

Defence Committee

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

Tuesday 3 November 2015

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 3 November 2015.

Watch the meeting – [An SDSR checklist of potential threats](#)

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

Questions 60–101

Witness[es]: *Dr Alia Brahimi*, Visiting Fellow, Oxford University Changing Character of War Programme, *Jon Marks*, Chairman and Editorial Director, Cross-Border Information Ltd, *Edward Schwarck*, *Dr Igor, Sutyagin* and *Peter Roberts*, Royal United Services Institute gave evidence.

Q60 Chair: I welcome everybody to our third public session on our study of potential threats. Our aim is to produce a checklist for the strategic defence and security review to see how flexible the configuration of what is proposed will be when threats that we may well not anticipate arise. We are attempting to scan the whole range of such threats. I invite the two witnesses on this panel to introduce themselves for the record.

Dr Brahimi: Hello. I am Dr Alia Brahimi, visiting research fellow at the University of Oxford's "Changing Character of War Programme" and the co-director of Contest Global, a strategic consultancy firm.

Jon Marks: I am Jon Marks, chairman of Cross-border Information, a business intelligence company. I have spent more than the last 30 years living and working in and studying the Middle East and, in particular, north Africa.

Chair: Thank you. This panel is focusing on the Middle East and north Africa. As a rough guide, we hope that this session will last approximately 45 minutes.

Q61 Phil Wilson: What specific threats to the UK and its interests are posed by the instability in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen? Are there other current or future potential threats that might emanate from the Middle East?

Dr Brahimi: If we take Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen together, what is happening right now is that you have this multi-pronged challenge to the integrity of the state. That is occurring mainly through the militarisation of what are fundamentally political problems, whether local, domestic or regional. In these cases in all of these countries, there are

similarities. The first is that if you look at the terrorist threat picture globally, the main drivers of terrorism at this point in time are actually poor governance and armed conflict. They are present to a considerable extent in all of these cases. In the case of all but Libya, what straddles the two is a sort of sectarian agenda. The drivers of terrorism are very much present in these countries.

It is also worth flagging that there are growing separatist currents within these countries, which increases that centrifugal force. There is the eastern federalist movement in Libya around Ibrahim Jadhran. In Yemen the Houthi are seeking greater autonomy, and there is also the re-emergence or the rearing of the head of the southern separatist movement, which seeks independence.

There is talk now of both Iraq and Syria looking different in the future than they have in the past, whether that is allusions to a potential Alawi rump state in western Syria, or the view from Iraqi Kurdistan that Iraq is not a viable project and we should support their independence. There is the emergence of Rojava, the Kurdish semi-autonomous territories in northern Syria, and even former military commanders from the US are intimating that the solution to Iraq's problems might be partition. So there are these separatist currents.

Also, all of these areas are both an effect and a cause of wider regional instability, whether through fighters, money, ideas or the movement of very desperate people. We hear a lot about foreign fighters from north Africa in Syria and Iraq, but it is worth considering that there are hundreds of foreign fighters in Libya, up to 300 of whom are being held in custody by various groups. There is also the recent spotting of French and British nationals around Sirte, the Islamic State's stronghold in Libya. These conflicts have all yielded considerable fighters and operating spaces for ISIL—and not only for ISIL, but also for other terrorist groups which we must not discount.

However, ISIL in particular now has an unprecedented capability to make good on its intentions, whether from its heartlands in Syria and Iraq or in Sirte in Libya, which is only a few hundred miles off the coast of southern Europe, and also in Yemen. Yemen of course has long been a stronghold for al-Qaeda's branch, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and we should never discount the threat from AQAP in Yemen. ISIL is now making an advance in Yemen: its sleeper cells have emerged and there have been bombings in Sana'a and Aden.

With Syria and Iraq in particular, there does not seem to be any ground force that is willing or able to take on Islamic State—at least not one that is not allied to al-Qaeda or an ideological militia, in which case you end up taking a step forward in the battle but two steps back in the war. In Libya and Yemen, we are not there yet. There are still fighting groups capable of taking on ISIL, but the window is closing.

Q62 Phil Wilson: What do you see as the potential future threats coming from the Middle East?

Dr Brahimi: The main one is actually just an increased strengthening of ISIL. That is the principal threat. ISIL has the intention to attack our allies, our counter-terrorism partners. There is very much the intention to attack the West and its interests. In addition, its ideology has a marked millenarian component, which is different from the Islamist terror

groups which we have seen in the past. This lends it no obvious restraints in its choice of weaponry.

I believe that there is an internal push and pull within the movement, between more rational actors such as former Ba'athists who are more interested in amassing property and power, and a segment within the group that is interested in hastening the arrival of the redeemer and is obsessed with Armageddon. We are dealing with less of a rational actor than we were with al-Qaeda when it comes to intention.

The capability is obvious. The state-building enterprise has yielded it considerable operating spaces that are far from the reach of the western intelligence services. We also have to think of our vulnerability. Currently we have no fully functioning and effective counter-terrorism partner in the Middle East and north Africa. Also, there is the unprecedented scale of the flows of foreign fighters. As Andrew Parker noted last week, MI5 has disrupted six terrorist attacks in the UK in the last year, and the threat it faces today is on a scale and a tempo which our security services have not seen before.

The main threat continues to be from ISIL, but there is a second: the spreading of armed conflict. That is challenging enough for the UK and its interests, but it is the spreading of armed conflict at the expense of reform that is probably one of the biggest threats to the UK and its interests—it is about the link between the two. Whether in Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Syria, you see militarisation being used almost as a distraction, a placeholder or a delaying tactic for reform and political evolution in a context where the status quo might not be sustainable. Those two realities together present a challenge to the UK.

The received wisdom regarding the Gulf has always been that its people prefer evolution to revolution, but if there are no or very few markers of evolution in the next five years, will there be a default towards the revolutionary model? That is perfectly possible. I do not want to single out Saudi Arabia, but if you look at its position now vis-à-vis a decade ago, when it faced a sustained assault from al-Qaeda in 2003, 2004 and 2005, you see that it is in a very different position in terms of financial resources, with the IMF predicting that it will run out of financial assets in five years because of not only its costly defence policy in the region but the oil price slump. Also, its standing in the region is changing and weakening slightly. There is a perceived element of choice in the war in Yemen, which does not help it, but also internally there is an unprecedented emergence to the public of domestic disputes within the royal family. So, the internal stability of the UK's allies is more precarious at a time when the threat from terrorism is rising.

Q63 Phil Wilson: Mr Marks?

Jon Marks: I agree with the general thrust of what Dr Brahimi was saying: one must start with political solutions rather than military ones. But we are here to discuss defence capabilities and the threat. On the first of the four countries you mentioned, despite the current efforts to resolve the divide between the two feuding Governments in Libya, even if we take IS out of the equation, along with the UN negotiator Monsieur León's brave but probably ultimately defeated efforts to overcome the conflict, it is hard to see Libya being in a stable position over the next five years. We have to look at that being a conflict zone.

I remind everyone that in the political terms you will all have heard during your careers about the nature of Libya's relationship with Britain over the years, Libya is a country

where Britain has traditionally looked to punch above its weight. We have great visibility there, like in Yemen, and we also have a substantial population of people of Yemeni and Libyan origin—and, indeed, some Iraqis and Syrians—living in Britain, so there is that personal level.

I agree, as everyone does, that the current narrative looks at IS. If you look at the coming five years, one would assume at the very least that radical Islamism will remain a dominant ideology and the dominant threat. Is that going to be IS? I don't know. Changes are afoot in how the international community, which has hardly been a community on this issue, will look towards that threat. Russia coming on board in Syria will possibly have the unintended consequence—I think it is unintended—of opening the doors to closer international co-ordination that, with a clear military mandate, could lead towards moves against ISIL.

Why is Daesh/IS so important? As Dr Brahimi says, it is because it has a millenary ideology that appeals to people, but it is also because it has taken territory. Coming back to what was said on the question of the state, this is very different. We have a situation in the Middle East where the threat actually has a territorial base and is able to project force and suck in people out of the territory. For a very long time I have felt that it might end up disastrously, but we must deal with the situation that IS actually has a physical capital in Raqqa, which may now have many British citizens in, as well as other people. The fact is that projection of force against Raqqa, in my humble opinion, is where the situation may end up. Whether that is desirable is another question.

On capabilities, I think we have to decide whether IS is the centre of what we are looking at, as well as al-Qaeda and others that are going to come. I think that among other areas to worry about are the areas of unresolved conflict: we know that they are there, but they are too hard. The area that I have looked at and lived in for longest is Morocco and Algeria. The conflict in Western Sahara has celebrated its 40 years. A large population is still living in refugee camps. The two main countries, the former French colonies in north Africa, Algeria and Morocco, which have maintained a form of stability since the Arab Spring, are pitted in conflict. The Algerian-Moroccan land border has been closed since 1994. Is this a healthy situation? What we have seen across the region is that while we are all focused on one conflict, there is room for another.

We have to work out whether the whole zone of conflict is going to be about ISIL, about radical Islamist groups. Five years ago we would have said that radical Islam is clearly a major challenge, but it would not have been the whole game. I wonder, looking five years ahead, whether we should just look at ISIL.

We have to look at the nature of state actors and non-state actors. In terms of capabilities, what is that telling us? Clearly, we have got displaced people. I think it would be a very good preamble to wonder where our border actually is. Is it at Calais, is it in the Mediterranean, with the number of people? That, in a hard-power, hardware kind of framework, would seem to suggest that we need to look at how we are going to be able to control the populations that are displaced. The question of no-fly zones implies being able to fly: very often, it implies having an aircraft carrier. Are we going to be looking at that kind of projection of our power? Indeed, in five years, will the doctrines of humanitarian intervention that have so influenced the past 15 to 20 years of international relations be

informing what we do? This is clearly extremely important, with the Syrian refugee crisis and more to follow.

Are non-state actors the whole game? Possibly not. Later we will come on to the question of who to deal with in this sense. Where should we think of threats coming from? Clearly, we have had four conflicts, and relations between the countries of the region more widely are in an extremely poor state—even if, thankfully, Iran and Saudi Arabia are able to sit down at the table in Vienna. The fact is that this is a very volatile situation that has a direct impact, for example, on the sea lanes. In answer to the perennial question ever since Roosevelt sat down with Ibn Saud to discuss their view of the way the world was going to go in the 1930s, it is a bit about oil, and we have expatriate populations all the way across the region that need to be protected.

Just to finish on emerging threats, there are countries that retained stability—some quite successfully, others less successfully—following the Arab Spring. There are unresolved issues in those countries. Succession in several countries could trigger political disputes, and there are conflicts, such as that in Western Sahara, that people have not looked at. People did not look at the Tuareg uprisings and the problems that flared up into Mali and led to the projection of European forces, including British support. So there is plenty of that and with the influence of climate change being felt on the rise of Boko Haram, for example, there is plenty to worry about.

Q64 Chair: I know Madeleine Moon wants to come in at this point, but I would just like to ask you both, from your experience, looking back at all the things that have happened over the past five years, do you think horizon scanning and prediction have been borne out, not at all, quite well, very well or brilliantly?

Jon Marks: Certainly, it is a curate's egg—good in parts. One problem has been that if you occupy the specialist policy wonk space in which Dr Brahimi and I exist, we will have been talking about the fact that mine workers in Tunisia were radicalised and argumentative in 2010, and that all was not well in Libya. Even if we articulated that very clearly, which in most cases, quite frankly, we did not, we were not necessarily listened to.

In terms of the prognostications of where things are going to go, the answer is no. You also have to look at the analysis that happened after the Arab Spring, because it was a democratic outpouring. I was in Benghazi and Egypt during the time and it was an extremely stimulating, democratic process. We can forget that. Certainly, being in Benghazi I had no doubt in March 2011 that that city needed protecting, if you were there looking at the people and seeing the threats that were being made against it. The problem was, where was the policy follow-up? That has been a real problem, but the analysis of the threats has been extraordinarily spotty.

Q65 Chair: Any comment on that?

Dr Brahimi: Actually, I have nothing to say on that.

Chair: We will move on. We have got quite a lot of ground still to cover, so we will focus now on slightly shorter questions and answers. Madeleine.

Q66 Mrs Moon: Thank you very much for mentioning Algeria and Morocco. They seem to get forgotten because they have some stability at the moment, so it is easy to think they are all right and we will focus where the problems are clearly present.

Can I ask you about border security? It seems as if we have totally porous borders throughout the Middle East and north Africa. Is that your assessment? How much has our withdrawal of Foreign Office capability on the ground weakened our understanding of the risks and tensions and pressures within countries that are now creating tremendous problems that we are also beginning to look at, and for which, sadly, one is also looking at military solutions to political problems?

Dr Brahimi: On border issues, in north Africa at the moment if you speak to the various Governments, the main security threat is articulated in the form of porous borders. Part of that is because they can deflect the blame for certain situations on to one another. One country will point to the other and say that that is the root cause. That is the case especially with Libya, that southern border and the border with Tunisia. In terms of the two most problematic towns in terms of radicalisation and the threat from radical Islamism in Tunisia, the first is on the border with Algeria and the second is on the border with Libya. That encapsulates the fact that it is the ungoverned spaces that are allowing the threat to gestate.

In terms of Foreign Office capability, I think, yes, that is a factor. One thing worth remembering is that a lot of the problem with an issue like Syria or Libya is the nature of the problem itself; it is so complex we sometimes do not know where to begin. That becomes a really big problem. It is hard to see a natural entry point and so perhaps we freeze a little bit. The problem has lots of component parts that we just have to break down. I think we need that problem-solving capability, that analytical capability, which can break the problem down into manageable parts, and then allow us to devise a full-spectrum approach to it. That is a very important capability to foster and retain within the Foreign Office.

Jon Marks: It is wider than the Foreign Office—let's use the word Government. There was a striking article a couple of weeks ago in *The Economist* about Spain and the way it has handled the refugee crisis, particularly referring to Morocco, Mauritania and those countries. The point that it made, and the Spanish have generally been seen to have handled this quite well, was that the Spanish have maintained quite an intense political Government relationship with those Governments, discussing those issues. I think that it is at that level that Spain is actually engaging on those nitty-gritty issues. Now the fact is that, as we know, the capabilities and resource of the Foreign Office have been significantly cut back. Are there the number of people, and is there the leadership and guidance necessary, to maintain a policy like that? We have to remember that, while people say the Spanish have done very well on this, traditionally it is always the case in Spanish strategic thinking that Morocco has been the No. 1 potential enemy— and friend, indeed. So that is an issue.

On the borders, the porosity of borders is not necessarily a bad thing. Even if the borders were closed, north Africa has always functioned by allowing people to cross, and to come and go. That facilitates informal trade but also social relations in border areas, stopping them from getting more explosive. It is also fair to say that the borders are very large, but

at the moment the border issue clearly is extreme, in the movement of people but particularly in how the movement of people fits in with criminality. That is really the critical issue that you are seeing more and more. You know, the maps have got larger and larger arrows; what was cigarette smuggling then got more sophisticated to be cigarette and drugs smuggling, and is now cigarette, drugs, arms and people smuggling. That is a huge issue that again brings us into the defence capabilities.

Q67 Richard Benyon: You have covered a lot of this question, but in terms of our checklist of potential threats can you just give a very broad overview of how the ink spots of instability in north Africa, the Maghreb and around there are potentially joining up, or am I being too dramatic in my language? You have already covered Mali, Western Sahara and Boko Haram. But is what I said an accurate portrayal of an area of instability and threat that we should be worrying about?

Jon Marks: Personally, I strongly think so. I think it is an area where you have got the sort of ideological threats that you have seen from the Islamist groups, but there is much more from there. There are the long-standing communal problems, and actually you also have them starting to exhibit themselves in southern Algeria as well, where regions feel themselves deprived in relation to the capital. That particularly happens when resources are squeezed.

I mentioned climate change not just to namecheck it; climate change is clearly very important. If you look at the famous satellite images, you see that Lake Chad was covering a huge area of west Africa in 1964 and basically it is now a pond that your kid could probably put his boat on. It really is very significant and shows the kinds of strains that are putting extra pressure on.

Now, as you say, it is hard to say how the dots join up; it can be like a 1960s-type lava lamp if you are looking at it as an analyst, trying to catch the wave. But the fact is that they do stick together because, if you look at it, you have a large number of marginalised areas, which are producing people who are radicalised both in an economic and social sense, as well as in an Islamist sense. And I think that is something that the IS narrative threatens to overwhelm when we are looking at those regions; there are other narratives that are affecting them, but that happens right the way along.

Will those different spots coalesce? It is harder to say, but there is certainly fear that if you look at the spread of the groups that have joined up with the IS franchise in Libya, and I use those words advisedly, you are again looking at a larger and larger territorial piece of land. In north Africa as well you have the potential for there to be a real governed space, rather than an ungoverned space; you may not like who is governing it, but the fact is that it is still there in north Africa, just as we have had in Syria/Iraq.

Q68 Ruth Smeeth: Like all the questions, this touches on what you have already raised. Given the increasing politicisation of religion in both the regions we are discussing and the likely use of proxy armies within that, as well as across sovereign borders, what is the impact on sovereign states, on the number of regional players who are going to be involved and on the role of international agencies and bodies in trying to tackle that, if we are talking about proxy armies?

Dr Brahimi: We are certainly going to see more proxy armies and non-state actors involved in conflict zones across the Middle East and north Africa, for two reasons. One is the widespread polarisation we now have. In the Middle East, it is along the Saudi-Iranian—Sunni-Shi’a, but mainly Saudi-Iranian—political rather than doctrinal axis, which recommends non-state actors as a way of projecting that conflict. It is also because non-state actors have so far chalked up the most successes, perhaps, against ISIL. I am thinking of the YPG, the Kurdish militia groups in Syria, the role of the Iranian-backed popular mobilisation units in the recapture of Tikrit in Iraq and Hezbollah pushing back ISIL from Qalamoun in Lebanon. Increasingly, non-state actors are probably going to come to define themselves as counter-terrorism partners, for better or worse.

Q69 Ruth Smeeth: What does that mean for international organisations such as the UN, in terms of how we are meant to deal with those bodies?

Dr Brahimi: It is difficult. For the UN, it is going to be harder to deal with chapter VII threats under international peace and security in the conventional way. Because these bodies fracture and then split conflicts into very small pieces, the UN, as León has demonstrated with Libya, has a role to play in bringing all those disparate actors together. If that is successful—I would not hold my breath—it could present a model of sorts. That is very much the UN’s value-add—to emphasise the political nature of these militarised conflicts, which is what León has done with Libya, and to provide a vessel for some of these groups to attain the legitimacy they are craving but also to walk back a bit from the edge. The UN’s role is probably going to be increasingly on that lower level, rather than the chapter VII role.

Jon Marks: On international and proxy actors, there are clearly certain regional-level actors that we can get on with very well, and the model for that is the Kurdish peshmerga. Whether building policy around working with a large number of private armies is desirable should be questioned. That comes back to the degree to which we are looking to make policy that will still depend on the state and the international order we have had since the end of the second world war, or whether there will be a recognition that there is a change.

I have three points. First, you have the new actors. If you look at the region, you have Saudi Arabia and Turkey. You have had Qatar—a tiny place—playing enormous games, and not just with FIFA. Egypt, clearly, is back and can project force. Those new players clearly must be fitted into the international order during a period when, by all accounts, the UN has been feeble and enfeebled by the divisions between the P5.

There is a wider question of how that international order will evolve over the next five years. I get a feeling that that is starting to enter the agenda, and if it is, looking to capabilities five years ahead—is the international community going to play a very large role? If it is—the UK clearly has a prominent role as a member of the P5—there will be issues such as the projection of peacekeeping forces. After all, after Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq, one has to assume that much as we do not like it after Iraq, there will have to be a form of nation building, and that possibly will have to have military involvement. So I think there is an issue there.

The other point, which does directly affect the military, but not capabilities, is that, relooking at, and thinking about, the state and the non-state from a policy point of view, it

is very clear, as the head of Médecins sans Frontières said a couple of weeks ago, when she got the Chatham House prize, just after MSF was bombed by the Americans in that awful incident in Afghanistan—remember that it has also, more recently, been bombed by the Saudis in Yemen—that there needs to be a restatement of basics such as the Geneva conventions. In crisis after crisis, everything is focused on IS and who we align with. Who do we align with? We are in a situation, as we have been for a very long time, of having to say, “Do we need to get back to the very basics to work out in which direction we are going to project our policy?” Playing with proxies is a very dangerous game.

Q70 Johnny Mercer: What capabilities do you think the UK requires to deter and contain threats emanating from the Middle East and north Africa? That is a very broad question, I know.

Dr Brahimi: It is, so perhaps I can venture a broad answer.

Chair: Perhaps you could try to focus on key points, because we do not have unlimited time—we still have a couple of topics to cover.

Dr Brahimi: Absolutely. I will be very brief in my broad answer. It is less a question of specific capabilities and more a question of how we use them in relation to one another—that is the key. The Government’s language now of a full-spectrum response is actually very helpful. In terms of the toolkit, you can use a harder edge for the part of the problem that requires detect and disrupt—special forces, a military answer—but as part of a broader strategy that also involves capacity-building upstream and dealing with the enablers of threats—weapons, money, people, ideas—but also the drivers of threats. At the moment, those drivers tend to be around grievances that arise from poor governance and armed conflict, and these create the political and physical space in which our adversaries operate. So the point is to integrate our military capabilities into a broader, full-spectrum response. Dealing with the drivers of terrorism or other threats is fundamental. For example, the US announced that it has killed 10,000 Islamic State fighters, but Islamic State has just replenished its ranks. Why? Because that threat is being driven by armed conflict in Syria and Iraq. My answer is that we would need a full-spectrum approach.

Jon Marks: I agree with Dr Brahimi. I am not a hardware man. It struck me that I grew up learning that we used to send a gunboat, and possibly—occasionally—that still would be quite useful. If you look at the region, as well as the places where you would put boots on the ground, we have the Mediterranean crisis. We need a clear view of how we fit into that—it is *mare nostrum*, in my humble opinion—and we need to be involved there; in fact, we cannot avoid being involved there.

Clearly, there are also the traditional Gulf shipping channels. It is very significant that we have the new British base in Bahrain, taking us back to east of Suez. Clearly, naval capabilities, including aircraft carrier-type capabilities, are what we have always deployed. It does strike me that the threats that you are going to see, if there are military responses, require long-distance projection of forces.

Q71 Johnny Mercer: Given the limitations on our national capabilities, what key opportunities do you think there are to engage with other nations to provide that full-spectrum response in a multilateral approach? What key countries would you think that encompasses?

Jon Marks: Within the region or globally?

Johnny Mercer: Within the region.

Jon Marks: We have our allies. The other big policy question that has to be resolved, because I do not think we have resolved it, is how we deal with, if not dictators, at the very least authoritarian regimes. The British Government was extremely supportive of civil society groups and people who strongly identified with the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. It seems to me that although money still goes into NGOs and things, at a Government level there has been a change. That change may reflect the realities of the world, but I think to make policy it would be good to have a clear view of that.

Our allies are clearly set. There are certain countries that we know very well and we deal with. Saudi Arabia—along with the Americans—is one. There are places such as Oman that we have had a long relationship with and places like Algeria. You may not like the way that the ruling establishment in Algeria is configured, but the fact is that they want to deal with us. Morocco is a country that we can do business with. So these are our countries—

Q72 Johnny Mercer: Further on that, I spent the weekend at the Manama dialogues in Bahrain. Do you think there is a degree of naivety in this country not only in our press but in our intellectual circles as to how these countries are governed? Are we therefore cutting off our nose to spite our face in terms of engaging with them and the role that they play in the international fight against terrorism?

Jon Marks: Personally, I do not like going around preaching to people about how they should behave in their own home, but I think there are limits. Not least, remember that when bad governance has come into play, be it in a Gulf state, a north African state or Europe, it does not necessarily lead to good political outcomes. I think that we still need to have a measure. Even if we decide as a country that we are going to change the normative way that we look at the people we do business with, I think at the very least a country that is founded on the idea of good governance should deal only with countries that display a minimum of good governance, not least because working with countries with bad governance generally tends to lead to some really worse problems down the road. Certainly, looking at the Middle East, that would be the case.

Dr Brahimi: I agree entirely because even on the issue of terrorism, you cannot be working with a partner to deal with the enablers of terrorism—spaces, weapons, money and ideas—and be strengthening the drivers, because it is ultimately self-defeating and a lot of the time those drivers are around governance issues.

Chair: Thank you. Before we move on to our last two topics in the remaining time for this panel, I know that Richard would like to come back.

Q73 Richard Benyon: I want to ask Dr Brahimi about the concluding words of an article she wrote when she said, about involvement in Mali, “France”—by implication, Britain, too, but our involvement was cursory—“will find itself at war with an amorphous ideology, expanding its mission across time as well as space.” You seem to be saying that the spin was that, in Operation Barkhane, France was going in for a relatively short, surgical operation and then to support the Governments of the region, but now that is not the case; they are there for

the long haul and we are in a familiar saga of decades of blood and treasure being expended. Is that right?

Dr Brahimi: I think that is right. I do not know about decades, but absolutely it is always a longer timeframe than first envisaged. And the thing with the case of Mali and that operation is that it is not just the situation in Mali, which had been reflecting wider regional problems. Now, France is having to act in Mali and it is also having to interact with a whole host of other regional problems that are on the borders and coming in, maybe from Libya. It is not just that their involvement is longer than they would have anticipated; it is just increasingly complicated because of the regional dynamics.

There is an important point to raise as well about “day after” planning. I think Mali is probably an example on the better side of the spectrum, but even with Libya recently, Robert Gates was saying that they were almost just making it up after the intervention in Libya. After what happened in Iraq, should that be the situation? I do not think so. Was there a lesson to be learnt? Yes. And the lesson that we must learn and which must be institutionalised and entrenched in this review is that notion of the day after, otherwise you are going to end up as France is in Mali. You may end up in such a situation for a longer haul, but also straddle a bunch of other connected issues that seem to be on the periphery, but are actually interlinked.

Q74 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. In the remaining few minutes we have two topics. The first one is: what do you think the impact might be of the Iran nuclear deal on the overall security situation in the Middle East?

Dr Brahimi: I will answer quickly. I think there are two outgrowths. On the one hand you have the very real fear, which has been voiced by the Gulf states, that the nuclear deal is essentially going to uncage Iran and afford it access to money, through the lifting of oil sanctions and the unfreezing of assets, for it to continue its meddlesome regional foreign policy. That is an important viewpoint and it reminds us that a lot of damage can be done with conventional weaponry. That is what the Gulf states are fearing.

Counterbalancing that, we suddenly have the opportunity for engagement and influence that we did not have even a few weeks ago, before the deal, and that is something that is bearing fruit already—there are some signs of it—over Syria. You have these two competing scenarios, but certainly the second one is to the fore at the moment and it seems very positive.

Jon Marks: I think that it is going to be extremely difficult. It is something that has been enunciated for a long time, before the current cold war and then the proxy wars, between Iran and Saudi Arabia in particular. First, we have to read people’s lips on these things. All sides said that the nuclear deal has been kept in isolation from everything else. I think that the fact that the Iranians have sat down at the table in Vienna over the past few days, with the Saudis on the other side, says much more for President Putin’s intervention than it does for any side effect from the deal.

As Dr Brahimi said, the deal—the opening up of sanctions—does and could allow many more funds to come in to the conventional Iranian coffers, and working out how that will play out is extremely difficult. A lot of people would like to say that it gives President Rouhani and his allies a kind of peace dividend that gets a moderate party back in Tehran.

I certainly hope so, but I am not sure that Iranian politics play out. The current scuttlebutt around Tehran is that General Suleimani, the head of the Al-Quds force and the main player in Syria and Iraq, is thinking about a presidential bid for 2017. It is very hard to tell.

The other thing is that, in terms of potential proliferation around the region, I think that the Iranian deal could accelerate that rather than slow it down.

Chair: Before I come to James Gray, Madeleine has a quick point and I have slightly whimsical point.

Q75 Mrs Moon: I wonder whether my whimsical point is the same as yours. I just wonder whether President Putin is, in fact, showing a greater understanding of the dynamics of the Middle East than of the West. Is that what is going on?

Mr Gray: I was going to ask about that.

Chair: Yes, we will come on to Russia in the next question, but thank you.

Mrs Moon: It was just something that struck me from the remark.

Q76 Chair: Good. Well, come in after James, if there is something to sweep up there. I wanted to ask: looking at both Iranian society and Saudi Arabian society, which, if either, do you anticipate evolving, modernising and liberalising first?

Dr Brahimi: Iranian society is probably already achieving those markers. I think that Iranian society generally is quite western. I think that they are not natural allies, culturally, of Russia. I think that they are, as a population, more our cultural allies, and if the deal entails an increasing opening up of society, I think it can only keep going in that direction because the key is openness.

Jon Marks: If you want to go to see openness, I think that the Committee should go and visit the Tehran book fair and have a look around. You will see the public expression of the kind of values that Dr Brahimi talks about. The problem in Iran is from the centre of politics and the direction that the country takes, but given an opening, I think the Iranians will take it. Saudi Arabia is an extremely complex place; you have some very brilliant forward-looking people there. You actually have some institutions in Saudi Arabia that are world beaters—Saudi Aramco, an oil company, for example, does stuff you don't see elsewhere.

I think the ruling nexus between the Al Saud family and the Wahhabi establishment has created a social cocktail that it is very hard to understand in the West and would be very hard to unravel, particularly, for example, in terms of gender politics.

Q77 Mr Gray: Following what Madeleine was saying, bearing in mind that the inquiry is about the threats we face and whether or not SDSR will address them, Mr Putin is quite plainly a threat in the high north, the Baltics and Ukraine. I will be focusing only on the Middle East and leaving those threats to one side. I am thinking of the huge influence he has, for example in Greece and Cyprus, as well as obviously about air strikes against whoever it may be in Syria. Overall, is Russia a threat in the Middle East or an ally?

Jon Marks: It is a player.

Q78 Mr Gray: I know that. That wasn't the question. The question was whether it was a threat or an ally.

Jon Marks: If one analysed behaviour—us against them—in the P5, for example, over the years, you would say that Putin was a threat. If there is a community of interests, just as I presume we have always had with the Russians, they could be an ally. I think a thing that was forgotten and has become much more apparent is that traditionally the Russians always have been a player in the Middle East.

Q79 Mr Gray: Let me ask a supplementary. Is Bashar al-Assad an ally or a threat?

Jon Marks: For us?

Q80 Mr Gray: For us with regard to ISIS obviously. Should we be hitting Assad or should we, along with the Russians, be siding with Assad against ISIL? Which should it be?

Dr Brahimi: Even in this context where Russian and British interests are ostensibly aligned in hitting the Islamic State, for example—the Islamic State needs a robust response and time has only been its friend—it is inevitable that there is going to be a hard hit against the ISIL. It looks like the Russians are doing it for us. When they are bombing the Southern Front of the Free Syrian Army around Daraa, it looks a lot less like a war against ISIL. Ultimately, it does not make a whole lot of sense, as I mentioned before, to be strengthening the enablers of terrorism, to be hitting ISIL's camps and fighters and this and that, but to be strengthening the drivers of terrorism. In Syria, these are grievances against the Assad regime. Even in this area where we are theoretically aligned, I think that Russia's approach is under-cutting.

Q81 Mr Gray: Let me put it a slightly different way; you may well be quite right in saying they are plainly not our allies at the moment. Should we not be seeking to make them our allies in the Middle East?

Jon Marks: There is no reason to turn round—it is part of the Russian projection, and its return, apart from the fact that it is good for business for Russia in the arms trade. If you look at Algeria and at Egypt now with a large arms deal, these places perfectly know the Russians. The officer corps speaks Russian. They studied in Moscow and Kiev, the older ones, anyway.

The Russians have a role. On the question of Syria, perhaps ally and threat is one way of looking at it—an uneasy partner may be the way around it. In a political situation that so clearly needs a form of resolution, where there are so many conflicting sides, just to say I am going to side with one or the other where clearly people have to get round a table at some stage and negotiate, then the Russians have a seat and at the moment Bashar al-Assad has a seat. I would say the Russians are the more important players, because other people from that part of the Syrian establishment could come forward. That is why I think the Putin intervention is so important. What he is saying is that it changes a dynamic, which no one has been able to find. Syria has been too hard. It has been one of those middle eastern issues that was too hard, but look where all of us accepting that it was too hard got us. So I think eventually, yes; it is, shall we say, an uneasy partner rather than a threat or an ally.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. We are very grateful to both our witnesses. This concludes this part of the session. You are very welcome to stay if you are interested in hearing the new panel. In the meantime, thank you again for such illuminating testimony.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Edward Schwarck**, Royal United Services Institute, **Dr Igor Sutyagin**, Royal United Services Institute and **Peter Roberts**, Royal United Services Institute, gave evidence.

Chair: Thank you. Once again, I ask witnesses to identify themselves for the record.

Peter Roberts: I am Peter Roberts, a senior research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute.

Dr Sutyagin: I am Dr Igor Sutyagin, senior research fellow for Russian studies at the Royal United Services Institute.

Edward Schwarck: I am Edward Schwarck, a research fellow in Asian studies at the Royal United Services Institute.

Chair: We have a full set of RUSI experts here today. Richard Benyon will start us off.

Q82 Richard Benyon: I am keen to know your views on Russia, the threat that we face, and how we should be looking at this in view of our checklist of threats. Dr Sutyagin, you have been very vocal in recent months, saying that you believe conflict with NATO is now a realistic event, and that you feel the West should be more prepared for such a conflict. Could you identify for the benefit of the record what you feel the threats are, geographically and in terms of Russia's capability?

Dr Sutyagin: If possible, I would like to concentrate on the types of threat, first of all, and then geographically. I see three different types of threat. One is military, another is a sort of influence or propaganda threat and the third is a cultural threat, which should not be overlooked. Militarily, Russia is at a stage where it needs to capitalise and get some results for the investments made in the armed forces. It has sunk money, and it needs to get some profit out of that. That is why it is inevitable that Russia and the Kremlin will be more proactive in using its armed forces, just for economic reasons. That is why you need to expect more Russian assertiveness and more open military actions on the Russian side.

Secondly, the military threat is emanating purely from the fact that the Kremlin does not have too much leverage now. It is losing its competitiveness internationally and economic influence. The way to fix its influence in the UN Security Council is found on the British and American side; it is possible to block Russian initiatives there when you vote on an agenda. The military is actually its last remaining tool. That is why it is possible to see more assertive and aggressive, in the political sense, use of military forces, which is the perceived threat for the West.

I do not think that we should expect a direct clash between Russian armed forces and, for instance, British or NATO member state armed forces. It probably could happen just by mistake. They are not planning to do that—they are cautious enough—but you will see more bombers flying around, figuratively speaking. That is the military dimension.

In terms of influence, that is very important. The Kremlin will support every move that will weaken NATO and the UK. RT is just one example. The influence of those who promote views similar to the Kremlin's, or favourable to it, is inevitable. That will happen. Everything that will diminish the British ability to react, to withstand pressure from the Russian side, will be welcomed. Unilateral disarmament—absolutely welcomed in the Kremlin; that is good. You will see more pressure in this sense—propaganda.

Q83 Richard Benyon: Britain leaving the EU, Scotland seceding from the United Kingdom?

Dr Sutyagin: That is absolutely welcomed, because divide and rule is the universal rule, universally applied by the Kremlin. It is the best and probably the only way which they know now. Divide and rule is absolutely perfect and everything which leads to division, leads to Russian rule, will be absolutely welcome.

The third is a sort of cultural threat, which is economic influence. The problem is that corruption is the backbone in the model of Putinomics. It is inevitable to have corruption. It is estimated that between 10% and 12% to up to 30% of Russian GDP is due to corruption. It is being lost in corruption; which means that any contact with the Russian economy is to some extent poisonous, because Russia exports corruption, and that is damaging for the economy, culture and society with which it interacts—for British society. Even British companies that have wide experience working in Russia will bring some corruption, corrupt experience, back to British society, back to the British isles. That is another serious threat, because that destroys your society from inside.

Q84 Richard Benyon: Of course, if “Russia Today” were commenting on this, they might say that your experiences of being imprisoned by the Putin regime may have slurred your thinking on this, but I entirely agree with you and I feel that we have to judge Russia as a threat in terms of what is going on in Russia and inside the Putin regime. Would you agree with that?

Dr Sutyagin: Well, I think so, because—just one comment if possible: if “Russia Today” followed my statements, my public presentations, they would find that I try to be, and I think I am rather successful in being more or less objective. Explaining the driving forces behind Russian concerns is not, I think, anti-Russian. Secondly, what is happening in Russia is the danger, because after all Russia is the largest country in the world by territory. By its unique geographic and geopolitical situation it is the bridge between Europe and Asia, and if the current Russian rulers create a situation of inherent instability in society, it is a universal threat to the rest of the world, because to have a volcano—actually, it is not that, but a sort of swamp—in the middle of Eurasia is not the best for stability. A swamp is not stable.

Richard Benyon: Could you talk to us a little bit about what capabilities Russia has that the UK needs to counteract if we are to deter any future conflict, in terms of new weapons systems, and the money that Putin has spent on increasing defence capability?

Dr Sutyagin: Well, I think that the most important capability Russia has that the United Kingdom lacks now is not in terms of weapons systems, but the procedure and the political will to act, because the Russian procedure is more or less vertical. It is a wartime-style command structure, which you completely lack. You do not have that, and that is a

serious inferiority on your side, and superiority on the Russian side. It is very difficult to match that, but probably it is possible to think about that—at least to keep that in mind. Streamlined procedure on the Russian side is very serious.

As for other capabilities, well, the Russian forces are being rapidly modernised now. They have reached the end of the research and development cycle, so now they are re-arming, and, what is also interesting, they are learning in a very effective and fast way.

For instance, the Ukrainian experience has shown that when they came to Ukraine in July last year, they attacked in a way that was like 1941. They did not know what to do or how to do it. They literally sent troops without even directions about where to go. Troops advanced on the sound of fire. It happened. A company of paratroopers was killed by mortar fire because they advanced under the sound of fire straight to the mortar battery. But they have learnt a lot. Now they are very effective in using electronic warfare and area denial equipment. They are very good at that. Probably one of the most impressive developments in Russian armed forces' capabilities is electronic warfare and soft kill capabilities. That is very interesting.

Also, there is a combination of soft and hard kill. Their staff culture is very high. They understand how to plan situations and how to play around international law. In Ukraine, for instance, they managed to deploy a huge number of troops—up to 91,000 to 100,000—near the Ukrainian border without violating a single letter of the Vienna document. They never exceeded the 8,000 or 9,000 troops limit that is established as the limit for exercises. They managed to locate and control them in a way that is effective, but absolutely permissible. That is another strong aspect on the Russian side.

One more threat is cultural. Politicians and to a large extent the military understand your culture, whereas you do not understand the Russian political and military culture. That is a serious force multiplier on the Russian side. As for the rest, the armed forces and the weapons systems are not that much better than British or American ones. They are in a large sense inferior, but there is one difference in the traditional historical emphasis made by the Soviet Union and then Russia on the unmanned ballistic missiles: the cruise missiles are much better. It is absolutely clear that it is much more affordable for politicians to fire a salvo of ballistic missiles than for you to send a squadron of Tornados, risking pilots. So that is one more consideration. The rest of the weapons systems are not much different.

Richard Benyon: I suspect others want to come in.

Q85 Chair: Before I bring anyone in, do either of your colleagues have anything to add?

Peter Roberts: There is a distinct difference between how Russia is viewed as a threat in the UK and mainland Europe; how aggressive you feel Russia is being depends on your proximity to one of her borders. The Baltics feel they are in a state of war already, whereas those further away in Portugal, Spain and Italy see an entirely different threat, whether it is from migration or Daesh.

There is a huge difference in how it is perceived, but if you speak to nations in the middling ground such as France and Germany, who are starting to really understand how Russia is playing against them, you see the announcements they are making in terms of

remilitarising their strategies. There is an understanding from some pretty smart people that all their efforts and beliefs in the theory of soft power have absolutely no impact with Russia at all—all their plans for softer defence engagement and economic sanctions have no impact on the strategic culture and decision making in Russia.

This is a very interesting dynamic on which to play back when you return to London and start to have some of these conversations. People look at you blankly and really fail to get how up close and personal Russian and NATO forces are being, particularly in places like the Baltics.

Q86 Chair: Edward, do you have any comment on this?

Edward Schwarck: No, I am happy to comment on east Asia, but not Russia.

Q87 Johnny Mercer: You had a really interesting point about the ballistic missiles and how it is easier for politicians in Russia to authorise them. But would you say there is a significant gap between the capabilities of those missiles, given the news over the last month when they hit the wrong country in the recent engagement? Do you think that that balance of their being easier to use is slightly lost with the effectiveness of them tactically?

Dr Sutyagin: We must not overestimate the effectiveness of ballistic and especially cruise missiles; after all, a cruise missile is just a bomb with wings. It has a very long range and precision guidance, but it is just one bomb. If you drop 26 half-ton bombs long distance, it is easier to send them there, but you cannot expect a larger effect than if you sent Tornados with 26 half-ton bombs. In this sense, it is necessary not to underestimate that—or overestimate it.

A ballistic missile might be slightly different because it is part of the rapid reaction force—you do not expect to wait for two hours until you reach something. In the European theatre of military operations, it might be decisive, because it is also precise. If you hit a command post with a ballistic missile rapidly, you decapitate your opponent's troops. In this sense, that is effective, and it is easier, because you do not wait until a pilot delivers the bomb and you do not risk that pilot.

Chair: Before I call James Gray, Madeleine has a brief point to make.

Q88 Mrs Moon: I wondered what your comments would be on a suggestion that was made to me recently: that Russia will test, probe and poke NATO countries, but will never come over the borders—it knows where to stop—and perhaps the greater risk is in places like Finland and Sweden, which do not have NATO membership. What is your comment on that?

Dr Sutyagin: To be honest, it might be a mistake for NATO not to send clear messages. There might be a misreading on where to stop—and there are already some misreadings on the Russian side. In Crimea, for example, NATO's record—the western record—was that NATO and the West would swallow Crimea, as they swallowed Kosovo and Pristina. It was exactly like that as they swallowed Georgia, so it was a misreading.

On advances into the NATO area, I think it necessary to read one more line in Russian policy—it is not that interested in grabbing another piece of land somewhere in the Baltic; it is more interested in ruling, or influencing, the whole of NATO. If you create a situation in which in some absolutely legal process a pro-Russian party gains a majority in one of

the three Baltic states, the whole of NATO decision making will be blocked. That is much better than gaining 20 sq km of territory in the Baltics. That is a much larger danger and a much trickier plan than, literally, just military invasion. The possibility is very serious and many people overlook it. The Kremlin is specialist in fighting dissidents, so it is good at precisely that sort of action.

As for probing Finland, Finland has a unique experience and a unique record. Historically, on one occasion in 1941 a single company of Finnish bicyclists stopped an advancing Soviet tank division, which retreated. In a sense, Finns are like Israelis; they know how to fight and they have the determination to fight—particularly Russians. That is why the threat to Finland is slightly overestimated and slightly over-exaggerated. But it might be dangerous to provoke Russia in Finland. If Finland joins NATO, the Russian side would perceive that to be a danger poised between the heart of Russia and the naval bases for its sea-based strategic deterrent forces. To cut the roads and railways to the north of Russia—the Kola peninsula—might be provocative.

Q89 Chair: Do you think that non-alignment has something to be said for it, if you are geographically located next door to Russia?

Dr Sutyagin: It seems to me, to be honest, that a neutral Finland and NATO with a neutral Finland might be a bit safer than having Finland within NATO.

Q90 Mr Gray: I would like to turn your attention to the Arctic, but before I do, I apologise as after this I have to push off elsewhere. I think Mr Roberts made this point, but there is increasing militarisation of the Arctic by the Russians. First, to what degree is that true? Secondly, why are they doing it? Is it military or commercial? Is it about the opening up of the northern sea route and all that? Thirdly, whichever it is, what threat is that to UK interests? I am sure it is not a threat to the UK militarily, but what threat is it to UK interests? Fourth, what can you do about it?

Peter Roberts: The Arctic is being increasingly militarised. Is that necessarily a change for Russia? No—the big change is in how the US and Canada are behaving in that manner, and, certainly, in the way that Norway is behaving as well. I will come to those in more detail when we talk about capabilities.

In terms of why Russia is applying this, if we look at the northern sea route fallacy—the great belief that the route is going to open and ships are going to flow through there instead of through the Suez Canal—and at the figures provided recently by Clarksons shipping, it reached a height of 74 ships in 2013. It died off to 36 platforms in 2014 and this year fewer than 20 have made the route. That is hardly a massive explosion of shipping with the opening of the route. Clarksons, the shipping agents in London, stated that there is very little economic benefit to passing through the passage in terms of fuel, for example, given the risks, the hull stringencies and pilotage fees charged by the Russians.

Q91 Mr Gray: I do not want to interrupt, but that is probably true now—it would not be true if the ice retreats more.

Peter Roberts: Again, if you talk to major shipping owners, none of them says that the route through the northern passage would be one that they chose out of preference. There

is very little economic benefit. In London Shipping Week, a couple of months ago, very few of the shipping owners I spoke to said that they would choose that route over the longer route through Suez.

In terms of resources, yes, there are huge economic resources under the Arctic—that is a well-known fact. The Russians are laying claim to those, as are the Canadians and Americans. That is the basis for some of the militarisation on the Canadian front. There are then the concerns about climate change, and various nations and organisations are contributing to addressing that, most notably through the Arctic Council.

It comes back to the military reason why Russia is interested. In the Arctic circle, outside the Russian submarine base, is the bastion in which they place their ballistic missile deterrent submarines. That is their operating area and their last line of defence. It is their absolutely vital ground—the critical ground that they must not lose. That constitutes a red line into which they would not wish to see American, British or NATO forces push. So it is definitely for military and security reasons. Russia is very keen to see this as continuing vital grounds—as a national interest that it will not give up.

How is it being militarised in other ways? Well, it is primarily the American and Canadian responses to this and shipping routes that open in terms of building ice breakers, addressing the coast guard and opening new military bases—both on the Canadian and American side—in the Arctic circle. Then you have various capabilities that they are buying, notably in terms of ice breakers from the American continent and submarines in terms of some of the Baltic states.

Norway is purchasing 12 new submarines, and it specifically has a requirement to have diesel-electric submarines with under-ice capability—a hugely unusual and unique capability, which will cost them a lot. That Arctic security for Norway sits at the heart of its security requirements. Norway really acts as a guardian of the Arctic, on behalf of NATO. That is where British interests come in. The Norwegians are underwriting NATO's risk in the Arctic. The Americans might be backing an element of it; certainly, aside from the Russians, they are the best at under-ice operations—that is, how they operate their submarines under the ice—followed closely by the Norwegians and, some way down the list, the British.

Q92 Mr Gray: We have let that capability slip, haven't we?

Peter Roberts: The capability for the Royal Navy has slipped. I think it is partly due to the number of hulls that are available to do it, but also the training for the navigators and the skill base required to get there. That is something which could be brought about—namely, if the UK did require capability to go back into it. But the UK interests arise through economic resources, a potential shipping route at some stage in the future, countering the Russian threat and holding or containing those ballistic nuclear submarines into the bastion basket in the north.

Q93 Mr James Gray: What about the contribution we make to land warfare through the Royal Marines training? Surely that is a unique capability.

Peter Roberts: The Royal Marines training is certainly useful. The cold-weather training of the Royal Marines is exercised to reinforce the Baltic states. It is not about Arctic

warfare on the Arctic landmass; it is about the reinforcement of Norway per se. That training and those skills are transferable, but they are slightly different. They are resupplied by sea, are short in duration and aim for longer-term reinforcement. If you were looking to capabilities that the UK could use in the Arctic to bolster NATO's security presence there, you would be looking at additional nuclear submarines, under-ice capability, persistent and long-range maritime patrols, extremely long-range surveillance to contribute to surveillance over the Arctic, ISR and SIGINT capabilities, which have massive utility in the Arctic, and measures that Russia takes seriously militarily, such as ballistic missile defence capabilities.

Q94 Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Before I call Jim Shannon, what are the current or future potential threats to the UK and its interests emanating from the Far East? What capabilities does the UK require to deter or contain those threats?

Edward Schwarck: The UK faces a number of threats from the Far East. Analytically, it is probably worth putting those threats into two distinct categories, namely first-order threats that affect British nationals or critical national interests, and second-order threats that may affect much broader British concerns, whether maritime law, regional stability, nuclear non-proliferation or the non-use of coercion or force among states. I would argue that the threats that we face are overwhelmingly from China in this regard, but they mostly lie in the second category that I mentioned. That does not necessarily mean that the challenge should be taken lightly, but rather that it will take a much greater degree of long-term strategic thought and perhaps a willingness by the UK to invest attention and resources in areas that do not necessarily yield a short-term pay-off.

I don't think that the UK is ever going to be a consequential strategic actor in the Asia Pacific. That is not a secret to anyone. The obvious problem is physical distance. There is also the problem of the growing sophistication of the capabilities and weapon systems of countries in the region. There is also the UK's dwindling ability to project force far overseas. The UK still has a role, however. If we are looking particular at the field of defence engagement, the UK definitely has a role to play.

If you are thinking about China, for example, it is only really over the past 10 years that China has discovered the value of military diplomacy, trust building, and military engagement. It is important that countries like the UK assist in the efforts of our allies such as the United States, Australia or other regional actors, to show that certain standards of behaviour and certain norms, whether transparency or the non-use of coercion, are shared by countries in a much broader global context than those strictly in the Asia Pacific.

Q95 Jim Shannon: Whenever we look at these issues, we are looking from a parochial point of view at what happens to the United Kingdom, but we sometimes have to look outside the UK and at where we get our assets from and so on. I'm thinking of Norway in this instance. Norway supplies almost 45% of our oil and gas, so our dependence on its oil and gas is great. Whenever it comes to protecting and ensuring that we have those assets and that energy resources come from such countries, we need to have a maritime presence in those areas. Last week, we had four members of the Australian Defence Committee here, who explained to us clearly what the issues were for them from an Australian point of view. They mentioned the threat of China, as you have said, and the importance of sea routes, which need to be kept open—China feels a wee bit threatened. Looking at the Arctic and defence engagement in the

Far East, what sort of UK naval capabilities do you think would make a strategic difference in this region if they were available? I believe we must make them available. I do not know which of you would like to answer that—maybe all three of you. I would just like to get your ideas.

Peter Roberts: I am happy to start off. As has been said, I do not think that the UK is going to be the decisive power in this. If it wants to be a naval actor, it can do that in one of two ways. It can look to provide a niche capability that no one else does, and the UK traditionally has provided that in platforms that deliver signals intelligence, communications intelligence or specialist weapons capability, such as the Type 45 PAAMS—the principal air-to-air missile system—that they deliver. The UK can deliver that in niche capability or it can deliver it in what is increasingly being required: the sheer number of platforms. Even the cleverest platform in the world can only be in one place at a time, and the Pacific is a grand ocean on a scale unimaginable to a landlubber.

Increasingly, it is the single platforms—two platforms—that are required. Nothing of the size of aircraft carriers and the like; it is about destroyers, frigates, submarines—particularly nuclear submarines—and re-supply vessels that can run around and keep all these surface combatants topped up. On top of that, there is a global shortage of maritime patrol aircraft; indeed, there is one in the UK as well. That is the sort of capability, along with SIGINT platforms, that is generally required.

Edward Schwarck: I defer to the expertise of my colleague on this point, but I would draw attention to recent reductions in platforms like destroyers, helicopter carriers and maritime patrol aircraft, which are all very relevant to the UK's ability to contribute meaningfully to military exercises, whether it is the US-led "Rim of the Pacific" or the annual exercises that come as part of the Five Power Defence Arrangements.

If you are talking about military engagement, there is also a lot to be had in terms of the various dialogues that we run currently with the Chinese, but also in our work with Japan and counter-piracy off the Gulf of Aden, or logistical support to operations in Afghanistan. Particularly in the case of Japan, those are very important in helping to draw some of those countries out of the region and make them stakeholders in the international system.

Q96 Phil Wilson: The UK and some of the western powers have declared that they have offensive cyber capabilities that might establish some degree of cyber-deterrence with Russia and China. Do you believe that the leadership in those countries are susceptible to deterrence thinking in this domain, or do they regard themselves as invulnerable?

Peter Roberts: Generally, most people are susceptible to deterrence thinking. I am sure Mr Schwarck could give some excellent examples of how the Chinese leadership—that is who we are talking about, not the Chinese people—are susceptible to deterrence. Some of their activities over the past decade have made that plainly evident. Are they susceptible to cyber-deterrence? It depends what you mean by cyber-deterrence. You are deterring them from undertaking an activity. You do not necessarily have to do that in the same domain. Deterring them from taking an action in cyberspace can be done another way. You can threaten or hold something else at risk.

In terms of the Chinese, the most interesting thing to hold at risk is their energy supplies coming out of the Gulf, which you can do in a non-cyber way. You can delay and defer

those through air or maritime activity on the long transit they have to get to the straits of Malacca and then through on to China itself. You do not have to do it in a single domain. Do not fight cyberspace in cyberspace. That is fairly clear.

In terms of Chinese scale, the only people capable of countering China in cyberspace are the Americans. There is no big red button that the security services or the military have and are able to press and suddenly stop China doing anything in cyberspace; it is too big and powerful. But China also has shared values in cyberspace. As it becomes more sophisticated, its system is as reliant on cyberspace as we are. There are opportunities there for medium powers like the United Kingdom, to undertake action, but it is less about thinking about this in a single domain and more about broadening it out into exploiting horizontal and vertical leverage to apply power where we have power to apply and not necessarily to chase after power, to chase after these great capabilities that will come at huge cost and that might not be very effective in this domain. I don't know, Ed, whether you want to draw anything out about the Chinese leadership.

Edward Schwarck: It is important to make the point that deterrence is not only about punishment. You can also have deterrence by denial. In the case of the threat posed by China, that would primarily come in the form of hardening our IT infrastructure—making it more secure and improving the cyber-knowhow of the UK commercial sector. I think measures like these would make the UK a much less desirable target, as China would see it, for cyber-espionage. Here one might use the analogy of a burglar considering which house to rob on a street. The house with strong locks and sophisticated alarms is much less likely to be targeted than the one without. I think the UK should be focusing most of its efforts here. That is particularly the case because if you are talking about deterrence by punishment, what are the options? If you are talking about a military response to cyber-attacks, that is obviously off the cards in the case of China. Economic retaliation, perhaps in the form of sanctions, which is being discussed in the United States at the moment, is clearly off the cards, given the emphasis that this Government has placed on its trade and commercial relationship with China.

That leaves talking. This is not an ideal solution or a particularly exciting solution, but I do think that the UK needs to make a clearer case to China on what is unacceptable behaviour. Of course China, at the moment, does not distinguish between state secrets and commercial secrets. I think this is a point that the UK should be drilling home in all our engagements on those issues.

Q97 Phil Wilson: Can I ask one more question? The role to be played by China in the financial support of the UK's infrastructure has caused alarm in some quarters. Is this warranted? What sort of threat might this pose? Do you think it is a threat?

Edward Schwarck: That is an extremely difficult question to answer. I would imagine that really only the intelligence services have an accurate assessment of that. Perhaps my colleague, Peter, has more to say on it. To me, it does sound like a highly risky investment. State-owned enterprises in China are inextricably linked to the party. They answer to the party first and foremost. They prioritise political concerns over commercial ones. In the context of China's nuclear industry, that of course is linked very, very closely to the PLA, which has a less than stellar record when it comes to intellectual property and state secrets.

Peter Roberts: My colleague is absolutely right. Chinese investment in the UK is not done on behalf of the Chinese people. This is not the great shareholders of the Chinese villages buying into British energy and infrastructure. This is about the leadership of China, the CCP, buying British capabilities and infrastructure. As a Parliament, you might decide that that is absolutely acceptable. There are many states where it is acceptable; the threat can be mitigated; and it provides critical capital to provide updates that could in due course be nationalised on a whim. This is unrealistic. We are selling some really, really important bits of Britain, in terms of our infrastructure, our resilience and our ability to operate, and we are selling them to provide short-term income, with some very problematic issues to come in terms of loss of intellectual property, ownership and operating benefits.

Q98 Phil Wilson: So it's not a good idea.

Peter Roberts: No.

Q99 Chair: Adding to that gloomy picture, while deterrence is effective in so many areas of defence and security, there is always the difficulty of attribution in the context of cyber, is there not? Doesn't that make the prospect of deterrence through the threat of retaliation that much more difficult?

Peter Roberts: It can do. You will be aware that Professor Tom Rid, at King's College in London, is the leading authority on cyber attribution and forensic attribution. The institute has done some work previously, and we are doing some research at the moment, on this very issue of cyber deterrence, and you could also take the view that forensic levels of attribution are not actually necessary. It has become the orthodoxy that you are required to know not just that the threat or the attack came from China, but which agency it came from—indeed, which individual it came from—and, therefore, if possible, where the order came from. You could extend that same level of forensic attribution into any domain—you could ask the same questions of a Daesh RPG attack—but we do not require it in those domains. This requirement—this orthodoxy—where we must demand forensic levels of attribution, is self-defeating. We are now applying moral, legal and ethical constraints to our own action that mean that we cannot, either as the UK or as NATO, beat an adversary. We are applying too many restrictions through our own liberal-society interpretation of what is required.

Q100 Chair: But I'm sure that you would accept that if we were to respond too hastily, we might find out afterwards that it was not actually some super-state that had launched the attack, but some 15-year-olds in their back bedrooms, as recently occurred with TalkTalk.

Peter Roberts: Indeed. I don't think there was ever a postulation that there would be an immediate response on that one. However, because the nature of cyber is so classified, you don't know certain things—for example, in response to the Office of Personnel Management attack and the stripping out of data that happened in the US, there may well have been immediate responses from the US Government that were not publicised. The level of forensic attribution might not have been available, but they certainly knew which state this came from, and they certainly were able, therefore, to make an immediate reaction that might well have, as others have said, taken the fingers from the archer.

Q101 Chair: Very interesting. We started with Russia, and we are going to finish with Russia. To what extent do we need to be concerned that NATO's article 5 does not protect NATO members sufficiently against potential Russian asymmetric tactics?

Dr Sutyagin: You should be concerned about that, not because of the military application, but because of the political implications. The problem is that the majority of this asymmetric or non-obvious—the more common term in Russian parlance—warfare is sub-conventional. It is for the police to take responsibility for suppressing these sorts of actions; that is surely why article 5 does not have anything to deal with this. But because of the psychological impact of these sorts of actions, nations might be concerned about the credibility of NATO. That is why these sub-conventional actions might destroy NATO itself. If you destroy the credibility of NATO, that dissolves NATO as a whole, which means that you lose—that is exactly the divide and rule which we started with. That is how sub-article 5 actions might lead to the destruction of the structure which is supposed to provide your defence and security via article 5. That is why you should be concerned.

Chair: Any other comments? No? In that case, thank you all very much. This session is closed.