



Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [The Situation in Iraq and Syria and the Threat posed by Islamic State in Iraq and The Levant](#), HC 690

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Members present: Rory Stewart (Chair); Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson; Mr James Gray; Mr Dai Havard; Sir Bob Russell; Bob Stewart; Derek Twigg; John Woodcock

Questions 44-152

Witness: **Dr Douglas Porch**, US Naval Postgraduate School, gave evidence.

Q44 Chair: Welcome everybody. We are now gathered for the second round of evidence in our inquiry into Iraq and Syria. We are very lucky to have with us today Dr Douglas Porch. Dr Porch, for those people who do not know him, is one of the most distinguished US academics on the subject of military strategy and counter-insurgency. He is the Distinguished Professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He was previously Professor of Strategy at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and taught at the United States Marine Corps University in Quantico, the US Army War College and the NATO Defence College in Rome. His most recent book is specifically on counter-insurgency, which is central to our inquiry, because of all these theories around boots on the ground and the surge—General Petraeus’s attempt between 2006 and 2009 to deal with the situation in Iraq. Welcome, Dr Porch.

Taking the Chair’s prerogative to begin, I wonder what you feel are the options potentially available to the international coalition and its partners in response to the crisis in Iraq and Syria, and which you think would be most effective.

Dr Porch: Okay. Let me say two things at the outset. The first is a disclaimer: I am now retired from US Government service, so what I say is my own opinion and not the opinion of the Naval Postgraduate School, the Department of the Navy or the Department of Defence. The second thing I should point out is that I am not a Middle East expert. I do military strategy and military history; those are my areas of expertise and I think you should keep that in mind.

Obviously, we have been involved a lot in Iraq and Afghanistan. My students were mid-level officers—03s and 04s—and one of the motivations for writing my book was that they were coming back from those two places and telling me, “Sir, this COIN stuff doesn’t work.” I also lost two students to green on blue, as they call it, in Afghanistan. I have seen marriages collapse as a result of repeated deployments in those areas and their frustrations. I have vicariously lived their experience and their traumas as they have seen friends and colleagues evaporated in IED attacks and so on. That is my motivation.

Students come to me and we talk about it in class. I teach a stability and reconstruction class from an historical perspective. We did this in Germany and Japan after World War Two, so why can’t we do it now? Why doesn’t it work? Why can’t we do a Marshall plan for Afghanistan? Those are some of the questions that have come up, as well as why, if the British were so successful in places such as Malaya, can we not do this? That is where I am coming from. I looked at it historically and challenged the historical record, asking how successful were the British in Malaya—I believe you spent a lot of time in Malaya—why were they successful and why did they win? When does one win an insurgency, and does one really do it with hearts and minds? My book was an attempt to look at how western democracies fight what C E Callwell called small wars.

I concluded that there are a lot sacrifices that one has to make. To be successful one has to be extraordinarily brutal so there is a huge price in civil military relations and military professionalism. These small wars erode military professionalism in many respects, because the insurgent is not regarded as a lawful combatant, and because he is not a lawful combatant, he—or she in this case—can be treated however. We have Hala, the battle of Algiers, My Lai and Abu Ghraib. Atrocities are sewn into the fabric of counter-insurgency.

That is where I was coming from. What you have to do to be successful, in my opinion, is to have the right political environment to succeed.

Chair: Just to cut in for a second, is it possible to focus quite hard at the moment on Iraq, and then we could expand that? What is your sense of General Petraeus’s surge?

Dr Porch: General Petraeus was fortunate in many respects. His timing was impeccable—al-Qaeda had overplayed its hand in Anbar province and had annoyed many of the tribes. Petraeus arrived with the surge and some say it was he who imposed it, but another interpretation is that it was actually the people on the ground who understood there was an opportunity to flip the tribes. The tribes were looking for a protector, so what we did was a typical colonial tactic. You arm the minorities, so they can protect themselves. I imagine that the Sunnis thought they would be protected like the Kurds, so we managed to flip them temporarily, but we see now how ephemeral that tactical success was, because as soon as we walked out the whole situation deteriorated.

Q45 Chair: Why did it prove to be so ephemeral?

Dr Porch: Well, because those people were not protected. The Government starts to attack them and kill many of the tribal leaders who were loyal and had been armed by the United States. In essence, what has been happening is the failure of democracy in the Middle East. Since the beginning of the post-colonial state in the Middle East, we had such hopes for

democracy, but the faux republics have disappeared. Democracy building in Iraq did not work.

Q46 Chair: So now, if we fast forward to 2014, we have people saying that what we need to do is get people in to clear, hold and build the Sunni areas of Iraq. They could be anybody—sometimes people talk about the Kurds, sometimes the Iraqi army, sometimes the Arab neighbours and sometimes they even talk about the international coalition doing it—but the general idea is that you go into the ISIL-held territory, you clear, you hold and you build. Does that seem to be a sensible strategy to pursue?

Dr Porch: That is a grand tactic, but it is not a strategy. What has increasingly happened is that Sunni identity has focused or become identified with anti-Shi'aism and, in this case, anti-westernism—anti-Americanism in particular. Who is going to be your local ally? It is going to be some local thug maybe, who can get some temporary advantage out of that, but there is not going to be any great loyalty unless you rebuild, accept that Sykes-Picot is over and we are going to sort of reconfigure the Middle East and create a Sunni state in eastern Syria and western Iraq. That might be a possibility, but right now the Sunnis feel encircled and ISIL or ISIS, whatever you want to call it, is the most radical movement. They have taken the lead; they are the protectors. Some people think that, obviously, not all Sunnis agree with them, but right now I would argue that they probably have legitimacy.

Q47 Chair: There are people who are saying that what we need to do is get boots on the ground and go face-to-face with the enemy. Does that seem sensible?

Dr Porch: So what? What are you going to fight? They will start putting IEDs everywhere and you are not going to have any support from the local population, so what's going to happen? I can tell you: my students say, "All this language and culture—as soon as I lose two of my guys, I don't care about hearts and minds. It's the people who are hiding these bad guys and we are going to take them out and we don't really care about that." That is going to make the situation worse and, in my opinion, lead to more atrocities. That is what we are going to see. Boots on the ground won't get you anywhere. You have to build a viable political structure. War is politics, right? The trouble with COIN is that it is very anti-Clausewitzian: it is tactics in search of a strategy. I do not see a strategy. International coalition is not a strategy.

Q48 John Woodcock: So what will the coalition achieve if it carries on with what it is doing at the moment?

Dr Porch: Every time we have intervened since Jimmy Carter in the 1980s, we make the situation worse. We create power vacuums, we alienate people and we create ungoverned spaces. We are living the consequences, in my opinion, of that succession of policies. I think the trend lines for democracy in the Middle East are dead so you have to say: what are we trying to achieve there? What is going to be the end state? Are we going to rebuild Syria? We couldn't rebuild Iraq, at least not successfully. In essence we built it as a Shi'a state, so you have roughly 20% of the population who feel they do not have any stake in that country anymore.

If we put boots on the ground, how is that going to be perceived? Well, we are there in support of Assad, who is a Shi'a, and in support of Iran and in support of whoever is replacing Maliki now—in other words, we are going to be there in support of the Shi'as. How much co-operation are we going to get from the local Sunnis? I think very little. Again, I am not an expert on this area, but just seeing the trend lines, I would not think it was good: you are going to get a lot of people killed, not just western soldiers, but a lot of Sunnis as well.

Q49 John Woodcock: But currently, the strategy is not boots on the ground; it is air strikes.

Dr Porch: Yes. So what does bombing do? It creates collateral damage, it further radicalises the population, it legitimises ISIL/ISIS, it probably encourages foreign fighters to become involved, and I imagine it radicalises indigenous Islamic populations—there have been a few in this country, the United States, France and elsewhere.

Q50 John Woodcock: You said that all the West's and the United States' intervention since the 1970s have made things worse, and you posit what ought to be the solution here, which is a much more intense political engagement to try to create something sustainable. That clearly isn't happening at the moment. Are you therefore of the view that the current engagement, as it stands, will make things worse than simply letting ISIL roam?

Dr Porch: You have to ask where ISIL is going. It seems to me that, at least to the east and the west, it has reached its extreme limit. It cannot go north into Turkey, and it cannot go into Kurdish lands. It is not going to take Baghdad, because there are plenty of Shi'a militias who are going to defend Baghdad. It is not going to overthrow Assad. So this is sort of it, right? Where is it going to go? There it is, a Sunni area that has a few low-grade oil wells. It makes a little money, but I would say that one of the things you may want to think about is doing nothing.

Q51 Mr Gray: I am a little puzzled. Without question, at this moment a humanitarian catastrophe is occurring across a large swath of the region. These people, ISIS, are without question pressing forward. They may not make Baghdad—you are almost certainly right about that—but they certainly are doing lots of other things. It would be a bit of a disaster if they were to take Kobane. People are being persecuted for their beliefs and their religion. Are you really saying that, as a civilised western nation, we should basically do nothing at all and hope that politics will sort it out? Is that broadly your thesis?

Dr Porch: Well, I think you should think about that as an option. There are a lot of places where we are doing nothing—Africa, for instance, and there are a lot of things going on there.

Q52 Mr Gray: But doing nothing about one bad thing does not mean that we should do nothing about all bad things.

Dr Porch: But what can you actually do there? What are you going to accomplish by intervening? I am asking the question.

Q53 Mr Gray: You are asking the question, and I think you are being a bit unfair in doing that. I am trying to pull it around. If you accept the premise that some wicked things are occurring across the Middle East—Syria is a complete basket case, ISIS is doing awful things and Iraq is a basket case, and that is without even thinking about Palestine, Israel, Libya and elsewhere—there is a perfectly legitimate, quasi-pacifist argument for saying, “Warfare achieves nothing, and we cannot see our boys being brought back in body bags, so let’s do nothing and hope that the United Nations and a bit of politics will sort it out.” I am being very unkind, and I am paraphrasing your views disgracefully, but it would be a perfectly legitimate argument if that is the one you are advancing. I am trying to get at what you are proposing.

Dr Porch: War is politics. You have to have a viable political goal. I do not see a viable political goal here. If you do not have a viable political goal, why do you throw British and American soldiers into a situation in which they cannot accomplish anything? That is my point. I would never say that war can accomplish nothing. I am all for defeating Hitler, Tojo and those people, but what is your goal? What is the centre of gravity? What do we take that is going to change the dynamic of that situation? That is why I say that you have to ask what the end state is. If you cannot envision an end state, why commit troops?

Q54 Mr Donaldson: Dr Porch, the UK Government has hired a private company to train the Peshmerga in bomb disposal. In the past you have been critical of the use of private companies for such contracts. In the context of a military establishment that is being downsized in many countries, what is your current view on the use of private companies in such a role?

Dr Porch: It seems very anodyne, and maybe using private companies to teach mine clearing is perfectly all right, but the experience that the United States had in Iraq and Afghanistan was disastrous. These men were out of control in most cases. They were not subject to local laws. We had several atrocities committed by private contractors exercising what, when I was in the US army in Vietnam, we called reconnaissance by fire. You just drive down the road, start shooting to the sides, and hopefully that will trigger the ambush. So that is one problem; another problem is that they cost a lot of money.

A third problem is that when indigenous soldiers are trained up, they are siphoned off to do things like work for private contractors themselves. I know that at one point Karzai wanted to kick them out because of desertion and defection to private contractors; the best police and soldiers that Afghanistan had were basically defecting. The army had to be rebuilt all the time because of that. I do not think that that is a good use of one’s money—it has a very bad track record.

Q55 John Woodcock: I should have picked you up on this before, very briefly. Surely the “don’t intervene” option and that being okay rests on your assumption that actually ISIL’s expansionism is at an end. How can you be confident that it has actually reached its natural borders, given the paucity of Iraq’s own army and the potential vulnerability of Baghdad itself?

Dr Porch: Of course, one can never be certain. But everybody treats ISIL as though it is the Wehrmacht. It really is not; it is not even the Viet Cong. These are guys running round in pick-up trucks, right.

Q56 John Woodcock: But they were beating Iraq's own, apparently official, army hands down.

Dr Porch: Well, we have not got to the subject yet, but one is security assistance. I wrote an article about that and about the failure in security assistance, meaning training up indigenous armies to be our foreign legions and how that has not worked in Mali; it has not worked well in central Africa; it did not work in Vietnam. The only place that it has worked particularly well has been in Colombia. In the United States there is a great search: how do we take the Colombian small footprint model and transition that to another place? I would argue that, just like the Marshall plan or post-world war two rebuilding of Germany and Japan, Colombia succeeded in contingent circumstances. You do not have a clash of civilisations here and you have a very Catholic, Christian country that has been co-operating with the United States since 1942, I believe, to protect the Panama canal when we thought that was under attack by the Japanese. Colombia has a good military that was demoralised. They had a president—whatever you think about Álvaro Uribe's politics, he fired a lot of generals and imposed a strategy on his military that ultimately was very successful. Are you going to have those conditions in these other countries? You're not going to get it in Mali; you're not going to get it in Libya. It is folly to think that there is a model you can transition from one area to another.

Again, I have a number of students who were involved in security assistance in all these places. They said, "You don't really know what the local hierarchy is. Just because the guy says he's a general does not mean that people are obeying him, because you have all these sub-tribal hierarchies beneath." And then they do not use equipment properly. This gets back to the question about contractors. You are working at a very low tactical level in militaries that really need to be reformed from the top down, and the approach often is to reform them from the bottom up. That does not work well because tactical proficiency in an operational vacuum leads to all sorts of problems. One of the things I did at a naval postgraduate school was run regional seminars for our foreign area officers. These are officers who are defence attachés, security assistants, country desks—they learn languages and that sort of thing. I remember one of them, the lieutenant colonel in an unnamed African country, said, "I just can't sleep at night because I know I'm training an army that is preying on its own people."

Q57 Sir Bob Russell: Dr Porch, we are talking here, are we not, of the consequence of the illegal Bush-Blair invasion of Iraq, and we are having to, a decade on, deal with those consequences? And as they were two Christian gentlemen—apparently—may I ask you this? You, in biblical terms, are suggesting that we should walk by on the other side, but should we not be the Good Samaritan to all these people who are in danger, as we speak, of being obliterated?

Dr Porch: Okay. Why are we in the Middle East? What is the national interest of Britain and the United States to be in the Middle East? Well, initially it is to spread democracy—right? That was what we were going to do when we invaded Iraq. That hasn't worked. Now the mantra is energy security. Well, the energy security environment has changed radically now, and we have to ask ourselves, do we really need the Middle East any more? I mean, what purpose does it serve? Now, with fracking, with natural gas, with all these other sources of energy, maybe the Middle East is not that important. Maybe we can sort of walk away

from it. If we do that, then we have to say, “All right—what do we have to prepare for?” One of the things that we have to prepare for in the short term is disruptions of energy supplies until we get our fracking, or whatever else you want to do—prepare for humanitarian relief, because already lots of bad stuff has happened. So prepare for that. And that, it seems to me, would be one of the things we could do from a Christian perspective or a humanitarian perspective, and then work politically with allies in the region to try to stabilise the place. Maybe through Turkey, which I notice let the Peshmurga through today to defend the town in the north, Kobane. But there are so many agendas in the Middle East. The Sunni-Shia one is only one. The Gulf states have their own agendas. Turkey is going to demand a huge price. And all of these things are going to change—they can flip overnight. So how do you even plan a political strategy? And you put your soldiers in the middle of that?

Q58 Sir Bob Russell: Do we have a moral obligation?

Dr Porch: Again, I am speaking personally. I think we have a moral obligation to do what we can do. I don’t think we have a moral obligation to accomplish what we cannot accomplish. I think we have a moral obligation to our own people and our own soldiers first, and I think there is a strong moral argument to say, “Don’t put them in a situation in which they will get killed, where they will have to commit atrocities,” because all of this is going to come home—right? It is going to come home in the periphery—it is the revenge of the periphery. You are going to have military atrocities; you are going to have degradation in civilian relations; you are going to have degradation of military professionalism; you are going to have the strengthening of the surveillance state, which we have seen. You are going to have militarisation of the police. This is what you are going to have if you do this.

Q59 Sir Bob Russell: Coming home, of course from a British perspective, it is estimated that there are 500 British citizens who should be charged with treason, who are currently fighting in what is called—I don’t really want to give it the title—Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which I think gives it a status that it does not warrant, because they are terrorists. They are there, fighting against British interests, arguably. If this continues, they may wish to come home to the United Kingdom, where just possibly they might wish to continue their terrorism and atrocities in mainland Britain. So don’t you think Britain has a role to play?

Dr Porch: All I am saying is that you risk swelling the numbers of those people if you intervene. That would be my suggestion.

Q60 Sir Bob Russell: You mentioned Turkey, and I would like to pursue that with you, if I may. To what extent will Turkey’s level of support—or, perhaps more accurately, lack of support—impact on the strategy to degrade and destroy the terrorist forces?

Dr Porch: Again, you have got me out of my depth here. I am certainly no Turkish expert, and I have no insight into Erdogan’s mind. But we know he hates Assad, and if we are going to intervene in Syria, presumably it is to reinforce some sort of Shi’a Assad regime, so that is going to be one way in which we will have differences of opinion. Obviously, Turkey can provide bases. Potentially, it could provide boots on the ground. One of my questions was, what exactly were you guys thinking when you sent Lawrence of Arabia to dismantle the Ottoman empire? It is looking pretty good now—we’re almost getting nostalgic for it. If

Erdogan has a lot of leverage on us, what will he demand in return for his co-operation? That is my question.

Q61 Sir Bob Russell: Dr Porch, you have made it clear—at least, that is my understanding—that the UK should not join the US and its allies in carrying out airstrikes in Syria. Is that right?

Dr Porch: Well, I understand that there are domestic political pressures to do something. You are all politicians, and politicians have to make compromises, and they have to make political choices in the short term and in the long term. I can understand that there are pressures to do something, and bombing is the easy thing to do, or drones are the easy things to do, but it is hubristic to think that this is going to have any long-term effect, except to cause collateral damage, extend the battlefield and escalate a situation, without any viable political end in sight.

Q62 Sir Bob Russell: My last question, Dr Porch, is that it has been suggested that if the terrorist group ISIL is defeated, they would be replaced by something worse, although I find it difficult to think what could be worse. If so, what should be the international coalition's strategy? Would it be flexible enough to take on a new threat should the terrorists in their current form be defeated?

Dr Porch: Al-Qaeda emerges in whatever form—ISIL is the latest one—wherever there is a rebellion against a Shi'a regime; they are always going to appear. You have also got to realise that the Middle East is one of the most wired regions in the world. There is no al-Jazeera for Latin America, for instance. Al-Jazeera, in a way, has played the role of unifying Islamic public opinion—certainly Arab public opinion—from Morocco to the Far East. These rebellions are presented as justified popular uprisings, and they are going to get support all over the region.

Sir Bob Russell: That is interesting. Thank you very much.

Q63 Mr Gray: In your list of possible casus belli—energy security and so forth—one you did not mention was preventing another 9/11. Don't you think it is perfectly legitimate to take action against ISIL to prevent similar outrages?

Dr Porch: Well, there is a difference of opinion about what sort of threat it poses to the homeland, both yours and mine. One argument would be that the threat is inflated and that intelligence organisations now have a vested interest in inflating it. The threat could certainly be there. I am just saying that that is one of the arguments. On the other hand, we have intelligence services in both our countries that are pretty proficient in tracking these things down. Also, if you intervene, you are actually going to have more threats, not less. That would be my argument.

Q64 Chair: Dr Porch, finally before we let you go, may we return to the nub of the issue? The basic model on how to deal with the predecessor of ISIL, al-Qaeda Iraq, was counter-insurgency: go in, surge, clear, hold, build. The solution that is now being proposed from

your President seems to be that you contain ISIL and somehow create the space or the time for the Iraqi state to get in there and clear, hold, build, and create the effective, legitimate and credible state structures: the Iraqi army gets into Mosul and gets into Anbar and somehow turns the situation around. Have I characterised that properly and what would be your analysis of that kind of theory?

Dr Porch: I would think that is the best case scenario. Do I think it is going to happen? No, because we have already seen how a Shi'a regime handles this. The other problem we are going to have is the same as the one we have in Afghanistan. We are going to have a safe haven, or whatever you want to call it, across the border in Syria, just like the Taliban in Pakistan. You can't get at it, so they are going to continue to attack and to stabilise. Then what do we do? Are you going to be like the French in Algeria, where you invade Tunisia because you have the FLN across the border? It just expands. Where do you stop? This is the trouble—these things keep escalating. At some point—and this is the moral question, I think—you have to say, "This is it. This is what we are going to do." Otherwise we are in for a lot of money and a lot of lives lost, and a lot of treasure expended, in my opinion.

Chair: Thank you.

Witness: **General (retired) Richard Shirreff**, US Naval Postgraduate School, gave evidence.

Q65 Chair: The Committee is fortunate to have with us today, again, General Sir Richard Shirreff, who most recently served as the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and has otherwise had a very distinguished career, during which he has served in Kosovo, Iraq—indeed, in most of the combat situations of the British military. He is with us today to provide a perspective on the strategy as a very recently retired British general. General Sir Richard, when did you formally leave the military?

General Shirreff: I left formally on 7 August.

Q66 Derek Twigg: General Shirreff, you have been critical of the Government's strategy. I want to put a question to you in two parts. Would you be confident that our current military is clear and confident about what the Government strategy is in Iraq and on taking on ISIL? In answering that question do you believe that, whatever it may be, it can be attained by air strikes alone?

General Shirreff: I cannot answer for the current serving military, as to whether they are clear or not.

Q67 Derek Twigg: I am asking what you think.

General Shirreff: If you are asking me whether I think we are seeing a credible and sensible strategy that is going to achieve a policy, I would start by looking to define the policy. I think we have seen on at least two occasions articles in Sunday papers written by both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary highlighting the threat that ISIL causes in

fairly apocalyptic terms and stressing the need to excise them from the face of the earth—or words to that effect; I paraphrase, perhaps. If that is the Government policy, I do not think that the strategy, such as it is, is going to achieve that.

Q68 Derek Twigg: Why not?

General Shirreff: Strategy is about integrating ends, ways and means in the pursuit of policy—I quote from the RCDS pamphlet on strategy. The policy needs to be clear. The ends need to be clarified. The problem needs to be scoped. You then need to determine how you are going to resolve the problem; then you need to allocate means to achieve that. That means putting your money where your mouth is, in a sense. What we have seen, I am afraid, from the Government is a degree of what I have described as gesture strategy: a lot of noise about the nature of the problem, but precious little in terms of resolving the problem.

If you go back, for example, to the protection of the Yazidis, back in August, what did we see? A lot of noise about protecting the Yazidis and the deployment of two C-130s to drop relief supplies. Well, you do not protect people by dropping humanitarian relief on top of them, and the results of that are plain to see.

Q69 Derek Twigg: I take the point that, obviously, you are now retired and you are not in the military command structure taking the decisions, but I am just trying to push a little bit further, because I think you have partly answered the question. You have said what the Government, via the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have said, but do you see a strategy? I am trying to pin you down to be a bit more succinct.

General Shirreff: Well, as I think I said, a strategy requires—

Q70 Derek Twigg: You have set out the objectives, but what is the strategy?

General Shirreff: I do not see a strategy, because a strategy requires the application not only of military force. Your previous interviewee, Dr Porch, stressed the importance of politics, and I would absolutely sanction that. It is about applying all the levers of power—political, diplomatic, economic, reconstruction, humanitarian, as well as military—to achieve the aims of policy, and I do not think we have seen that.

Q71 Derek Twigg: What difficulty would that put the military in, in terms of trying to do their job?

General Shirreff: If you ask the military to take the lead in a political vacuum you are asking for problems, because there is no such thing as a purely military solution. You cannot expect the military to apply force without the other levers of power being applied at the same time. So if that is your strategy, it is going to fail.

Q72 Derek Twigg: A number of distinguished heads of our armed forces have said this will not work without ground forces. Would you like to comment on that? The fact is, you have a problem with the strategy in the first place.

General Shirreff: Yes. If you take the threat posed by ISIL, which is potentially looking at defeating and undermining a state in the Middle East, Iraq—given the collapse of the Iraqi armed forces in June, and frankly, by the look of things, they do not seem to have got much better since then—the only way you are going to stop that, if you decide that that is what you want to do, in other words, your policy, is to apply military force.

You cannot apply partial military force; you have to concentrate effort. As Guderian said, “Klotzen, nicht Kleckern”—concentrate, don’t dribble. What we are seeing at the moment is dribbling—politically expedient air power. If you are serious about it, you have got to be prepared to apply all the levers of military power, from the air, if necessary from the sea and, if necessary, on the ground. I would have thought that if you are serious about dealing with ISIL, your first step is to try and do what you can to build up the capability of regional powers to deal with it themselves, because we all know the challenges of getting engaged in the Middle East. However, maybe you do not have time to do that. It may be that your national interests say that you have got to stop them earlier and you do not have the time to build up a regional capacity, so you might have to deploy force yourself.

I think the capacity-building point is the key issue to be looking at, and you do not build capacity in armies unless you are prepared to get on the ground and do it alongside. I think the Afghanistan example is a good example of where capacity has been built up in line with strategy; it has been built from the bottom up and I think it is a great credit that, in respect of ISAF, by the end of the mission, at the end of this year, NATO will be able to say that it has built an adequately capable Afghanistan defence force. But that has required significant cost and significant expenditure of both blood and treasure, and that is what it takes. You cannot stand off, expect private security companies to do a little bit of EOD training and call that capacity building.

Q73 Derek Twigg: Following on from that important point that you have just made, what went wrong with the Iraqi armed forces, and were you surprised?

General Shirreff: I saw one specific area. My view, which I gave to the Chilcot inquiry and was certainly in my post-tour report, is that we adopted a hands-off approach to training the Iraqi army, an approach that was excessively risk-averse. We did not build up a relationship of trust. We did not train alongside, live alongside and, if necessary, fight alongside the Iraqis. We stood off at divisional level and expected them to do it. Certainly, the results were plain to see when some Iraqi formations were put into the fight in Baghdad in 2006. That said, I think that the Americans did a much better job. They were prepared to engage and get stuck in on the ground alongside the Iraqi army and did extremely well.

Roll forward a bit, and my last experience of working alongside the Iraqis was as deputy SACEUR when a very small NATO training mission working alongside the Americans back in 2010-11 was actually achieving a significant effect in professionalising the Iraqi army through training in officer cadet schools and staff colleges, mentoring senior officers, training Iraqi oil police and the like. That was having a significant impact on the Iraqi army and, through that, the state of Iraq. Of course, that ended at the end of 2011.

Q74 Derek Twigg: What is your view of the fighting capability of ISIL? Dr Porch suggested that it was groups of fighters, not really an army, so do we really want to send in our ground force against them and stir up a hornets' nest?

General Shirreff: I haven't seen the intelligence assessments of ISIL, but the key point is that ISIL only needs to be one bullet better than its enemy, and it is clearly one bullet better than the Iraqis. You have a jihadist terrorist movement that has managed to equip itself with the means and capabilities of a national army through equipment captured from the Iraqi army, so it has got tanks, armoured vehicles and guns, and therefore you need the capabilities to deal with those. I am sure that, in terms of professionalism, procedures and the like, it would be absolutely no match for a well equipped western army, but it will probably be better than the Iraqi army it is up against.

Q75 Mr Gray: If I have understood your thesis correctly, it is a perfectly coherent one, namely, that if the policy, as laid out in newspaper articles and elsewhere, is to remove the cancer that is ISIL, quite plainly the strategy of limited air strikes against Iraq will not achieve it. In order to achieve that policy, the strategy would have to be very much more extensive use of military levers of all kinds, as you have described. That is a perfectly sensible thesis. Politically, of course, the latter is extraordinarily unlikely. There will not be an all-out war against ISIL with British forces there. Given that, what should the policy be?

General Shirreff: You need to ask the policy makers that. I am not a policy maker, I am here as an ex-professional soldier, and my military recommendation is that if you want to destroy ISIL, you've got to do it properly.

Mr Gray: Okay, but I am saying that the reality is that we can't do that.

General Shirreff: That is a political judgment.

Q76 Mr Gray: Of course it is a political judgment, but generals come at the apex between politics and the army. The previous witness said, broadly speaking—I hope I am not misquoting him, and I think you were in the room at the time—that we shouldn't really do anything and we can't do anything. Given the reality of the politics, namely that we can't have all-out war in Iraq or Syria involving British and American troops, at this stage at least, are you not advocating broadly the same thing, namely that because we can't do that, the current tokenism, as I think was the term you used, of limited air strikes in Iraq is pointless and therefore we should do nothing?

General Shirreff: No. I think that, at the very least, we should do whatever the art of the possible is to build up capability with the Iraqi army and whatever anti-Assad forces in Syria we deem might be suitable to be built up into a force capable of taking on ISIL.

Q77 Mr Havard: General, you have sort of answered the second part of the question I was about to ask. If we are going to train people to do things, whether it means extracting them and putting them in Jordan or wherever we do it, or whether we do it in-country, trying to help them to gain or regain capacity is one of the things that is going to be attempted. On your point about the Iraqi army, in 2010-11, a lot of money was spent trying to assist the

Iraqis in training their army, but interestingly enough that was about weapons systems, and it was done by contractors who were selling arms and all the rest of it. So on the point about contractors coming in and aiding the Iraqi state by their choice to train their army, they were training them in weapons systems, rather than training them to be an army with a moral component whereby they would stand and fight for their country, rather than their allegiances being somewhere else. So what do you think we should build into this training programme? I would say we should start with non-commissioned officers. What would you say?

General Shirreff: You build everything that an army needs into a training programme.

Q78 Mr Havard: But am I wrong? Do you start with the officers and clear that political question?

General Shirreff: You start with the individual—soldier, NCO and officer. You build up the capability of the team—section, platoon, company and battalion. You ensure they have the capabilities in terms of weapons systems, and ensure they know how to use the weapons systems as individuals and collectively as teams. You ensure they have the staff systems to be able to deploy those capabilities and the supply chains to ensure that the logistics is there for them to do that.

Q79 Mr Havard: And leadership and intent?

General Shirreff: Leadership training is absolutely integral, of course, to the building up of the individual officer and NCO.

Q80 Mr Havard: You start at that end rather than teaching them to shoot a gun. A lot of them know how to pull a trigger; it is about getting them formed into a unit that is going in the right direction.

General Shirreff: You have to start with the foundations, and the foundations are individual basic training, whether soldier, officer or NCO.

Q81 Chair: You remain surprisingly optimistic about training the Iraqi army, but it might be possible to say that this was tried. We saw this. The US army put a lot of effort and a lot of money into the stuff you are talking about. When I went to see them in Baghdad in 2008-09, they were living alongside the Iraqi army. They were very proud of doing that. You had units trying to rebuild, all the way from the private soldier up to officer level. And what have we ended up with? This incredibly corrupt, Shi'a-dominated, Iranian-dominated, army. Now you essentially propose that we return to try to do the same thing, but presumably this time with less resources than we had before, and without the American soldiers embedded at every level, so why should we share your optimism? Is this not simply suggesting something that is impossible?

General Shirreff: You highlight one essential pre-condition, which is that it is not a sectarian-based force in which one section is able to predominate over the others. Arguably, in 2008 this was a relatively sectarian-free armed force. Since then, of course, you have seen the Sunni being alienated and the predominance of the Shi'a element.

Q82 Chair: Is not the problem that if it was a sectarian-free force in 2008, but within six years the whole thing collapses and becomes a sectarian force again because of the politics, Iran and the Government, it looks like the best that we achieved was a temporary stop-gap? We are putting a lid on something. We have put all this energy in, we train them up and we walk away, and six years later we are back to square one again.

General Shirreff: I think I would say that by 2011, when we were renegotiating with the Iraqi Government the mandate of the NATO training mission, this was not an entirely unprofessional organisation. What you saw with that NATO training mission, which was only about 150 people, was that the focus on officer training in the academies, on staff colleges and at the higher staff level of training was definitely, without question, improving the professionalism of the Iraqi army. Through that, it was providing a stabilising force in the Iraqi state. Of course, in 2011 the status of forces agreement is not signed and NATO has to pull its training mission out very quickly.

It is worth mentioning that I met the Iraqi Defence Minister, General Abdul Qadir, in April of that year. The Iraqi Government recognised how valuable the NATO training mission was. They were keen to maintain it, and indeed were prepared to part-fund it as well, because they recognised how valuable it was. Of course, you then see the end of that, at the end of 2011, and I think from then on you get increasing Shi'a domination; you get the impact of the Syrian civil war and the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq, aka ISIS, and then, I think, the whole thing begins to implode. I stick by what I say, that in the ideal world you would do it properly, but nevertheless you can achieve quite an impact at a higher level with a relatively small, focused, professional mission, along the lines of a NATO training mission.

Q83 Mr Havard: Can I just ask a bit of a geeky question on police and police forces, the other part of the security element? Do you see that as all part of the same set of training, or do you see a separate set of arrangements for that? How do you see that working together? Because of the experience we have had in Afghanistan, I wonder what you have to say on that.

General Shirreff: I think it is very much part of the same set, and actually, again, the NATO training mission is a good example, because as well as training the officers, as I have just described, at different staff college levels and officer cadet school, being a multinational NATO force it had a significant carabinieri contingent from Italy who did a superb job in training the Iraqi police and the Iraqi oil police. This highlights the value of a multinational force where you can bring in different disciplines, such as carabinieri and gendarmerie and the like, to focus on the police as well. Indeed, Afghanistan is similar, because the training mission consisted not only of the Afghan army but Afghan national police and Afghan civil police as well.

Q84 Mr Havard: So you would say it is not an army, it is a security force.

General Shirreff: It is a security force, yes.

Q85 Mr Donaldson: Do you think that the UK's current force structures are optimal in terms of our capacity to respond to a crisis such as that in the Middle East at the moment?

General Shirreff: No.

Q86 Mr Donaldson: In saying no—which is very clear—what do you think needs to change, especially in terms of not just the Middle East but the potential situation in eastern Europe as well?

General Shirreff: Well, I think what we have seen with Army 2020 is a hollowing out of the force structure. I think the Army has done as good a job as it can do with a very difficult set of cards to play, but I think that by reducing the Army by 20,000 and expecting the Army Reserve to be able to fill the gap, what we see is a very hollowed-out force structure. Although on paper the Army is meant to be capable of deploying up to a division, I think the reality is that whatever is behind the shop window in terms of sustainability and logistics would be pretty wafer-thin. So I think the chances are that it would not be able to do its job.

Q87 Mr Donaldson: So if, in addition to our current commitment in the Middle East and our declining commitment in Afghanistan, we had to deploy troops with NATO in eastern Europe, are you saying that it is difficult to see how that could happen successfully under the current structures?

General Shirreff: I think it is, yes.

Q88 Mr Havard: Are you saying that, essentially, what we are sending is what we can send rather than what we might like to send or what we need to send?

General Shirreff: No, I am not, because I think we could send a lot more than six Tornados.

Q89 Mr Havard: So what could we send?

General Shirreff: You would have to ask the Chief of the General Staff that, in detail.

Mr Havard: You are becoming a politician, General.

General Shirreff: Under the Army 2020 structure, according to the rubric, you should be able to send up to a division, if necessary. Now, I think if you looked in detail at that you would find that extremely difficult to do. If you remember, if you go back to the first Gulf war in 1991, a division consisting of two armoured brigades and an artillery brigade effectively had a corps's worth of logistics. Pretty well the whole of the British Army of the Rhine's core capability for logistics was deployed there. The result was that that was a force about which the American corps commander at the time, General Freddy Franks, described its ability to advance across the desert as relentless, because it was so well logistically provisioned, which is what you need for that sort of warfare. I do not think we could begin to match that.

Q90 Mr Donaldson: On the current crisis in the Middle East, do you think that is likely to have an impact in terms of the ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan and how that is managed post-withdrawal? Are there lessons from Iraq, for example, that can be applied in relation to withdrawal from Afghanistan, or is it too late for that?

General Shirreff: There are a lot of questions there. First, on the impact on draw-down in Afghanistan of ISAF, the ISAF mission finishes in just over two months' time. Effectively, at the time I left SHAPE, the plan was that by the end of October the force level in Afghanistan would be pretty much the same as the post-ISAF train/advise/assist mission that we were planning at that time, at around 12,000. What you will have seen anyway by now is that the majority of ISAF will have drawn down. You will see pretty much a flat line now through into the train/advise/assist mission when the ISAF flag is drawn down at the end of December. I do not think it will have a major impact on the train/advise/assist mission in Afghanistan.

That was one question. Remind me of the others.

Q91 Mr Donaldson: Are there lessons to be learned from Iraq, for example, in how this is managed? Or has it gone beyond that? What do you think the impact of the withdrawal from Afghanistan is with regard to the earlier question on our capacity to deploy in two separate theatres of war?

General Shirreff: Right. I would slightly change the angle. There are lessons from the Afghan experience that could be applied to Iraq, particularly on capacity building. As I said earlier, that business of doing it properly—building up an army from the grass roots and building up respect, confidence and capability—in a way that, frankly, was not done in the British experience in Iraq, is relevant to what might happen in future in Iraq.

Q92 Mr Donaldson: On that point, do you think the Afghan army is likely to perform better than we have seen with the Iraqi army?

General Shirreff: I am optimistic. There is one major caveat—provided the international community stays committed, both in continuing to train/advise/assist, and importantly in providing the money. Don't forget that Afghanistan did not collapse when the Soviets left in 1989; it collapsed when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1992 and the money dried up. I am optimistic that, provided those two caveats are satisfied, the Afghan security forces will be able to contain what will be an ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan.

Q93 Mr Donaldson: On the final point, do you think that the draw-down from Afghanistan will ease the pressures on force structures and our capacity to deploy?

General Shirreff: It certainly should, because you are not committed anywhere. We see now, with the draw-down in Afghanistan, that the level of UK forces committed on operations overseas is probably at an all-time low since about 1968.

Q94 Sir Bob Russell: Could I ask Sir Richard this question? Bearing in mind that Turkey is a member of NATO, would you care to comment on its refusal to get involved with the major humanitarian disaster on its own doorstep?

General Shirreff: All I would say is that, yes, Turkey is a member of NATO, and it has been a loyal member of the alliance since its formation, but of course NATO is not engaged in any operations in Iraq at the moment.

Sir Bob Russell: NATO nations are, though.

General Shirreff: That is a different thing from saying that NATO is involved. There has been no decision taken around the North Atlantic Council to engage NATO. NATO nations might be engaged unilaterally, but that is not saying that the alliance is engaged. Therefore, it is up to Turkey and Turkish national interests what they should or should not do. If I may say so, standing on the sidelines a long way away from a tough neighbourhood and telling other people what they should be doing is not a clever way to do business.

Q95 Sir Bob Russell: No, I recognise that, but are you telling us that it is Turkey's domestic situation that is the dominating factor in its decision not to get involved?

General Shirreff: I suspect it is Turkish national interests more than anything else. Turkey is applying the Palmerstonian dictum of "our interests are eternal, and those interests it is our duty to protect."

Q96 Derek Twigg: Do you think that what little we have agreed to do so far will have a negative impact on our relationship with the US?

General Shirreff: Yes, I do. I think there is a real danger that we have given up by default a position, which we were proud to have, of standing shoulder to shoulder with our No. 1 ally and that could have long-term consequences.

Q97 Derek Twigg: Such as?

General Shirreff: Well, there was a time when the Americans could always rely on us, as I say, standing shoulder to shoulder. I think one of the consequences of this could well be a further distancing of America from engagement in Europe; and instead of being able to say that we were alongside, in a sense we join a long list of other allies that are not prepared to deliver when America makes the call.

Q98 John Woodcock: By that rationale, we ought to be joining the US and those members of the coalition that are extending operations over the Iraq border into Syria.

General Shirreff: Well, if we want to continue to have influence with our premier ally, we need to be prepared to commit alongside. That willingness to commit significant military force into a coalition or an alliance with the Americans has, I think, given us significant influence. If you don't commit, if you're not standing shoulder to shoulder, you don't have influence. It's as simple as that.

Q99 John Woodcock: Can you try to communicate that, translate that, into something that is tangible? I absolutely understand what you were saying in a general sense, but in terms of the influence that it can give us, how can you say that is in the interests of the United Kingdom and its citizens?

General Shirreff: By committing alongside the Americans, we have a say in outcomes that we would not otherwise have and an influence on those outcomes that we would not otherwise have.

Q100 John Woodcock: Because you could say—I am not suggesting I take this view—“Well, what good did that do us in the Iraq reconstruction, because we really messed that up?”

General Shirreff: You could say that, but I think in return I would say that if we had done it properly, we would be in a different position.

Q101 John Woodcock: And did we not do it properly because we were not listened to or because we, too, got it wrong?

General Shirreff: I think we failed to do it properly for a number of reasons and I look forward to the Chilcot inquiry reporting on this. I think time would preclude—how long have you got? We could spend a long time discussing why we didn’t do it properly.

Q102 John Woodcock: Finally, to return to boots on the ground, you were very clear about the need to follow through and do things properly. Your response on Turkey and not seeming to hector other countries that are much closer to the danger and the gravity in the region is, I am sure, a point well made. Does that mean that the hope of persuading other nations, Arab neighbours of Iraq and Syria, to commit ground forces is, in your view, probably futile?

General Shirreff: Well, if the UK is trying to persuade other nations to commit more than we are prepared to commit ourselves—

Q103 John Woodcock: The rationale for a number of Arab neighbours is clearly, “The threat is greater for you because you’re nearby, and we’ll help you in some way.”

General Shirreff: It goes back to the same point. If you are prepared to commit and stand shoulder to shoulder with people, they may be prepared to commit, but if you’re going to stand at the back of the room and shout, “Go forward! Go forward! Oh, I’m not going to come with you,” you don’t stand on very firm ground.

Q104 Bob Stewart: General, you talked about strategy. Is the mission to destroy ISIL?

General Shirreff: The mission is what—

Bob Stewart: No, the military mission. What is the military mission?

General Shirreff: The military mission will be determined by Government policy, and I don't know what the mission is, because we haven't got the Government policy that says it. On the one hand, I hear, "Destroy ISIL." On the other hand, I hear, "Humanitarian relief."

Q105 Bob Stewart: Like we have had before.

General Shirreff: I don't think we have got clarity. If you do not have a clear strategy, you can't have a clear mission.

Q106 Bob Stewart: Let us assume that the mission is to destroy ISIL, and as you say, we are picking at the edges with air power; at the very best, we are going to contain ISIL into, hopefully, the perimeter that it is currently occupying. We are hoping—a big hope—that the Kurds and the Iraqis will get their act together and be able to deal militarily with and destroy the enemy, which is ISIL, themselves, which is a pretty tall order, as I think we would agree. We are also hoping, as John Woodcock has just implied, that the Arab world would put up troops to back Iraq and the Kurds, which is clearly not evident. I asked that question of the Defence Secretary yesterday in Defence questions: what is the Arab world actually going to put up beyond something from air power?

We have declared again—repeated yesterday—that there will be no infantry on the ground from the United Kingdom and apparently, the United States, too. I just cannot see where we are going to have an endgame, because in the end, I fear that if, as we started this conversation, ISIL is such a threat to this country—the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have said that it is such a huge threat—we may have to commit ground forces into action in the middle-east, and we may have to eat our words on whether we will put infantry, armour and artillery on the ground in support of those people on the ground. In a way, I am not asking a question; I am asking for you to comment. Have I got this wrong?

General Shirreff: I was going to say, “—and your question is?”

Q107 Bob Stewart: I am not sure that I have a question, Chairman. My point is that I just cannot see how we can do anything else if all those things happen—if the Arabs don't cough up, if the Iraqis and the Kurds aren't good enough, and if ISIL stays there terrorising. Are we just hoping for a miracle; that the people who are terrorised by ISIL will rise up and destroy them—eat them?

General Shirreff: You highlight the importance of a political process or a political approach that achieves that political aim.

Q108 Bob Stewart: It is going to be very difficult to get politics into that area anyway, but it may well be that the military would have to go in to get the politics in. That is perhaps my question. Is there a military requirement to go in so that politics can operate there?

General Shirreff: Well, there may well be, but I think that if the scenario you postulate comes to pass, we are left with the basic fact that if you want to neutralise ISIL, you have to do it militarily, or you take the time to build up local capacity to do so. That is going to take

time. You either contain, in which case, it might not be enough, or you have to deploy force to destroy.

Q109 Chair: Finally, General, before we let you go, you have talked a lot about training and I want to finish on that. If we were training Sunni forces to take on ISIL, what exactly would we be training them to do? Are we trying to create the kind of force that we created in the 1980s against the Soviet-backed Afghan Government—in other words, are we training up people in guerrilla tactics and in laying IEDs, or are we training up a counter-insurgency warfare force that is going to clear, hold and build Sunni territory? If it is the latter, will that be in the form of tribal militias—the Sunni Awakening sort that we had in 2007 and 2008—or will it be a fully integrated part of the Iraqi army?

General Shirreff: It is the first duty of the commander to determine the nature of the campaign on which he is embarked. You need to understand the nature of the problem. You need to understand the nature of the threat posed by ISIL, the way it operates and then design a force which can counter that. It may be any of the above. It may even be a more joined-up, capable armed force, that looks more like a conventional army.

Chair: General, thank you very much indeed.

Witness: **Major General (retired) Jonathan Shaw**, gave evidence.

Chair: We are lucky to have General Jonathan Shaw, who was the Colonel Commandant of the Parachute Regiment. He has commanded at every level, right the way through—Kosovo, Iraq—but particularly relevant, he was the Commander of the Multi-National Division (South East) in Iraq. General Shaw, thank you very much for coming.

Q110 Mr Havard: We are going to run around some of the same issues, but you are reported to have said—whether it is true or not—that it may be futile to do some of these things unless you have a clear political plan to go with it. It is an obvious remark to make, but it has a lot in it. What are the objectives? What should we be seeking? What are your comments about where the two fit together or whether they do fit together?

Major General Shaw: Yes, I did say that. I did say that military action without a political plan to pursue is futile. What I meant by that is that it stands a very limited chance of success and a pretty good chance of making things worse. Worse, in a wider context, it provides an excuse for politicians not to get to grips with the really difficult issue, which is sorting out the politics. It is as if reaching for the military is what they do if they cannot think of anything sensible politically to do. That is a big mistake, because it distracts the media and puts everyone's attention—like this Committee—on the military side, whereas the really difficult issues are the political ones.

Q111 Mr Havard: So if the real political question is a rapprochement between the Iranians and the Saudis and how you curtail the Qataris, what is the political question that we should be dealing with first before we reach for the military and how do we solve it?

Major General Shaw: You need to address the question of what you think is the problem is of ISIL and where it comes from. It has been characterised in many ways. At one level, it is yet another manifestation of Sunni extremism. At another level it is significantly different from Al Qaeda in its orientation. Al Qaeda was looking at the external influences that have corrupted Islam—hence attacking the United States in 9/11. If you look at the literature and what al-Baghdadi is actually saying, Isis is very much aimed at purifying inside Sunni Islam. You could therefore characterise it even more so as not just a battle within Sunni Islam, but actually a battle within Wahabi Islam. Who are the true representatives on earth of Wahabism? Wahabism, as you know, is a very pure form of Islam and sees itself as the only legitimate form of Islam.

If you look at the behaviour of ISIS when they have taken over areas in the region, they have not just been against non-Muslims, not even against the Shi'a, but against any form of even Sunni-Islam that does not comply with their very strict Wahabi Salafist interpretation of Islam. So this is a particularly internal theological causality behind ISIS which you need to understand. It seems to me, therefore, that the real threat that ISIS pose is not to us in the west; it is to Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which, let us face it, are the only two states in the region—in fact, in the world—that have as their official state religion Wahabi Salafism, or Wahabism, to be more precise. It is to them that we should be looking for a resolution of what I see as still being fundamentally an ideological religious problem. I go back to my earlier response. My concern with the response so far is that we seem to be mowing the grass as far as killing terrorists is concerned, but we seem to be talking very little about the real problem, which is this particular ideology or mentality. If we are talking about threats to the United Kingdom, I think the major threat is that ideology, rather than necessarily any military force that may be rampaging around Syria and northern Iraq right now.

Q112 Mr Havard: So, do you see the existing military response as containing this expression as it currently is, while these guys roam around the place creating their caliphate as best they can? My understanding of his declaration is that his caliphate is the whole of the world, or the entire Muslim population of the world—that would include Malaysia and everywhere else, no doubt—but he is just starting with the Middle East, the Levant and Cyprus, interestingly enough.

Major General Shaw: Indeed.

Mr Havard: But you have got to do something in response. We are doing something in response, but what you are saying is that that is really just a containment strategy, but in one sense it is not addressing the real, underlying problem. You have now got the Saudis and others committing matériel and forces, and you have got a UAE woman pilot flying about the place and shooting them up. Is there not some progress in terms of the neighbours understanding their own problem and accommodating themselves in a different way?

Major General Shaw: There is some sign, but very little. I think that the containment policy is a sensible policy in so far as it goes, in that at least it tries to buy time. It is buying time for the Sunni nations in the region to work out their response. We need to have some sympathy with them because although you cite the case of them raising matériel to fight the battle, I think Saudi Arabia has sent about as many fighters as we have, which is pretty inadequate. I suspect that the life of that poor female pilot in UAE is now being made hell by the religious extremists in UAE.

Underneath the surface of those countries, whatever their formal states say, we have got to recognise that a recent poll in Saudi Arabia showed that 92% of people in the country thought that ISIS was a legitimate expression of Islam. Also, there was the blog about the Saudi pilot who refused to go on a bombing raid against ISIS because he believed in ISIS. We need to recognise that there are extreme internal divisions in the Sunni world, and we should not make assumptions just because the Government says some nice words about joining the coalition. Actions speak louder than words, and the minimal efforts that the Sunni states have made towards tackling ISIS show just how difficult they are finding it to handle this. The internal power struggle in Saudi Arabia is so extreme that some people have termed what is going on at the moment the war of Saudi succession. In many ways, that is what we are seeing.

When we are looking at what we should do, it is right that we should see this as a threat, but I think we would be wise to take a sort of Hippocratic oath on this one that in trying to do something, we do no harm. One of the great problems is that although we in our western way see evil and believe that we are on the side of good, that is absolutely not the way it is seen in the region. If we are going to do military engagement in the Middle East, we should remember Clausewitz's words—not the bit about war being a continuation of politics by other means, but the bit about victory being defined in political stability terms, not in terms of a fleeting passage of arms. What does that long-term political stability look like? Until you have worked that one out, it is very hard to know what military action is actually useful.

As I say, if we in the West are leading on this, what is the effect of Christian forces in what is not just an internal Islam, or even an internal Sunni, but an internal Wahabi battle for legitimacy? How does the intervention of Christian people in an internal Wahabi battle play? How does that make people whom I would identify as our allies in Saudi Arabia—such as King Abdullah and Prince bin Nayef—feel? Does it make their job easier or more difficult? I would feel a lot more confident in the western planning if I felt that I and our planners fully understood the mindset of the Saudis.

Q113 Mr Havard: We could go on discussing this for a long time, but I just want to bring you back to some of the practical things where we are. A couple of things come out of what you say. There is this criticism about the Iraqi armed forces—you heard some of the discussion that we had earlier with others about it—who were not going to stand and fight as a coherent army. Maybe some of these elements you described are reasons why that was. What is your view of the training of the Iraqi army, its ability to become a coherent force? What should we do? Is there some way we can assist in that?

Major General Shaw: Before I answer that can I just go back to your comment about practical matters as against the sort of intellectualisation mentioned earlier—

Mr Havard: Yes, it was a mistake. I understand that.

Major General Shaw: Those bits are absolutely fundamental to understanding the nature of the problem. If we don't get that nature right then we really are making a mistake.

Back to the practical issue of change in the Iraqi army. An army is always said to be a reflection of the society that is drawn from. The Iraqi army like, the Afghan army, will be as strong or as weak as the Governments and the governance and the societal glue from which it

is drawn. We can do all we want. When I was out in Basra in 2007 trying to organise the withdrawal there was a police chief who had just been sent in. He suffered about three assassination attempts in as many weeks. I said, "What can we do to help?" He said: "This isn't about training or equipment; it's about loyalty and you cannot touch that." That is a lesson we just need to learn. We can give these people the best weapons in the world. We can train up the yin yang but, fundamentally, if the moral component is weak they won't be any good. That is why 30,000 ran away in Mosul against 3,000. ISIL believed in what they were doing and these guys didn't.

Q114 Mr Havard: But when the same guys are fighting for the Badr militia or Muqtada al-Sadr's guys and all the rest of it, they have a moral component then. They don't run away then, do they?

Major General Shaw: They are fighting for their own patch, aren't they?

Q115 Mr Havard: Exactly. That is the point you are trying to make, isn't it? Are we slightly deluded in assuming that we get the Sunni awakening or whatever that was meant to be and that in some way, magically, all of these different groupings will cohere into a reformed Iraqi army? Is that not going to happen?

Major General Shaw: There is a sort of yes and no to that. I still think that if we are looking for an answer about what to do about ISIL, we need to look at the divisions that possibly exist within ISIS. ISIS is in part a positive force. They have certain objectives. In part it is an anti-force. So why are the Ba'athists, who are not religious, particularly, and just happen to be Sunni, allied with these ultra religious people? What is the bond between them? Answer: they both hate the existing status quo. If we can drive a wedge between them that has to be the way to do it.

I am not there and I am not reading the intelligence but I would be surprised if the tribes in the Anbar are any keener on ISIS than they were on al-Qaeda. So there are wedges there which is why this containment mission, which was slagged off a bit in questions to the previous witness, has a certain coherence because it buys time for the intelligence people and for these discontents and these divisions to become apparent. Again, one of my concerns is that the more we Christians get in there, the more we ally people against them. If we just incubate them we can let their own internal divisions come out.

To come back to your other question: what Sunni force can we muster to take back northern Iraq if our objective is politically to restore the territorial integrity of Iraq as it was before? There is the difficulty. The Iraq army will be a fundamentally Shi'a army. Seeing a fundamentally Shi'a army taking over Sunni lands will be problematic. They will almost certainly not be treated as liberators by the local Sunni population, which poses its own problems. The real question is where you are going to get this Sunni army from. Are you going to get it from the local tribes? Are you going to get it from Saudi Arabia? I doubt it. You can see the problems.

Q116 Mr Havard: I do see the problems. My argument would be, well, why not? That is an argument that we will have when we go and see them, no doubt. All of this has to be long

term. You made the point about sustainability and persistence. What do the Americans call their operation at the moment? Inherent Resolve, is it? It is something about resolve and persistence. It has to be sustainable. How do you see that running if it is going to be a long-term political argument to deal with the objectives?

Major General Shaw: I have no idea.

Mr Havard: You have no idea.

Major General Shaw: I don't know what it means.

Q117 Mr Havard: But it is important, isn't it, in terms of how we configure and participate.

Major General Shaw: Absolutely. Therefore, politically we should not

be looking for quick wins, because there are not going to be any. It actually gives credibility to the containment programme.

Q118 Mr Havard: So the Prime Minister is not wrong in saying it is generational?

Major General Shaw: No, he is not wrong at all. If he is going to adopt that philosophy, I don't think he should see this as a recent event. He should see it as merely the latest recurrence since 9/11 of Sunni extremism. The most encouraging line came from Tony Blair—not a man I normally praise too much—who recently said that the biggest threat that the world faces is Sunni violent extremism. I think he is absolutely right. That should set the world priority; it is the problem we have been facing since 9/11. That is the generational struggle. We have already been doing it since 9/11, and we are going to need to keep doing it.

It comes back to the root cause which, in my view, is not the military but education. In my view, the nature of Islamic observance across the world is being altered by madrassahs and the forms of Islam that are being taught in those schools. That is the time bomb that will lead to the generational struggle that the Prime Minister talks about.

Q119 Mr Havard: Okay. Those two gentlemen cannot be wrong all the time, can they? By the law of averages, they have got to be right some time.

What is Turkey's involvement? One thing that interests me in the discussion about Syria is that we gave a lot of attention to the south of Syria—there were a lot of discussions about whether they are being armed, where the arms are going in, whether the arms are coming from Croatia and who is paying for them—but nobody seemed to know what was happening in the north. All of a sudden, we had ISIL in the north. It is a big place with big spaces, and its neighbour at the top end is Turkey. The situation is moving every day, but what do you think Turkey can do? On your point about religion and all the rest of it, they are not Arabs. How should they play it, and how can we help them to play it constructively?

Major General Shaw: Our starting point should be to limit our expectations and see the world through Turkish eyes, not our own. If you look at it from the Turkish point of view, they, like many countries—ourselves included—assumed that Assad would go quickly, and they opened their borders for jihadis to go across. It all went rather sour for them when that

did not work out and when the nature of the jihadis became more extreme. If you are sitting in Turkey, you now see three threats: the Kurds, ISIL and Assad. They have got to balance those three and work out which is the priority. It seems to me at the moment that their priority is to get rid of the Kurds first, Assad second and then deal with ISIL.

If you take seriously Erdogan's statement last week, in which he said he wants to redraw the boundaries of the Sykes-Picot agreement, his ambition seems to go right through Sunni Syria, down the Euphrates and into Iraq. Given that those are his stated objectives, the question is, what will he actually do? In the past two weeks, he seems to have changed his political direction so many times, agreeing to one thing in the United Nations, reneging on it the next week and now apparently allowing America to go back in. So I do not know. There are lots of things we want from Turkey, but we should start by understanding Erdogan's fears, which will give us a compass on where he is going to go next.

Q120 Mr Havard: At the moment you just want a Hippocratic oath from him, do you?

Major General Shaw: From my point of view, I hope he will see ISIL as the biggest threat because, as I said before, I think it is the biggest threat. But I understand why, from his point of view, it might not seem to be at the moment.

Q121 Bob Stewart: Two questions, General. With all your expertise and training, have you got any idea how come ISIL can pick up relatively sophisticated tanks and artillery, turn them around and be pretty good at using them without doing a British Army course? We spend weeks training on those things, and I am confused about how they can pick up a tank, gun it, command it and look after it. Have you got any insight on that, because it seems extraordinary?

Major General Shaw: Like most people, I was surprised when ISIL suddenly burst onto the scene—I have not been reading classified intelligence for some years. Reading back on it now, people are saying that this force was in gestation for some time. I can only go on what I have read in open source—your sources of information are probably considerably better than mine—but it seems to me that they have been trained on those things over some period of time.

Q122 Bob Stewart: So they were prepared to pick them up?

Major General Shaw: So it would seem, but I have no particular knowledge on this.

Q123 Bob Stewart: The second issue is that it seems impossible for us to deal with this situation. There is no solution that any Methuselah can come to as to how we deal with this rift through the Arab world. Is the truth that, in the end, it will be history that resolves this problem, in that we are not going to have any impact and could make it worse, and if we do go in, we will not be thanked, and, in the end, the people who are suffering the most will have to sort it out for themselves? Is there an argument that we should just say, "To hell with you, a plague on all your houses", and just say that we are leaving?

Major General Shaw: “Solution”—I hate that word. In a 1991 report on Northern Ireland, the Norwegian peace activist Torkel Opsahl said, “If you want a solution, go to a chemist”. He said that conflict is inevitable in society; the issue is how you manage it. Conflicts need managing, I agree with him absolutely. There is no magic solution. This is about people and how you manage them. It is about how people choose to manage their own conflicts, which are inherent in every society.

As I think has been said before, the opportunity for Maliki was there after the Anbar uprising, had he had a different cast of mind, to reward the Sunni tribes for their revolt against al-Qaeda and bring them into the politic—for example, to make decisions on the distribution of oil profits—and give them seats in Government. What actually happened was that he saw the arming of the Sunni tribes as a very short-term experience, because in the Shi’a mentality the biggest threat, which united all Shi’as and on which Iran backed them, was a resurgence of Sunni power—they wanted to ensure that we did not go back to Saddam’s regime. As soon as they had got rid of al-Qaeda, the Sunnis were basically shut out again. That was always the political weakness of the military campaign in which we armed the Anbar tribes. That was mismanaged; the opportunity was missed.

Should we say, “To hell with them”? No. That is far too prescriptive. I firmly believe that we should be in strong support of a fundamentally Sunni approach to what is, as I see it, a Sunni problem.

Q124 Bob Stewart: I wasn’t actually suggesting it; I was just playing devil’s advocate.

Major General Shaw: Splendid. That is why I am in favour of a long-term policy of containment, rather than trying to solve it from our point of view.

Q125 Bob Stewart: That might be the alternative step, mightn’t it? We do not abandon, just contain.

Major General Shaw: And we wait for the Sunnis to sort it out.

Q126 Bob Stewart: That is what I am getting at.

Major General Shaw: I am sure, politically, that somewhere we are thinking that part of the way to manage the situation may indeed be to reconsider the region’s borders. I understand that a lot of people are saying that the borders of Iraq will not be recovered and regained in the way that they were before—we are not going to turn back the clock. In the light of that, there needs to be some pretty sharp political footwork to work out some stepping-stone system to a new future.

Q127 Derek Twigg: General, if we are indeed talking about containment until they sort themselves out, what would it take to achieve that militarily?

Major General Shaw: It seems to me that ISIL’s success has so far been limited to Sunni land, and as soon as they have hit either Kurd land on one side or Shi’a land on the other, their progress has slowed quite dramatically. You could therefore argue that all we need to do

is provide sufficient air power and have it on call so that if it is needed—if there are ISIS strikes—it can help to maintain a sectarian buffer, if you like. I guess that how that works out in Syria may be a different battle. I have been looking mainly at Iraq. It is about air power, which perhaps means some forward air controllers on the ground. I noticed that someone said earlier that although there would be no infantry on the ground, there might be forward air controllers. I don't know, but they might already be there providing that kind of assistance—who knows?

I also think that the counter-IED task is vital, because although it does not hit the headlines very often, ISIL have a technique whereby they surround outposts with IEDs. Having a counter-IED force in Iraq would be very useful for containing them and preventing them from using that weapons system to take out outposts, whether they are Sunni or Peshmerga. On that basis, it ought to be as sustainable—certainly in Iraq—to stop their incursions further south.

Q128 Derek Twigg: Do you think the air power we have offered so far is sufficient?

Major General Shaw: I do not know enough about the land incursions. They seem to have slowed their incursions. If I am right about the Shi'a and Kurds holding their own land, I am not sure it is too bad. I suspect that the real need is for more precision in how it is applied, rather than necessarily the sheer quantity of it. At the moment, we seem to go on flights and have trouble finding a target, which would suggest we have a bit of overkill.

Q129 Derek Twigg: Would that not also need significant or sizeable ground forces, wherever they may come from, to help contain it? Are you basically saying that air power alone—obviously, with various special forces and spotters on the ground—would be enough? I want to be clear.

Major General Shaw: I would hope that that is enough. I am taking a punt on the moral fighting power of the Kurds and Shi'a to protect their own land. I rather agree with the will to fight of the Badr Corps or SCIRI—whatever they are called these days. Those local militias do have a certain intensity of moral courage that was noticeably absent in Mosul. If they were aligned with a bit of western firepower, I would be confident that they could hold where they are.

Q130 Derek Twigg: We have talked about a number of countries in the Middle East. Does Jordan have a role to play? They are particularly threatened. They have a vast number of refugees and cannot take any more without even greater instability.

Major General Shaw: My understanding is that Jordan is playing a more forward leading role than most countries. Given the links to our country and the orientation of their king, that is understandable and a good thing. What I would like to see is more participation from across the region.

Q131 Derek Twigg: I want to be clear—I think you said earlier that you were not clear what the strategy is.

Major General Shaw: Indeed, I am not. You are quite right.

Q132 Derek Twigg: Did both you and General Shirreff say that?

Major General Shaw: Yes. I would like to see a Sunni strategy for coping with this and us supporting it. That is the trouble with the westerners coming up with the strategy; it ends up being a Christian strategy and Christian action with the Arabs.

Q133 Derek Twigg: But you do not see a strategy at all at the moment?

Major General Shaw: At the moment, I cannot see where it is heading. I cannot see the politics.

Q134 John Woodcock: Would you briefly clarify—apologies if I have misunderstood—what you said about the tension between the need for a containment strategy and the issue of potentially making it worse if it is Christian-led, as you put it? Does that tip the balance into being unhelpful when it is ground troops? Could the current level of engagement, with the extra things you suggest, be a positive thing or is the UK being involved in this way counter-productive?

Major General Shaw: I do not see enough of the intelligence factors to be able to judge the overall effect of western air power on this game. I just see what I read in the papers, and opinion seems to be divided. It is potentially very double-edged, for all the arguments that the first witness said. Every action has both positive and negative things; you just have to balance those. I am not, in principle, against air strikes with the aim of limiting the ISIS advance, but the metric has to be the effect it has on the overall political campaign. That is what concerns me—I cannot quite see that.

Q135 John Woodcock: We can all agree that we would love our neighbours to be leading this and doing all of it, but that is not going to happen. We have to make a judgment as to whether we step in, in some form.

Major General Shaw: Yes. We are being very fatalistic. We may say that it has not happened in our lifetime, but there are instances in the past when they have actually taken action if they feel sufficiently threatened. They do things in ways that we do not really conceive of, because they have a different mindset and work in different ways.

Q136 Sir Bob Russell: I am left with little more than a minute to ask this question.

Chair: Sir Bob, you have much more time than one minute. You have 10 minutes.

Q137 Sir Bob Russell: I won't need 10 minutes, but thank you.

General, do you believe that the UK ought to join the United States and its allies in carrying out air strikes in Syria?

Major General Shaw: If the legal foundation is sound, which I think the Foreign Secretary was saying it was the other day, then militarily it would make sense, for the same purpose—a containment strategy—to do that. But that is a big if.

Q138 Sir Bob Russell: General, you will be more aware than I of the current size and structure of Her Majesty's armed forces. Are those structures of sufficient size and capability to deal with a crisis, such as the one in the Middle East?

Major General Shaw: The fact that we are using six—now eight—aged Tornados shows that we have been buying the wrong planes for the last 10 to 15 years—in that we bought a brand-new sparkling plane and put a concrete block in the nose instead of a gun as a cost-saving measure. I would say that, in the current circumstance, that was a bit of a false economy, particularly as I understand that the concrete block and all the alterations to the aviation has cost as much as the gun would originally have done.

Q139 Sir Bob Russell: That is pretty definite condemnation. Could I just take it a bit further? We have this one crisis. If there were further developments in eastern Europe which required UK forces as part of a NATO mission, or perhaps further troops are required in response to the Ebola crisis—that would be three—are Her Majesty's armed forces sufficient to do all three missions effectively?

Major General Shaw: That is a very emotive question, because it leaves undefined what you mean by “effectively”, what the size of the contribution is, and how you identify the mission. The Ebola one I cannot argue for. The east European one is interesting, in that it depends what you see the threat is. Fortunately, the chief of general staff of the Russians, Valery Gerasimov, outlined a year ago the way he saw Russian forces operating, and it is a way of—as far as I know it is the first country to describe how they were going to engage in what we would call hybrid war.

The big worry I would have about hybrid war is not the capacity of our armed forces to cope with it, but the capacity of Whitehall to organise across Government a coherent plan, rather than just a comprehensive approach, to deal with it, because the whole nature of hybrid war plays to a strength of the Soviet—sorry, the Russian system—*[Interruption.]* A Freudian slip. That exposes what I perceive as a chronic weakness in the British Government system, in that we do not have an executive culture across Whitehall, and Whitehall finds it difficult to create a plan across Government—it is an accumulation of departmental efforts, to cite the book I have just written on exactly that topic, “Britain in a Perilous World”, which I would submit as evidence to the Committee.

Do we have enough forces for it? If I understand Gerasimov correctly, the military involvement in that campaign is small, limited and precisely targeted, and the only time that it is applied is when the battle is already won, when the population are sufficiently stirred up, when you have sufficiently motivated the population and so on. Then, as in Georgia, Crimea and Ukraine, little green men appear and, suddenly, the game is lost. That is the worry I would have about the Baltics. I do not see massed tanks rolling across from Germany. What I see is subversion, corruption, disinformation and maskirovka—all that classic stuff. In that sense, it is not a question of mass that we need; it is a question of precision and application of all the levers of Government power in support of the host countries in the Baltics.

Q140 Sir Bob Russell: Committee members have visited two of the Baltic countries. I wonder whether you would agree with one of our recommendations, which is for regular NATO exercises—not permanent NATO bases—in the three Baltic countries.

Major General Shaw: Contrary to what I just said, I am very surprised that NATO has not forward-positioned troops right the way across NATO already as a sort of human trip wall, which always used to be the basis. There was a force that was designed to represent every nation in NATO that deliberately deployed for exactly for that purpose. I am surprised that we have not already got those troops there on a rotating basis in the Baltics.

Sir Bob Russell: Thank you, General. I knew that we lived in a troubled world. The three witnesses this afternoon have indicated that it is even more troubled than I thought.

Chair: General, thank you very much. James Gray wanted to come in briefly.

Q141 Mr Gray: As Sir Bob says, our three witnesses are reasonably unanimous in saying that what is happening in Iraq and Syria is either tokenistic, too little, useless, dangerous or achieving a very moderate containment, but no more than that. In all your discussions, thinking and talks around the world in recent weeks, have you come across anybody who enthusiastically supports what we are doing in Iraq?

Major General Shaw: Not in the terms in which you are asking the question, no.

Q142 Mr Gray: It is a simple question: have you come across, do you know or can you think of anybody at all—commentators, think-tanks, politicians other than the Prime Minister—who is well-informed in these matters and who would say that what we have agreed to do in Iraq, namely limited air strikes, is the right thing to have done?

Major General Shaw: I think the air strikes in Iraq could well be the right thing to be done, but the problem is that it is not connected to a political plan apart from the containment aspect.

Chair: That brings the formal public session to a close. We are now going to continue a brief discussion with General Shaw. Dr Porch, we will see you outside. Thank you everybody. I thank the public very much for coming and colleagues if they need to leave.

Resolved, That the Committee should sit in private. The witnesses gave oral evidence. Asterisks denote that part of the oral evidence, which, for security reasons, has not been reported at the request of the witness and with the agreement of the Committee.

Q143 Chair: ***

Major General Shaw: ***

Q144 Chair: ***

Major General Shaw: ***

Q 145 Mr Havard: ***
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Q146 Mr Havard: ***
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Q147: ***
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Q148 Derek Twig: ***
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Q150 Derek Twigg: ***
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Q151 Chair: ***
Major General Shaw: ***

Q152 Mr Havard: ***
Major General Shaw: ***