck that one. The point I would make about the Black sea is that it is clearly a strategically vital region. Of course, you don't have the Russian-speaking populations in NATO nations in the same way that you do in the Baltic states, so there is not the excuse that we saw deployed in Crimea. Nevertheless, it remains a critical area to keep a handle on and, in particular, to keep surveillance on. Rather than deploy a Type 45—rather than committing force before it is necessary to do so—I would find other ways of understanding what is going on.

The other point I would make is about the importance of capacity building and partnerships in the Black sea. Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey are clearly part of NATO. Georgia is a great friend of NATO. It is committed hugely in Afghanistan and has done some heroic stuff there, 30% of its territory is occupied by Russia and there are the frozen conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We should not forget that. Georgia remains an aspirant member of NATO. That is a matter for the NATO summit, but until that political decision is made, NATO can do more to capacity-build and increase capability, and, as part of that, keep an eye on what is happening there.

Q286 Ms Stuart: Do you want to say more about the frozen conflicts and the way Russia deals with them?

Chair: Can we take Chris Donnelly?

Chris Donnelly: The Russians are demonstrating that they now have the capacity to unfreeze the frozen conflicts, move the situation in their favour and freeze them again. We are seeing a concept of war that is not only as I have described, but that is constantly increasing the level of activity and getting us used to accepting it, so that we become like the frog in a bucket of water, warming up slowly and not realising that we are accepting more and more that we should not be. That is the danger, so first we need more intelligence, and secondly it is crucial that we revise our capacity for thinking and acting strategically—for understanding what is going on and its implications.

I think your point about the Black sea and the Type 45 is well made. First, we have an international water. Secondly, we have a supply route for countries such as Ukraine to diversify their energy supply—into Odessa, say—which is crucial for that country to keep free, so the international community must ensure that it is not stopped. Thirdly, we have the

whole essence of how to deter this new form of warfare that is coming in under our radar: how do we dissuade the Russians from pursuing these sorts of activities?

One way is some form of standing force from NATO—some presence or tripwire. A second is to develop some form of reaction force so that we can react if we have to react symmetrically—we don't have to, but if we had to—to a kind of snap exercise. Thirdly, I cannot support strongly enough the General's point about the need to exercise this now and to create something in the modern form that we used to do in WINTEX, which brought the military, civilians and politicians together at the very highest levels to ask what we will do if this happens—how do we prevent this from escalating and becoming a new cold war?

Q287 Mr Havard: May I come back to this? To me, the strategic focus has already moved. The Russians are responding to all that. They have this interest in the Black sea and the possible destabilisation of the south-east Mediterranean basin. You can see all that happening and they are responding. A criticism might be that we are not responding as quickly as perhaps we should—but park that for a minute; I want to progress this thing.

I asked earlier about who is and is not in NATO, what you do and how you lay down capacity because of exactly the point you just made, General. You effectively talked about the defence engagement strategy that we should develop with the Bulgarians or whoever; people who are not necessarily directly involved—the Georgians are a good example. We seem to have a strategy developing where NATO has obligations to do what NATO does and NATO should configure, and then we have the UK, and all it does, presumably, is deploy its own strategy with non-NATO countries through defence engagement. Is that essentially what is being said here?

General Shirreff: Yes, but I would say more. What I think you have put your finger on is the importance of partnerships to NATO. NATO is a regional security organisation, but the security challenges it faces are global. We have been focusing very much on NATO and Ukraine and the changing paradigm in Europe. Nevertheless, look at Afghanistan: there were 28 nations and at the peak 22 partner nations, from as far afield as Mongolia, El Salvador, Finland, Sweden and down to New Zealand and Australia. There is clearly a benefit for NATO in security terms, because it is a way of accessing what are, in the case of some partners, very capable forces, and of spreading the political risk and getting more political buy-in internationally. And, of course, the partners get something out of it as well. The same applies in the crisis we are discussing at the moment.

Of course, we have not talked about two NATO partners in the north, Finland and Sweden, who are directly involved as well. The bottom line, of course, remains collective defence—Article 5, as we have discussed—but that should not preclude NATO from providing support, advice and assistance on a bilateral basis with other partners, should that be required. However, the bottom line remains that they do not get the full guarantee.

Q288 Mr Havard: And is that what you get out of this summit?

General Shirreff: What, that they should get the full—

Q289 Mr Havard: No, a general description.

General Shirreff: Out of the summit I would like to see Partnership for Peace, which was established during the 1990s and has proved very successful in bringing in not least a number of new members of NATO. I would like to see—I think, frankly, it has got pretty tired, and there is a real requirement to invigorate it with a partnership for peace and security. That raises a much greater strategic issue, which is: how do we defend and protect—it is your security point—

Mr Havard: It is.

General Shirreff: How do we achieve security in this increasingly dangerous world when a threat of Boko Haram in Nigeria, for example, could destabilise Nigeria and have an impact on the Nigerian diaspora here in the UK? How do you achieve security or reduce the threat of dramas or crises emerging out of the Middle East and dangerous places in the world before you have to respond to them? I think we have to make an assumption that the sort of industrial-scale deployments we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan are not going to be politically acceptable to electorates and therefore to politicians. Much better to think about preventing a crisis in the first place. Through partnerships, there may be a way forward there.

Chair: I'm afraid there are a lot of colleagues coming in and not a great deal of time, because of Prime Minister's questions.

Q290 Derek Twigg: I have two questions. Do you think that the relationship between politicians and NATO is dysfunctional in terms of ensuring proper direction to NATO, particularly in times of crisis? Do you think there is a problem there? General Shirreff, you have made the point before about politicians getting more involved in the processes, but do you think there is dysfunction in that relationship?

General Shirreff: No, I do not. I took over as DSACEUR on 4 March 2011, the day the North Atlantic Council made the decision to initiate the no-fly zone over Libya. What followed was two, three—I cannot remember how many—days of intense discussion around the NAC table, much of it pretty inflamed at times. What I think you saw there was the 28 nations of the alliance debating, discussing, having major differences, but ultimately forming a consensus. That consensus remained absolutely solid all the way through the spring and summer of 2011, even at a time when, frankly, we were not sure how the Libyan campaign was going to end. There you saw the strength of NATO, the strength of consensus and the strength of the political system that we have got. It is ponderous and it is a bit slow. Having said that, in the Libya thing, the fact that NATO took over command of the operation and was carrying out operations 13 days from the United Nations Security Council resolution being signed in New York is an indication that, despite the fact that it was slow, it was pretty good. I am an optimist on that one.

Q291 Derek Twigg: Any comments on that?

James Sherr: One of the complexities of the world we now live in—what distinguishes this Europe, even if our relationship with Russia becomes a lot worse, from Cold War Europe—is that our economies are interrelated in a way they were not before. I think that does create, at the political level, more fundamental arguments about where national interests well and truly lie than the kind we had in the Cold War. I could take it on faith when I was working in the institute that Chris Donnelly directed that the assessments in the round from military intelligence and counter-intelligence people in Germany would broadly chime in with the thinking of their political establishments—I would not single out Germany on its own; I would say that about many countries. One has no business taking that for granted today. The political level now presents a set of problems that I do not think existed when we last saw the Soviet Union as a military adversary.

Q292 Derek Twigg: Do you have any view on that, Chris?

Chris Donnelly: Only that my experience is that when the chips are down, the politicians are really capable of making very difficult decisions very quickly. I do not see it as the politicians' issue, albeit that I would like to see more of the exercising of more knowledge and understanding.

Q293 Derek Twigg: Okay, having said that, I think there is a common view that to get the public or even Parliament to support any further interventions or military action—unless there was an immediate threat to our borders—is almost impossible in this day and age, particularly following the Syrian vote. My next question is: given that—the experience of the Syrian vote is an example—do you think the military advice being given to politicians, not just in this country but through NATO, is good enough for politicians to be able to put a credible case for intervention to the public and to Parliament? Are there improvements that could be made? It could be argued that part of the reason that people did not vote for the Syrian intervention was that the case did not stand up as being credible and was not explained that way. I wonder whether the military advice and the expertise that exists is good enough or can be improved to give politicians a much better chance of persuading Parliament and the country to take military action in certain circumstances—for instance, if something further happened in the Baltic states.

General Shirreff: I will limit my comments to NATO and a general point. As far as NATO is concerned, I think the military advice given to the North Atlantic Council is good and has been well thought through. The advice is shaped at a strategic level and then goes through the military committee and the chairman of the military committee. I think the military advice is, as you would expect, military advice. I think it is the duty of the senior soldiers, sailors and airmen—this is the general point—to give professional military advice which is aware of the political context in which it is given, but does not seek to second-guess and make life easier for politicians.

James Sherr: I think there needs to be a deep and protracted investment—which is not costly: it is about intellectual resources and political commitment—in regenerating expertise, not only about Russia, but these wider questions about the changing shape of conflict. The good news is that I have been struck by the extent the conflict in Ukraine has

been a crash course for all the military and civilian professionals that I am in touch with in NATO and at national levels. I think it is a question of how one reinforces that and gives substance to it. I think we need to make that effort.

Chris Donnelly: Except at ministerial conferences every few months, the day-to-day running of NATO does not involve politicians; it involves civil servants. I went to NATO in 1989, and there were 16 member nations then. Of the ambassadors sitting round the table for the weekly meetings, more than half of them had serious military experience, and two of them—the Canadian and the Turk—had been chiefs of defence. When I left in 2003, of the 20-odd nations then sitting around the NATO table, not one of the ambassadors had serious military experience. The level of military advice has remained constant; the ability of the individuals to absorb it has fallen. This is not a thing for politicians—because politicians know that when the buck stops, it stops with them—but in the intervening period, I think NATO has become a little slower to react to the warning stimuli. That is James’ point: some educational process could, at little or no expense, seriously improve NATO’s sensitivity.

Q294 Mr Brazier: I have two questions, which both stem from that. Following Mr Twigg’s questions, surely the biggest challenge of all for NATO in the conference and the follow-up is to close the gap with the people? The reality is that to suggest reinforcing the Baltic and possibly even fighting a war there now would command very little support among the public—even among those elements who know that the Baltic states are part of NATO. We have got an organisation where four fifths of the members come nowhere near the spending targets, including two of the three Baltic states, and where one of the very few members that is spending enough—France—is selling warships to the Russians. Do we not need a bit more of an existential focus at this conference to ask, “What is this organisation actually for, and are we carrying the people with us in what is a collection of democracies?”?

General Shirreff: You say it’s a challenge for NATO; of course it is a challenge for the nations, because the nations make up NATO.

Q295 Mr Brazier: But the conference is a conference of the nations that make up NATO, and that is why—

General Shirreff: But ultimately it goes back to the point that I think the nations own the responsibility. Clearly, they pool their resources and their capabilities together within the overall alliance, but the alliance is no more or less than the nations concerned. So the challenge is the challenge for the nations to educate, and it goes back to our points about educating and ensuring that people—electorates—understand the reality of the defence situation they face.

James Sherr: Mr Brazier, in the time I have worked in Ukraine there have been two NATO offices there, which have been very competently staffed and very energetic. One of them deals purely with these questions: what is NATO and how does it work? The result is that much of that community in Ukraine understands much more than a lot of our communities at this point. What effort is put into the Atlantic Council of the United Kingdom? Who is funding it? Has anyone heard of it? We have discussed the wider question

about the direct involvement of political leaders in this kind of process, so I just underscore the importance of the point that you are making.

Q296 Mr Brazier: I was just going to come to that, but the key point is that we have actually got the nations there at the conference, with our own Prime Minister chairing it, in a few weeks' time. And this surely must be the point when we ask the much more basic question: is this still a serious organisation that means what it says? And that must mean asking some pretty hard questions, and the French continuing to sell ships to the Russians while there is a serious threat to three of the members is at one extreme end of it, and what we are all doing to persuade our people that this is still a real organisation must be at the other end.

May I ask my second question, which follows directly from Professor Sherr's remarks? I am all for having a NATO political interface in each country, and getting that going again in a way that it used to exist and, to some extent, still exists in America; they didn't have a national problem with putting in some tripwire forces. However, doesn't it have to go a bit deeper than that? My concern is, as Chris Donnelly said, the almost-all-regular model for the forces, and most of that is concentrated on a relatively small number of bases. With the best will in the world, any Government in this country will have serious difficulties reconnecting defence with the nation, because the nation is no longer involved and mostly doesn't know anyone who is involved in it. Is there a view on that?

General Shirreff: We have a situation where peace is seen as the default setting, and that when wars happen, they happen a long way away in countries of which we know very little, like Iraq or Afghanistan, and in which—like it or not, and by design or default—electorates and therefore politicians have decided that their spending priorities are health, education and social welfare, rather than defence. So defence is seen as a declining industry, or a declining business. Now that sits not with defence, I would suggest; I think it sits here, with you guys.

Mr Brazier: Absolutely.

General Shirreff: So it's your task.

James Sherr: Let's be brutally honest with ourselves: we have publics in all NATO countries who have become very cynical about what their Governments say to them about war. We have war-weary countries. I think the message that needs to come out of all this is that we are not talking about some kind of a slippery slope designed to fight a war with Russia; we are not talking about that kind of situation at all. We are talking about the military dimension required to reinforce and protect our fundamental political and security interests. That will not be an easy sell, but the challenge has to be directly faced and presented. When you talk about the risks to the Baltic states, people immediately start asking, "How can we possibly fight a war with Russia?"

Chris Donnelly: It is also more difficult because the whole information space has changed fundamentally since we last had to do this. It is very difficult to now find any competent journalists who understand defence and can pass this on. The impact of traditional newspapers on people's attitudes and understanding is seriously diminished, compared with

even a decade ago. The MOD, 20 years ago, sponsored 11 defence fellowships—I think that was the maximum—around the country, which created nuclei in our universities of people doing independent, in-depth work on defence and a source of serious information that was completely trusted by the public and the élites of the country. They have all gone because there have been savings and funding cuts. That kind of expertise in transmitting an understanding to the people needs to be regenerated.

Q297 Mrs Moon: Chris, you talked earlier about ambassadors not having a political understanding or background. I am not surprised, because our focus seems to have quite deliberately shifted over the years to pulling Russia closer in by building economic ties. The feeling was that Russia would eventually become much friendlier and part of the club, and that we would engage and have a much easier relationship with them. We now have very strong economic ties with Russia which influence our ability to deal with them militarily. In particular—I would welcome your comments on this—we have close energy needs that are met by the Russians. What are the implications for our ability to react when Russia could cut off our energy supplies, right across Europe, which would have a devastating impact on our economies and ability to react? At a recent Chatham House conference on globalisation and world order, I was struck that the German representative said there was an urgent need for a European Union joined-up energy policy to build protection. Would you agree with that? How do we tackle our interdependence, economically and energy-wise, with Russia?

James Sherr: There is no area in which we are dependent on Russia where Russia is not even more dependent on us. That has been a factor in the change of tactics we are seeing on the ground in Ukraine. The Kremlin is not delusional. There is an understanding that Russia needs the European market and technology from advanced member states. In an odd way, that means we can worry less about what might go wrong. Energy is not a gift from Russia; it is a vital business for the functioning of their economy. What we can and must do is diminish the extent of our dependence so that Russia can no longer turn it into political leverage in a crisis or normally. That is doable but, again, depends on making hard political choices. That is where I think we are.

Chris Donnelly: I would agree with that and add that it makes good business sense to not be reliant on a monopoly supplier. The essence of your question, however, is that the current Ukraine crisis is not the cause of our problem with Russia; it is a symptom. The cause is deep and systemic. We tried hard to bring Russia close to us.

Mrs Moon: We did.

Chris Donnelly: And Russia has said, “Push off.” Russia has said that it wants to establish an alternative to the Western world order that has been established since the end of the Second World War, and it is setting about doing so.

The second point is that having a capacity for strategic thinking allows you to understand and reconcile the fact that countries can be your enemy and your ally at the same time, and that you have to work together accordingly. The most obvious example is our alliance with the Soviet Union in the Second World War, but if you want a current example, Russia and China currently have a good working relationship despite the fact that they are adversaries in many areas, because they both have a strategic default setting. We are not

thinking strategically, so we suddenly find ourselves faced with this dilemma of which the energy issue is a manifestation. Whether we invest more in fracking to become independent in gas is a national strategic issue. It does become quite simple.

Q298 Mrs Moon: I want to go back, because you raised fracking, which really got to me. Anders Fogh Rasmussen said at Chatham House that the anti-fracking movement in the UK was being pushed by the Russians. Would you agree with that?

James Sherr: Yes, but we have to be very careful as to what that means. Some years ago, I drew a parallel between the Russian approach to the anti-fracking movement and to green issues and its approach in the '70s to the whole issue of unilateral nuclear disarmament. Their thinking about this is very similar. They see this as a home-grown cause here, which can be influenced and steered to help them to achieve certain political and strategic objectives. It does not mean that this is not a home-grown cause and does not even mean that the anti-frackers are wrong, but we need to understand how the Russians see it and how they are going to treat it.

Q299 Mrs Moon: And how they will utilise it.

James Sherr: And how they will utilise it.

Q300 Ms Stuart: This follows quite nicely, because enemies can also be allies and we need Russia for the withdrawal from Afghanistan, for example. There are still areas where we are working together. I understand that the German operation in Africa uses Russian planes and Ukrainian crews. In this world of interdependency, to what extent is Russia still an ally? In what areas are we still working together? What is left of the working relationship?

General Shirreff: At a military level, I understand that all military contacts have been broken off as a result of the crisis. That is the decision that has been taken, but I would say that before that, as a result of the efforts at partnership, the mil-mil relationships developed at senior levels were very profitable and helpful. For example, I was asked to take part in a seminar at the general staff academy in Moscow last October, where the Russians discussed their lessons learned from Afghanistan. It was a fascinating experience and I came away rather regretting that we had not done something like it in 2001 because we may have made some different decisions.

Where we can, which is subject to the political decisions of the North Atlantic Council within NATO, we should recognise that, as Chris said, Russia is adversary and ally at the same time, and look for ways to continue to build the relationship. Ultimately, of course, it depends on whether we are given the permission to do that.

James Sherr: We have a strong objective interest in combating—I am choosing words carefully because they matter here—what the Russians call jihadism. They live in what is in a large and increasing part a Muslim country. As a result of their own actions in the Caucasus they have greatly accelerated something they profoundly fear, which is Islamic

radicalism. By some Russian expert calculations more than 50% of conscripts to the armed forces by 2020 will be Muslim.

That is an element of certain aspects of their policy. In the Middle East, as in so many other areas, they keep defeating their own objectives by the methods they use. Because they see us as a geopolitical adversary we have not been very effective in discussing this with them or co-operating with them. This is an area where we both have some legitimate apprehensions.

Chair: Apologies, but I am afraid we will have to finish by about five past. I will bring in Gisela again and then Sir Bob Russell.

Q301 Ms Stuart: Just a quick question. In that context, is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation anything to talk about, or do we dismiss them as being a thing of the past not the future?

James Sherr: It is largely China's view.

Q302 Sir Bob Russell: Gentlemen, we have already touched on the Russians' interests, the backdrop to the invasion of Georgia and the annexation of Crimea. What are the chances of a Russian attack against one of the Baltic countries, say, in the next 10 years?

General Shirreff: If NATO is not bold, strategic and ambitious, the chances are high.

Q303 Sir Bob Russell: If I could press the point, would that be a military invasion, or a further alleged cyber attack as happened to Estonia?

General Shirreff: I think what we have seen in Crimea, as Chris was saying earlier, is a new form of warfare, in which states are destabilised from within through the deployment of irregular means to prevent the nature of the insidiousness of the attack being registered. What I think we have seen in Crimea is the sort of scenario that we could see in the Baltics.

Q304 Sir Bob Russell: But the Baltic countries are in NATO and Crimea was notionally in Ukraine. The difference is that the Baltic countries are in NATO. Would you see a full frontal military attack? What would be the motive or motives for such an attack on one, two or three of the Baltic states?

General Shirreff: I think it is difficult and sometimes misleading to start trying to second-guess scenarios, but implicit in Putin's speech on 18 March in the Kremlin is a strategy for reuniting Russian speakers under the aegis of Mother Russia. That should send alarm bells ringing in NATO and has done so.

James Sherr: If Russia had succeeded in doing what it set out to do—through unconventional means control the whole northern littoral of the Black sea, the southern territories of Ukraine right up to the Moldovan border—then the chances today would be very

high that they would use this mix of capabilities with very little inhibition, at least as a form of intimidation whenever they had an interest in doing this. Their real interest in the Baltic states is eroding the distinction that we all accept in this room between a NATO member and a non-NATO member; to get them to accept that over critical interests of importance to Moscow there has to be agreement with Moscow, that they are not fully independent actors. I don't see them planning an attack today in any way on any Baltic member of NATO, but the possibility of such a thing happening through miscalculation in a crisis is dangerously high. At that point, if it is clear that NATO has no plans and no capability to defend the Baltic states and we are unprepared for the mode of conflict and unconventional steps are being taken without being noticed, I fully agree with the General: the risks become very high.

Chris Donnelly: We have looked at the Baltics and we have our eye on them, but there are other areas on Russia's periphery that are also at risk. We need to keep our eyes on the Balkans and Bulgaria, because it is not only the Baltics that are at risk. My second point is that it is about the essence of what constitutes an attack. If you look at how the Russians have used their conventional forces in Ukraine, by rushing them up to the border in an intimidatory fashion they deterred the Ukrainian Government in Kiev from taking measures to deal with an internal problem on their own territory. Then, when the Government in Kiev began to get their act together, the forces were withdrawn. Is that an offensive, or not? We are looking at a different way of warfare, and we need different mechanisms to dissuade and deter the Russians from doing that. As the General said, that is where NATO's capacity to demonstrate reaction in kind is important.

Q305 Sir Bob Russell: I think that you have set the scene, in a way. What should the priorities for the NATO summit in Newport be?

General Shirreff: The first thing is that there is a bit of housekeeping to be done, which is to recognise and learn from the Afghan operation, because this year sees the end of the ISAF operation, and not in any triumphalist way, although I think NATO can be proud of what the strategy has achieved in Afghanistan. Setting aside the politics of Afghanistan, whether there will be a bilateral security agreement, whether there will be a train, advise and assist mission subsequently, NATO has achieved what it set out to do at the Lisbon summit in 2010, and that is a significant achievement. Lessons can be learned from that. That is point No. 1.

Point No. 2 is a strong statement of the importance of Article 5, collective defence, and putting in place measures to recognise the importance of deterrents to prevent the sort of scenarios that we have just been discussing in this new defence paradigm in Europe as a result of the Russian thing.

Point No. 3 would be to recognise that the world is a dangerous place outside Europe and that NATO has to think through how to respond. That means a strong credible Reserve, a new form of NATO response force, and a new form of partnership for peace and security. That is a menu of things that I would like to see coming out of the NATO summit.

Q306 Sir Bob Russell: Would that include in the Baltic countries either the permanent basing of NATO troops from other countries or regular exercises in the three Baltic countries as part of the NATO robustness that you referred to?

General Shirreff: We discussed this earlier in a question from Colonel Stewart, and my view from a military perspective is this: if you want to deter any form of attack, whether armed, subversive, cyber or whatever, you have to have some form of military presence.

Sir Bob Russell: So that is now on the record twice.

General Shirreff: Yes.

Q307 Sir Bob Russell: Do NATO and its allies have the ability to counter asymmetric measures?

General Shirreff: That is a big question. Yes, up to a point, Lord Copper. How far do you want to take it?

Q308 Sir Bob Russell: Well, you are the military expert, not me.

General Shirreff: Let us take cyber, for example. I think you have been to the cyber-defence centre of excellence in Tallinn, so you will have seen some of the capabilities and thinking.

Sir Bob Russell: We have been told about them.

General Shirreff: That is a good example of how the alliance is taking forward measures to counter an asymmetric attack. In the field of cyber, it is about the exchange of best practice across the alliance to ensure that one ally does not suffer a sort of cyber Pearl Harbour, and not only to protect allies, but to protect and defend the alliance's systems as well, because the alliance has its own CIS. That is a good example of how the alliance is pulling together to prevent or to defend itself against asymmetric attack.

Q309 Sir Bob Russell: May I follow up on what Mr Donnelly said earlier about the military expertise among the ambassadors, or about the lack of military knowledge? Dr Robin Niblett told us that NATO staff and command structures had been reduced on the expectation that national military forces would supplement them, but that that had not always happened. Does the UK take its NATO obligations seriously and send its best people?

General Shirreff: Having just come from a NATO post, I can tell you—I need to see the latest figures, but, coming back to the command structure—that yes, the command structure has shrunk dramatically. That was right and what the nations wanted, but NATO has always made the point that with a reduced command structure, if the alliance is to be able to do the things that the nations expect of it, the command structure needs to be manned to 100%.

Q310 Sir Bob Russell: With competent people.

General Shirreff: With competent people. You will need to check with the Ministry of Defence for the latest figures for the UK manning of the command structure, but I can say that when I left at the end of March, the UK was quite a long way down the league in manning its posts in NATO. I think that the quality of the people that the UK sends to NATO is very high. You can be proud of the fact that, when there is hard work to be done, the quality of UK staff officers and commanders in the alliance—as I think you would expect—is pretty impressive. You need not worry on that score.

Q311 Mrs Moon: We are broadcasting the sitting. One assumes that the Russians are listening and are interested in the questions that we ask and in the answers that you give. If you were to put together one sentence that you think it is important that we hear, and that they hear, what would it be?

General Shirreff: Thus far and no further.

Bob Stewart: A great line.

James Sherr: I have no secrets from the Russians, and they know that, but one thing I would say to them and get them to think about. Here again, they have demonstrated what they have demonstrated going back to tsarist times—that through proactive defence and strength they have once again created the very threats that they feared would arise if they were weak. I think that at some point towards the close of the Soviet era, Mikhail Gorbachev and the people around him understood that, and they began to think about it. I hope that we can look forward to a similar process taking place in Russia in the future.

Chris Donnelly: In their current enthusiasm for what they are doing, the Russians are damaging their own long-term interests and long-term future.

Q312 Chair: We have just three minutes left and, to conclude, let us focus again on the NATO summit. We have had a number of suggestions from the three of you during the sitting. Recommendations for the NATO summit have included the formation of a potential divisional headquarters in the Baltics, a core headquarters in Poland, pre-positioning of kit and much larger-scale tactical exercises. A potential suggestion, General, is that we need to look at the NATO rapid response force and perhaps even the formation of a standing force under the command of SACEUR. In terms of that kind of granular detail, would any of you reflect—perhaps the General could go first—on more concrete, detailed things that we could ask for from member states at the NATO summit?

General Shirreff: Many of the questions and discussions we have had here have absolutely highlighted the value of the formation that we had in Cold War days, the ACE mobile force, the AMFL—a standing reserve force, capable of being deployed from the southern flanks of NATO to the North Cape in north Norway, involving all NATO allies and all NATO members. It was a standing force; it was a credible force. It bound all the allies in

from the very start and it is exactly the sort of reserve capability that I think the alliance needs in this very dangerous time.

Q313 Chair: Is this something that Britain could take the lead on, and if so, should Britain be devoting more money and resources to helping this happen as part of our leadership initiative at Newport? Is this an opportunity for Britain to take the lead in this?

General Shirreff: Absolutely.

Chris Donnelly: I would say not only that it is an opportunity, but that it is very important for Britain to do this. Britain's leadership at this point will encourage the Americans to take a greater interest in NATO and reinforce their support of the organisation. We have an important role to play in bringing the Americans in more. As you know, President Obama's shift to the Pacific—his pivot for the country—has taken US eyes away from Europe, the Middle East and so on. This is an opportunity for us to bring that perspective back into play in Washington.

James Sherr: Until recent years, Poland, the Baltic states and some of the Scandinavian countries took it for granted that we understood their defence environment in the way that they did. I think that some of that confidence has been shaken. By taking exactly these steps, this will be a time to suggest to them, if they doubted it, that the UK is back and that they can count on us.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed. We could have continued for many hours to come, but thank you for your wisdom and your time. Have a great afternoon.

All witnesses: Thank you.