



Public Administration Select Committee

Oral evidence: Whitehall: capacity to address future challenges, HC 669

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Members present: [Mr Bernard Jenkin](#) (Chair), [Mr Nigel Evans](#), [Paul Flynn](#), [Mrs Cheryl Gillan](#), [Sheila Gilmore](#), [Kelvin Hopkins](#), [Mr Andrew Turner](#)

Questions 297-345

Witness: **Major General Jonathan Shaw**, former Assistant Chief of Defence Staff, gave evidence.

Q297 Chair: May I welcome our witness to this extra session on future challenges facing the United Kingdom and the machinery of Government? May I ask our witness to identify himself for the record, please?

Major General Shaw: Ladies and gentlemen, Jonathan Shaw, chairman of Optima Group.

Q298 Chair: You are author of?

Major General Shaw: Author of a book entitled, “Britain in a Perilous World: the Strategic Defence and Security Review we need”.

Q299 Chair: I am very anxious in this session that we should understand your analysis of the 2010 strategic defence and security review, and what we need in the 2015 and 2020 SDSRs, merely as a tool in order to understand what we are lacking in Government, as Government addresses future challenges facing the United Kingdom. Also, I am very anxious that if you don’t think we are asking the right questions you tell us, because I think we will get more out of you in the hour we have got available. What went wrong with SDSR 2010, and what does it tell us about the shape of Government?

Major General Shaw: The strategic defence and security review of 2010 was the first such review to be both a defence and a security review, which posed novel challenges of cross-governmental consultations that really had not been apparent under previous strategic defence reviews.

Q300 Chair: Why was that?

Major General Shaw: A strategic defence review could be seen to be the preserve largely of the Ministry of Defence, whereas a security and defence review raises questions of cross-Government challenges and governance, and that very much affected the way the

review was completed. Furthermore, it took place, of course, at a time so shortly after the economic crash that the Government's priority was less on security and defence and more on restoring finances. Budgetary pressure was extreme, and one of the problems that posed was, to my mind, that it became an objective in itself rather than a constraint. I remember at one meeting people were asking, "What are we trying to produce in our future defence force?" and someone came back with the answer, "A balanced budget." Having a balanced budget is not an objective when you are doing a defence review. It is a constraint. It is not an objective.

So, there were twin challenges. One was to produce as cheap a defence force as possible, because of course the comprehensive spending review was taking place at the same time as the SDSR was taking place. We did not even know how much money we were constrained by in that review. It was an iterative process, bouncing proposals back between the Treasury and the Ministry of Defence.

The other thing that became apparent during SDSR 2010 was that it was run by a gang of four—the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Treasury and the Foreign Secretary—which is odd, given that it is a strategic defence and security review. Both the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence were, in a sense, providing answers, shuffling them across the road to this inner cabal, and then being asked to show again. Yet the Ministry of Defence took responsibility or was criticised for the decisions it made, and actually the decisions were not made in the MOD at all. The final decisions were made and the approvals were all given in the centre of Government, which is a strange way of doing business, I think.

Q301 Chair: In a nutshell, tell us why this matters and what effect it had on the outcome that we should mind about.

Major General Shaw: Because it meant that the final shape of the review was more about money than it was about the security or the defence of our country.

Q302 Chair: Yes, but how did that manifest itself?

Major General Shaw: I think the financial decisions overweighed the strategic considerations.

Q303 Chair: Such as?

Major General Shaw: There is the whole question of the futurology. It links to another question, and that is the difficulty of foreseeing the future, but also the reluctance of the political system to commit to a vision of the future, which I think is a weakness of leadership, and I think it set us up for failure.

The simplest exposition of that is the ambition that there should be no global shrinkage of influence, which was a very key line given by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. And yet the tools of our international influence, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence, both saw diminished resources. The only tool of international influence that received any uplift in resource was the DFID budget. It created an imbalance between the Government's aspirations and the Government's plans. It was a reluctance to resource its plans. If you say you are going to have no global shrinkage and yet you cut all the assets, it is bound to be the case that you will have less influence overseas. That was disappointing.

In terms of specific equipments, certain equipments have come back and bitten us. The MPA was a classic case.

Q304 Chair: What was a classic case?

Major General Shaw: The maritime patrol aircraft. Also, the aircraft carriers continue to completely distort the budget in a way that is not really tied to any coherent defence posture.

Q305 Chair: What are the anxieties that you have about SDSR 2015 if this is not addressed?

Major General Shaw: My anxiety is that since 2010 much has changed in the international geopolitical environment, whether it is the Arab Spring, the rise of ISIS or the resurgence of Russia as an aggressive player on the world stage. What I am hearing in public statements that the Prime Minister makes is that we are just going to see a light-touch review. I don't think we need a light-touch review; I think we need quite a substantial review, because the situation has changed. The security environment in the world is significantly worse than it was in 2010, and I don't think a light touch is sufficient.

I also think in 2010 we did not have the costings for the plans worked out in 2010 for something called Future Force 2020. In 2015 it was assumed that you would have to do some serious cost analysis of whether that was affordable. The financial and the conceptual chickens are coming home to roost in 2015 on the Future Force structure 2020. First of all, "Is it affordable?" but overriding that from my point of view, "Is it still the appropriate force mix we need to tackle the challenges that have emerged since 2020 was conceived?"

Q306 Chair: You accept that there has to be a cost constraint, but it is the way that cost constraints are integrated with the decisions about capability. To what extent do you think we can carry on doing a bit of everything as opposed to deciding, "We are now a defence niche player," in terms of big bits of kit and big programmes?

Major General Shaw: I think that is right. There is a political desire to be able to give a minimal response across the field and not to make a final decision on any one capability. That is increasingly unsustainable, but you will have to ask the experts in the field how those capabilities now match up. That says more about politics than it does about our defence posture, because in an honest world, if we were going to match our resource to our policy objectives we would be recognising our own weaknesses. You are absolutely right in that assertion.

The amount of force we sent off to attack ISIS on the ground in Iraq was lamentable. It raised real questions about the sorts of capabilities we have got, and whether we have been spending our money on the right equipment and the right tools. Also, we need to talk to our allies more openly about what they want from us. One of the things that has come across as people do a critique on the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is that, in a sense, Britain's bluff has been called. We have talked big but delivered small, and that is why there are many Americans who confess themselves disappointed in the British military effort. We simply have not put the resource in to back up our words on the world stage. There is a time for honesty and being realistic about what we have got.

Also, in terms of deterrents, it is important that we are able and have a willingness to use instruments that can do what we say on the tin, so that if we say we are going to do something we can actually do it. That is the way you recover some form of a deterrence posture. I think our current record would raise question marks in people's minds as to whether our public statements are matched by will or capability, and I think that is a real danger for the country.

Q307 Chair: In one respect, 2010 was an attempt to integrate counterterrorism, cyber capability, energy security, response to climate change, and perhaps even going wider to other civil contingencies like human pandemics, into a more coherent whole. Surely that was a desirable objective.

Major General Shaw: I would agree with that. No, that is absolutely right. If your premise is that the country does not face an existential threat, which was their premise, and you could argue about that if you want, you have to look at the wider security issues to the country: why do we need to spend any money on defence, why do we need to spend money on security, and getting that balance right.

Q308 Chair: What is lacking between this desirable aspiration and the outcome, which you lament? What is the missing piece in the middle?

Major General Shaw: It seems to me that Whitehall is set up on the analytic model of Departments and Departments' primacy. You analyse a problem, you decide which slot to fit it into, which Department to give it to, and you let that Department crack on and deal with it. Many of the challenges we face are cross-departmental, and the problem with Whitehall in structural terms is that it is not structured to deliver cross-Government plans. At best it does cross-Government approaches, and there is more than a linguistic difference between those two. An approach is very much an accumulation of voluntary departmental effort. A Government plan at the moment is very much the sum of the individual departmental parts. Put them together and they often fall apart, because a plan is something where the various approaches are meshed together.

One of the structural weaknesses of Whitehall is that it does not have an empowered Cabinet Office or an empowered Central Department, as it used to be called, that can mesh plans together and create a workable overall plan. You end up with a variety of independent actions that do not necessarily mesh together well or achieve the long-term aim, or indeed are managed over time. There are some structural and cultural and doctrinal problems in Whitehall, which makes it difficult for Whitehall to deliver good cross-Government planning.

Chair: That is what we want to explore next.

Q309 Mrs Gillan: I was interested in Whitehall capability and strategy. You certainly did not hold back in your pamphlet with what you said: "I have observed gaping holes in the executive competence of Whitehall, holes that will be exposed when faced with the challenges of the SDSR." Then you went on to strategy and planning: "There is no long-term vision for this country...for instance no planning is allowed for two eminently foreseeable security challenges, Scottish independence and the (rest of the) UK leaving the EU." To turn that on its head, is there any area of Whitehall, any areas of Government, where you see good strategy and planning?

Major General Shaw: I certainly see good execution, as I say in the book, again, in the counterterrorist world. I put that down to the fact that there is a healthy blend of

practitioners and policy people who have a common approach to problems born out of experience and training and personal familiarity with each other. In that sphere Whitehall does very well. You could argue that that is a crisis management tool, but behind that lies a structure driven by the OSCT. That is quite capable of banging heads together and driving things forward in policy terms, so long-term plans. If you look at the security plan for the Olympics, for instance, the OSCT did a very powerful job there. Charlie Farr deserves much credit for creating that kind of coherence. What is interesting about that particular individual, for instance, and the success of the OSCT is that it is very much a triumph of his personality over a structure that does not, I suspect, officially empower him to have quite the sort of clout he does. In a sense, it is his personality making things work more than having an empowered centre.

The other thing about domestic counterterrorism is it is quite clear who is in charge. It is very clear, certainly in my experience, that the Home Office are in charge. Once you put someone in charge, they are empowered to do certain things. That clarification of command and control is very important—knowing who is in charge and who is responsible and who can make the decisions. It gets us away from the perils of collective responsibility, which lies at the root of the way that Whitehall works. In my observation of the way collective responsibility works, if a problem is owned by everyone it ends up being owned by nobody. People tend to vote for their own sectional interests, as I said, rather than for the overall plan. that is just a structural weakness.

So, where does it work well? In that counterterrorism area it works well. I was going to say it lacks a vision, but the CONTEST strategy that was devised by David Omand back in 2003-04, and that was driven through by the OSCT, has been a good example of cross-Whitehall work.

Q310 Mrs Gillan: Can I just probe you a bit more on that? In a response to the Chairman you referred to an “inner cabal” that ended up taking the decisions rather than the decision making being in the right place. Do you think that that is a function of the current Government structure, with a coalition and a quad that appears to be in command in the Cabinet Office, that you appear to believe has a mandate to interfere in all policy areas, but no power and no resources to enforce anything? How much of what you observe and your criticisms is about our current structure in Government?

Major General Shaw: Yes, it is about our current structures, but personalities will always drive that. The particular context of 2010 was—I am speculating here—sort of a desire to rein in the Ministry of Defence after the wars since 9/11, or the conflicts since 9/11, when the influence of the MOD in Whitehall was felt, I think by many, to have got too big for its boots. I think there was a deliberate attempt to corral the MOD back into coherent Government policy. In a way, I absolutely agree with that. It does need to be tied into there. My complaint was not so much that decisions were finally rubber-stamped elsewhere; it was that I do not think those people were interested in defence or security. I think they were just interested in cash cows and finance. That explains one of the reasons why we had a rather unsatisfactory, in my view, outcome in 2010.

Interestingly, as I say in the book, de facto what we ended up with in 2010 was a reversion to a maritime strategy, because all the money ended up going into naval resources, and cutting our manpower of the Army, because manpower is seen as a cost not an asset. My prediction for 2015 is that that will continue again. Yet, as I say, if they want a truly

maritime strategy, they are going to need a different force set than they have got. All the money is going to submarines and aircraft carriers, and we simply do not have the mass to carry out the strategy that we have, in effect, committed ourselves to. We have got real incoherence here in the outcome of 2010. I am just hoping that someone has the vision in Defence to spot this incoherence, and can convince the centre that we need to somehow do something to create a balanced and capable defence posture.

Q311 Mrs Gillan: So, you are falling back on your original analysis—that you would like the MOD firmly placed in the centre of any future strategy—and you are looking for a personality who is strong enough to carry through what you think will be a positive outcome.

Major General Shaw: That has to start at the top. If we are talking about coherent Government, it has to start with an honest admission by the Prime Minister of where he sees the United Kingdom in however many years' time—some sort of vision. Then the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence and DFID and everyone can resource and implement that, and domestically, with the security services, the Home Office can implement that at home, and we can play our part in that. So, yes, I do think we need that, but it needs some very strong, clear thinking in the Ministry of Defence. I would like to see it come. I am not confident we will get it.

Q312 Kelvin Hopkins: It is my view that the Civil Service has been in the firing line for some time now. There have been serious cuts, there has been pressure on finance and so on, and politics has changed as well. How much do you think that this weak centre of Government, as you put it, is to do with a loss of confidence in our Government machine, many senior civil servants taking early retirements, there is a lot of churn, and they have lost confidence and coherence as a result? Is that a factor?

Major General Shaw: The cuts have made the civil servants' job extraordinarily difficult, because what we are seeing in all the cuts is cuts in the machinery of Government, but not cut in the output of that machine. So, you have got fewer and fewer people desperately trying to do the greatest job, and the great word is more efficiency. I would say we are trying to be so efficient now, we are becoming inefficient through the mistakes we are making.

I have a huge amount of sympathy for the Civil Service because you can see all the pyramids just shrinking and shrinking. We seem to have the same number of points at the top, but there are shrinking numbers of staff to support it and deliver it. In their rush to please Ministers, a lot of civil servants have hidden from the fact that the engine they are thrashing is getting weaker and weaker. It is no wonder that people perhaps are leaving. That is all the more reason, it seems to me, to train the people you have got to do a better job and to work better across Whitehall. It seems to me that what we can afford less and less is individual stovepipes, whether it be Departments or even stovepipes within Departments.

Certainly the Ministry of Defence has got round this problem with a marvellous thing called matrix management and flat culture, neither of which I happen to agree with from a leadership point of view, because not only do businessmen tell me they do not work but I have seen with my own eyes it does not work. I also think it makes leadership, which everyone bangs on about, almost impossible. If you do not own your people, if they are

used by anyone, it means the good people get thrashed and the bad people get ignored. That is probably a bit of a tangent.

I do feel a lot of sympathy for the Civil Service, particularly in the Ministry of Defence. It is regrettable that we seem to have lost the ability to generate defence big hitters among our civil servants. For whatever reason, the people brought in as Permanent Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Defence have not been schooled in the Ministry of Defence. The last three have come in from outside. You can say that someone like Bill Jeffrey who came in with his big security background was exactly the sort of man you need in this new environment of the security and defence review. However, to have an accountant there, Jon Thompson—a very capable man, whom I like—I just question whether he has got the depth of field to really argue a case and think through a strong case for a coherent defence posture.

Q313 Kelvin Hopkins: We need, obviously, bright young things, and we have got many of those in and around the Civil Service. I am of a certain age myself, and we also need people with experience and the wisdom that comes with that. Are we losing out by allowing too many people to retire early and having too much change, if you like, in these senior posts?

Major General Shaw: I do not really have the figures to back that up, but if that is indeed what is happening, I would agree that that is a shame. I do not think you can stop them retiring early.

Q314 Kelvin Hopkins: No, unless they are offered a lot. The other point I wanted to ask about was your focus on officials and Departments and so on. The politicians in the end have to make these decisions. Has there been a change in the political culture, in the sense that there is more short-termism, more day-to-day concern with *Daily Mail* headlines and so on—comments we make a lot? Has that affected decision making in an adverse way?

Major General Shaw: My observation would be absolutely that it has—that, begging the individuals on this Committee's pardon, we have an over-influence of people who have spent their entire life in Whitehall. I understand that the number of ex-SpAds as Members of Parliament is only about 90, but those 90 people tend to have a disproportionate influence across Whitehall. This is precisely because they are schooled in the political machine. They have worked all the time there; they get their safe seats in their 30s and they get to be a Cabinet Minister in their early 40s or late 30s.

The wise old grey heads who come into politics late, if I may refer to them that way, people who bring experience in, arrive in the political machine too late to be fast-tracked to the top of the political tree. We have a dominance within the political class in Whitehall of these bright young things, who bring a lot of expertise at Whitehall but who really have no experience of execution or doing stuff in the outside world. That is bound to be regrettable.

There were many times in Cobra, watching Tony Blair surrounded by his acolytes, when it was a dialogue of ignorance. No one really understood the topic, and on many occasions one had to step in and give some advice about where to put ambulances, for instance, in the fuel protest, or how to run the logistics in foot and mouth. There was a general sense of relief around the political world that, as one politician said to me when I apologised for being quite abrupt on one occasion, "It was just delightful to hear someone talking who

actually knew what they were talking about.” There is a real problem here in the lack of expertise.

My observation would be, again going back to Tony Blair, who has come under a lot of criticism over the years, his intent, I think, was extremely good. I just found that on the occasions I could actually get through to him, he was not being supplied with the right information to make the right decisions. Because of this whole sycophantic system, no one really felt empowered, or people were very reluctant to speak truth to power to him. That is another real problem.

As I say, one of the hopes I would have if we had proper process in Whitehall, where Government plans had to go through a set number of planning processes, would be that we would depersonalise policy. It would be possible to object to a plan without objecting to the person who had sponsored it. The personalisation of policy over the last 20 years is another bad consequence of, in my view, the lack of process in Whitehall and people’s ability to make policy just because they are who they are, rather than because it is the right policy that has been through the rigour of a planning process. That does not exist in Whitehall. That is the trouble.

Q315 Kelvin Hopkins: I am not a military expert or an enthusiast for militarism, if one likes, but I was shocked recently. I went to a meeting of my local air cadets group, presenting awards and all of that. I discovered that there are more air cadets in Britain now than there are staff in the Royal Air Force, which I thought was astonishing—the numbers. There is one thing, and then on the other side we have recently been apparently assisting the Americans with air strikes against ISIS, but the number of aircraft based doing this job in Cyprus is tiny. They are very old and sometimes not very operational. I was quite shocked by those two statistics. Is that part of the problem we have?

Major General Shaw: You are talking about the air strikes. ISIS, I think, illustrates precisely the problem of the fact that we have been preparing to fight the wrong war and have been equipping ourselves with the wrong toolkits. The fact that we took the ground attack gun out of the new Typhoon and replaced it with a block of concrete that, because of the avionics and everything else, cost about as much as the Gatling gun in the first place, means that we are not using our fast, sexy jets to do the ground attack. We are using the worn-out, clapped-out old Tornados. You are absolutely right.

It was ironic that we sent, I think, as many planes as Belgium. One of the jokes in the MOD is, “Come on, give us a choice: are we going to be a big-five player, with the nuclear bomb, or are we just going to be Belgium?” Here we are in our latest conflict deploying the same forces as Belgium, and that struck me as quite ironic really, but telling, as you say.

Q316 Mrs Gillan: You also say, Major General, that “Perhaps the biggest inherited obstacle to clear thinking about the SDSR is our [imprecise] language”, and you go on very helpfully to give definitions of strategy, defence and security. I was particularly struck when you said that strategy is often used in Whitehall to be synonymous with policy. I can confirm that you are right. How much of this do you think is attributable to the degradation of the training programmes across Whitehall, because how otherwise are you going to get officials to speak the same language and to understand what is meant by that language if you do not have highly intensive and common training right across the Whitehall machine, particularly at a high level?

Major General Shaw: I agree. I think you are absolutely right. That is what I put it down to in the book. The lack of a central training college or a central course that creates doctrine and then teaches it across Whitehall is a gaping void if what you are trying to produce is cross-Government answers. I remember the fuel protest, when Cobra was called by Jack Straw precisely because he had been so impressed by Cobra's response to the Afghan hostage crisis in early 2000. When we were faced with the fuel protest, he got everyone together in Cobra again—the first time I think it had ever been used for anything other than the counterterrorist scenario. These officials and politicians emerged, blinking, into Cobra, completely not understanding what was going on, how it worked and the different language. It was an eye-opener to me, who sat there in the counterterrorist thing, just watching the rest of Government struggling to work together cohesively at that level.

I agree absolutely with your comment that there is a void in the training. You mentioned training. I am not aware of any training that civil servants get in how to do execution. I understand there was a college course, Sunningdale, that used to train people in this. Certainly if you look across the water at France and the ENAC—École Nationale d'Administration et de Commerce—there is a rigorously trained lot for a tiny élite at the top. That is a tiny élite who have effectively run France since World War Two. The irony is that that college was set up by Charles De Gaulle when he took power after World War Two, because he had been so impressed by the way that the British military put together its D-day plans.

That training that you mentioned is, to me, absolutely crucial. You need to step back from that, though, because you need to create a sort of joint cross-Whitehall doctrine first of all, and then you need to teach it, so very much the military model. One of the ironies of the Civil Service resisting this idea is that it was the Civil Service that largely forced the army, navy and air force to create this thing called jointery, which none of us particularly liked because we all like our little parochial stool. It is just human nature, is it not? I think we would all admit as we have come out the other end that it is not perfect, there is still rivalry etc., but at least we now have a common language. We know what we are talking about, we can plan together and we have improved.

That is lacking in the Civil Service. It would be a lesson. If you take a threat like hybrid war, that is absolutely cross-Government: it will involve education, it will involve health and it will involve the cyber thing—just everything. That is the threat that we know we face from someone like Russia with Valery Gerasimov helpfully writing a pamphlet explaining exactly what the Russian military was going to do and how the Russian state's power was going to be used. Sure enough, that is pretty much exactly what they did in the Ukraine, so we should not be surprised by any of this. The only surprise from my point of view is that we do not seem to have reacted nationally in a way that responds to that threat.

A key way of responding to it would be to set up a command and control system and a doctrine across Government that could handle a threat like hybrid warfare. If you were going to resurrect a sort of Sunningdale Civil Service thing, it would not just be for civil servants and politicians; it would also have to include the military, because you really would need one centre of excellence. Therefore, perhaps one answer is to turn the Shrivenham Centre, which I know is bursting to capacity, into a national centre of Government execution rather than simply a defence school. In the end, that is what we need. We need a common language right the way across.

Q317 Mrs Gillan: I happen to agree with that, but are we in the eleventh hour? Have we missed the boat? That is what worries me, because we have already destroyed something that gave us that commonality and gave us that ability for strategic thinking right across Departments. The very threat we face is going to be right across the Departments, which historically just do not work together well. I can speak from experience myself. If we reinvented that right now and put it in place, are we in time or are we already out of time?

Major General Shaw: We are pretty much doomed for 2015, I am afraid. The SDSR that is going to happen this year is going to run on existing tracks, so I am not very optimistic about a totally coherent response this year. The 2020 SDSR is a much more feasible target to aim at. I say that not just because of the whole Sunningdale thing, but I think that that gives us five years to work on an Opposition Government, who then might be in power, to educate them when they are in opposition.

I do think the time in opposition is the time when we need to train people, because once you are in government you are just stuck on a treadmill that works far too fast for any training. You learn on the job and you crisis-manage your way through it. We need to use the period in opposition and grab people early in their careers and educate them and train them. Maybe all MPs on becoming an MP go and do this course. I do not know. In short answer to your question, yes, I think we are too late for 2015, but I am hopeful of 2020. There is time to do stuff by then.

Q318 Chair: That is very interesting and maybe we should look at the École Nationale d'Administration and see what they do for the coherence of French policy, not that that is producing particularly positive outcomes for them at the moment. On this business of creating a shared language and a shared understanding, and your use of this word “doctrine”, by that you do not mean, “This is what to think.” What do you mean by doctrine? There does not seem to be a shared doctrine across Government Departments about how to operate.

Major General Shaw: Yes, “doctrine” is a bit of a dirty word in English. People generally ascribe to it a sense of constraint, of limiting thought. Doctrine is a “how to think”, so it is a creative process. It allows much greater independence. It is all about how to think rather than exactly what to think, so it should not have that pejorative sense.

Q319 Chair: But this is one of the ironies, is it not—that the military seem to operate or try to operate in Whitehall, but find themselves in a ghetto of their own coherence? Yet how ironic is it that Whitehall seem to adopt military terms to comfort themselves that they have coherence, but they do not seem to understand what those terms mean. They use the word “strategy” when they mean “plan”. You used the word “approach”, and what is the difference between an approach and a doctrine? We can easily be dancing angels on a pinhead here, so how do you get the military way of thinking about total Whitehall capability out of the ghetto?

Major General Shaw: I cannot think of any way to do it apart from instituting some sort of course that teaches people this. The problem is illustrated many times in Whitehall. General David Richards in his autobiography talks about the problems he had explaining his objections to the Libyan operation. His request that it be put through some sort of strategic coherence model was completely misunderstood by, I understand, the No. 10 team, who saw it as being obstructionist and just getting in the way of what they wanted. Thinking through the whole strategy process is a way you achieve coherence.

One of the problems is exactly as you say: that the military are stuck in a ghetto of their own coherence and no one understands them. That is in part the military's fault for talking in their own private language, but it does illustrate the wider point that we need to create a general language so that everyone understands it. I would agree with the previous questions about setting up a central school. I cannot see any other way of getting round that.

Q320 Sheila Gilmore: Interestingly, I suspect the assertion that we, as a country, are prepared to fight the last war is one that has been made for probably at least 150 years. Is there not some merit in people, Permanent Secretaries, for example, not being too steeped in the Department? You suggested that people were coming in from outside without the expertise. However, if there is a substructure of specialism and people who know what they are doing, the other side of the coin is that you have somebody who has come right through that and they are blinded to the wider picture.

Major General Shaw: There is always a danger that people who spend a lot of time in institutions become institutionalised and start becoming completely obsessed with the minutiae of the thing rather than the big picture. You are absolutely right. There is a famous saying, which I find to be very true, that every institution is like a golf club. The longer you are in it, the more you are interested in the club rules and the less interested you are in playing golf. There is a real point there about people becoming institutionalised.

None the less, we need to balance that against the fact that we do need people who have a very clear vision, who understand it and understand the consequence of the decisions. You really only get that by deep experience of being able to read the likely consequences of certain decisions. It is a trade-off. I accept your point on the danger of it.

Q321 Mrs Gillan: Something struck me as you were talking about the training of politicians and civil servants. One of the things that I found most valuable was our Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme; maybe other colleagues have been on it. It involved 21 days or 28 days serving with the RAF, which was an extraordinary experience and at least gave me, as a politician, an insight into it. That type of training has been invaluable to many of my colleagues in this place. Do you think that that should be extended and looked at in terms of taking civil servants from other Departments, particularly in the light of the threat that we face at the moment? Would that sort of training be advantageous?

Major General Shaw: Ironically enough, I used to be in charge of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme in the Ministry of Defence in my last job. Funnily enough, and not wishing to quibble, it is a very good thing, but I would say it is more educational than it is training. It familiarises you with the culture of the place and gets you to understand the reality, but I do not think it is training in the sense we have been talking about before.

Should more people do it? Time is very short, with fewer and fewer civil servants there. The time for training is very difficult. I was at the Royal College of Defence Studies on Friday. They were lamenting the fact that police do not send any chief constables because they do not want to be seen to have enough flesh in the system to be able to send people on educational courses.

Mrs Gillan: That is terrible. That is dreadful.

Major General Shaw: I might agree with your premise that the more people who are familiar with the culture and the sort of education you get in the Armed Forces

Parliamentary Scheme the better, but I think it is unfeasible to suggest it at the moment. I suspect that the Civil Service is so tightly employed that that would not happen. In general principle, absolutely: the more people that understand the culture and the tools the better, because I do think that there is that ghetto that was mentioned earlier.

The military ghetto is getting smaller and smaller. Fewer and fewer people have military education, fewer and fewer people's parents had service careers, and fewer and fewer people understand the reality of what it is to be in the services. I am getting on to a bit of a hobbyhorse here. We see that in the encroachment of civilian law into the battlefield, which I deeply abhor. It is deeply damaging and is, in my view, the biggest danger to the armed forces we face at the moment, but I am probably getting completely off piste now.

Mrs Gillan: Yes, but it is interesting.

Q322 Chair: One of the things we are considering is whether in fact what the military do for Members of Parliament in the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, the Civil Service should do for Members of Parliament, in terms of educating Members of Parliament about how Government Departments work, giving MPs a wider exposure.

Major General Shaw: I think what we are coming down to is a recognition that our political class needs re-educating and retraining in a sense it does not get at the moment. At the moment all it gets is experience doing the job. All these suggestions would be helpful but need to be put into a coherent package of how we train our political class to be good at doing things rather than just getting re-elected, because in my view that is where the balance has shifted.

Chair: I don't think the Prime Minister, or the Deputy Prime Minister, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary ever went on the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, and yet there they were, deciding the future of our defences.

Q323 Paul Flynn: Can we assume, on Democracy Day, that you are not a real democrat? You have referred to an "inner cabal" when you were talking about the elected Government, and you appear to disagree with the fact that on 29 August 2013 the Members of Parliament overthrew a decision of the Prime Minister, who wanted to go to war. Would you want some kind of military control of Government? You talked about politicians being trained by the military. This is a rather bizarre view of democracy on this particular day.

Major General Shaw: I think you are assuming too much. I actually agreed with that vote that the House of Commons took.

Q324 Paul Flynn: You have answered the question, then. Could you tell us what has worked in horizon scanning, military planning? We went to Iraq in pursuit of non-existent weapons of mass destruction, we went into Helmand in the belief that not a shot would be fired, and we sent 453 soldiers to die in Afghanistan on the pretext they were defending us against a non-existent Taliban terrorist threat to the United Kingdom. What did we get right in the last 20 years?

Major General Shaw: That is a very contentious portrayal of the past, if I may say so.

Q325 Paul Flynn: It is absolutely accurate.

Major General Shaw: Not absolutely accurate.

Q326 Paul Flynn: What is wrong with it?

Major General Shaw: I don't think the plan was that not a shot would be fired. I think it was certainly John Reid's aspiration that not a shot would be fired, and those two are quite different. Quibbles aside, what did we get right in terms of speculation? It is not an impressive record, is it? I don't think we do have a good record at it.

Paul Flynn: You can dismiss John Reid's—

Chair: Okay, let him speak, Paul.

Major General Shaw: I am saying I don't think we do have an impressive record on futurology. Black swans appear all over the place. The Arab Spring came out of a clear blue sky.

Q327 Chair: But I think Paul's question is more about how military plans failed to meet the aspirations of the politicians who approved them. Why do you think that occurred?

Major General Shaw: I think the military got it wrong more than we have admitted, but before that, I think the political goals set were wrong. Once you had gone into Afghanistan, the political aspirations for the Afghanistan we were going to create were far too ambitious. They paid more attention to our aspirations for the place than they did to the reality on the ground. It seems to me that our failure to understand Afghanistan and how it worked made us over-ambitious in our political targets.

Q328 Chair: But it is worse than that. It is reported that one of the reconnaissance teams came back from Helmand before we deployed to Helmand saying, "There is no insurgency in Helmand, but if you want one we should go there."

Paul Flynn: Absolutely.

Major General Shaw: I would certainly agree with the first part of the statement. As to the second part, well, whoever wrote that was right. I went to Helmand in 2005, before we sent troops down there, and found about 150 American troops there, huge amounts of aid and no trouble. We reversed that equation by putting lots of troops in there, no money, and interfered in the local tribal system, which ended up shooting at us. You can argue that it was a self-created error, and would I place the faults there on our inability or our incapacity to understand the reality of what we were dealing with and our over-ambition with the goals.

Q329 Paul Flynn: Who is "we"?

Major General Shaw: The military were part of that problem. I think we got that wrong as well as the policy makers.

Q330 Paul Flynn: Have we learned the lesson? This was not a trivial matter. When we went into Helmand only half a dozen British soldiers had died in combat. We went in there to get rid of the poppy crop—an utter failure, as it is at a record high now—and to bring it peacefully under control. It is not. The Taliban is still very much there. Nothing worked.

Major General Shaw: No. I agree.

Q331 Paul Flynn: Those 453 British soldiers, I am afraid, are dead, for always. There were voices in the military and elsewhere that said, "This is a hornets' nest. We are stirring it up." They were absolutely right—nothing worked. There was almost unanimity at the time of people saying, "This is fine going on." Now we have got a hallelujah chorus of generals, former Ministers and everyone saying, "Of course it was all chaotic." When are we

going to get it right in time to stop these terrible tragedies, and when will we stop the pretence that we are a great world power, which is what is behind this?

Major General Shaw: I am not sure whether that is a question or an assertion. I would agree with you; I would agree with your aspiration that we should do that.

Q332 Paul Flynn: You don't have to answer it, but let us look at what you have been saying this morning. You seem to be suggesting that the highest aim of Government should be military—that we should see ourselves as military. You referred contemptuously to Belgium. Belgium did not spend 14 billion in Afghanistan, and they did not lose 632 soldiers in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Are we suffering from these delusions that we have of our past military glory, and because we want to punch above our weight we spend outside our interests and we die beyond our responsibilities? Is that not what has got to be put right, and to change our mindset on the idea that we are the conquerors of the world and we are those who determine world policy?

Chair: Please can we be Belgium?

Paul Flynn: Yes.

Major General Shaw: I said before that what I was really after was a coherent vision, and to resource it appropriately. My complaint would be that we have been resourced like Belgium but aspire to be the United States, to put it in bold terms, and it is that gap between our aspiration and our resourcing that needs addressing. Let's have a bit of honesty about it.

I apologise if I have given the impression that I want a military takeover of the place. That is absolutely not my concern. It is possible to plan in civilian life, I understand; I just have not seen a training course that does it. All I am saying is that we need some form of training expertise in Whitehall to make things work better, for all the reasons I have said. It does not have to be military. In fact it should not really be military, but the military have a lead in the example of how to do it. If you were setting up a civil system, there are certain key things that you could learn from the way the military do their business.

Q333 Paul Flynn: Is it not true that when we have gone in with all guns blazing it has always failed, and when we have gone in with humanitarian aid it has usually been a brilliant success? The Army is very good at it—in Sierra Leone, Kosovo and Bosnia. If we took a line like Norway does, who do nothing but that, and if we decided, for instance, that Trident was distorting military spending and we could spend it on more soldiers and more humanitarian aid, would that not be a sensible way forward?

Major General Shaw: It might be more coherent if that was your political view, absolutely. I just take issue with the fact that you described Sierra Leone and Kosovo mainly as aid triumphs rather than military triumphs. I don't think that is true for either of those.

Q334 Paul Flynn: Humanitarian is the word I am looking for.

Major General Shaw: But it still involved fighting in Sierra Leone.

Q335 Paul Flynn: Indeed, yes, but with a humanitarian aim—not with an end of taking over or regime change or conquest.

Major General Shaw: Absolutely not. In fact, it was an operation supporting the status quo. The reason the Sierra Leone operation was so successful was because the politics had

already been sorted. We were merely removing a military threat to an established political system. That is why it was a success. One of the problems was that people assumed that the military were therefore a suitable instrument to deal with political problems, and that is the wrong one. In brute terms, the military are trained for two things: to kill people and break things. They are not very good at creating political systems. That responsibility, if it is possible, has to rest somewhere else.

The big question mark we need to raise is whether the intervention in another country, particularly with the military, to achieve a political purpose is achievable. I don't think it is. I think the military are the wrong tool to achieve political goals. They can destroy things but they are not going to create them. One of the illusions of the last 15 years is that if there is a bad leader in a country and bad Government it is because of bad individuals—remove them and good people will step up. No, they won't; they will prove to be exactly the same people as were there before, because that is the political culture.

We need to understand the political soil of these countries and understand that our ability to influence what plants will grow in this political soil is very limited. One of our problems in the last 20 years is that we have been aspiring to create systems in political soils that simply are going to wither on the vine. They are just unsustainable without us being there, and this is a false long-term goal. This sets us up for failure from the start.

Q336 Paul Flynn: Is the Ukraine crisis a diplomatic failure or a military failure, and what would you do about it?

Major General Shaw: Blimey. It is both, funnily enough. It is an analysis failure, because we made an assumption that this sort of thing would never happen, and that assumption has been proved unfounded. We had created dependencies on Russia that I do not think we had anticipated, and we had not fully absorbed the security aspect of that. We had not taken measures to give us the security that if that dependence on Russia, Gazprom for instance, went wrong we would have the resources to withstand the pressure. Hence the rather confused response to the Ukraine crisis, because although we talk tough, actually there are economists—

Q337 Paul Flynn: Briefly, because I keep asking this question and an answer does not come back—I am shouting down the well—could you give me an example of a non-humanitarian military mission by Britain in the last 25 years that was a success?

Major General Shaw: You safely exclude the Falklands campaign from that one in your timeframe.

Paul Flynn: Yes.

Major General Shaw: Sierra Leone was a success. East Timor was a success.

Paul Flynn: Humanitarian.

Major General Shaw: Yes, but there was fighting involved, the deployment of troops.

Q338 Chair: Is it also fair to ask the question, will our aid programme, concentrating on the poorest countries in the world, do much to create security in respect of the behaviour of Russia or China or North Korea or Iran?

Major General Shaw: No, it won't at all. It is irrelevant. It is relevant to a place like Africa. It might have some relevance in Africa. Having been in charge of that bit for the MOD, I cannot think of an area where our aid from DFID has prevented a crisis.

Paul Flynn: One linguistic point, Chairman: we should record that this is the third meeting we have attended in which the word "stovepipe" has been used by witnesses. This is clearly the word of the year.

Chair: I have heard it more often than that, so point taken.

Q339 Mr Turner: I am interested in where the decision is taken. Where were the decisions taken about us moving into Afghanistan? Was it genuinely the Prime Minister? Was it people just below that in the military or were no decisions taken? Was it just accepted we were going to go?

Major General Shaw: I think you had better get a different witness to answer that question. I suggest General Sir Rob Fry would be a good witness on that one.

Chair: We have had him.

Major General Shaw: You have had him?

Chair: Yes. I am afraid we have covered that and have not quite—

Major General Shaw: I presume you know the answer then. I can only speculate. I was sitting on the sidelines.

Chair: It is a fair question.

Major General Shaw: It is a fair question, but I am afraid I do not know the answer.

Q340 Chair: Okay. Just before we wind up, you talked about the limitations of horizon scanning. What is lacking from the Government's horizon scanning?

Major General Shaw: I would say, in summary, that Whitehall is set up for crisis managements rather than across-the-board planning. One of the problems with horizon scanning and planning for the future, contingency planning, is that in a resource-pressured time it can be seen as wasted effort and wasted assets. Certainly politically this is one of the problems. It does not get the priority it deserves because there is no political credit for solving problems that the public do not know about.

Q341 Chair: How should horizon scanning first of all be integrated across Whitehall, and then be integrated with long-term policy formation? Incidentally, as we respond to what we think we can see or might be able to see or guess, how do we exploit opportunities rather than just responding to pressures?

Major General Shaw: You need a very agile planning system. The first thing is you need to invest in horizon scanning and believe in it. You need a mechanism, I think, that monitors the extent to which your anticipated futures are being achieved or whether we are deviating. Horizon scanning with a warning mechanism where things are flashing only really has relevance if you know what your existing plans are anyway and if you have plans out into the future. Your horizon scanning is used both to create your long-term plans but also to manage those plans over time. This is the key bit of strategy.

Q342 Chair: You talk about an agile planning system. What would an agile planning system at the centre of Government look like so that it integrated horizon scanning, financial planning? Why is the National Security Council not part of that machinery and why does it not work?

Major General Shaw: It would be part of the machine, but what Whitehall lacks is a central body that runs that. It lacks a strong secretariat that creates Government plans as opposed to merely collating departmental actions, putting a ring around them and calling them a Government plan, which, as I say, is the sum of its individual parts.

Q343 Chair: It tries to reconcile those plans. Are you saying that then you finish up with half of nothing from each Department, as opposed to what? What would an agile planning system look like? How many people would it have? What would it do?

Major General Shaw: Okay. You could take a secretariat. It would be a secretariat sitting in the Cabinet Office or it would be the Central Department. I would love to go back and look at what the Central Department at the old Treasury used to do when it sat in the middle and provided that coherent function. I am told it used to do this function of managing plans across Departments and also reallocating funds across Departments. It had that financial power to reallocate resource.

What would the NSC secretariat look like? It could be 20 people, it could be 40; it depends how much horsepower you wanted to give it. More interesting at this stage would be to work out its functions. They would be to cohere departmental effort to provide Government plans that are tied together and that are planned not just in accumulating Department efforts but also planned over time. Then that body would also have a constant feed from what you might call a national ops room that could just alert it to how plans were developing and what warning signs were coming up on the horizon. It is a complex mechanism.

Q344 Chair: To what extent did the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, under Tony Blair, use to do that?

Major General Shaw: I don't know. I cannot answer that question. I don't know.

Q345 Chair: It sounds to me as though if this agile planning capability did not have control or at least heavy influence over how public expenditure totals are managed—not to challenge the Treasury's ability to set an overall total but to manage departmental totals and to vire between them in order to create coherence—it would not be worth much.

Major General Shaw: I agree. That needs, and I would like to do, more research, because I don't know the answer. I have just been told that this function used to be done by the Treasury when it was known as the Central Department, and that is exactly what it used to do. It used to manage that fund so there was no conflict with the Treasury. It managed those resources itself and reallocated resource as reality changed.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Major General Shaw. You have been extremely informative and helpful and I hope you will like our Report. Thank you.