HOUSE OF COMMONS

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Flexible response? An SDSR checklist of potential threats, HC 493

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Watch the meeting – Flexible response? An SDSR checklist of potential threats

Members present: Dr Julian Lewis (Chair); Richard Benyon; Douglas Chapman; Mr James Gray; Johnny Mercer; Mrs Madeleine Moon; Jim Shannon; Ruth Smeeth; Mr John Spellar; Bob Stewart

Questions 1–34

Witness[es]: **Professor Malcolm Chalmers**, Director of Research, Royal United Services Institute, **Nigel Inkster**, Director of Future Conflict and Cyber Security, International Institute for Strategic Studies, and **Professor Andrew Dorman**, Professor of International Security, King's College London, gave evidence.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to our inquiry into potential threats and the checklist that this Committee hopes to draw up against which to measure the flexibility or otherwise of the forthcoming Strategic Defence and Security Review. I would be very grateful if our three witnesses today would introduce themselves for the purposes of the record.

Professor Chalmers: I am Malcolm Chalmers and I am the Director of Research at the Royal United Services Institute.

Professor Dorman: I am Andrew Dorman. I am a Professor of International Security at King's College London, based at the Defence Academy, and the commissioning editor of the *Journal of International Affairs*.

Nigel Inkster: I am Nigel Inkster, the Director of Future Conflict and Cyber Security at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you for coming today. I am going to start with a fairly general question before handing over to my colleagues. I would like to know what each of you feels are the current threats, rather than the potential future ones, to UK interests that the Government ought to be taking into account when drawing up the SDSR. In particular, Mr Inkster, you have previously focused on cyber-security as what you regard as the biggest current security challenge. Is that still your view, or have other threats emerged to change your position?

Nigel Inkster: I will address cyber-security first, because I think that for the foreseeable future this is going to be a problem that we are all going to have to face. The nature of the

cyber domain—the architecture, the design—is such that it is always going to be replete with vulnerabilities, but we have become so dependent on information communications technologies to enable pretty much every facet of our daily life that this risk is ever-present.

We are also having to face up to the reality that although the cyber domain has brought us many benefits, it has also become an environment of contestation and conflict between states, and between states and non-state groups. It has been a powerful enabler, particularly for non-state groups, enabling them to project far beyond the area in which they are immediately engaged—a classic example being the ability of Islamic State to project its propaganda and its vision in ways that influence young people around the world. But we are also seeing significant state activity. The cyber domain has been a great leveller, but there still remains a first division in terms of capabilities, and that is really occupied by the United States, Russia and China. Each of them, obviously, presents rather differently.

Russia looks at the cyber domain very much in terms of hard security, and given the tensions that have arisen following Crimea/Ukraine, we are seeing an increase in very aggressive Russian activity, not just in areas like information security, but also in aggressive reconnaissance of physical capabilities—undersea cables, etc.—the implication being that these, in times of high tension, might actually be subject to sabotage. We have also seen recent experiments in which Russia tried to close itself off from the internet and see whether it was able to maintain domestic connectivity. So that is one area where we can expect continuing problems.

China is rather different. Although the focus in the media is very much on the phenomenon of state-sponsored industrial cyber-espionage, and this is a reality, I think in the medium to long term the bigger issue with China is that country's potential to leverage its size, its impact, its attractiveness as the world's largest and fastest-growing market in digital goods and services and the degree to which its major national champions, like Huawei, are engaged in delivering networks in the developing world, to shape the global cyber-environment to their advantage in ways that might not necessarily suit us. It is more a challenge than a threat in the case of China, but it is a challenge that requires constant awareness and monitoring.

Q3 **Chair:** That certainly puts cyber on our radar. I ask our other two witnesses to address other current threats that we ought to be covering in the Strategic Defence and Security Review and the national security strategy.

Professor Chalmers: The Government have, I think, now completed their national security risk assessment, and having been involved in some aspects of that as an external consultant a few months ago, I was greatly struck by how many threats, risks and challenges you can come up with, given a blank piece of paper and lots of different experts. We can divide those in different ways. We can divide them geographically; from every region of the world there are challenges to the UK— economic, security, military and so on. We can divide them by types of actor; strong states, weak states, non-state actors. We can divide them by the instruments that such actors may use to cause a challenge or threat to us. So cyber is one instrument, then there is terrorism, conventional weapons, nuclear weapons, economic pressure and blackmail and so on. The last two are important in combination. When we talk about cyber threats, in order to understand what

the cyber threat is, it is not cyber per se, any more than it is terrorism per se, that poses the threat, it is the combination of a particular actor and a particular instrument that potentially poses a concrete threat now or in the future.

When doing a threat analysis there are all sorts of things to think about. We need to think about meteorite strikes, adverse weather conditions causing flooding, infectious disease of the sort we had at the end of WWI causing millions of casualties—that is potentially the most serious threat of all in terms of loss of life. However, in order to conduct an SDSR, one has to assess the relative probability of impact of all those different threats, in order to have a meaningful discussion about what capabilities one has to generate. That is not only because we have limited budgetary resources. It is also because responses to some threats can cause other problems.

Sometimes, when we over-respond to a particular risk, it does not only cost more money, it may also exacerbate another problem. Therefore, for example, when we talk about policy towards China today—China is very important in terms of challenges and also, maybe, opportunities for this country going forward—there are potential military security concerns down the road, there are certainly contemporary cyber-security concerns, but there are also other agendas in relation to economic opportunity and, indeed, joint management of global issues, such as climate change, which are themselves important challenges. So we need a sense of probability of impact of all those challenges, just in relation to that one country, in order to come up with the balance of capabilities we want to address those challenges today, as well as investment in capabilities for an uncertain future vis-à-vis China.

We could go through the same discussion using the example of Iraq. Immediately after 9/11 there was heightened concern that Saddam Hussein's Iraq might pose a threat through weapons of mass destruction, possibly linked to terrorism. Because of the particular focus on that aspect of Iraq's challenge, military action was taken and other risks were taken, which were realised in relation to everything that has happened in Iraq since then, in terms of the Sunni/Shi'a conflict. So it is very hard in the security business simply to solve problems by devoting more resources to them, unless you have a more strategic sense of the effects, positive and negative, of taking action—indeed, sometimes even of providing capability.

Chair: Before Professor Dorman comes in, Madeleine has an interjection.

Q4 Mrs Moon: You mentioned economics, the probability of impact and capabilities, but what about issues such as skills? There is a lot of discussion at the moment about losing our capability in steel manufacturing. Does it also create a threat and a risk for us if we do not even have the capability to make the steel to make some of the platforms that we need?

Professor Chalmers: It could do. To conceptualise that in terms of risk or challenge, you would have to identify scenarios in which the lack of that capability exposes the UK to greater security risk than there might otherwise be—for example, if in a crisis we were unable to get access to particular capabilities for our military or other national capabilities that we would not be able to get nationally. You have to analyse that in terms of alternative sources of supply and, indeed, alternative timing of supplies. I am not sure about the specific issue of steel. Most elements of steel production are bulk production of

a relatively freely available commodity in the world market, but for more specialist items you are, perhaps, reliant on a relatively small number of overseas suppliers.

Professor Dorman: I shall build on the answers of my two colleagues to the question we had. We can think about threats but we can also think about our own vulnerabilities, and one question we should ask in various risk assessments is, what is UK plc actually vulnerable to? What are the challenges? There are three areas. One concerns our critical infrastructure vulnerabilities, whether it be cyber or the foreign ownership of different resources. To what is our infrastructure actually vulnerable that is a threat to the United Kingdom?

The second concerns our economy. We are very dependent on the financial sector. One of the vulnerabilities the UK has is to periodic financial crises. We have seen them every five to 10 years, we know that will happen to the UK. That is a long-term threat.

The third, particularly for the SDSR, is our ability to horizon-scan, to identify potential challenges and threats. One of the real fears—because we are having to work on the 2% and the protection of that—particularly in the Foreign Office is how much, in a sense, our eyes are taken out. We may be able to protect the big battalions, the ability to wield a big stick, but if you do not know who you want to wield it against or where your target area is, you are just swinging a bat blindly.

Chair: Thank you. That is a good start.

Q5 Ruth Smeeth: I shall start with your comments on our ability to horizon-scan. What fundamental assumptions were made towards the 2010 SDSR and what was missing, what did we fail to identify? What went wrong last time, so we can see what we are going to miss this time?

Professor Chalmers: I think it is the fate of every defence review—it is certainly true of every defence review since the 1950s—that there will be people, within a year of the defence review, who will say "You didn't predict this" or "You didn't predict that". Sure enough, that is what happened this time. People criticised the defence review for not predicting Libya, not predicting the Arab spring, not predicting what is happening in Syria and Iraq, not predicting the narrowness of the Scottish referendum. That can be a little unfair, because it is not the job of SDSRs to predict what is going to happen in the next five years. That is simply not possible, for all the reasons we understand very well. Rather, the purpose of an SDSR or a defence review, in my view, is to provide a set of capabilities that allow the country to respond as best it can to inherently unpredictable events. That is the measure, I think. For example, the measure in relation to Syria and Iraq today, or Libya, or indeed Ebola, is to ask, if we knew then what we know now, would we have made different decisions in relation to capabilities in 2010? So it is more about a checklist against the capability choices rather than against predictions, I would argue, which is most important.

To give one example, knowing everything we know now about what has happened in those five years, if we had had the same defence budget available in 2010, would we have made a different choice in relation to the maritime patrol aircraft or the Invincible class carriers? There was a choice in 2010, for example, between scrapping Harrier and

scrapping Tornado, because you had to scrap a whole fleet of aircraft in order to make the record savings that were deemed necessary at that time by the Treasury.

Looking back on those five years, would the UK have been better off without Tornado, but with Harriers and Invincible class? I am not sure it would have been. You can argue the toss on that one, I think. On the maritime patrol aircraft it is quite legitimate to argue that, given all the things that have happened over the past five years, there is not much that has happened in which the maritime patrol aircraft would have put us in a particularly better position than we would have been. There could have been unexpected events. We could have faced a Russian submarine threat of greater intensity, but the calculus back in 2010 was that over this period we probably would not, and that has been proven right.

Q6 Ruth Smeeth: To go back, what were the base assumptions for the 2010 review? What were the core items? What were we actually basing the 2010 review on?

Professor Chalmers: I think they were based then, as they are now, on analysis of a wide range of threats, attributing different probability and potential impact to all those threats. One of the differences, I suspect, between then and now is that then we were putting more emphasis on some areas than we would do now; we were putting more emphasis on the possibility of war with Iran because of the unresolved nuclear issue. That will be a down arrow this time. We were putting more emphasis then on the ability to sustain extended stabilisation operations, because we were still in Afghanistan in large numbers in 2010 and we are not now.

On the other hand, I think we put less emphasis on the possibility and the requirement of providing forces for conventional deterrence of Russia. We are allowed to put rather more emphasis on that now, given the events that have happened. Similarly, some of the lessons we have learned and the capabilities we have had to generate in relation to Iraq and Syria, I suspect will mean that we put more emphasis on air power and drones, and perhaps associated special forces, than we would have done at that time, although I think that was already something of an element in 2010 because of Afghanistan.

Professor Dorman: If you look at 2010, the world from a UK defence analyst's point of view was a lot easier to deal with. It was a lot more peaceful and fairly straightforward. What you saw in 2010 was a de facto adoption of a 10-year rule. It was, "We will get out of Afghanistan as quickly as we can; we will assume there will be no interstate wars for the next 10 years, so we can take some risks—maritime patrol aircraft would be one of those areas—and we can reconfigure our Armed Forces."

That is the whole idea of Future Force 2020, so that by 2020 we will have reset the UK's Armed Forces when we can see this new world of 2020. But you took a whole series of risks. Where was the focus? The focus was on the economy. That was the focus of the Government at the time. It was about maintaining the credit rating and trying to balance the budget. You can evaluate how well they did that.

The point was it was to take a window on defence and security, because the world did not look quite so bad then and you could take some risks on that, quite reasonably. As Malcolm says, it is one of the challenges that you have always got when you do risk analysis or when you look at horizon scanning. We can all identify trends, but you never quite know what will kick off and what will not. There was a whole series of trends, but

no one could predict what actually ignited the Arab awakening and spring. We saw how close Scotland and Australia were in the rugby last night, but we could not ultimately predict. It was a refereeing decision that tipped the decision one way. Things happen. You can do a whole analysis, but individuals play a part.

Nigel Inkster: One of the underlying assumptions of the 2010 review was a world of uncertainty, and that word featured quite widely in the discussions. I also was at pains then to remind a variety of people critical of the process that this was a Strategic Defence and Security Review. A lot of the security issues that this country was facing then and a fortiori is facing now are not problems that require a purely, or even predominantly, military response. So one or two of the features of the SDSR 2010 process involved, for example, ensuring that the intelligence and security service was adequately resourced to maintain a degree of strategic awareness. A significant amount of money was devoted to the development of cyber capabilities, most of which went to GCHQ, but not all of it. As Andrew said, the presumption was that unless and until the United Kingdom got its economy sorted out, it really was not going to have the strength and the underpinnings to do all the other things that it would ideally need to do.

Q7 **Bob Stewart:** You have given a slightly dichotomous answer, the three of you. On the one hand, Professor Chalmers has said it is not the position of the SDSR to forecast the future, and then all three of you went on to say that you made the assumptions based on the SDSR and that you thought we could get away with not having a maritime patrol aircraft, because presumably the threat from the Russians was not as great. I am not arguing against you; I just wanted to point that out. Actually, the SDSR is in the business of forecasting what we think might happen. If it is not, what the hell are we doing trying to talk about Army 2020 or anything else? That is what the SDSR does.

Professor Dorman: I agree with you. You are predicting the future, but in 2010 we were predicting for the next 10 years a more benign future than has ultimately turned out, which allowed the Government to take a whole series of risks.

Q8 **Bob Stewart:** I am always reminded, Professor Chalmers, of what your boss taught me when I was at university: threat is capability times intention. That is a pretty good formula to start any assessment of threat, is it not?

Nigel Inkster: But inevitably we are not really making predictions about the future, because, by definition, that is not possible. You are making pragmatic judgments about the most likely outcomes.

Bob Stewart: I am only nit-picking. Forgive me.

Professor Chalmers: No, I think you're making a fundamental point, not nit-picking at all. The point I was making was that it is unreasonable to expect an SDSR to make specific predictions about specific events, or even events of the order of the Arab spring, which is hardly specific—it is much more fundamental than that—or indeed exactly what happened in Ukraine last year. Of course, it is part of an SDSR exercise that you do all sorts of horizon scanning, scenario planning and thinking about what is more likely than other things. Then, after that review of all the uncertainty, you come up with capability choices and deployments and postures that seek to minimise the risks to this country's interests,

giving an assessment of what our interests are as well as an assessment of the probability and potential impact of different risks.

I would say the test of an SDSR is how far it manages to provide capabilities that are relatively flexible and robust against the risks that are more serious from a UK point of view.

Chair: You mentioned earlier, Professor Chalmers, that the key thing is whether or not the SDSR designs forces that are flexible enough to meet credible potential threats, rather than to meet only those that we think are most likely to happen. That is why the short title of this study is "Flexible Response?" It has a question mark, and that is the question we are hoping to answer in our report.

Q9 **Mrs Moon:** Malcolm, you highlighted the tension between international and domestic priorities in the SDSR and the NSS. Within that discussion, is there a tension between the actual potential threats and public perception, and how do we balance that?

Professor Chalmers: I think quite a lot of security is in the eye of the beholder, and perceptions are very important. One of the key responsibilities of the Government in this country and others is to make citizens feel safe. Some threats are more worrying to people than statistical analysis of the number of deaths might suggest. This is not invented by the media or political class, and it is a real public concern, but if the number of people killed in road accidents every year were killed by terrorism, there would be an enormous demand for Government action, and rightly so.

Q10 **Mr Spellar:** The difference between rail and road accidents is similar.

Professor Chalmers: John, you're absolutely right. People worry far more about rail and, indeed, air accidents than about road accidents. Perceptions are important, and a legitimate part of this, because it is about making people feel relatively—everything is relative—secure.

The other thing I would emphasise is that for quite a long period since the end of the cold war, with the focus on military intervention rather far from our shores, there has been an implicit assumption that threats to the homeland have been relatively limited, so we have been able to focus internationally—providing security for others, or not, as the case may sometimes be. Today, that is largely still true, but the balance is shifting towards international potential risk actually impacting directly on UK citizens and business. Cyber is a good example. Terrorism is another area. Terrorism and cyber are both things we were not thinking about so much immediately after the cold war, but we are thinking about more now.

Migration is another example of where the impact of conflict in the Middle East is having a material impact on European societies on quite a large scale. There is a shift in that direction and it is important, again in terms of public confidence, that the SDSR is seen to be addressing threats that impact directly on UK citizens, as well as continuing to provide a contribution to international efforts to solve problems that are inherently international perhaps, but where the direct impact on the UK is less direct.

Q11 **Mr Gray:** You slightly glazed over Madeleine's extremely important question. Is there not an internal tension between public perception of what we need and what we actually

need? You mentioned, for example, cyber and counter-terrorism. The public don't know about that. It is rather like our constituents always wanting bobbies on the beat and people in uniform walking up and down the high street, even if clever things are being done in the office. The more the SDSR spends on answering the common man's perception of the threat, the less it might be spending on the real threats. Is there not an internal conflict somewhere there?

Professor Chalmers: I certainly think the Government must show leadership in such issues. Government by opinion poll would take them in all sorts of strange directions, and I would not propose that, but psychology is important. If people are not prepared to board aircraft or trains because they fear a threat, even if that threat is much smaller than they think, that is a concern for the efficient working of our society. Similarly, in the cyber sphere, people or businesses might refrain from an activity that could contribute to economic production, and that could harm our economy. Perception is important.

Q12 Mr Gray: But their perception might be nasty people in green uniforms who come and blow people up in a public square. You are right about their perception of cyber and the other things you mentioned. What I am getting at is that the average citizen will look at the SDSR and say, "It is terrible that there are not enough tanks. There are too few battalions—isn't that awful? We're withdrawing from Germany. That's terrible." The fact that we are spending an awful lot more money on cyber, which they understand, is lost.

Professor Chalmers: I agree entirely on that point. As I say, the Government have to show leadership and to take tough decisions. Sometimes they have to cut out capabilities that they are convinced are no longer fit for purpose.

Professor Dorman: The other thing to bring up is that the Government have adopted a risk-based approach. One of the calculations that you will never be able to say publicly is, "What is the level of acceptable damage?" We have insurance for our cars and homes; we pay an excess and individually we decide what level of excess we are prepared to pay. If it comes to things like the Armed Forces helping to counter flooding and to sort things out, how many houses and which houses will we accept can go under water, and which not? The Government need to make assumptions, but then public perception changes its mind and they flip with it. There are real challenges, as you identified, on what is perceived to be the right thing to do and what the Government actually should do. To use the tank analogy, we can keep buying tanks, but if we do not buy tank treads what use are they? The Government might put more emphasis on logistics or our sea capabilities, rather than being able to hit someone over the head with something. That is citizens, in a sense, having to rely on Government knowing what they are doing.

Nigel Inkster: A slightly separate but related issue is that within this country there are widely disparate perceptions of the value of security as a public good. In certain parts of society, there is a tendency too quickly to dismiss the public utility of security or somehow to assume that it just falls from the sky fully formed and we do not need to do anything about it. That is also a factor. It gets more difficult when we are talking about some of the more nebulous threats, such as cyber-security, because 90% of the time they do not generate physical impact. There are no visible, perceptible consequences from that activity, yet if we look at crime figures in this country, for example, what we are seeing is the criminals moving away from the banks, because that is not where the money is; they are moving into cyber-space, which is where it is.

Q13 Mrs Moon: I want to follow that up. I wonder how honest we are in the SDSR and the NSS about how much our defence relies on NATO planning. We paint a picture to the public that here is Britain valiantly standing alone in the world, this is our plan and this is how we are going to tackle it, whereas in fact it is things like the rapid response plan and the high readiness force that will actually be deployed, rather than Britain deploying its own forces. Is there a need to have a more nuanced approach to telling the public about our reliance on NATO and our responsibility under MOUs to provide defence and support for other countries? Is that missing in this open approach? Should we be building up more?

Professor Chalmers: A few weeks ago at RUSI, Secretary of State Michael Fallon made a point about what our approach in the SDSR should be by using the phrase "internationalist by design". I think that that is absolutely right. Of course there are elements of our defence and security provision that are for uniquely national purposes and are very important to us, but an awful lot of what we do, particularly in the defence sphere, is internationalist and about contributing to alliances. Indeed, one of the strongest elements of our defence and security policy since the creation of NATO in 1949 has been precisely that we have these permanent alliances with the strongest military force on the planet and all our neighbours. That is absolutely key to our security. We would have a very different national security policy if we did not have confidence in those allies.

There is of course an element of that that much of public opinion absolutely understands. There is sometimes also an element that is more nationalist and about the memory of 1940, rather than about the memory of 1941 to 1945. There has always been that tension between nationalism and internationalism in our approach. Of course, from a national point of view, despite that history of strong alliances for the past 60 years, it is also legitimate to have a bit of reassurance that, if in future those alliances become less reliable, we do have some capabilities of our own.

Professor Dorman: I completely agree with what Malcolm has just said. You saw that in 2020 we did not emphasise NATO quite as much as traditionally we did in the past, because we were not worried about NATO quite so much. I think that we will see a much greater emphasis on NATO in the 2015 paper. The two things that I think the new SDSR is—

Bob Stewart: Professor Dorman, can you speak up? Everyone behind you is having real difficulty hearing the evidence.

Professor Dorman: I'm sorry. The two things that the 2015 SDSR should emphasise are, first, how important NATO is—

Bob Stewart: Still not loud enough—I can see the reaction behind you.

Professor Dorman: Okay. So the two things are, first, how important NATO is and therefore how dependent we are on it. The UK is dependent on being part of NATO. The other thing it needs to do is emphasise that NATO is not the only alliance and partnership we have. As Malcolm alluded to, the UK has a whole series of different defence relationships and always has done. They are central to how we think about defence and security, so it needs to articulate that.

Q14 Richard Benyon: On that point, has enough work been done to allow us to assess what is an article 5 issue for NATO? When the concept of collective defence was first thought up, it was troops pouring over a border and attacking a nation state, but it is no longer that. As you have described, there are concepts such as cyber and other forms of attack. Are we clear about what is an article 5 breach? I cannot remember the exact terminology—

Bob Stewart: It's an attack.

Richard Benyon: An attack, as defined by article 5.

Professor Chalmers: That is a really good question. Referring to an earlier question, one thing that has changed over the past five years is that there is a greater awareness of what I would call sub-conventional threats, triggered by events in Ukraine and a concern that similarly sub-conventional threats from Russia—that is only one example—would get below what they would perceive to be the article 5 threshold. Part of the response to those scenarios, which are worrying, is thinking about a flexible response from the NATO side that allows us to match sub-conventional threats with credible moves that are also likely to be sub-conventional in nature. It is not credible to respond to small-scale subversion or cyber threats by deploying a NATO division. That is just not going to be credible, so you have to have something that tackles that edge.

In relation to both terrorism and other sub-conventional threats, those challenges are often arising precisely because of western conventional superiority. Our potential adversaries do not want to take on the United States in particular or US-led alliances at the conventional level, because they know they will lose. They therefore try sub-conventional or, in some cases, as with Putin's declaratory policy over the past year and a bit, raising the spectre of nuclear escalation, which, again, is a response to NATO's conventional superiority.

Professor Dorman: If you read article 5, it is interesting, because it says that an armed attack on one is considered to be an armed attack on all, and they will meet. There is no actual legal requirement for the other partners to come in. The assumption is that they will, but what an armed attack consists of is not defined. I think that when it was drafted there was an assumption that it would be state-on-state conflict, but we are now looking at different things it could be.

Article 5 is not nearly as strong as the old Western European Union's article V, which was that in the case of an armed attack, you would be involved, and every other country was committed. There is technically an opt-out. Other countries could opt not to be engaged, but NATO members assume that article 5 is an automatic guarantee. In reply to your question, there are real question marks about what that actually constitutes. One of the real fears is how Russian infringement of Turkish airspace could escalate. Would that constitute article 5? Interestingly—I think Nigel will want to come in here—the 2008 cyber-attack in the Baltics was not deemed to be article 5.

Nigel Inkster: In the cyber domain in particular there is the problem that there are no agreed definitions of what equates to an armed attack or a use of force as defined in the UN charter, so devising an acceptable response is quite challenging. If a cyber-attack generates physical damage or deaths then that might be a rather different story, but most of the time such attacks do not. There is a real risk here that article 5 may be susceptible to

death by a thousand cuts. If we see a state such as Russia doing something and not getting a response, doing a bit more and still not getting a response, that is a real danger.

Q15 Chair: Would you all agree that it would be a very grim day for NATO—which was after all designed to ensure that we never went back to the scenarios whereby people could pick off one country after another without the United States getting involved—if the credibility of article 5 were to be undermined in that way?

Professor Dorman: I agree. It is interesting, because this is the one article 5 mission we have had post-9/11, which is not one that anybody had really predicted or thought us through. It was very much emphasised—I think the UK and German Governments led on it—that this was an attack on one of us, therefore it was an attack on all of us. It was very much emphasised that it was article 5.

Chair: Indeed. Of course, most people would probably argue that it is a measure of the success of article 5 that throughout the cold war it did what it was supposed to do, which was to discourage anyone from thinking they could pick off an individual NATO country without bringing the whole house crashing down.

Q16 Mrs Moon: Since we keep talking about the US and its vital part in NATO, the US national security strategy was published in February 2015. How many of the threats identified in that are relevant to the UK, particularly in the light of the US pivot to the Pacific? Are the US threats to security still the same as ours?

Professor Chalmers: I think that there is an awful lot in common between the US national security strategy and what I think we are likely to say in ours. In terms of the sort of challenges we face in the Middle East or Russia or elsewhere, we are absolutely right to say that the US puts more emphasis on the potential security challenges posed by China in Asia-Pacific than we are likely to do. It is partly a matter of geography, but it is also because the US national security strategy puts a lot of emphasis on the exceptional role of the United States as the world's single superpower and the world's predominant military power, and on the need for US leadership. None of that is appropriate for the UK because we are in a different strategic situation. That affects a lot of what is said.

The other interesting aspect—we will see what our national security strategy says—is that I am struck that the American document is actually quite upbeat. If you read in particular the foreword to the document, it certainly does not say things have got worse in the last five years; quite the contrary. It is very upbeat in terms of American economic growth, American leadership and the successes there have been over the recent period.

Q17 Mrs Moon: But there is an election coming.

Professor Chalmers: National security strategies are produced by Governments, not by committees of academics, so of course it does. There is a lot of emphasis on achieving UN poverty goals, climate change success and so on. Also—and this will be an issue in the American election and may be an issue in our national security strategy debate—there is a bit of emphasis on the wisdom of what is called strategic patience, not responding to every particular security challenge with American military force. This is a really live debate as to whether the Americans have got it right in relation to Syria or Ukraine today. That may or may not be a point at which the UK and the US take different positions.

Professor Dorman: I generally agree with that. On a different scale, the UK and the US are global players and have global interests. Not surprisingly, a lot of the threats and challenges that they identify in their strategy are the same ones that we do, but the importance of geography plays a part. So the likes of Syria and the Arab spring are far more concerning to us, because geography means that they are closer to home for us, compared with the United States. So there is close alignment, not major differences.

The US pivot to Asia is interesting. There is an element of a UK pivot away from Europe, although we have seen deployments much more east of Syria in the Middle East. We have increasingly talked about the five-power defence agreement. The UK is talking much more of a global role and its partnerships out there. Not surprisingly, there are not quite so many differences between the two, but the scale is obviously different.

Q18 Mrs Moon: Given that they are paying 75% of the costs of NATO, I suppose we ought to take account of their priorities.

Just quickly, are we as good at recognising opportunities as we are at recognising threats, or are we on the back foot and looking out only for threats?

Nigel Inkster: The Chancellor of the Exchequer would argue that, for example, in relation to China, the United Kingdom has been rather good at emphasising the opportunity aspect of what is in fact quite a complex relationship. Yes, in a number of areas, we have been quite good at looking at the development of different non-traditional security relationships. The international development agenda, which is now integral and hard-wired into SDSR thinking, is another area where the UK is identifying and seeking to exploit opportunities.

We have the same thing with the international economic order. The United Kingdom was, for example, one of the first developed countries to move into the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank—a Chinese concept, but one that it was in principle open to others to become involved in. That goes to the point that, when we look at defence and security in a country like the United Kingdom, we are increasingly looking at something that feels like a whole-of-Government, if not a whole-of-nation, approach; it is not just about the Armed Forces or the intelligence services.

Professor Chalmers: May I add to that briefly? One of the things, as I understand it, that the Government are eager to ensure as part of the SDSR process is what they call the prosperity agenda. Although prosperity does not necessarily neatly fit into a review of defence and security, the Government are anxious to make sure that it will figure in the SDSR outcome, for precisely the reasons Nigel put forward.

Another example is migration. Migration—simultaneously, and in different regards—potentially provides many opportunities for economic development and upskilling our country, but it provides risks and potential threats in other regards, depending on how it is organised, controlled and promoted. That is not uncommon; there are many such phenomena out there, such as technological developments—drones can be a source of a threat, as well as a source of opportunity. So it is important to think about both at the same time.

Professor Dorman: One of the things we are also seeing with this SDSR is a greater emphasis on defence engagement and international engagement. It is probably an area

where we look too much at ourselves, particularly given that, over the last strategic defence review, there were a lot of cutbacks. Now, we are actually starting to see, in terms of the Armed Forces and other elements, where the opportunities are out there to engage and to develop areas. In a sense, I think we had a bit of a dip, and now we are starting to look much more at that international agenda and at how we can engage with that. One of the problems we have had is that, post-Iraq and Afghanistan, with the level of casualties we had, we looked a bit insular for a while. Now, I think we are starting to remind ourselves that we need to go much more internationalist.

Q19 Mr Spellar: My question flows on from that. Yes, we have the diverse nature of threats, and we have analysis across different Departments, but how well are Departments actually making threat assessments, and what effect does that have on the final outcome?

Nigel Inkster: There is a central mechanism for risk assessment through the National Security Council and Departments are required to feed into that. The NSC has to act as a triaging mechanism and the final determiner of priorities. That is a kind of discipline. Let's not forget that the NSC and the national risk register are relatively recent concepts in the UK; we haven't had them all that long and it is safe to say that they are a work in progress. We are seeing a greater institutionalisation of these habits and mechanisms, and people are inevitably getting rather better at it and more comfortable with the process over time.

Q20 Mr Spellar: That's the architecture, but are you satisfied that the component parts are as robust as they should be? For example, there has been a hollowing out of Defence Intelligence. Is there sufficient depth of analysis in the Foreign Office, for example, to inform those decisions?

Nigel Inkster: That is an issue. It comes in a number of parts. If we look, for example, at the Joint Intelligence Committee and the assessment staff, not a lot has happened since Robin Butler wrote his report. The assessment staff is not a lot bigger than it was, it has not become significantly more professionalised than it previously was and there is very little external engagement. For example, whenever I visit Washington I find that I engage with the US National Intelligence Council and whenever its members come to London, they tend to look in. We do not have that kind of interaction with the assessment staff.

I think you are right about Defence Intelligence. I think most of us in this area feel that that was a false economy. It was rather odd in so far as British Armed Forces generally have actually invested quite a lot in intelligence. Intelligence in the military sense was one of the things that survived the SDSR 2010 process pretty well. The lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan did seem to have been assimilated and hardwired in terms of the importance of strategic awareness, command and control, intelligence and reconnaissance. All those capabilities were there.

The Foreign Office has suffered an erosion of what most of us would regard as one of its primary utilities, which is area specialisation and regional knowledge. It is still there of course, but it is less concentrated than it has been in the past.

Professor Chalmers: That is absolutely right. I would emphasise that there is a tension between having the approach elucidated in the last SDSR of having no strategic shrinkage and seeking to be a player in a very wide variety of places and themes. As a result,

capabilities across Departments have sometimes been spread very thin, because we have not been willing to specialise. I am not saying that the decision not to specialise is wrong, but one aspect of that is that our dependence on the United States, and to some extent the other members of the "Five Eyes" intelligence-sharing agreement, is very considerable. Without that, we would have much less visibility. We provide valuable information assets to that arrangement, so it is not entirely one-sided, but the Americans clearly provide much more than others. Even within that, however, I think we can learn to do things better.

The experience in Afghanistan and Iraq and now elsewhere in the Arab world is perhaps that we did not put enough emphasis on language skills in the past. Technical intelligence gathering is all very well, but actually having people from the agencies or from the Foreign Office, whoever it might be, living in societies and understanding what makes societies tick beyond the Ministries in the capital is really important in terms of picking up what is happening. Picking up what was happening in Egypt before Mubarak was overthrown, for example: a lot could have been understood there in relation to where the Muslim Brotherhood was going and the different factions within that. I think we did not do enough in that regard and in that example. Ukraine is another example of that phenomenon. It is easy to say, hard to do, but one of the questions in the SDSR will be about the extent of resourcing for analytical capabilities across Whitehall.

The last point I would make in relation to that is that in many of the situations that are important for us in defence and security terms, events are not easy to read no matter how great your resources are. There is a temptation sometimes for Ministers to want one truth when there is no one truth; there are several truths and the people in those countries, even the people in charge of those countries—perhaps particularly them in some cases—do not know what is happening, so the idea that we in Whitehall absolutely know what is happening is not right. So I think it is helpful sometimes for Ministers to be presented with more than one truth, to reflect the uncertainty that exists. Those who say, "We want much more integration of analytical capabilities across Whitehall," have to take into account the potential cost of that integration in terms of reducing the level of diversity, which is actually one of the potential strengths of the JIC process that is so central to our intelligence world.

Q21 Jim Shannon: To the question "Is regional knowledge still there?" your answer, I think, was yes. I suggest, with great respect, that perhaps the regional knowledge is not there. I have two quick points. First, we have a statement from the Minister about paramilitary groups and dissident republican activity in Northern Ireland, and it is at a fair level. I understand that they have got a another group and an Army response has been brought into Northern Ireland to address that. When it comes to flexibility, do we have the knowledge to respond?

The second point is in relation to Russia. If we are so knowledgeable about what is happening in Russia, how come we did not know that they were going to invade Crimea? How come we did not know who the balaclava-wearing people on the streets of Crimea were? When it comes to intelligence, we used to have a fantastic network across the whole of Russia. The intelligence was so good, they could have told us what was happening everywhere and now we do not have that. Is the knowledge there? I would suggest that perhaps it is not. It is not there at home or, with great respect, in Russia, either.

Nigel Inkster: As a former intelligence practitioner myself, perhaps I can pick that up. I think you give my former service a little too much credit in terms of its capability to have visibility of what was happening in a place as big and complex as the Soviet Union.

In relation to Crimea, the reason we did not anticipate what would happen was that Vladimir Putin himself did not know what was going to happen. His answer to the whole situation in Ukraine was Mr Yanukovych. That was his answer, that was his strategy. It was only when Yanukovych fell apart—collapsed and effectively ran away—that Putin was left with the potential of a very humiliating outcome and did the only thing he realistically could to restore some credibility, at least domestically, which was to annexe Crimea. Yes, I know that Putin has subsequently said that it was all part of a long thought out masterplan and strategy, but I do not think that most of us believe that.

Q22 Douglas Chapman: In the briefing paper, Malcolm Chalmers said that one of the central lessons that can be drawn from the experiences of the last decade is that the UK needs to improve its ability to understand foreign societies at risk of instability as well as its ability to respond appropriately and intelligently to multiple international crises. I do not expect the other two to comment on Malcolm's assessment of that, but if we accept it as a reasonable stance to take, has the Government's analytical capability to determine threats reduced post the 2010 reduction in budgets, especially in the Foreign Office? I know that Mr Inkster has made comments about that before, but I wonder whether our other two guests want to comment on it.

Professor Dorman: Unlike my colleagues, I have never been an insider; I am just doing it as an academic on the outside, looking in. There are a number of things you would want to pick up here. As Nigel indicated, a lot of events and changes happen, but a number of things are worth bearing in mind.

A lot of information is generated, but it is not always passed around very easily. I have been involved in a study for the Army in conjunction with Cranfield university, looking at region and country studies. The Army wants to put it around the whole defence network, but you cannot put a file around that is more than 20 megabytes. Just trying to circulate information in Government is deeply and profoundly problematic, because you cannot put big files around. Information is really difficult to circulate, so there are some logistical issues.

There are also issues with the relative capacity of where you focus. There are a lot of academics externally who are generally not consulted, and lots of country and regional experts. A lot of them are outside London. There tends to be in Whitehall a consultation in the London bubble. I suggest they look beyond the London bubble, because there are lots of good academics out there. As Malcolm alluded to, if you get a bunch of academics together, I can guarantee you will get multiple different answers. I edit *International Affairs*, and I get a whole load of submissions about Russia, Putin and Ukraine. What is fascinating about the academic debate on that is that it is so polarised. There are two sides: you are either pro-Putin or anti-Putin, and neither side will talk to each other. It is incredible and the most polarised academic debate I have ever seen. It is about networks, how you bring people in and knowledge, because there is often information there.

There is another thing I have observed from the Ministry of Defence. The Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre does the great "Strategic Trends" document, which tells you

what the world will look 50 years hence—a fantastic document. You have Defence Intelligence looking at very short-term analysis. The problem you have is the gap in between—between what is going to happen in 48 hours and what is going to happen in 40 years, because "Strategic Trends" does not tell you how you will get there.

One thing you have at the FCO is a lot of cuts and attrition in terms of capacity. Malcolm was talking about knowledge. I remember talking to one of my colleagues—I will have to be diplomatic and not say which country the defence attaché was in, but they were the most senior and experienced person in that embassy. We have made a whole series of cuts to defence attachés, and there is a loss of knowledge within the Foreign Office and language skills—we emphasise skills, not knowledge, across Government.

Professor Chalmers: The only thing I would add to those two excellent comments is that it will be interesting in the SDSR to see the extent to which the concept of the adaptable brigade, which the Army has been developing, is given real flesh and, indeed, resources. The Army has been focusing on a number of the different lower readiness brigades, adopting particular regions of the world—west Africa, east Africa, the Gulf or wherever—and focusing on providing a greater analytical capability in those brigades in relation to those particular regions, through not only desk analysis but networking and getting to know the key players in the defence field in those areas.

That is quite a resource-intensive business. It requires a different model of training and career development in the Armed Forces from the one we have had so far, where those skills have not necessarily been highly valued. It also requires, of course, MOD people—in this instance, in the services—to co-ordinate what they are doing with other Departments involved in the field, such as the Foreign Office, DFID, the Home Office or the agencies. That in itself is a big challenge.

The thinking in Government is moving in the right direction on this, but the biggest challenge is often an implementation one—making this work so that we have a thinking Army and a thinking military in the future that is fit for purpose for the sort of complex conflicts we are likely to be involved in, whether those are in relation to eastern Europe, Africa or wherever.

Nigel Inkster: I wonder if I could add one more thing for the sake of completeness. There is an issue that is not really being looked at in the current SDSR proceedings sufficiently but probably ought to be: the whole question of open-source analysis. I am thinking particularly of phenomena such as social media. This is not really something that the intelligence services, per se, ought to be doing. After all, you have intelligence services to do the things that nobody else can—social media, by definition, is accessible to anyone who cares to access it—but being able to analyse, monitor and make sense of social media, particularly in fast-moving combat situations, is increasingly becoming a skill that is in short supply but is needed. It is a very different kind of intellectual discipline and process from, so to speak, conventional intelligence analysis. It is a skill that needs to be developed, and the sooner we can start to identify some kind of national strategy to do that, the better.

Q23 Chair: We have spoken quite a lot already about the limits of risk-based assessments—in other words, attempting to forecast the future. It has been suggested in written evidence to this inquiry from a number of academic sources—we have been very

grateful for the high quality of written evidence that we have received so far—that, by its very nature, risk-based assessment of potential threats is unreliable and that ensuring flexibility, as we discussed earlier, in the UK response to threats, would be better than trying to guess which threats are most likely to arise. Do you agree with that, and how could such flexibility be achieved?

Professor Chalmers: It is important to have a risk-based assessment at the start of each SDSR, but it is also important not to allow it to unduly drive capability choices. There have been moments in our national history in which it made a lot of sense and, indeed, we had no alternative but to focus most of our resources on a single threat. That was clearly true during the world wars, although even then we had to make some big choices. It was true during much of the cold war, in which there was a decision to focus on the Soviet threat at the expense of our global role in the '70s and '80s. I think that probably the right choice was made at that time.

We are in a different situation today. Any reasonable risk-based assessment of where we stand today would identify a range of possible risks and a lot of uncertainty. Therefore, given the nature of the risk assessment today, it makes sense to have forces that are flexible and to put a heavy reliance on international partners, because we can address relatively few of those risks by ourselves.

Q24 Chair: Before anybody else comes in, may I ask for a comment in this context? Three tiers of threat were referred to in the national security strategy. Earlier, Colonel Bob referred to threat plus intention. The way the national security strategy looked at it was very similar. It said, "taking account of both likelihood and impact." The curious thing about this methodology is that "An attack on the UK or its Overseas Territories by another state or proxy using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear…weapons" was in tier 2, not tier 1.

Does it make sense to put in tier 2 a threat that, although very unlikely—such as nuclear war—if it actually materialised, would be so catastrophic? Although it is unlikely, we nevertheless have to invest resources into making it incapable of being carried out by an enemy without unacceptable levels of retaliation. In other words, does it make sense to balance off likelihood against severity and therefore take a very severe threat and, instead of putting it in tier 1 where most people would think it should be in terms of preparing against it, relegating it to tier 2 or even lower just because it is regarded as less likely to occur than some lesser threat?

Professor Chalmers: First, you read out that line, but in practice you would have to differentiate between nuclear and the other elements of WMD threats. A chemical weapons threat to the Falklands, for example, is a very different matter, in terms of impact, from a nuclear threat to the UK itself. You have to unpack it a bit. Of course, the threat of a nuclear attack on the UK is not the only high-impact, low-likelihood threat out there. An outbreak of pandemic disease is probably more likely, with very substantial impact and millions of potential casualties. So there are a number of those out there, but you raise a reasonable point. The question is as much about how you translate risk assessment into capability planning as it is about the risk assessment itself. Of course, there are all sorts of reasons why all sorts of threats should be moved to tier 1; there has to be a prioritisation. I do not disagree with you, Chair, but if the result of putting it into tier 2 is that you would

not have any capabilities for responding to that threat, then of course that would be an error.

Q25 Chair: But don't you accept that some threats are so devastating in their impact, if they were to happen, that it is still a duty of Government to cater for them fully, even though they tend to be lower down if you try to offset probability with severity?

Professor Dorman: In some respects it is presentational. Do you present the most likely or the worst case, which is possibly the least likely? It is a presentational argument and you can argue either way. When you have looked at the issue between likelihood and impact, the question is then, how do you respond? The nuclear dimension was deemed to be less of a priority, if you go by those tiers, yet the UK retained a nuclear capability.

It comes back to Bob Stewart's line: if you are looking at threat you talk about intent and capability, but in terms of your response, you also want to ask, over what period of time? One of the big things about the nuclear question is that if you get out of the nuclear game you are not going to get back into it, so when you do your calculations, things might not be very likely, but because of the ability to either regenerate or not regenerate, you have to plan for them.

Q26 Chair: In other words, it could well be the case that it is more important to deal with a so-called tier 2 threat than some tier 1 threats.

Professor Dorman: It could be. If you look at where money was actually spent in the last SDSR, it was not all focused on tier 1. Also, you would not plot a direct correlation between the two as regards money.

Chair: And quite right too. Mr Inkster, do you want to comment?

Nigel Inkster: No, I have nothing useful to add.

Q27 Chair: Lastly from me, before I go to Richard Benyon, are there potential future threats or regions that the Government ought to focus on when drawing up the new SDSR, and should geography feature more prominently in threat assessment and the associated strategy?

Professor Dorman: Geography does and should play a part, including nearness. It can be a mistake for Government to articulate when it prioritises one region over another. If you look at the 1998 strategic defence review, we talked about the arc of concern in north Africa and the Middle East, but in a publicly available document you are sending signals by saying you are prioritising this region and not prioritising that one. You do that as part of the process, but it is an unwise Government that then says, "Actually, this continent is really important and that one is not important", because you are sending a signal that you may not wish to send.

Geography does play a part—why is America pivoting towards Asia? Geography. The Middle East has become slightly less important, Asia is more important. But it is part of your risk calculation anyway. We talk about the movement of migration; that is because it is up close on our doors. We would not be worried about it so much if it was further away, but it is about access. So geography plays a significant part, but I would not necessarily articulate it in a publicly available document.

Q28 Richard Benyon: We are incredibly short of time, so I'm going to ask you a massive question, which you are going to answer very briefly.

Professor Dorman: And you want a yes or no.

Richard Benyon: Well, not quite a yes or no. Is there adequate robust challenge to analysts? How much does the murky world of politics enter into risk analysis? You could argue that in the previous SDSR, if they were being more frank, they might have talked about the possibility of Scotland seceding; they might have talked more about Iran, which you have already mentioned; and they might have talked about the pivot and the United States' withdrawal from areas where it has been predominant. Are we adequately challenging of the system we use, so that we can challenge those kinds of omissions?

Professor Chalmers: I don't think we are. There is a genuine problem—Andrew referred to it—which is that published documents are a form of declaratory policy, and you have to think about the signals you are sending. An SDSR publication is an information operation, and therefore you certainly don't want to be talking too explicitly about national vulnerabilities, even if you know they exist.

There is sometimes a problem of internal censorship within Government: you can't talk about some things within Government because they are seen as unacceptable or too difficult. That has to be combated, and that is where drawing on the wider academic or think-tank community can play a role. We think-tankers have a responsibility not simply to tell the Government what they want or expect to hear, but to ask the uncomfortable questions that are more difficult for people inside the machine to ask. Even if we sometimes get it wrong, that is part of the role. Compared with the United States, we do a bit less of that, although we can a lot more in that regard.

If the 2010 SDSR had half a page discussing the Government's concerns about Scotland and contingency planning for what the UK would do if there were a yes vote, that would have played directly into the next four years and the run-up to the referendum, and perhaps not in a helpful way. That doesn't mean that people in Government Ministries weren't thinking about the issue; I think they were.

Q29 Mr Gray: On that particular point, do you think this SDSR ought to consider the possibility of a vote to leave in the 2017 EU referendum? There would be significant strategic consequences if that were the case. Do you think the SDSR ought to consider that, our would that be putting into the public domain a thought that ought not to be there?

Professor Chalmers: I think a lot of work should be done on that within Government, but I am not at all convinced that it is something you should put in the public domain. In the end, this is a document produced by a Government who have their own particular view about the consequences or not of success.

Mr Gray: The defence consequences of leaving would be extremely significant.

Professor Chalmers: My view is that if there were to be a vote to leave, there should be a new SDSR and NSS once the negotiations on the terms of leaving had reached their end, because Britain's position would be very different after that secession. You would know not after the vote, but after the negotiations. The same point relates to Scotland. If

Scotland had left the Union, the UK would have had to review fundamentally its national security policy.

Professor Dorman: As Malcolm said, there are some things you can't put on the public agenda or in a public document, but that doesn't stop them going in the national risk register, because that's classified. I don't know whether Scotland was on the national risk register—I understand that it wasn't, but I have got no evidence. There are some things you put on a risk register and look at, but you don't necessarily make them public. The staff work should be done for that. I think that is the way you would go on in some areas.

Chair: Jim Shannon has to leave in a moment, so he has one question.

Q30 Jim Shannon: I have a very quick point. You mentioned tiers 1, 2 and 3. Obviously, we have our friends and colleagues here, but none the less a question has to be asked. I am committed, as a Unionist, to the unity of the United Kingdom—Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England together. I wondered what the panel thinks of the constitutional change to the United Kingdom should Scotland leave. Is it a tier 1, a tier 2 or a tier 3? What is your opinion? Should Scotland leave, is the constitutional change to the United Kingdom tier 1, tier 2 or tier 3?

Professor Dorman: It would so fundamentally change the concept of what the United Kingdom is that it is tier 1. If the Union breaks down, is that not a fundamental change to the state?

Professor Chalmers: I would say that it was tier 1. I have written things about this in the immediate aftermath of the Scottish referendum. Of the more significant developments that could take place with a reasonable probability and with a significant impact to UK security, the most important would be a vote for Scotland to leave the Union or a vote by the UK to leave the European Union. If you compare the importance of those two developments to the UK's long-term security interests with how the Syrian civil war pans out or whether or not the Ukrainian Government stabilise themselves or what happens to Nigeria's security, those two things are more important than any of those.

Professor Dorman: If the ultimate role of the state is to preserve the state, something that unpicks the state is a tier 1 change.

Nigel Inkster: I agree entirely.

Chair: James Gray, would you care to ask a question?

Mr Gray: No. I have no further questions.

Q31 Chair: In that case, I will pick up on one of our earlier ones that we have not yet covered. Given the closure of the Advanced Research and Assessments Group, would the UK Government's analysis of potential threats be improved by the introduction of some sort of formalised arrangement or network that allowed academia and industry access to information that allows them to have a role in the assessment of threats? I flag up again the value of the academic input that we have had so far in written evidence and so far today in oral evidence from witnesses.

Professor Dorman: It is interesting work. The group did some good work and was of mixed capability. The idea that you bring industry and academics more widely into consultation and take their inputs is valuable, but I am not sure that the route that the group went was the most appropriate. The group was of mixed returns in terms of what it developed. There were some very good bits and some very weak stuff that came out of it.

The question is, in what form, and how do you bring that in? If you look at that group as an example, an awful lot of academics who were area or country specialists were not brought in. The key thing for Government is how they break out of their traditional networks into looking at groups that could talk to them. A lot of academics are never consulted and there is generally a London bubble. I would encourage the Government to think about how they bring those people in. Industry has a role to play.

Q32 Chair: For those of you who remember right back to the 1997-98 SDR, how would you compare the way in which wider society and, in particular, academics were consulted for that exercise with how they were consulted in subsequent SDSRs in 2010 and 2015?

Professor Chalmers: Having attended quite a large number of consultation meetings on the SDSR over the past four months with the Cabinet Office, the Foreign Office, DFID, the MOD and others, there is quite a lot of activity going on, and a fair amount of it is outside London—it is not only in London. In the end, the closer you get to capability decisions, the more sensitive it becomes and the more difficult it is to have a two-way conversation with people in Government. I have had a number of intelligent conversations at the broader level of risk assessment and strategic priorities, but in terms of the particular maritime patrol aircraft that we should buy and things of that nature, that is clearly highly sensitive and commercially sensitive.

There I would draw a distinction between external input from academics and from business. A business-aware approach can be very helpful in dealing with issues where a lot of important decisions have to be based on sound financial judgment, but businesses that have a stake in the game will be partial—understandably so—in the input they have, and that inevitably diminishes their contribution to analysis as distinct from a process of lobbying for a particular interest.

My experience, coming from a think-tank, is that we do quite a lot of commissioned research already for Government Departments on issues of importance. There is more that could be done in that regard—I would say that, wouldn't I? There are challenges to overcome in terms of getting access to classified information, which sometimes can put outsiders in a difficult position, because we want to be able to comment freely on issues. If we have too much access to classified information in a particular area, that may inhibit us from doing it, so sometimes it is on the outsider's side. Not wanting to get too enmeshed in the classified world will limit the extent to which they can provide advice that is appropriate.

Chair: In the last five minutes, I know Madeleine wishes to come in. Colonel Bob, did you want to come in?

Bob Stewart: I was worried about being quorate, because I have to be in the Chamber.

Chair: It is all under control. You can go now if that would assist.

Q33 Mrs Moon: Your comment about business and having a stake in the game is interesting. I worry sometimes about our over-reliance on semi-political lobby groups that describe themselves in charitable terms and lobby on behalf of a particular interest, perhaps on behalf of a nation state. You know the sorts of groups I mean. It has been suggested that the US lack of real understanding of what was going on in Iraq was because of an over-reliance on people who were lobbying on behalf of an alternative future Government for Iraq. How much is that a threat to us, and do we have an inability nowadays to get outside our embassy compound? When we went last year to Iraq I was horrified to find how little both the UK and the US moved outside the compound and talked to ordinary Iraqis, and they were certainly not going outside of Baghdad to talk to anyone. They were always coming into the compound. Our thinking seems much tighter than London-centric; it is almost embassy-centric as well.

Professor Chalmers: Those are two really important points. On the first one, it is very important that in this area of defence and security we sustain the integrity of our ability to deliberate within our Government without lobby groups, wherever they come from, being present in that discussion. That is very important.

On your second point, I have been struck over the years by the number of times people in one of our embassies in a difficult area rely on their local employees—their drivers and cooks and so on—to tell them what is happening on the other side of the wall. That cannot be right. Those people do provide something extra, but they do not provide enough of a nuanced understanding, and obviously they provide a partial understanding, telling their employer what they want to think. We have all heard stories about translators in the field in Afghanistan and Iraq where the local guy coming out of his house talks for five minutes about all the terrible things that the Brits are doing in Helmand, and the translator says that he is very glad we are here protecting him from the Taliban.

This is a real problem that we have not begun to address. There are of course, as always, quite a number of really exceptional diplomatic staff and staff in our intelligence agencies who go beyond the call of duty and provide lots of useful information to us, but we need to get that more systemic.

Nigel Inkster: I have had lots of direct experience of this myself and am very well aware of the problem from a former life. It is very difficult for an organisation such as the Foreign Office, because you can imagine what will happen if something goes wrong. If a diplomat goes out and is killed, you never hear the end of it—the headlines, the legal proceedings, the health and safety follow-up. All these things are real factors. We can't just wish them away. It is very difficult in some of these combat situations, which is in effect what they are, to undertake that kind of information gathering. We may just have to accept that the conventional embassy was never designed to do this sort of thing. It is not the most appropriate way to go about gathering information in this kind of situation.

Professor Chalmers: In the most dangerous environment.

Nigel Inkster: In the most dangerous environment. We may just have to accept that this is the case and start to think about a different way of doing this. You rely more on your intelligence component. You rely more on deployed military in the field. That is the only way you can hope to achieve it—and technical intelligence, where it is available. Embassies were designed for very different purposes.

Q34 Mrs Moon: Is the other risk that we face that we think we understand societies by looking at photographs taken from a drone flying overhead, rather than talking to people on the ground? I met an academic who had completed his PhD travelling round the Middle East talking to all the terrorist groups, who were very keen to talk to him about their political philosophy, because he was independent. I thought, "Good God", and we know nothing about it. In that case, he actually had face-to-face interviews with all the terror groups; knows their philosophy; knows who the people are; but he is an academic so he is nothing to do with our intelligence community, and rightly so in one sense, for his personal protection. Instead of talking to those individuals, we are looking at photographs from the sky.

Professor Dorman: We are not great at identifying networks and where people are and what they are doing. One of the problems we have is understanding who is writing or researching in a particular country or region and who has been there and who has not. That information is just not gathered.

Professor Chalmers: Expertise in specific countries is undervalued. The way in which we do intervention across all Departments—this is not a specific defence issue and is one of the drawbacks of flexible response—is that we have generic capabilities which we can apply anywhere. So you have an expert on community engagement, or on police reform or whatever it might be, who develops a model in Kosovo and then tries to apply it in East Timor or Iraq or Colombia. Rather than starting with where a country is and where it has got to, they start with a model which, after all, was the basis for their particular career, whether they are a Foreign Office diplomat or a DFID aid worker or whatever they might be.

Nigel Inkster: It can be done. David Petraeus did this in Iraq in 2007. He got together a team of experts on Iraq, including some non-US people and one of my colleagues at the Institute. He put together a team that focused from the perspective of deep expertise in the country that was being dealt with. It is possible, conceptually, to do this; we are just not very good at it.

Mrs Moon: If you read Rory Stewart's book, he would suggest that—and then ignore them.

Chair: Gentlemen, can I thank you all? It has been an exceptionally productive session. We have been in competition with a number of urgent statements and questions in the main Chamber. Nevertheless, we have got there almost on time. We are really grateful to every one of you. You have given us a great deal of food for thought.