HOUSE OF COMMONS

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Future Force 2020, HC 512

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Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1-96

Witnesses: **General (retired) Sir Graeme Lamb** and **Mark Urban**, BBC correspondent and military historian, gave evidence.

In the absence of the Chair, Mr Havard was called to the Chair.

Q1 Chair: Welcome. Obviously I am not Rory Stewart. He is having a baby, so he is on a training course, doing pre-parental duties. We hope he will be here later. Thank you for coming.

General Sir Graeme, you have come in front of the Committee many times before. I will not try to chant your CV. It is very impressive and goes back a number of years. We ask you to do two things for us today, if you could. The first is to help us with our general approach on where we are going with Force 2020. A bit later we would like you to say something about Syria, Iraq and current circumstances, if you could. We will try to do that as a discrete item at the end, though obviously it will run through what we say. We will deal with it in the particular later, if we could. We have about an hour and a bit. I am sorry, but business life is very hectic here at the moment, so Committee members will pop in and out.

I will kick off with Force 2020, rather than Army 2020. As you are aware, we did a report on Army 2020. It seems that in public discourse the two things are often collapsed together. They are related, but they are not the same. We now want to look at where we are with Force 2020 and the conceptual basis for the new force structures, not just the question of Reserves or not. We want to look at the whole concept of the new approach to putting together your force structure. Numbers may have come out of financial austerity, but can you say something about whether you think there is utility in the concept of the structure in the first place?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Obviously, I have to fill the fridge, so Force 2020 is not part of my daily digest, but I do understand the underlying approach. I have two concerns. One is that

the new Joint Forces Command is not seen as it probably should be, which is as the tri-service driver—the joint driver that delivers the capabilities set out by the National Security Council, the Ministry of Defence, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, Government, Parliament and all the rest, in terms of what they wish their armed forces to do.

The second space that gives me a degree of concern is that as we come out of Iraq and now Afghanistan and look towards Force 2020, I sense that there will be an energy to return to contingency—return to what we feel comfortable with, and what has served the nation extraordinarily well for 300 years but may not be entirely fit for a 21st-century purpose. I will be interested in Mark's insights from his side of the space, but I sense that what has changed is the nature of the threats now challenging the defence of this realm.

Q2 Chair: Right. Thank you for coming, Mark. You are well known to most people in the country, because of your appearances on television. I think you were in the Mob at some point, were you not?

Mark Urban: I was, yes, ages ago.

Q3 Chair: I thought so. You have experienced some of it and are a well-known commentator on this. How is this seen elsewhere, outside the cognoscenti?

Mark Urban: Thank you, Chairman. I would stress—having covered these issues for 25-odd years for various newspapers, as well as the BBC, and been a historian of the forces—that I am speaking in a personal capacity today. The basic conceptual idea is a good one—what one could call a capability-based rather than a threat-based approach, when one looks back to the defence reviews at the end of the Cold War. It has to be. The world is so unpredictable at the current time. Saying, "We will attempt to do such and such an operation at around 6,500 if we have to as a single enduring operation," or whatever the other yardsticks are in there, is a good approach.

The danger—everyone I speak to in the forces day to day is all too aware of it—is that events or possible financial stringencies will intervene well before these performance benchmarks can be met. The desired benchmarks in, for example, being able to get a brigade into action in three months will not be achievable, or things will happen that undermine it. In terms of what General Lamb calls the "possible return to contingency", one could talk about a capability-based approach if we were looking at this 10 years ago, but we would all understand that the likely scenarios in which aircraft, ships and armed forces would be used were against inferior or emerging-type threats, non-state groups, ungoverned space—all those types of contingency. There is clearly a big change in post-Ukraine events, in terms of the possible enemy that British forces might be deployed against in a NATO scenario—for example, in reinforcing the Baltic republics against a Russian separatist threat. When you have a Russian separatist threat which has, as we have seen in Ukraine, deployed very high-end anti-aircraft capabilities, downing three dozen Ukrainian planes and helicopters in a few months, then those sorts of state-to-state warfare capabilities, which have long been pushed into the background in the UK armed forces, suddenly have a very significant relevance again.

Q4 Chair: Will contingency become complacency, then?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Absolutely. I have no difficulty there at all. The problem in many ways is not that returning to contingency is a bad thing. If you have a limited force structure—I am a taxpayer, so I get the cash flow and financial headspace for this—you can only do so much. If you take the bulk of that and put it into a return to contingency, my view is that it does not take account of what is newly emerging. This is a very different century from the last. We had a century of terrifying order—two world wars and a Cold War, finishing off with a nuclear deterrent that went through that. There is clarity, though, of the rules of the game, in many ways.

As we left the last century, Russia lost, and increasingly I sense the United States of America has lost interest, so the two leaderships of those great spheres of influence have now departed or are departing the stage. In many ways, I find myself looking at a world where security is not such an attractive term, and stability or instability is very much more the one that I sense we as a nation find ourselves confronting, whether that is social, political, diplomatic or economic. All those instabilities are in my view trending, and some quite violently, upward.

Q5 Chair: Okay. So you are trying to plan better against increasing uncertainty, which is a difficult trick. Is the word "resilience", rather than anything else?

Sir Graeme Lamb: I think the answer is that you need part of your resource. You need part of the force that we have. I have no difficulty with that. There are the carriers, but I have no difficulty with what I call the F-35s and all this. The truth of the matter is that when you have a limited budget and a new set of problems, you see that Darwin wasn't wrong. It is not the strongest and most intelligent, but the species that adapts, that will meet those threats. The danger is that I sense we are not necessarily adapting to these new spaces. We have not done so for some considerable time. It is easy for me as a retired fellow now to throw stones at the glasshouse. I am very conscious of that. In many ways, your ability to manoeuvre the budget of the Ministry of Defence and the big, major components—that is, people and/or equipment—which are long-burn programmes, is extremely difficult. In many ways, we are set on a course that was set some time before.

If that suits—I agree entirely with Mark—that capability base, that is fine. However, when you have uncertainty and unknowns—and that is increasingly what we are looking at, whether it is Ebola, ISIL, transnational and sub-national threats, social unrest, or a break of the social contract in this country or wherever you want to place it—the truth of the matter is that you have to look at your force structures and see how you can adapt within that. I do not believe that it is sufficient just to make do against these. If I am not mistaken, the failing state index has 126 of the nation states of the world on the wrong side of the rails. They are either failed or failing. The trend in that is all bad. The uncertainty is a reality, so what you should not do is question how you plan for uncertainty; what you must do is make sure that you look back to your force structure and see how we will deal with uncertainty. The military are by design a force that is intended to, and should always be, be prepared at the nation's bidding to

move into harm's way. It should also be a force that is suitably structured, organised and culturally attuned to operating in chaos.

If I ask who else joins us in that space, interestingly the journalists do. Interestingly, you can pay for it with certain contractors. You will find it within some elements of the intelligence community and some of the NGOs. At that point in time, no one else comes to play.

Q6 John Woodcock: Given the long lead times for creating new bits of kit, will you explain in this context what you think adapting successfully would look like? Given the current threats, what should we not be doing, what should we stop doing and what should we be doing more of?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Again, I am not about to burn my boats with all my friends in the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Army—Oh, but I have always done that, so why would I want to change? I did a piece of work for the United States military some years ago. At that time, General Mattis of the US Marine Corps, a great man and a great American, invited me across to lead one of their three confidential scenarios as they put together their joint operational environment, which is a piece of work they produce for the chairman and looks 20 to 25 years out. A very bright middle-aged man from MIT spoke to us for about 40 minutes, at the end of which I came to the conclusion that although I did not understand the vast majority of what he said, the big takeaways were absolutely clear: the next three to five years were all about innovation and integration—taking what you have got and making it work better. He said that, 20 years out, it is all about invention and discovery; your take from that would be that you cannot prepare for that, and it would be a wrong assessment, because the truth is that you must invest in your people. The emerging sciences and technologies that are appearing all over the place will change the nature of the threat we face and therefore the systems we require to deal with it.

If you go back and look at the big procurement programmes, when 9/11 occurred, another great friend and great American, General Pete Schoomaker, had just retired from the US military. He was one of the last Vietnam Special Forces and an extraordinary soldier. He was driving to Montana when he had a telephone call saying he was needed back as Chief of Staff of the Army. He said to Donald Rumsfeld, "Don't you get it? I have retired." Donald Rumsfeld phoned again and said, "No, no, no. We need you back as Chief of Staff of the United States Army. The nation is in need. The next telephone call will come from the President of the United States of America and I would rather he did not have to make it." Being a good soldier, Pete then gave it the all right. He turned the car round and drove back to Washington.

Peter cancelled the Comanche programme, which was the next generation of the attack helicopter, the Apache. The deal was that the Secretary of State would cancel the programme and Pete would keep the money. It cost a fortune in the cost out to Boeing or whoever was producing it, and that had to be absorbed, but it gave him ready cash to be able to manoeuvre his people, to buy them for the coming fight and to start doing some R and D and get some necessary capability in.

From a conversation I had as Director of Special Forces in 2001 to where I sit now as an old bloke with a face for radio in 2014, the truth is that I do not think a year has passed when I have not said, "Why have we not got more ISR?" The new two decades are not about fix and strike; they will be about find and exploit. That is a personal view.

How you adjust the programme is for those who work not far from me, and work extremely hard, but the truth of the matter is the importance of that shift. When Michael Heseltine was going into the Ministry of Defence and wanted to change it, he presented the proposition and people said it would take several years. He told them they were not listening to him and that it needed to be done quickly. That is exactly how we work in operations.

Q7 Chair: Agility among accountants might be an interesting concept to pursue. We will come back to a number of the elements within that as we go through. A lot of what you describe was only predicated as an idea in 2010 and here we are in 2014. This business of the dynamism, the speed and the non-sequential, co-existence of a number of different problems all at the same time appears to be new to us and therefore we have got to configure to deal with it.

The plans for the force structures and the concept of Force 2020 were meant to run out to and be fully established in 2020, not 2014. That is why we are asking the question: if we are going to have a defence review in 2015, or whenever it is going to be—I have a fiver on it being 2016, but that's just a private bet—bearing in mind the iterations between now and 2020 when the original plan was predicated to be fully formed, is the concept on which it was based valid? Let's ask you, Mark, what do you think? Is reactive and adaptive forces and trying to put structures together to do that still valid?

Mark Urban: I think the reactive or adaptive concept has to be the right one. The point is that I think a lot people in Whitehall seem to have assumed, based on the situation, say, six months ago, that they would have five years of not being involved in operational contingencies in which to put this together. You see that almost being expressed explicitly by the CDS in his RUSI lecture early last December. He more or less bemoaned the fact that the French are more aggressive and more liable to get involved in operations and that caution has overtaken the UK. Certainly the people I was speaking to around the time clearly assumed that we would have some years to turn everything around and get everything in the right sort of shape for this conceptual 2020 force. We know now that they haven't got that time and I think there are some very serious challenges. I am not going to nominate things to be chopped or whatever, because I don't think that's my role.

Q8 John Woodcock: Do you agree with the basic analysis that those kinds of decision need to happen?

Mark Urban: I think they do need to happen next year because if one goes to the three principal capability areas I think you can already ask some very serious questions. Part of that assumed hiatus, which for some reason the defence and foreign policy elite thought was going to be there, was this idea that capability gaps would not matter or that somehow they could just be worked around for the next few years. However, now we see them in stark

relief, for example with the Tornado force. How does the UK, in the next year or two as the Tornado airframes become so worked out, actually drop guided weapons? We know there is a capability now with Typhoon, but it hasn't been used operationally yet and the gap, if F-35 does not come in quickly and the fact that it will only initially be integrated with certain basic weapons, seems to be getting bigger. For example, precision bombing is potentially a big area of the capability gap, which is exposed now in the current situation in Iraq.

We see it with the Army. The plan was three response force brigades able to move out within three months. We know now that a single mechanised battle group going to Poland for exercises has severely taxed the resources of the British Army in terms of just assembling a single battle group's worth of working vehicles. We know there are serious problems. We see reports that only 36 tanks in the Army are fully working. That is also very much a work in progress, yet we know from events in eastern Europe that people might have to move a lot faster than 2020 in responding to some kind of contingency.

Lastly, in terms of the other principal area of activity—Navy, sea power and so on—we know that some of these questions about the F-35B, for example, which has not been ordered despite the fact that we were certainly receiving information early this year that it was imminently going to be ordered, are now causing people to question whether it should be flown from the carriers at all. Should the UK simply wait for the conventional variant and not use the F-35B at all? These are very big questions in terms of either extending the anticipated gaps in capability, also, of course, in financial terms, and in asking, how do you continue to meet contingencies until whatever your plan B or C materialises? We know with the Tornado force that 2 Squadron will not be taken out of service at the anticipated date. We know that workarounds are already going into place, but all that hugely complicates the decisions for SDSR in 2015.

Q9 Chair: But is the general concept about Force 2020 correct?

Mark Urban: I think the question is this: can it survive in the way that it was originally defined in 2010, with those kinds of benchmarks? Another issue comes into it, of course: will there be any possible future pinch on the defence budget, or feeling about whether it can be afforded, even in the form in which it was originally laid out, without all these workarounds and new operations that have come up? I think that that is very doubtful.

Chair: So the questions about how you make it work have changed things.

Q10 Mr Donaldson: General Lamb and Mr Urban, with diminishing capacity in our armed forces, conflict prevention becomes more important. Do you think that the Government have the right balance between soft and hard power?

Sir Graeme Lamb: I would say that if you could accelerate the timeline and meet the intent—the truth is that the adaptable force, which is how the Army is looking at the approach to being able to extend reach, is about not intervention but early engagements—then my view is that the structure works. The idea of having specific parts looking at different parts of the world makes good sense.

However, if you then commit to companies training forces—let us say in Nigeria with Boko Haram—that is a company commitment, which therefore requires a battalion's worth, as you know only too well, and there are the structures that need to go into it, plus the logistics. It then requires the airlift to be able to deliver that, and our tactical airlift is changing to being ordinary in many ways: we will take the C-130s out of line in 2022, and will start to adjust on that with the A400M coming in. So you have some interesting assumptions and these gaps beginning to exist. Your ability to be able to deploy that force, and early, is essential. That is good use of soft power. It is absolutely delivering ethical, legal, morally bound training; it is pushing people in the right direction; and it is raising a standard that allows the internal forces to deal with the early stages of unrest, criminality, and all the rest that goes with that.

In many ways, the structure will work. The one thing that we all understand is that, invariably, the reason why all the programmes break is because they come in at inflation times three, right? So the money never works—everybody low-balls the actual costs, and they never come to anything like what is proposed. As a result, the only way that you can maintain the programme is that everything gets pushed out wide, so by the time that you get it, incredibly, it is becoming really quite obsolete or slightly out of fad—or, "events, dear boy, events" have overtaken what is occurring.

If you want to bring the time this way, the corollary is true: you have to throw more money at the problem. I sense that that is not within an easy wish of Government, Parliament or the nation state, in this case. However, that is what you need to do if you do not want to carry capability gaps and want to be able to deliver the force early to what 2020 looks like. By the way, on top of that, these new and emerging threats will in fact require further investment. Ebola is a good example of that.

Mark Urban: I sense that in your question there might also be an issue about DFID, or non-soft power that is not related to defence engagement. I would have to steer around that particular bear trap, but it is obvious to lots of people to whom I talk—forces, intelligence services and all the rest—that there is a resentment of the ring-fenced DFID budget. That is quite clear when you speak to people in the system. There is also a sense of frustration with it, in the sense that, during operations such as the Helmand campaign, the foreign aid budget was designed and legally protected in order to prevent it from being used for narrow UK political objectives, at which point I think a lot of the company commanders were saying, "Well, then what's the point?" That is not necessarily a view that I hold, but I do think it is interesting that the Government choose to protect it still, despite the wider stringency in public spending.

With regard to the specific defence engagement point, nobody is going to say it is a bad idea to head off a problem early by injecting some know-how, some training, and maybe a little bit of capability—ISTAR or the other things that have been deployed in Africa; I do not think anybody is going to say that is a bad idea. My questions would be, though, are you in danger of frittering away resources? What are the metrics of success? We watched British soldiers training the 10th Iraqi Division year after year in southern Iraq and then, when the challenge came with the militias in Basra, it fell to pieces. Other forces had to come in.

Is the UK now engaged in further training activities of that kind, on a smaller scale? In some countries, actually, when the forces concerned—the Malian forces had also had considerable foreign training before they fell apart, and they are now being rebuilt. What are

the metrics of success and how should the UK's scarce assets best be used? I think that is the question about defence engagement.

Q11 Mr Donaldson: In relation to the defence engagement strategy, do you have any suggestions as to how those metrics could be improved?

Mark Urban: I do not, but I do think that an almost American approach for you or one of the other Committees, in which there was a more formalised GAO-style audit of that type of activity, might be helpful.

Sir Graeme Lamb: It is easy to throw stones at soft power. My sense is that—and you have heard me say it before—the military are best at the operational level. Actually, most of their actions are at the ground, tactical, and they fit into a strategic space. They merely attend to a problem that has been presented to them to contain and/or in fact produce an outcome, but it has a beginning and an end to which politics buffer—both those; so the idea of whole-of-Government approach applies.

If you look at the Iraq invasion in 2003, again, it is informative in so much as 1003V, which was the battle plan, as we all know, would probably have filled this building in the underlying background paperwork, analyses, reconnaissance, intelligence, notes, courses of action. You would have just filled up an enormous amount of space on that which the military intended to do, which was very clearly a 125-day battle plan from start to finish, of which day 125 took you into the centre of Baghdad. I would be intrigued to see how much paper and underlying analysis was then put in place for what was going to be a 125-month minimum follow-through action.

That is not to decry, actually, good people in those Departments who were responsible for that space, but the truth is they are not structured and organised. We talk about—and we use the terms very easily—whole of Government. Actually, the truth is we do not structure them to be able to do that. We do not culturally put them in a place where they can, with great ease, put themselves into harm's way. In fact, actually, quite the opposite; they have to be constrained within spaces where they cannot go and operate, and as a result you then bring in individuals like Rory or Emma Sky to go out into harm's way, to be there alongside those in uniform; but actually, in fact, your governance models cannot work. So there is a bigger piece which sits across the whole of Government, which needs to be brought to bear if you wish to attend to this problem. If we do not attend to failing states, then for whom does the bell toll? I sense it is a Westphalian model.

Q12 Mr Donaldson: And even in cases with limited military intervention, like Libya, it is the follow-through, then, that you feel is where the thing falls down.

Sir Graeme Lamb: Well, I think, firstly the follow-through; but actually, in fact, that maxim: try and understand what you are doing in the first place. Understand the culture, the implications, the consequences, intended and unintended, of that, and you begin to then present something which looks like—on which you make a decision. That does not mean you are fearful of that decision.

The problem with that is it comes back to, in many ways, what I think is a central theme to the challenge that we face, which is threat. That is what the armed forces represent to those on the other side: capability and intent. We have always had an interesting balance of both in this country, with sufficient capability and always a strong sense of right—that is, doing the right thing in difficult circumstances in the way of intent. Our circumstances today are quite different. In many ways we are in danger of not having the capability and not having the intent and we would be significantly poorer for it.

Q13 Chair: So defence engagement is a useful way of doing it but you have to be clear about what you are doing in the first place.

Sir Graeme Lamb: Absolutely.

Chair: Sir Bob would like to speak to you about NATO.

The Chair of the Committee, Rory Stewart, took the Chair.

Q14 Sir Bob Russell: General, I get the distinct impression that in your view Future Force 2020 is too rigid and there is not flexibility. You used the quote, which I hope I have right, that the UK Government are "not adapting to the new spaces". I read that as a suggestion that Future Force 2020 is too rigid.

Sir Graeme Lamb: You have to start off with the framework and I think 2020 is a fair shot at that framework. It is so far out, it is quite difficult to turn round and say, "Oh, it will be as we see it." I think it just represents that broad frame. We have to have sufficient capability within that to adapt and adjust. So, reinforce success, be able to withdraw weakness, be able to invest where we can and it is necessary, whether it is people or equipment and whichever service, to readjust our structures and support that as we go through the period.

It is a bit like a mobile phone. If I said that the phone I have today will look very similar to the one I will have in 2020, that would be a ridiculous and reckless statement on my part. I sense that is no different from the speed of change we are seeing out there. Having something to work upon is really important, as is how we are able to manoeuvre in that space. That is where I sense the rigidity lies and it is one that will not help.

Q15 Sir Bob Russell: Does Future Force 2020 need to change, particularly in view of the UK Government's restated commitments to NATO? If so, how do you see it changing over the next five years or more?

Sir Graeme Lamb: I am probably the wrong fellow to ask about NATO.

Q16 Sir Bob Russell: You have a view.

Sir Graeme Lamb: I have a very strong view about NATO. NATO served our nation and its intent very well from 4 April 1949 at the Washington treaty and its signing, when the parties, having failed twice from the IPU and the failure of the League of Nations, recognised that article 5 in the true sense was the way to enforce, by word and absolute clarity of deed, our intention. You then had the underlying game theories and all the rest that ran through that period up to 1989 to 91. In 1991 when the Warsaw Pact was disbanded, with the term "There is no socialism to defend," NATO was immediately, I believe, wounded below the waterline.

NATO has served and seen adaptations such as a coalition of the willing and a series of spaces where we learned and paid into interoperability, joint training and other capabilities within that joint command control. Those have allowed us to operate within coalitions of the willing since, but they have not been NATO. In many ways, therefore, NATO is a very expensive coalition of whatever is willing.

Q17 Sir Bob Russell: Of considerably more countries than when the Warsaw Pact was around.

Sir Graeme Lamb: Yes, because if you read the German account—not the American or Russian, necessarily—of the discussions that took place in 1989, the clarity is "not one foot further east". That was the understanding in many ways. Then we took nine on board because we were able to do so.

Did I ever believe during that time that the same sense of responsibility to article 5 prevailed as it did on 4 April 1949? I did not. I sense, therefore, that if you look towards capability and intent, how other people read our intent is: will they do this? I question what made good political sense and democratic sense, and a whole raft of other senses, but, to me, as a hard-boiled look the other man in the eye and say, "If you cross the floor I will kill you" type, the truth of the matter is I am not sure that we have had that same spirit since 1991 in how we have presented our defence of article 5.

Q18 Sir Bob Russell: Mr Urban, linked in with what the general has just said, do you think the UK will be able to provide the strategic leadership necessary to meet the promises that Britain and other countries gave the NATO summit in Wales?

Mark Urban: Sir Bob, I am assuming that was implicit in your previous question about re-commitment to NATO. Was it financial or was it broader?

Q19 Sir Bob Russell: It is everything. Following what the general said about article 5, there are some countries that are perilously close to Russia.

Mark Urban: Yes. I think the situation at the Wales summit, and since, is pretty surreal. I would say that in 25-plus years of dealing with defence and security issues, it is almost unprecedented in that we have this 2% commitment, which all countries are supposed to be meeting at the end of a 10-year period, and which the UK proudly says it is already meeting. And yet, when one discussed the issue with the Defence Secretary, and others discussed it

with the Prime Minister—how on current public spending and economic projections we will fall below 10% within a couple of years, so does that mean we are actually going to spend more on defence?—we found that they simply disputed the projections, whether it was the RUSI work or whatever.

Some other people have also done projections—the FT recently did some very good ones—about how much the UK would have to be spending in three or four years' time to be meeting the 2% criterion. It seems to be a question now that the Government simply will not answer. Whether we will have any clarity on that before the next election, I do not know, but a lot of the questions we are talking about today, about the feasibility of the 2020 structure, are contingent.

I am told you are talking about at least £6 billion or £7 billion a year more in defence spending 10 years down the line. So there would be a lot more cash if this 2% commitment could be relied upon throughout the next 10 years, and a lot of these aspects of Force 2020 that one might ask questions about would be more affordable, but we simply do not know at the moment that that cash will be there, and therefore in response to your question about leadership—

Q20 Sir Bob Russell: So you have doubts as to whether Britain can meet its present obligation to NATO, particularly when we have got Ebola and other scenarios that may or may not come along. Are you telling me you have doubts that Britain will be able to honour its obligations to NATO?

Mark Urban: I think the doubts are widespread in the informed community, whether it is the work of Malcolm Chalmers at RUSI or whether it is what one hears from people who are privileged to the internal planning at MOD. Meeting the 2% target and continuing to do so over the next 10 years would require substantial increases in defence spending, which the Government at the moment will not commit to making.

Q21 Sir Bob Russell: One of our obligations to NATO is support for the rapid reaction forces. I have more than a passing interest in that, because I represent the garrison town of Colchester, home of the 16 Air Assault Brigade. Will Britain be able to honour that obligation to the rapid reaction forces if called upon by NATO?

Mark Urban: There is clearly capability there. As you know, 16 Brigade is a very can-do organisation. If some emergency blew up and NATO regarded it as a duty to intervene, it would be ready to do so. I think there are lots of questions, though, about the planned full structure in the 2020 plan and where we are at the moment against that—particularly, for example, with the need to potentially reinforce Baltic republics or others—as to how big a force Britain could actually move over what time scale.

Q22 Sir Bob Russell: My last question on this section is to both gentlemen. Should the UK undertake more missions with the United Nations?

Sir Graeme Lamb: We should, because, in many ways, we have been often absent when we could have leant in, and we have allowed other nations to fill that space not as well as, or as appropriately as, it should have been. It gives meaning to our commitment to the United Nations and the intent that goes with, in many ways, the treaty of 4 April 1949—the desire and the underlying principles that go with that.

I have no difficulty with seeing how that would fit into some of the responsibilities we should have in defence, but it is now another burden on people, another burden on cost, another burden on equipment etc. while you are trying to do all these other things, and that is before we have actually begun to address the emerging threats. So the truth is that you can load it on, Sir Bob, but the answer is that you need to load in a beltload more money.

Sir Bob Russell: I asked the question.

Mark Urban: One of the interesting things about the current situation is that it is increasingly hard to conceive that the UN Security Council consensus will find consensus about new missions, particularly if they were what you might call the higher-end type of missions—not simple peacekeeping, but the type of thing we saw in the Balkans, which, even then, there often was not Security Council consensus for, such as the Kosovo war—given the very poor state of relations between the US and Russia and the fact that China wants to prioritise different things.

The only other thing I would say about UN peacekeeping operations is that those they can agree on, like Congo and some of the other operations that have been taking place around the world, are actually a perfect opportunity for some of the emerging powers, like India and China, that have actually been contributing to anti-piracy controls or peacekeeping in Congo, given the size of their armed forces, to take up the slack.

Sir Bob Russell: Thank you very much.

Q23 Chair: Can I bring you on to intelligence? We seem to have a world that, over the last 10 years, has become more and more dependent on understanding political terrain and economics—on understanding things which are not purely military—if we are doing counter-insurgency or even if we are dealing with this hybrid, ambiguous warfare coming out of Russia. At the same time, the Committee's reports have suggested that we have essentially hollowed out defence intelligence; we have seen the Russia analysis sections shut down, and we have ended up in a situation where we are begging and borrowing South Caucasus desk officers to cover Crimea.

We are in a situation in northern Iraq where there is no assistant defence attaché on the ground in Kurdistan. In thinking about the future shape of the military, to what extent do you think one of the big priorities for investment is looking at all those areas of intelligence, strategic communications and information warfare? May I start with General Lamb?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Earlier on I made the point that my sense was that the next two decades won't be about fix and strike; they will be about find and exploit. So that just reinforces, actually, the point you raise. As you know only too well, and the rest of the members of the Committee do as well, the intelligence space is often one where the challenge is quantity versus quality. I have been disappointed on many occasions, from a very large raft

of quantity, to be presented with nothing better than form at a glance, and therefore have gone out to other sources—in our own intelligence community, but interestingly, more than often, into the commercial space—to find a better understanding, of the old political officer type, of what is occurring. Again, Chairman, you will understand this only too well.

In fact, both what the tactical data are, what the data points coming through are, and how that fits into the cultural lungs of the problem you are dealing with, matters; so I think just turning around and saying we need to double up on DIS would be a fateful error. I think what we need to do is turn around and say, "Where in those spaces in quality, whether that involves equipment, relationships"—I disagree with President Obama on many other points, but the truth is that when he came over and said, "That special relationship sits with the at-sea deterrent, special forces and the relationship with GCHQ," he absolutely nailed it. I know Iain Lobban talked yesterday as he departs from what has been a long tour in running GCHQ; but the importance of that relationship is not an inconsequential part of the long-term defence relationship that matters with the United States of America, because we gain—they do, too—a great deal out of those two places.

I don't think it's just a case of, "Find me more billets, give me more numbers, cover more space," because the truth is that you will find some very good risk analysis coming out on what has been happening, and predicting what was about to happen, out of some quite small spaces out in the commercial world, and those predictions have been surprisingly accurate, so I am cautious about just throwing money and numbers at the Department and it just growing by another—

Q24 Chair: General, one thing that the Committee found in its reports on Helmand was a sense that in the early days, when we went in in 2005-06, we didn't know a great deal about Helmand. Do you have any reflections on what that means in terms of reform—the kind of institutional structures and practices that you would have to introduce to ensure that if we were in a similar situation in the future, we didn't go into places that we did not fully understand? How do you get a situation in which generals are challenged, politicians are challenged and information is fed through, so that people stop and think?

Sir Graeme Lamb: There are three spaces that immediately spring to mind. There is always a raft of experts—you are one—in Afghanistan. I can't remember his name, but there was the fellow who sailed round the Falklands twice in a little boat in 1982 to give it the old, "How cold is it and what it's like to land on?", because no one had a Scooby-Doo about what was going down there. But there are experts that sit within that field. It's interesting that if you look back into history, the board that sat and supported the OSS to start with was made up of some of the principals of the great universities of America, on the basis that what you wanted was situational understanding, not situational awareness—not the science, but a depth of cultural sense that sat within that. I'm referring to the old political officers.

For some reason, we see these people as tainted or unworthy souls in the way of what are commercial spaces that exist out there. Whether it is people who are mining in Afghanistan, mining in Africa or whatever, the feeling is, "It's the commercial and we must not, because we will be immediately associated with getting backhanders, fraud and so on." In fact, the Bribery Act is very clear. It gives us a greater advantage that a number of these companies absolutely have to operate within that, but they are on the edge of a depth of understanding

that few other people have. I can think of a number of occasions on which I have sought out individuals and sat down and said, "Give me the skinny on this," and their observations have been horribly accurate, but we don't tend to tap that.

And then we have SIS. I think SIS have served this nation extraordinarily well—some very brave people, whom I know and have operated with—but in many ways there is always what I call the scratching away of, "Why would you not put yourself in harm's way? Why would you not turn up and say, 'I'm here on behalf of Queen Victoria and therefore claim this nation on behalf of the great British empire,' etc.?" So the truth of the matter is that I sense there are spaces out there that we have not yet addressed. And then there is the Reserve community and their cultures and all the rest, which fit into that. Has that been pulled together as something that is not that expensive, but in many ways would give us some phenomenal insights into the space? I'm sure parts have, but not all.

My final point on this is that, as you and I and many members of the Committee would recognise, to understand the unreasonable men, you have to be unreasonable yourself. Most people in government are decent fellows and women. Actually, you need to find the unreasonable people who can sit there with a warlord, a drug baron or some other scallywag and recognise him or her exactly for what they are and what they will be prepared to do, because they do not fit into the norms of life.

Mark Urban: No one is ever, particularly in such a turbulent period of world politics, going to say no to more or better intelligence. Obviously the question is how you get it. Recalling that the SDSR in 2010 set strategic intelligence gathering as one of the key priorities, the first thing that would be very interesting to see as your inquiry progresses, or whatever, is some kind of sense of what has actually been delivered in the past five years, given that more money was assigned to it, including in the MOD, as well as in the agencies.

The second point that occurs to me, looking at the past couple of years, is that sudden U-turns, handbrake turns or changes of direction in national foreign policy must, of necessity, liquidate expertise in intelligence organisations, whether that's defence intelligence staff, SIS or whatever. We know that language skills and analytical skills take years to grow, and if you are suddenly yawing around saying, "Actually, this week's priority is west Africa", the number of people who can speak the right dialects for northern Nigeria would clearly be tiny when you have spent the past five or 10 years investing in Arabic, Urdu or Pashto and the previous 40 years in Russian and other east European languages.

The key question is how you achieve some kind of focus. I have a number of points to make. Could there be a case for extending the type of partnerships that GCHQ has on crypto and cyber with certain universities, in terms of language and regional skills with academia? Is that an approach for DIS, SIS or central intelligence machinery? It could be a worthwhile approach. At what point is there a "Five Eyes"-type of approach to burden sharing, which as I understand it in the Cold War used to extend to things like their training of linguists? At what point do we say, "No, we will do Russian and you in Germany can do X, Y and Z east European languages," or, "We will do this dialect of Arabic"? I sense that everything that has happened in the past 10 years would make the UK agency people extremely reluctant to go down that approach of putting their eggs into a certain number of baskets in terms of linguistic and analytical—

Q25 Chair: There is also an issue specifically for the military, which is about the tactical information that you would want to get at a very local level, around Nad-e Ali or Sangin, which is not going to be produced by a fancy intelligence agency that produces covert secret reports. It is often open source and having to rely on the local intelligence officer, who will be a soldier. One of the questions is: how do we rebuild the military's capacity specifically in this, tactically, on the ground?

Mark Urban: I refer you back again to what came out in 2010, which was that the Int Corps was meant to be one of the growing bits—maybe the only growing bit—of the Army, and tactical intelligence was an important part of what they were meant to provide. They cannot be everywhere; they cannot master all languages. I know that they send people off on specialist language courses, sometimes for a year, sometimes for longer, but I think that is critical.

In terms of the unit intelligence officer, that is generally not going to be an Int Corps person. They have got to be nurtured, haven't they, by the specialists, into how you build the battlefield picture. But I think it is hugely challenging, particularly if, say, the forces were to be involved in two years' time in dealing with violent Russian separatists in Estonia, where the requirements are clearly completely different from what is required in Kurdistan, helping the KRG to stand up stronger armed forces. It is a real problem, and the more that events become unpredictable, the harder it is to plan in those capabilities.

Sir Graeme Lamb: I do some work with Palantir, which has been very successful. What is interesting with Palantir as a tool set is that it was seeded out of agency money. You had the recognition that here was a capability that could be built, but the answer was to let someone else pay for it—they'll commercialise it; they'll make a belt load of money out there, and all the rest of it—but when you look to its application, especially from my side, it has saved numerous lives. It has been extremely useful at the base end of being able to adapt to local tactical data, the sort of streams that you are talking about, and to pass forward that information in a combined intelligence push. Now, there are other systems out there, and I am not pushing Palantir, but I just use that as an example of where you have a relationship to commerce where the investment is predominantly taken by commerce. It has all sorts of different applications and it reads across, but it can adapt at a sickeningly speedy pace because it is not constrained by all the normal institutional inertias of Government and Departments.

Q26 Mr Havard: Can I ask a couple of questions about cyber-warfare? We are talking about Force 2020, and the UK has made this declaration that it has got cyber capability within the armed forces and it has got offensive capability within the armed forces. Led by the RAF, there are various things being put together. I am not going to say much more than that at this stage, but you know that they are part of the broad force structure for the future. It relates to the question about intelligence more generally. What do you think we should do? One of the things that is happening in there is that Reservists are clearly going to be a major element within it. How do you see that being merged into the Future Force structure?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Cyber is all things to all men and women. It is a complicated space. We have left it unattended, probably since we first saw it emerging, because it suited

everyone to be able to take into that space, so we never established, as we did with nuclear, the same—

Q27 Mr Havard: But now we have declared it a domain, and we have got doctrine and so on.

Sir Graeme Lamb: Doctrine—no. There was absolute clarity in the rules for use of nuclear deterrent and nuclear use. Actually, there are virtually no rules out there that apply into a space that is offensively threatening—which can absolutely stop, shut down, change and disrupt your way of life. At what threshold does that become an offensive use of something that would be considered an act of war?

Q28 Mr Havard: But we have declared it the fifth domain, haven't we?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Correct. But the answer is that unilateral declarations—in the nuclear space, there was a great deal of that. I sense that doesn't exist in this case, and people, for various reasons, have not pushed hard into it. It is quite difficult, therefore, to have anything other than a whole series of offensive and defensive packages that are nationally or occasionally even bilaterally formed, as opposed to something that was very much clearer, by way of, "These are the rules under which this is considered."

Stealing secrets from business has been going on since time immemorial. We may not like it, but the truth of the matter is that we did it and others did too. It is where you come into that that is considered to be an offensive use. In my view, it is a very dangerous space. The interesting aspect is this. People would say, "This is an asymmetric threat." In many ways, I sense that you kill asymmetry symmetrically. Actually, how the nation approaches this is quite important.

My final point is this. Do not underestimate the nature of the people on the other side. We always put them into the radicals or into the Russian or Chinese camp, but beware the criminal camp, because they can afford people who would leave you cold. I met up with a young fellow a little while ago, because I was interested to see whether he could be used as a red team player. He was 23 years old, and he had spent four and a half years of a five-year sentence for carding. He was a god on the computer, although he was nothing to meet or sit and talk with. The most interesting part of the conversation—at the end of it, he lied a couple of times, so he was of no value to me whatsoever—was that, as far as I could figure out, he had absolutely no moral, legal or ethical boundary. None. Even I have some.

Q29 Mr Havard: That leads to another question about information warfare and psychological operations linked with intelligence, and that is interesting in relation to the discussion about Russia's activities. We are trying to figure out what we say about what component that needs to have in terms of Future Force structure.

Sir Graeme Lamb: We need to fit into a greater part. The truth of the matter is that the bits we need to defend—the core elements of our essential needs and essential services, the

functioning of Government and the like—actually the truth is that it probably needs to be expanded, which the Americans have done in their space. Secondly, within that, you turn around and say, "Who owns it?" America went down a line where what they set up was independent, but the idea is that this crosses boundaries of Departments. We are hanging on to some stiff, old departmental straitjackets, at a point in time where these problems as they are applied to us—whether criminal, terrorist, radical, just lunatic or opportunist—absolutely have no difficulty of flying across all those spaces in the dark web.

Chair: We have been going for an hour and 10 minutes, and I am aware that the General needs to get away in 20 minutes. We have a lot of colleagues to come in, so it would be helpful if you could keep answers quite short.

Q30 Sir Bob Russell: General, as you are aware, the MOD is placing more emphasis on using the Regular Reserve. Is that a viable option?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Yes. I was part of the review. I turned around and welcomed that, because my concern was that if we had taken the Reserves down to 7,000, or whatever it was, the answer was going to be that it would die. When you are dealing with uncertainty—by the way, the world is just getting hugely more uncertain—it is about having a force you can rely on; who will carry unlimited liability and be able to be moved out at a moment's notice and work to the point where they fall asleep and then come back to work again.

The truth of the matter is actually, whether it is resilience in the United Kingdom or the ability to bring expertise into specialist areas, whether that is cyber or other areas of expertise, such as intelligence or cultural crossovers—you keep ticking the list off—it requires a relationship between the Reserve component as it complements, not matches or tries to be the same as, the Regular part of defence. But the idea that somehow it does not have a part, or that it is what I call the old-style view of the Territorials, is absolutely not the case. Do they fit into this new structure? Absolutely. The question is: can they be brought there? I have no difficulty with it.

It started off really badly. There was, no question about it, a reluctance on the part of a number of people to introduce the Reserves. They wanted to keep the Regular component as high as they could for as long as they could. I understand the reasons why, but the truth of the matter is that it was not about taking a long-term view. That is my personal view, so the truth is that you now have, in the form of the CDS, who was part of that original work, and the CGS, the other Nick—Nick Carter—in my view, the opportunity to re-establish what that relationship looks like, to put energy behind it and, therefore, to crush over what has been an institutional inertia about making this happen. I have no difficulty in thinking that it can.

Q31 Sir Bob Russell: So are you confident that the Reservists will be able to ramp up quickly to meet demands?

Sir Graeme Lamb: I think that at the end of the day, if you make the proposition attractive—if they understand that they are not second-class citizens; if they are there to contribute; if they are doing things that they see a sense of purpose in and/or a need for; and if they are brought in not reluctantly, but actually as genuine partners—I believe that it is

absolutely achievable. When you look at the numbers, if you turn around from a business perspective—30,000?—it is really not a drama.

Q32 Sir Bob Russell: So we are not being too dependent on Reservists, then.

Sir Graeme Lamb: No, I don't think so. I think the Reserves have an absolutely essential part to play. The idea that they replicate the Regulars would, I think, be misunderstanding how they fit into this kaleidoscope—this complex part, which is defence. I think they have a really important part. What you don't want to do is have a really expensive fella being No. 2 on the machine gun in—whatever it may be. The truth is that if he is really expensive, in effect, he's got skills you probably need.

Q33 Sir Bob Russell: What happens if the Reserve recruitment and retention doesn't work?

Sir Graeme Lamb: If it does not work, my view is that, like all these things, it is just a case of application of will. It can be made to work.

Q34 John Woodcock: I want to ask you to expand on what you said at the beginning about your concerns over Joint Forces Command, but first, very briefly, I want to go back to the issue of flexibility. I was really struck by what you said, Mark, about the difficulty of simply wanting to transfer intelligence capability into a new area. Is that not, however, a wider lesson across capabilities and going into kit? Is not the danger that your understandable desire for extra flexibility on capability will mean either that we simply have less of everything—or less of a lot of things—because we just keep stopping before we get to the end point, or that we end up doing what the Department has vowed not to do, which is to add extra cost on to programmes by constantly wanting, say, the upgrade to the mobile phone that itself will need to be upgraded in 12 months' time?

Mark Urban: When you said that we will just end up with less, I think that is the key question for me in today's session about the 2020 force structure. Given all the pressures we have talked about—capability gaps, the need to load in cyber, perhaps a need to enhance strategic intelligence gathering and all those other things—is it really credible that the types of force structures, whether it is some squadrons or response brigades, will survive until 2020? Of course there is also the wider fiscal climate as well. I would say no.

John Woodcock: Okay. Thank you.

Mark Urban: It will be force structure, again, that gets crunched.

Q35 John Woodcock: The three services have not embraced the JFC. Can you expand more on your concerns?

Sir Graeme Lamb: I think JFCOM has been fitted in and is working. Does it genuinely own the joint capabilities? My view would be probably not. Should we wait to allow that, in a

glacial form—as we have historically—to eventually prove itself and then gain traction and responsibility? My view is that that is not how the opposition forces that are already against us—the threats we face—are operating. The truth of the matter is that JFCOM has genuinely been that voice for asking what the joint capabilities are and what the things we need most are—we're having to try to readjust on RIPA. How many ISR lines have we got? It would almost be a bit of a joke, if it wasn't criminally incompetent. You turn around and say, "This is just not right." You know, my father went from Alamein to the Reichswald, and in that short space of time we went from a Sopwith Camel sinking the Bismarck to a jet engine. These things can be done. That required a huge amount of effort—I get that—but we could do so much better. I sense that; I don't see it.

What you need is to have a champion—or whatever you want to call it; perhaps a tsar—with a genuine responsibility and accountability for the delivery of the joint capability that he or she is so presented with, and the ability to deliver that. I am not sure about the level of similarity for the joint forces commander that he has currently—that sort of delegated authority and/or pull.

Q36 John Woodcock: Do you have anything to add to that?

Mark Urban: No.

Q37 Mr Donaldson: Do the armed forces have the capacity to regenerate following draw-down from Afghanistan, bearing in mind existing commitments such as Sierra Leone?

Sir Graeme Lamb: Do not forget that I am now six years out of date. I'll be on dangerously thin ice, but I can skate quickly. The ability for people to be able to turn around and double up is something that I have no difficulty with at all. That is the nature of the beast that I left six years ago, and I do not think it has changed in any shape or form. Whether the equipment can match that I am not sure. As to whether the breadth of different tasks being asked of them, and how they are being pulled together, can be made to work—whether it is Ebola and/or doing what are called exercises in Poland—it is on those spaces that I need to defer to somebody who actually knows what they are talking about.

Mark Urban: Of course we would like to think, knowing the sort of brilliant people who are in the forces, that this is well within their capability. My concern would be that where there is a continued threat to force structure—cap badges, identity and all those other things—people will continue to do what we have seen in the past decade, which is to devote too much energy to those sorts of battles, and to be too defensive or too closed. We saw that in Iraq and Afghanistan. There was a widespread perception among the Americans, for example, that the Brits thought that they knew it all and were not good at taking advice or being self-critical. In terms of now, having to shift paradigm completely back towards armoured warfare in Europe or some new paradigm in the middle east will be a hard push. Look at the situation with the Tornado force, for example, which was heading for disbandment and then given a reprieve to do this operation. The fact that the machine is being remade around these people, as they are being asked to engaged in new types of operations and all the rest of it, is a hell of an ask.

Q38 Mr Donaldson: Do you want to comment on plans to restore collective training for contingency operations in the aftermath of Afghanistan and, as you say, the remaking of the machine?

Mark Urban: It has to be done. How many people are there now who were in the British Army when it last exercised an armoured division? I think that that was in 1990 or 1989. I have had discussions with people about exactly when it was, but it was a long time ago. An armoured division has been deployed to Iraq operationally since then, but there is the question of moving it through Europe, and skills such as air defence, which have not been emphasised over the past 10 or 15 years, need to be relearned. All parts of the machine have to fit together through collective training. I would say that it is an urgent and pressing need, given what has happened in Ukraine in the past year.

Sir Graeme Lamb: All I would say is that one of the courses that I did as a very young fellow was systems of approach to training. I was then asked to look at Hereford selection. I said to Johnny Holmes, who was CO at the time, "You're in great shape. Selection is fine. You just need 18 months to do it in." The danger is that what we have is a need to do all this training and to bring together the component parts to train individually. When people see an ISIL tank and say, "My goodness, they have tanks," I say, "Have you any idea what it takes to make that function as a weapons system, let alone as part of a collective system?" The answer is considerable investment, and that considerable investment has not necessarily been taking place. Do we need to have those skill sets? That comes back to my point about threat, capability and intent. If we have a weakened intent and capability, we are not in a good position.

Q39 Derek Twigg: I am going to switch to Iraq and Syria. Does the international coalition have any coherent strategy?

Sir Graeme Lamb: It would be reckless of me to say no.

Derek Twigg: We just want your honest opinion. You can be reckless if you want.

Sir Graeme Lamb: People say, "Oh my goodness, where did this come from?" The answer is that we were seeing it emerge as soon as the pressure placed upon Assad led to him withdrawing his force elements out of eastern Syria. You could see the emergence of some of these AQI, ISI, ISIL energies. At the same time, you could see the disquiet among the Sunni community in the tribes out in western and northern Iraq. The jury-rigging of the Iraqi army by al-Maliki was beginning to irritate. The idea that this was unforeseen is wrong. Where are we now, and do I see a sense of people trying to run to find an answer, proposition, idea, strategy—

Derek Twigg: The question is about whether you recognise any coherent strategy that exists today. Is the answer no?

Sir Graeme Lamb: No, but I think at the moment that it would be wrong to say that I see a single coherent strategy. I see a number of opinions and views that are being expressed about what to do, and America, with John Allen, is beginning to give some structure to all that. The

problem, however, is that everybody looks towards the military as the solution to the ISIL problem. ISIL or Daesh—whatever you want to call these murderers—are an idea or a movement, so they are inordinately more dangerous. They have, in fact, expressed themselves to date as an unstoppable force. They now have been checked within the region, and if they move forward from that against an international coalition, they will show, or begin to indicate, that they are an unstoppable force beyond, and therefore globally. Their weapon of choice is not the butcher's knife; their weapon of choice is propaganda. They are really, really good at it; we are really, really bad at it. So, if you turn around and say, "I'm not going to commit ground forces," all you've done is psychologically said, "I have a glass that is half empty," as opposed to turning around and saying, "I rule in the use of ground forces," and then you just choose not to use them, or choose the time and place you may wish to use them, but you show a commitment of intent to this.

I sense that if you just look at them and where they are now—20,000 to 30,000, spread over the size of the UK between Syria and Iraq, some technicals and some stuff they've stolen—you can turn around and underestimate them and say, "They're not a threat." If you look at them and say that they've got however many SA-19s you want to pick a figure from and other capabilities that sit within that, you turn around and say, "Their potential as a transnational influence is breathtaking."

Q40 Derek Twigg: A lot of people say—no one is disagreeing—that there has to be a political solution, and of course there has to be. It depends how and who we have that political solution with. They may have been halted for now, but do you believe in the meantime that there has to be a military solution?

Sir Graeme Lamb: No. My view would be—

Derek Twigg: Can I just add to that? Can a military solution be delivered by air power alone, or do you need boots on the ground?

Sir Graeme Lamb: I think that air power is an essential part of it. The reality is that the main point of effort right now should be to double up, and double up again, on the political influence and our ability to shape and help the Iraqi Government—the al-Abadi of the day—to make the right decision about what the proposition is for the Sunni tribes. If he cannot do that, my view is that all will be lost.

Now that's just a personal view from somebody who is not that well informed and who sits a long distance away. However, the truth is that all will go badly, and you already have two faltering—indeed, near failing—states in the middle east, you would probably lose Jordan and Lebanon, because the refugees will move in a position and a placement that will then overbear both those countries, and you then start to have absolutely the domino effect.

So the truth of the matter is that the military can only do so much. Can it do enough with just air? ISIS has already adapted. It has already moved into towns—some of them in fact for their own protection, where they move alongside people, and all the rest of that, which is no different than Saddam did before. Can air alone do this? No, my view is that I don't think it can. What we need to do is to be prepared to put people alongside the Iraqi forces, because who is alongside the Iraqi forces today? It will be the Quds force, and they will be getting all

the credit for the air bombs that we are dropping, the progress that has been made and the Shi'a militias that come along behind them, and we'll be absolutely setting up Iraq for a longer-term downfall.

The idea of not ruling in the use of ground forces is, in my view, a psychological mistake in the propaganda war. It shows a weakness of intent. By the way, if you really want to get a good result, think: could we have given the bombing campaign that broke the Taliban to the Northern Alliance in 2001? The answer is not. It had to be delivered by forces on the ground to be able to bring that to bear in a way that was appropriate and precise. And, by the way, it stopped the nonsense of warlord and/or cross-sectarian use.

Q41 Derek Twigg: What about the Iraqi army? Is it as bad as we hear? It has obviously been routed, to a certain degree. Is there any hope there in the next year or two with the Iraqi army? Even if the Iraqi Government decided they wanted to try to come to some political solution, is the army capable of doing anything in the next year or two?

Sir Graeme Lamb: I think the answer is that, again, I have not seen them for a while, but I understand that if you have got some pretty rough and not slightly broken building blocks, you can actually work with those. It will require some investment. Actually, what it requires is a reinvestment in belief and/or what I call a sense of leadership and their responsibility, because when I left—there was no question about it—they felt in most places to be part of a national force. I sense that that is no longer the case. And the jury-rigging that al-Maliki did of the leadership within that took the soul out of the force.

Q42 Chair: A very last question on a huge subject. The basic model that is being sold at the moment to go along with air power is that somehow some version of a counter-insurgency campaign is fought in the Sunni areas, perhaps led by Sunni militia or the Iraqi army, but someone is doing the clearing, the holding and the building. Is that the right doctrine? Is that the right way to look at what would need to happen in western Iraq?

Sir Graeme Lamb: My view is that you crush ISIL in Iraq and at the same time you attend to them in Syria. You don't take a linear view; you have to do both at the same time. You also make sure that you deal with what is called Jordan in Lebanon, the ISIL pocket and all the rest who are sitting around there, otherwise that will come in from the left field.

As far as those in Iraq are concerned, the answer is to go back to T.E. Lawrence's 11th, 15th and 27th article, but in effect, as you know only too well, what is really important in this particular fight, which is about propaganda, is that you don't want the white boy too far out in front. In this case, what you need to do is to ask, as we saw in 2007, 20008 and 2009, is who is better to kill ISIL than those who live and own the ground on which they are currently residing, and that is the Sunni tribes. They are there because, as we know only too well, you live in Euphrates because you are a good fighter.

They have been disappointed once and disappointed twice. You must raise the bar substantially for whatever the proposition is that then turns round and says that they're future is better as part of Iraq than with whatever they think ISIL might be, is it is how we use what is emerging as the sum of the atrocities that have occurred, what it looks like, and our

understanding lessons from the Taliban as to how they proverted and therefore took over authority. What is really important is that the proposition from the Iraqi Government must be not entirely dissimilar to that which the Kurds enjoy, as it has to be for the Shi'a.

That is the real main effort, and it is political not military. Then we can do the engineering—help the tribes, put in air power and boots on the ground and all the rest. You don't want too many Shi'a militia in there, and you certainly don't want too much of the Iraqi army in there, because the truth of the matter is that they'll feel angry with, and therefore take retribution and revenge upon, those they saw as allowing this force in, or being compliant and complicit with ISIL, and therefore there is loss of the Shi'a authority.

Chair: Thank you.

Mark Urban: I am only going to give you a point of information. In the effort to turn the Sunni tribes in Anbar and elsewhere in 2006, 2007 and 2008, General Lamb and other British people were a key element. For various reasons to do with political risk and other things, the Americans didn't want to do too much themselves and a lot was done by Brits. It seems odd in the current situation that the Government have these experts—some are still on the Government payroll and others are not—but have not made more of an effort to reach out and engage with those tribes because they are critical to what will happen in the next few months.

Chair: Thank you both very much. That was a marathon session.

Witnesses: **Professor Paul Cornish**, Exeter University, **Peter Roberts**, RUSI, and **Professor Philip Sabin**, King's College, London, gave evidence.

Chair: Welcome. We are very lucky to have Professor Paul Cornish of Exeter university, Professor Philip Sabin of King's College London and Peter Roberts of RUSI. I will hand over to my colleague and friend, Dai Havard, to begin.

Q43 Mr Havard: I think all three of you were sat in here during the previous session. You know that the first thing that we are trying to do is to see whether the concepts set out for Future Force 2020—not just Army 2020—have utility in them to see through the business of the plan up to 2020, or whether events or processes will impinge so that different structures will have to be considered. We want to know what recommendations or observations we could make about that.

Professor Paul Cornish: I would say that the rate-limiting step on Future Force 2020, as I speak, is the budget. This is an obvious point to make, but I have written that maybe we are on the edge of recognising that 2025 is going to be the new 2020, so to speak. We have already seen some radical adjustments in FF 2020 and I think there are going to be more down the line. That is just stark reality.

Professor Philip Sabin: The issue is inertia. In my written evidence, I say that even 25 years ago people were talking about Typhoons and new-generation carriers. These things take a long, long time to come to fruition. Nobody even dreamed of what the world would be like now. The ideal, as General Lamb said, is that we have a big contingency budget that can be used at short notice for urgent operational requirements to change things.

The reality is that if you do not commit that money, it is not going to be there. It is just not going to be around. There is an argument that you keep as much as you can in the programme so that you can then reuse it for different purposes as required. The fundamental element in the adaptability is people. Kit can be made adaptable, but only by people. If you invest too much in the technology and you lose out on the people, you really are in trouble.

Peter Roberts: I think FF 2020 is based on a grand strategy for the UK: well articulated, bought into and expressed in classical terms of austerity. That is the case. Whatever FF 2020 was it had to be affordable. Whether that balance of forces meets the current requirement and the geopolitical context in which we find ourselves now is a slightly different question.

Q44 Mr Havard: So what are the immediate changes? At the moment, I suppose you might be accused of saying, "If you are going to react in a particular way, are you making the programme?" because the programme is still described. You are trying to create FF 2020, but your immediate necessity might be to do something that slows you down on that trajectory. What do military planners and the bureau think they need to do currently to rebuild that process of so many Regulars and so many Reserves? I think they are going to have to say, "Your plans are not going to work. We just have to do something else."

Professor Paul Cornish: The notion that the armed services would begin to make that sort of preparation does connote the image of turkeys and Christmas for me. I do not suspect that they are going to be too willing to talk about that kind of thing. There are going to have to be cuts in the defence budget. That seems obvious to me. Quite where those fall is going to be the obvious key issue. There will have to be some searching assessment of the extent of the cuts that each of the services can take while still remaining sufficiently capable in its own role.

This is what I am getting at, though I am not advocating it in any sense. I could imagine that the Army might be able to sustain a reduction of a certain number of battalions while still remaining the Army. Similarly, the RAF could sustain a cut in air transport while still remaining the RAF. I don't have a position in any of the three services, but if you were to say to the Royal Navy that it would lose its Type 45s and therefore its air defence capability, it would effectively cease to be the Royal Navy. There will have to be some close assessments of possibilities.

Professor Philip Sabin: It is very difficult. If you went back 10 or 20 years and said, "What is the irreducible minimum for the forces?" it would be about double or treble what we have now, so the irreducible minimum is very much a moving target, and that may well change in the years to come.

You need to ensure that you have capabilities that can work, for a start. We are not in a deterrent age alone any more. We are in a deterrent age, especially with the Russians and

Chinese and so on, but we are in the age of usable forces. There are plenty of nations that have theoretical capabilities that cannot practically be used. Britain, to its credit, through having used the forces so much in the past 10 or 20 years, has tended to focus on the support and so on to be able to do so, and I think it would be wrong to move away from that.

We do need to engage, it seems to me, with this notion of "Can we afford to be a mini-superpower?" We are trying to do everything, from a nuclear deterrent to aircraft carriers and armoured forces, and so on and so forth. At a certain point it is a toy capability that we have: yes we have a little bit of everything, but it is unusable. With the operations that are going on in Iraq and Syria now, for example, if you look at the amount of air power that is being used by the coalition as a whole, not just the UK, it is much, much lower than it was in Afghanistan in 2001. That issue of mass matters. You cannot just have a little bit of everything and it will be okay. Mass does matter.

Q45 Mr Havard: So you only get scale through allies.

Professor Philip Sabin: You certainly need the allies, and the alliance element of the strategy against ISIL and al-Nusra, and so on, is fundamental. If it was just a lone crusade by a couple of nations, it would not have the mass, but it would not have the credibility either. I think the alliance element is vital. That means, therefore, that you need to put together an overall package with allies that is going to make military sense.

Q46 Mr Havard: But that is increasing your dependencies in order to make your plan.

Professor Philip Sabin: Well, you have to do something.

Peter Roberts: Future Force 2020 is based on defence planning assumptions. They are nothing more than a guideline. It is not an architecture to which you automatically go, and it has always been this way. You construct a balanced force because it is the best bet you can make to hedge your insurance. The big question is: is that balance affordable?

Actually, for the amount of forces that the UK possesses, Future Force 2020 does not have a huge level of ambition. It is not over-stretching what there is. The question is: against the money that is allocated over what you are delivering, is it invested in the right places, as in are we focusing too much on exquisite technology and platforms, instead of perhaps investing more in mass and scale? Can we rely on some of our allies to deliver what we wish them to or not? There is a clear decision to be made over what the irreducible minimum is, against the current environment, but there is also a question over whether we could do better with the amount of money that is allocated for defence.

Q47 Mr Havard: Can I ask you a question about numbers? There was all the excitement about how many are in the Army—how many Reserves and Regulars, and that sort of thing—and the plan is now stated. There is supposed to be a process that gets you from A to B over a period of time, as described, and there is a sort of relationship between the two, so what is your view of this? Do you think it is like a third of the Army will always be Reservists? Is

that what is being said? If you take the current numbers, it roughly works out like that. Are there new totems and shibboleths, and are there inherently must-dos within the plan to get there, or is this more flexible? What do the service chiefs need to say about their ability to make that transition over the given periods of time that they have?

Professor Paul Cornish: It has always seemed to me that there was a rather straightforward "two thirds, one third" idea behind Army 2020, certainly, which I think is fine. I think what the Chief of the General Staff and, indeed the service chiefs, need to say is that this thing cannot come on the cheap. It does require sustained investment. It is not cost-free—let me put it that way—as it does require sustained investment and incentives, and all these sorts of things, if you are going to achieve a Reserve force that can slot into and be, as you heard in the last session, part of the complex structure of FF 2020 and Army 2020, which I had the privilege of seeing at an early stage. I must say all along that I thought it was actually rather a sophisticated and comprehensive model, but in and of itself it will not survive. It needs backing from Government and from Treasury, otherwise it will not work.

Q48 Mr Havard: So the model is right, but we were critical that there was no real evidence that the number relationships were tested and made any sort of sense.

Professor Paul Cornish: As I said, it struck me as two thirds, one third, which is a good rule of thumb.

Q49 Mr Havard: Okay, so I am going to ask you whether the concepts are right and it is the application we are arguing about and the investment in order to make the application correct. Is that really what we are saying?

Professor Paul Cornish: Yes, I think so.

Q50 John Woodcock: We have heard a lot in this inquiry and elsewhere about being stretched suddenly and the need to do different things. I think if I were the Secretary of State, I might say, "Okay, well fair enough—but what?" If you want mass, and it is all too thin, will someone give us an example of what should go to achieve that?

Professor Philip Sabin: That is interesting. Maritime patrol aircraft went and this Committee was saying, "Oh no, we've got to keep this."

John Woodcock: Sure, so you are now the Secretary of State. Tell us what you would do.

Mr Havard: We regret that. Not that we said that, but that MPA have gone.

Professor Philip Sabin: The first thing is that we need to consider priorities. What do we want to do? What do we want to achieve as a nation? That is why the strategic framework for SDSR '15 is going to be so important. Are we actually going to change what we are trying to do in terms of ambition?

What is the relationship with allies? How far can we actually depend on allies? I will give you an example in terms of mass. We decided we were going to cut back the amount of combat air forces, for example the number of squadrons, because we said, "The allies will be here and they will be able to fill in that." Is that right? Looking at actual experience in the conflicts that have occurred since, in Libya and now in Iraq and Syria, is that correct or do we need to revisit that? Are there areas, now that we look at Ukraine, where some of the things that we said we might be able to gap and do without, such as maritime patrol aircraft against submarines, we no longer feel that we can afford to downplay?

What about the nuclear deterrent? There are plenty of people who say that Britain could do that—

John Woodcock: Now, hang on a minute.

Professor Philip Sabin: Yes, exactly. Strategically there is a huge argument that we need this, especially in the modern world. This is the problem that Britain faces; for decades we have said, "Oh we must have that, we must have that." The Germans don't feel that, the Turks don't feel that and the Japanese don't feel that. There are a number of other nations that do not have the bind that we are in, largely, I think, for historical reasons as a former imperial power. There are certain things that are unthinkable, but the price we pay is that we have one of everything and are Jack of all trades, master of none.

It is a very difficult issue and must start with a revaluation of strategy, where we want to be and how much we want to pay. If we wanted to pay 3% of GDP on defence we could have a lot more. If we wanted to pay 4%—we used to spend more than 5%. What does the nation want?

Q51 John Woodcock: Okay, we start with strategy, but we have got strategy spectacularly wrong in recent years. We did not predict Russia or other major things that we failed to properly plan for. Relying on that and then going on a basis where we put more eggs in one basket is surely asking for trouble, isn't it?

Professor Philip Sabin: Absolutely. Of course, all of this has problems. You have a defence review, you say you are going to cut something and the very next year a war comes and you need it, such as the Falklands, 1991 in the Gulf and so on. However, there are plenty of other nations that do not have the wide range of capabilities that we do that are still here. There is a difference between strategy and prediction. Predictions are always going to fail; we are always going to get that wrong, but we are not doing too badly on strategy because we are still here and people are not shooting each other in the streets—at least not in the numbers that they are in many other nations. So on strategy in terms of guarding what really matters to us, we are not doing too badly.

Q52 Mr Donaldson: How well are we doing in terms of the balance between the use of soft power and hard power?

Professor Paul Cornish: I listened very carefully to the discussion in the previous session and I think it is important to draw distinctions between soft power in general and hard power

in general. There has been a very good debate, as you know very well, all about the meaning of these terms and Professor Nye in the US has done a lot to develop the argument. We in the UK do a great deal in the general soft power sense, everything from development aid through to diplomacy, economics, cultural relationships—you name it. There is an awful lot going on in that space. You could make the argument, though I don't know where you would find the evidence for it, that it looks as if it is probably fairly well balanced with hard power, by which I mean defence, intelligence gathering and so on.

What I find more interesting is the balance between soft defence power and hard defence power. The point I would make is that we talk a lot about defence engagement and the value of foreign militaries training with us, or in our academies, staff colleges and all that sort of thing. That is a very important part of soft defence power, but my point is that soft defence power is a proxy for hard defence power, not a substitute for it, and that you will not have that soft defence power, which I guess is your primary interest here, if you do not have the hard power as well behind it.

Peter Roberts: I agree. I am not even sure that hard and soft power survives contact with recent events. In fact, this striving to get smarter and smarter is just an unhelpful way to look at the world and really constrains the way that we talk about operations. If you take a historical perspective on it, what we term the soft power engagement end is actually done a lot more effectively by the third sector, with the military coming in and providing niche capability. That is not necessarily hard power, and the reaction to the Ebola outbreak and the military's part in that is a good way of reflecting that. So on the hard and soft power, there are different ways of looking at how we tackle this in the future, and I am not sure that Nye's prism will be sufficient for how we deal with the problems of the next couple of decades.

Professor Philip Sabin: Ideas matter hugely. How you win that battle of ideas is far more difficult. It is not necessarily a matter of huge investment. One of the most dispiriting statistics I read was that there are more British Muslims serving in ISIL and al-Nusra than there are in the British armed services. That is a battle of ideas that we need to win. However we do it, that is what matters.

Q53 Mr Donaldson: Therefore, do you have a view on the current defence engagement strategy?

Professor Paul Cornish: I am sort of glad it has been reawoken. It seemed to have been allowed to go into a bit of a slide. I think it is all to the good that it has been woken up again, but it can only go so far as it can go. It will never ever be a substitute for hard power. I am sorry to bang on about that again.

Q54 Mr Donaldson: Any thoughts on the current deployment to Sierra Leone?

Professor Paul Cornish: It is a combination of a legacy responsibility—or relationship, if you like—with pretty cold-blooded self-interest. It seems to make sense on various levels, but I would not see it as any more than that.

Q55 Sir Bob Russell: We should look on the bright side, because, had the vote in Scotland gone differently a few weeks ago, I suspect we would be having a completely different discussion about the United Kingdom, so let us be grateful for that.

Should Future Force 2020 change? If so, how?

Professor Philip Sabin: I think it will have to change to some degree. I hope it does not change simply on financial grounds of affordability—there are plenty of other people who want that money. The best would be if we can adapt it at the margins to cope with the fact that the world in 2015 is different from the world we foresaw in 2010. Graeme Lamb is absolutely right: if we have some investment that we can use for technologies that are maturing now for needs we have now that were not foreseen then, that would be great, but as I say, we will have problems just affording what we have already planned for.

Q56 Sir Bob Russell: We do have the UK Government's commitment to NATO, so we are not on our own, and you will be aware of the increasing joint training with France, which I think is something we should welcome. Do you think the UK will be able to provide the strategic leadership necessary to meet the promises that Britain made at the NATO summit in Wales?

Professor Philip Sabin: I fear that the 2% seemed a little self-serving: "We're already doing it. You all need to come up." If everybody did, that would be wonderful, but the reality is that Britain and France have always spent more of their GDP, because we felt we wanted to—we felt we needed this wide array of capabilities and we have a responsibility that many other nations simply do not feel. In the ideal world, we would get together and have joint programmes. We have to some extent—in the transport field, for example—but in other areas we are still competing, between BAE and Dassault on UAV programmes, because there are commercial competition interests and national protectionist interests. So it is really trying to overcome those and say, "Hey, we are all in the same boat, especially given what is happening in Ukraine and in Syria. Let's try and work as Europeans." You mentioned Scotland and yes, we have overcome that vote, at least for the moment, but we may have another one very soon in which it will be touch and go whether we stay in the European Union, so there are lots of dimensions to this issue of working together.

Peter Roberts: But one does need to be quite careful about demanding 2% from others. Take the requirement for Germany to increase her spending by £28 billion a year in order to meet that target, given their economic growth model at the moment. That money would not be invested in a nuclear deterrent or aircraft carriers, so we would see a two corps-size army in mainland Germany, in the centre, which is hardly going to stabilise Europe in the face of Russian concern over expansionism. In the same way, you could be looking at Spain and Italy having to double their budgets when they were in significant financial problems. Is that something that we would really wish to see in the very short term? There are some very difficult decisions there, and asking for 2% immediately might not be entirely helpful.

Professor Paul Cornish: I do not see the UK as being in deficit as far as leadership of NATO is concerned. I think we do rather a lot of it, to be honest, and perhaps even too much. NATO is a nuclear alliance, and there we are, one of Europe's nuclear powers, which I think is significant. I think there are plenty of other things in which we assume or are actively

taking a leadership role in terms of encouraging others if not to achieve the 2% goal, then at least perhaps to move closer to it over time. There is work to be done in acquisition efficiency, pooling our resources and all those good things, but then we find that we have taken leadership for many years of the ARRC, and now we are also in a position of taking the leadership of the new reaction force. It does seem to me that we cannot carry on doing everything, and I wonder whether one of those ought to be given kindly to our French or German allies, perhaps.

Q57 Sir Bob Russell: If I can move on, Professor Cornish, is the Army the right size? You indicated earlier that you could disband a few battalions.

Professor Paul Cornish: No, that was a loose example. I was not trying to advocate that in any sense.

Sir Bob Russell: I am pleased to hear that.

Professor Paul Cornish: That was never my intention, as I think I made clear. I am going to evade the question, if I may, by saying that I do not know what "right size" means. I said before SDSR 2010 and I am saying again before SDSR 2015 or indeed 2016 that these decisions about the size and shape of all three of the armed forces have to reflect politico-strategic guidance. The size of the armed forces is rationalised by something bigger than them. I could imagine that if we had the guidance, as it were, from No. 10 and the Cabinet Office as to the UK's strategic outlook, we could, of course, envisage a smaller Army—or indeed a larger Army, just to rebalance my position on this. I do not think that there is anything writ in stone. There is no natural law that tells me what size an army should be. The Australians have a much smaller army, and so do the Canadians, I think, so where are we?

Q58 Sir Bob Russell: Are our armed forces flexible, agile and operationally capable at their current size? Do they have the right capabilities?

Professor Paul Cornish: They seem to be. There are always capability deficiencies in any armed service, I guess. But it seems to me that if you judge the performance of Britain's armed services over recent years, they have performed well, or if not as well as could be expected, that capability deficiencies that have arisen have been dealt with. I do not want to paint too rosy a picture, but I do not see any major lamentable deficiencies in the Army at the moment.

Q59 Sir Bob Russell: I have two linked questions, which others might want to come in on. Is the existing equipment held by the Army at the right levels of availability and sustainability? If there are critical shortfalls in equipment, what are they?

Peter Roberts: For the Navy, you come back to that first question: is it the right size? Arguably, it is below critical mass for developing capabilities or regenerating capabilities, certainly in terms of the specialist people who are lacking, with engineers being a key

problem. That is now below critical mass and unsustainable for the future, and it is starting to determine the pace and tempo of operations.

In terms of equipment, the difficulty is that the service chiefs do not necessarily have the freedom to spend the money how they wish, so they are driven by conditions in the centre, for example in terms of hull numbers, but also in terms of sovereignty—where they are building platforms. This means that while the money might be right in terms of allocation, they are not necessarily given the flexibility to scale themselves correctly, because they have to pay over the odds as a result of the economic policy. That might be fair enough, but it does lead you to the conclusion that the Royal Navy, for example, is not the right size. It is probably below critical mass now and it will need a 10 to 15-year plan to regenerate itself and the people it needs to operate two carriers, an amphibious capability, nuclear submarines, the deterrent and all.

Q60 Sir Bob Russell: Professor Cornish, I wonder if I could just finish my questions on Reservists. You will have heard the previous session. Is the Army too dependent on Reservists?

Professor Paul Cornish: Army 2020 has shown itself to have been too dependent on the Army Reserve, because the Army Reserve has not developed. I think that is a kind of mathematical fact. However, I would, perhaps stubbornly, insist that the plan is a good one. The deficiency is not in the plan; it is in the backing for it and the drive behind it, if you like, in terms of investment, incentives and so on for those who employ Army Reservists.

Q61 Sir Bob Russell: But what happens if the recruitment plan does not work, as some people are predicting?

Professor Paul Cornish: Then there is a grave problem, but it has not yet not worked because it has not yet been fully tested.

Q62 John Woodcock: Can I take you back, Peter Roberts, to what you were saying about Germany and its influence on Russia? Surely it is the case, actually, that if Germany were to increase its defence spending significantly—if it were to take more deterrence missions in Europe—it would actually very significantly change Russian assumptions in a way that was helpful to NATO and to the UK.

Peter Roberts: If you take, for example, a German plan to treble the size of its army in order to be able to spend its increase of 0.7% of its GDP over what it has now, the field army that it would generate would pose a significant threat to Russia. What is going to be the Russian reaction to that? Our culture and our mindset—the way we do our critical thinking—might be to think that would change the deterrent value, but actually it could play in exactly the opposite way, in terms of there being no alternative for Russia, seeing itself as encircled by NATO and increasingly pressured by NATO, but to increase spending on its own armed forces in turn and to rebuild its own land capability. Therefore, instead of stabilising Europe, it would act as a kind of destabilising mechanism.

Q63 John Woodcock: But do you not accept that the principal opportunity for Russian expansionism that we have seen so far has actually been the opposite: the lack of reaction to a number of events, which has given Russia an opportunity?

Peter Roberts: Indeed, I would agree, but I am not saying that that needs 2% spending. You could have deterred it with the forces that are available to NATO right now, so actually an increase in the size of those forces makes no sense because all you are actually doing is increasing your capability but not your intent. The difference would be if you changed your intent. By changing your intent, you would signal your ability to use the forces already available and deploy them quickly to an area where they are needed in order to defuse the situation. I would agree with that entirely, but what you do not have is that NATO-European grand strategic political intent that says, "Yes, I wish to use the current capability in a fast reactive manner and to act as a conventional forces deterrent."

Q64 John Woodcock: Do you share that analysis?

Professor Paul Cornish: I think so. It seems to me that historically Russia has been in turns expansive and neurotic, and it seems to me that if we in Western Europe are concerned to manage that, the one way we cannot do so is by being seen to be backing out of hard power, so to speak. That is the way I think we are perceived in Russia, and so they can basically do whatever they like. They can flip between the expansive and the neurotic at their leisure, so to speak, and we have nothing to say.

Professor Philip Sabin: The worst possible situation, which we have been in before, is when we disarm and give in during crises, and the other side gets emboldened and then pushes, so we finally rediscover our resolve and get into a terrible war. That really would be a failure of strategy. The issue is how we best avoid that absolute nightmare situation in which there is a war between two nuclear-armed blocs. Opinions differ, but I would go back to what we said in the first session: what is crucial at the start is to have people who really and deeply know what is driving the Russians now. Are they only concerned about the minorities in Ukraine and trying to manage the crisis, and they would not expand into the West even if we had no forces; or, on the other hand, are they probing with bayonets so that if they encounter mush, they go on? The answer to that question of interpretation of the Russian mindset—both extremes are far too simplistic, I think—must underlay any consideration of how to recover from the current, very dangerous situation, where the credibility of our deterrence has been threatened by our recent capability weakness and, as Graeme Lamb said, our weakness of intent. However, if we are not careful, by pushing back we will get ourselves into a worse situation and be at war.

Q65 John Woodcock: But that takes as an assumption the failure or ineffectiveness of ramping up deterrence power or intent latterly. You say that that is a worse situation, but is not an even worse situation one in which we continue in our current mode and Russia gets more and more serious in its expansionism, and then we are completely trampled?

Professor Philip Sabin: The worst situation is where we are in a war that escalates to nuclear weapons—that is very clear—so the question becomes how we avoid that. In 1914 we failed, in 1939 we failed, and in the early Cold War we succeeded—just about—in avoiding that worst possible outcome. Then there is the question: can you have, within the best outcome of avoiding a war, a success in your strategy of protecting your freedoms, your ideology and so on? We must understand that we are not in the old 1914 world, where war is an acceptable outcome.

Q66 Sir Bob Russell: The big difference today is of course the huge economic union of 26 or 27 European countries. Doesn't that give added strength to the defence of Europe—a democratic, free Europe?

Professor Philip Sabin: Absolutely it does, and I think economics are by far our most powerful weapon. Even without major military action to reverse what has happened in Ukraine, let us say, we can put enormous strain on Russia. The problem is that we face the pain ourselves. The issue with Germany is interesting, because they are the ones on our side who are the most entangled and have the most to lose economically. Again, we have to get our own house in order: what do we want, what is the priority as an alliance, and what costs are we prepared to pay for it? It may be more in terms of reducing our dependence on Russian energy supplies, for example, or not selling them military kit—those may be the costs we have to pay more than increasing to 2% in defence budgets.

Professor Paul Cornish: It is also the case that the richness and the well-developed nature of the relationship between Russia and the European Union was just as well developed and rich at the time of the Crimean annexation, so I think it is possible to have that relationship and for there to be opportunities to make gains at the margin.

Q67 John Woodcock: Peter Roberts—with others to come in—you have talked about the Navy being below critical mass, as you see it. There is clearly a gap between vision and capacity to achieve. Do you think broadly the Government have got the vision right for the Navy?

Peter Roberts: The naval vision is expressed in terms of Future Vision 2025 and Future Force 2020 is a stepping stone on the way there—2025 largely being driven by the delivery of carrier-enabled power projection, and that is a given. The question is not, "Is the strategy right or wrong?" The problem is the freedom to reward and retain key people who will enable that vision, that strategy. There are more effective strategies that could deliver a better, more cost-effective Navy, but not within the current constraints operated by MOD and the Government, which dictate, for economic and national reasons, requirements over sovereign build capabilities, recruitment, retention and training.

Q68 John Woodcock: Can you say more about that?

Peter Roberts: One of the key elements is that the hull numbers for the Royal Navy are driven at 19, and that is a restriction on which the Navy is funded with frigates and

destroyers. Those, as in the Type 45 platforms, are hugely expensive and are built here in the UK. One could argue that there is another option, whereby you could, as the MARS tanker programme has done, buy offshore and bring them in at a much cheaper cost—so, for example, you could operate a smaller force of Type 26 frigates and buy in addition a dozen or more corvettes to fulfil the standard tasks the Navy does. That would give you a two-tier Navy that would operate one section at the very high end of capability, doing the very tough war-fighting roles, and the other doing something much like the US Navy has done with the littoral combat ship, which is something for constabulary operations—the day-to-day stuff that happens such as hurricane relief in the Caribbean, engagement and training in west Africa, counter-piracy in east Africa and the Straits of Hormuz, defence engagement and the far east work. Thereby you retain your high-end capability without having to reduce the sum of its parts by deploying elements around the world, and you can retain it to train as a core power-projection tool of national power. One the one side, you are driven by the requirement to build in the UK, which drives up the price, which means that you cannot have the flexibility to change your force structure.

Q69 John Woodcock: Before you go on to the second part, may I ask: would you not be concerned by the longer term vulnerabilities to which the UK is exposed by further reducing its shipbuilding capacity, as would follow from buying more off the shelf from other nations?

Peter Roberts: Considering that at the moment it takes the UK about 18 years to design and build a ship, arguably you could recreate within that time frame the capability to do so, should you require it, but at the moment we do not have a strategic warning time that gives us anything like that, so the national requirement to build surface ships at that level has to be questionable.

Q70 John Woodcock: Finally, on particular gaps in the Navy's equipment, is there anything you would specify that we are not doing that we need to do?

Peter Roberts: Maritime patrol aircraft are absolutely essential to provide permanent wide-area surveillance; greater use of hyperspectral intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance through the use of unmanned aerial platforms; and a dedicated weapon that allows navies to overcome problems of swarm tactics, which are increasingly being used by adversaries.

Q71 John Woodcock: Again, can I invite you to speculate on where that extra resource could come from? What should we not be doing?

Peter Roberts: It is interesting. Look at, for example, the Royal Australian Navy, which operates an entirely different ethos from the Royal Navy. It retains a comparable number of surface platforms, but with a markedly reduced manpower requirement. The requirement for the Royal Navy at sea is something like 8,500 people, yet the overall headcount is about 29,000. There are elements there—people being the most expensive element in the naval budget—that need to be sorted out and an understanding reached of how you can reduce that,

in the similar way to what the Royal Australian Air Force has done, increasing the number of platforms it operates and by contracting out second and third-line maintenance.

Q72 Mr Havard: I will ask questions about the RAF. I think you heard some comments made in the previous session about the F-35 and how that sequences with carriers—it is interesting. Obviously the whole business of their work is changing, with this whole idea of pilotless craft—well, not pilotless; pilots just not sitting in the airframe. Where do you think the RAF are in this Force 2020 projection and what we can say about them, or for them?

Professor Philip Sabin: As I said before, the biggest issue for the RAF is combat mass. If they had their wish of how they would spend another £1 billion or £2 billion, it would clearly be in avoiding the incredible draw-down there has been in the number of fast jet front-line squadrons. That raises, as you say, the question of whether there is an unmanned alternative—and a cheaper unmanned alternative. The current situation in Syria and Iraq is providing an interesting test case because of course the Tornado is already deployed, in its last days of operation, and we are going to move the Reapers from Afghanistan to do a similar sort of job involving the precise targeting and overwatch of these elusive targets. It will be very interesting to see, as we have seen in Afghanistan, the Tornados and the Reapers working together, and the relative merits of the two.

It would be wrong to see an early transition to a major unmanned alternative for the manned systems for a few reasons. The first is that it is not particularly cheaper, because currently the person is simply removed from the cockpit, but you still need the same infrastructure, number of personnel and so on. The second point is that we are increasingly worried about cyber-warfare and electronic warfare, and the current generation of unmanned systems, in particular, is extremely dependent on the proper working of the satellite system and the links. You certainly would not want to use that kind of system against an opponent with any ability to turn them off, make them crash and the like.

That leads me to the third point: we are no longer facing just people like the Taliban in Afghanistan. Even ISIS in Syria might be able to do things, and the Ukrainian rebels have already shown what they can do with air defences, so if we are to have any kind of capability in the context of more symmetrical confrontations, rather than asymmetrical ones, unmanned air systems of the current generation will not give you very much at all. They really are weapons very much for the kind of challenge that we face in Afghanistan and, to some extent, the one that we are facing against ISIS.

Q73 Mr Havard: In all that, it's not just about fast jets, is it? Helicopters came under joint command structures—a lot of skin and hair was flying at that point—but that has matured a little. There are also the questions of lift and transport, manoeuvrability, and who flies what—you know the arguments. What is this RAF going to look like? Do you need an RAF? Can you make it work? What is being said?

Professor Philip Sabin: I am a great fan of jointery. I remember that we were involved with the staff colleges at the time when they merged—'97, I think it was—and there was all sorts of resistance, with people saying, "How can we lose the Naval staff college?" and,

"How can we lose the Army staff college?" Within a few weeks, if not a few days, of the new joint staff college starting, people were saying, "How could we ever have done it differently?" Since then, the British have, in many ways, been in the lead among other nations in terms of their progression towards jointery.

I would not want to carry jointery too far—the Canadian experience is always mentioned as an example of trying to go to the ultimate extreme—but there is a real risk, as we saw in 2010, that the more that you start to put at risk the very heart of the armed services, and their core capabilities and very essence, the more they will fight each other, get bitter, and not want to share or to come up with an overall view, because they are very protective. Paradoxically, you want not to threaten the survival of the services, as plenty of letter writers to *The Times* are wont to do, in order to get them to work together and be more confident. It is the matter of the sun and the wind. What makes the man take off his coat? It is not the wind.

Q74 Mr Havard: Paul, your musings.

Professor Paul Cornish: We are going to hear more of this argument—it bobbed up around 2010—that the Royal Air Force is, of the three services, the one of that could be sacrificed, as it were, on the altar of the cuts, with fixed-wing going to the Royal Navy and rotary split between the two. If we go anywhere near that debate again, it needs to be nailed early on—or, indeed, to be adopted early on by the Government. Philip is absolutely right that if it is allowed to run, that can only be damaging and divisive in the discussions about where we need to be for 2015.

Basically, that is my position—we need to be very careful. If we lose the Royal Air Force, there is a danger that we lose its core function, which is, as I think Philip was saying, the application of fixed-wing fast air. Of course, the Royal Navy does that too, but it is the specialism of the Royal Air Force, and it would be quite a loss.

Q75 Mr Havard: Peter, do you have any observations on where we are with the RAF and how it fits in with the plan?

Peter Roberts: I am a great fan of being able to draw together the best of the three services in operations, and of the single-minded expertise of the Royal Air Force, not only in flying operations but in other areas, such as space. Its ability to embrace technology really adds a huge strength that I do not think can be replicated through simple jointery.

Q76 Mr Havard: Do you think that it was obvious, in a sense, to give the new fifth domain of cyber-warfare initially to the RAF to develop?

Peter Roberts: Cyber was taken on by the RAF, but it is under Joint Forces Command. The problem is that cyber at present is being delivered not in an integrated way, but very much in a silo. That is the problem with making it a fifth domain.

Q77 Chair: As we come towards the end, could we pull back to the big, strategic picture, and get a sense from each of you of what a more ambitious Future Force 2020 might have looked like, had you been the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Defence? It seems to the Committee that we are currently working on the assumption that we will drop below 2% of GDP. That is something that the Committee has fought against very hard, but it is impossible to get any of the major political parties to commit to spending 2% of GDP beyond 2016. We are looking, at the moment, at a drop to 1.6% or 1.5% of GDP, which flies completely in the face of the encouragement that we gave to other NATO countries in the Wales summit. I just wondered whether we could step back and put you in that position. Let us start with Peter and work our way along. What would a better Future Force 2020 have looked like, if you had been in charge?

Peter Roberts: I think the biggest debate, and what costs most money, is sovereignty, and we have not had that debate for some time. If you remove the sovereignty handcuffs, which are based around the Ministry of Defence, Defence Equipment and Support and the single front-line commands, you could deliver more than Future Force 2020 on 1.6%.

Q78 Chair: Just drill down to what that force would look like. Let us say that you can deliver more; more to do what? What is this thing? What is a good comparable country? What is the object? What kind of country is Britain? What kind of things should it be doing?

Peter Roberts: It is a balanced expeditionary intervention force that focuses on high-end war-fighting, with the ability to flex into lower levels. It passes off responsibility for constabulary operations to other Government Departments, and focuses on what it is supposed to do, which, as some people have called it, is the high end of hard power. It is the real capability that is the full-on deterrent.

Q79 Chair: By "constabulary operations", you mean counter-insurgency warfare of the sort that we are doing?

Peter Roberts: Yes. If you look at Krulak's three-block war, arguably blocks one and two—constabulary, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and helping the locals—are better done by other Government Departments and the third sector than by the military.

Q80 Chair: Okay. To pin you down before we move on to Philip, as regards this object—your vision of Future Force 2020—what would be the difference between that and, for example, the US Marine Corps, which is a broadly similarly funded object?

Peter Roberts: I think we would be seeing less investment in civil-military co-operation skills and in rebuilding infrastructure skills. We would see less specialisation, more commercialisation of logistics support as regards supply, greater use of autonomy and robotics from overseas, less reliance on national sovereign and hard and resilient communications, and greater commercialisation of solutions, such as second and third-line maintenance.

Q81 Mr Havard: Can I press you on sovereignty? You mentioned some of this, but we talk about sovereign capability—that is the language that is currently used. Sovereignty in terms of acquisition, equipment and so on is presumably part of what you are talking about. I am wondering what is meant, in this package, by less sovereignty.

Peter Roberts: It runs in everything, including core, big engineering projects. In fact, the real niche capability that Britain has is adding pieces of technology and niche capability. So in terms of satellites, it is not building the actual satellite per se, but adding the skin that goes on the sensor on top, which means that it is a British sensor rather than anything else. It allows you to outsource the bulk of heavy engineering skills and invest in the best of British R and D at the moment and bring those to market.

Q82 Mr Havard: Right, because what we as a Committee have said in the past is, "2% of GDP. Yeah, yeah. 2% of your own budget maybe for S and T and R and D at the Ministry of Defence." So you don't see that being lost in your argument.

Peter Roberts: No, if anything, it would see a slight increase in R and D, but to exploit the best of commercial practices out there, because there are some superb ones.

Q83 Chair: Professor Sabin, same to you. What is this object going to look like and how would it look different from the US Marine Corps?

Professor Philip Sabin: The first point is that we who care about defence need to argue very strongly in this huge fight that it will be over the budget. Otherwise, it will go down to 1.6% or 1.5% and so on. There will be many people pulling the other way, so it is important that we make the case and articulate why it matters for the national strategy that we want to fulfil. If you want such things, you're going to have pay for them or decide that we don't want them. It is one or the other.

The second point is that we must avoid where possible or minimise internecine fighting within the services and between the various interest groups over what capabilities to buy and how they are used. We do not want everyone pointing fingers and saying, "The carriers are stupid," or "The Typhoon is stupid," or whatever, because we will all lose. Those who care about defence need to pull together or else we will all die separately. As long as we have at least some success within that, it seems that it is about maintaining the current plan and at least not having to make further cuts, because we really are at that minimum that we have so long said we were in terms of the number of forces.

Q84 Chair: Can I just challenge you a little cheekily on that? You pointed out that when we talked about a minimum some time ago, it would have been about three times the size of what we are now at.

Professor Philip Sabin: Absolutely.

Q85 Chair: So why should we believe you that this is now the minimum?

Professor Philip Sabin: It is like the boy who cried wolf. We have cried wolf many times in the past.

Q86 Chair: What do you mean by the "minimum"? Why is this the minimum whereas what we had when we had three times as much was not?

Professor Philip Sabin: You are right that there is no absolute minimum. We are seeing now, very much before our eyes in Iraq and Syria, what happens when you don't have enough capability. Even when you're bombing them, the enemy are nearly taking towns. The enemy are taking Anbar province. You would think, with the whole world against them it seems, we would at least be able to have this effect. We are starting to get it very nastily demonstrated to us what happens when you do get to that sort of minimum capability. If we are going to cut even further from that, we really are in trouble. If we have any kind of spare capability in terms of financial investment—

Q87 Chair: I am being a bit cheeky, but when you say "in trouble", what is it that Britain would be unable to do? Presumably, the United States, if it wanted, could put 200,000 troops into Anbar province again tomorrow. What is it that you are worried about?

Professor Philip Sabin: If we wanted, given the budgets that we could make available and so on, we could all win this particular war and do whatever we want, but the issue is—

Q88 Chair: What specifically are you worried that Britain can no longer do with the budget that it has? What can Britain no longer do?

Professor Philip Sabin: I don't think Britain can contribute to an alliance operation the war-winning capability that it was able to contribute in Libya, for example. It is an interesting case. The United States had pulled back. They had by no means withdrawn and their support, refuelling and intelligence support were still crucial, but the combat air attacks of the British and French, with many other NATO allies, were doing the heavy lifting after the initial campaign. It took a long time and it looked for a while as though it was not going to work. We are now facing in Iraq and Syria the real worry—we talked about it earlier—that the other side will show that they can indeed outface the great Satan and can overcome this demon of air power. The number of people who will misguidedly flock to them then will make what we are seeing now look like a picnic. There are real concerns and we need to ask, "What matters to us? How much does it matter to us that that does not happen?"

We had a debate earlier on about NATO, and it is interesting how NATO can actually become an end in itself. In Kosovo, for example, one reason why, after the initial problems of the air campaign, we fought on and overcame Milosevic is that NATO was on the line. Do you see? So the success of our strategy—the coherence of our alliance—becomes a fundamental strategic pillar, and it seems to me that that is where we are now in terms of the

minimum forces. We have cried wolf too often in the past, and are now getting into a position where we really do not have the capabilities and we do seem like a paper tiger. Look at the amount by which the defence budgets of Russia, China and so on, are increasing compared to the tiny amounts that might be on the table for us—or probably even cuts. It does seem to me that at this moment the fundamental issue is what do we want to do. What do we want to do as a nation? We could wash our hands of all of this.

Q89 Chair: What do you want to do, Professor?

Professor Philip Sabin: I want us to be safe and secure. I want us to avoid the problems that are overcoming too many nations around the world—falling apart completely, economic collapse, security collapse and so on. That is the fundamental issue. I want us to be strong as an alliance so that the alliance, the western nations, remain the dominant security force, and the shaping force of the world—and not, for example, the Chinese or the Russians. I think that would be a bad thing. And I want us to win the battle of ideas. That is the fundamental battle, it seems to me, whether it be about what the Russians are doing in Ukraine, or about what ISIS is doing in Syria. We need to fight and win that battle of ideas, and at the moment we are not doing so. There are too many zealots on the other side.

Q90 Chair: Thank you, Professor, very much. Professor Cornish.

Professor Paul Cornish: I could think of a number of changes that might have to be made, but they are fairly marginal. I would want to review the relationship, for example, between Joint Forces Command and PJHQ. It seems to me that we have a command with its own Headquarters and another Headquarters that is also joint, so there may be some scope there. I think I would almost recommend reviewing 16 Air Assault Brigade and wondering whether actually it could be split into its two components, giving you two brigade Headquarters, one on a roulement basis and one that could become NATO's rapid reaction force brigade Headquarters. They seem to me to be two different cultures wrapped into one, so that might be worth reviewing. The chances of expanding it into two more brigade Headquarters, I accept, would be limited.

I think, and it pains me to say it as a former—long since former—Royal Tank Regiment officer, we might also have to give up, for the rest of time, the notion that we could have a serious heavy armour role in a major conflict in Europe, and leave that to others.

Q91 Chair: Can you help us on that? Just expand that a little bit. Why do we have to give up that?

Professor Paul Cornish: Because here is one of these capabilities, if you like, which over the years has become increasingly niche, and it is heading towards a cameo capability in the British Army—the ability to field very heavy armour, main battle tanks. My own regiment has been amalgamated almost to the end. That is my position on this. From a very personal perspective, I just do not see that we are going to be capable any more of making a major heavy armour contribution to a major armed conflict.

Q92 Chair: What are the metrics that distinguish being able to make a major contribution from not?

Professor Paul Cornish: It is having more than one regiment's worth of tanks available to go, I think—to be quite honest.

Q93 Chair: So two is enough?

Professor Paul Cornish: No. If we are talking about an armoured conflict—

Q94 Chair: What are the metrics for being able to attain your objective of being able to make a major contribution?

Professor Paul Cornish: It is one of those questions where you sort of know that you are looking at something that is too small, but have no idea where it would cease to be too small; but if you have got one or two armoured regiments then, really, getting them to Europe and deploying them into Europe, and making use of them in this notional, possibly even fanciful, scenario of an armoured manoeuvre battle in Europe seems to me to be almost too difficult for the UK to contemplate any more.

So that might be one of these marginal adjustments, if you like—not marginal if you happen to be in the Royal Tank Regiment, quite plainly. Apart from that, though, my point is that if I were to be in charge of designing the Future Force now—2020 or 2025—funnily enough I think it would come out looking pretty similar to what we have got at the moment. I cannot imagine any Prime Minister, any political party, standing up and saying, "Here's the solution, let's do away"—as we were just saying—"with the Royal Air Force" or "Let's reduce the Army entirely to home defence and forget this expeditionary stuff. We don't want any interest in foreign wars, or whatever. Let's reduce the Royal Navy simply to coastal patrol and fisheries protection and so on."

I just do not see that happening; therefore, we are in the business of trying to maintain this three-service balanced force with reduced funds. I think that is inevitable. Therefore, we cannot get out of it. So what is going to be required are all the peripherals around this declining balanced force structure. We are going to need clearer, better and more consistent political strategic leadership to understand what the armed forces can do, and when they can do it and when they cannot. We are going to need better, clearer risk assessment, risk management, and all these things that we know are happening and have been happening since 2010 in the national security strategy, and so on. All the packaging around this declining force is going to be vital to make it workable.

Q95 Mr Havard: So are you saying, for example, about the tanks that you would like to have them, you could use them, and they are very necessary, but really they are too expensive to sustain as a capability on the scale you want, to do anything sensible with them? Do such criteria have to apply to disappear a capability?

Professor Paul Cornish: It is looking that way.

Q96 Mr Havard: Is it sustainability that tips it, rather than—

Professor Paul Cornish: We just need to be honest with ourselves. If we are looking at reducing the armed forces even more, and if we are looking at the Army in particular taking heavier cuts, then there will have to be some very hard choices, and I can imagine those sorts of things being discussed.

Again, as with the Royal Air Force, I am not recommending any of these positions. I am not recommending reducing the Army by five infantry battalions. But I think that some very hard choices are going to have to be made.

Going back to the US Marine Corps, which is the comparison that is always drawn, I like to think about it this way: if the US only had the Marine Corps, it would now be saying, "Maybe we should also have an Army, an Air Force and a Navy". So I resist that tempting allusion to sliding in the direction of the USMC. I think it kind of exists and works because they have got the other three.

Chair: I am afraid we are out of time. Thank you very much indeed to all our witnesses. We are now moving into private session.