

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [Russia: Implications for UK defence and security](#), HC 763

Tuesday 19 April 2016

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Ben Nimmo and Dr Jonathan Eyal \(RUS0016\)](#)

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

Questions Q107–162

Witnesses: **David Clark**, Independent Consultant, **John Lough**, Vice President, Gabara Strategies Ltd, and **Ben Nimmo**, Senior Fellow, Institute for Statecraft, gave evidence.

Q107 Chair: Welcome to this public session of our inquiry into Russia and the implications for UK defence and security. We have a panel of three expert witnesses today, and I would like to begin by asking each of them in turn to identify himself and to explain very briefly where their areas of expertise arise.

John Lough: Thank you for this invitation. My name is John Lough, and I am a vice-president of a consultancy company called Gabara Strategies. I am also an associate fellow of the Russia and Eurasia programme at Chatham House. I have a 25-year background in Russian affairs and was NATO's first representative to be based in Moscow in the mid-1990s. I have a wide range of interests related to Russia, and I am particularly interested in Russia's relations with the European Union and NATO. I have spent some time working in the Russian energy industry, and I have a deep interest in energy security issues. I also follow the subject of disinformation.

David Clark: I am David Clark, and I am a senior fellow at the Institute for Statecraft. I am also an independent consultant specialising in foreign policy, Russia and eastern Europe. I was previously a special adviser at the Foreign Office from 1997 to 2001.

Ben Nimmo: My name is Ben Nimmo, and I am also a senior fellow at the Institute for Statecraft. I am a specialist in information warfare, particularly but not exclusively Russian, and the Russian strategic narrative. I am a former NATO press officer and a former journalist with the German press agency, DPA.

Q108 Chair: I am going to start with you, Ben. You have seen that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has reacted rather strongly to some written evidence that you sent in to the Committee. It is the Committee's wish to try to understand Russian defence policy. Why do you think that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has responded so strongly and in such a hostile way to your written submission? Is this a general view within Russia, or do you think that the response being so irate is simply an act of propaganda?

Ben Nimmo: That is an interesting question, and it is an interesting use of the word "strong." I think that the emotion it displayed was quite strong, but the actual content is fairly weak in the sense that a lot of it was very general and accused me and my co-author, Dr Jonathan Eyal, of profiteering from Russophobia. It only makes a couple of substantive comments, one of which is that they accused us of reporting on the Sputnik radio network. Sputnik radio has not started in the UK, and in fact we were writing about the Sputnik website, so it is an irrelevant comment.

I draw your attention to a particularly interesting comment. One of the things that we explored in the evidence was what appeared to be a systematic bias in the choice of politicians whom they interview from certain parties, particularly from the more fringe parties. Zakharova's comment was that, "In addition, interviews with MPs from not the largest of British parties on RT TV network programmes are due solely to the fact that representatives of the Conservative and Labour parties were instructed by their bosses a long time ago to have no contact with this Russian media outlet." That is the only real claim of substance that they made, and you know far better than I do whether that is true or not. It seems to me to be somewhat implausible, but you would know whether you are under instructions not to talk to RT.

Q109 Chair: As someone who, from time to time, looks at the Russia Today television channel, I was interested to see a Conservative MP taking part in a programme only a few days ago. I certainly know that individual Conservative MPs have made a decision not to go on Russia Today, but I am not aware of any instructions that have been given. Would you say that, in general, they have a point in claiming that, if people will not go on their channel, that will inevitably skew the composition of the people who appear on it? Do you think it is a good idea for western democratic politicians to give the channel credibility by going on it, or do you think they are then likely to be manipulated in propaganda terms?

Ben Nimmo: In general, the way that RT and Sputnik tend to work is that they achieve their disinformation effect by focusing on one narrow slice of a spectrum of views and giving it disproportionate coverage. It is very important for individuals—not just politicians but experts, analysts, academics—to be aware that if they are invited on RT, they are not on a level playing field. The broader context and broader appearance is to cherry-pick views which suit the Russian strategic narrative and then to run with them. An individual would need to think, "Do I actually want to appear on this channel and give my views, knowing that I'm not contributing to a genuine debate of both sides? What I am doing is adding to a drumbeat of one particular viewpoint."

In terms of whether you can excuse RT on the claim that people won't talk to it, no you can't. I will quote the Ofcom judgment on RT from September last year, which quotes Article 5.5: "If a broadcaster cannot obtain an interview or a statement on a particular viewpoint on a matter of political controversy then it 'must'—emphasis is added here—"find other methods of ensuring that due impartiality is maintained". Whether or not they

could find people to interview under the Ofcom broadcasting guidelines, RT, like any other broadcaster, has to represent other viewpoints. If they don't, then saying, "We couldn't find somebody to interview," is not an excuse.

Q110 Chair: Can I ask the other panellists what their view is about the wisdom or otherwise of participating in the Russian television channel?

John Lough: Personally, I would not give an interview to RT because I would not want to find myself participating in any form in their agenda. As has been pointed out, RT is obliged to report the other view. They might do that only cursorily, but my personal advice to Members of Parliament would be not to engage with RT in its current form.

Q111 Chair: David, what is your view?

David Clark: I have always declined requests from RT for interviews, initially because it was quite inconvenient, but latterly because I have realised that it is a propaganda outlet for the Russian state, and not an independent media organisation. Whatever it was doing would therefore be constructed in such a way as to buttress state policy, rather than genuinely look at an issue.

Q112 Chair: As you may or may not know, the Committee is going to visit Russia in order to try to understand some of the Russian perspectives on the issues under consideration by this inquiry. We have run into some difficulties because, although I understand that our counterpart committee, the equivalent defence committee of the Russian Parliament, will meet us, no officials are being allowed to meet us. This means that we will be picking up views from a variety of think-tanks and people who will represent a wide range of opinion, but not officials of the Russian Government itself.

Do you think this reflects some particular concerns about the inquiry that a committee of western Parliamentarians might be making, or do you think it is a reflection of a general attitude since the cooling of relations between Russia and the West? Any offers?

John Lough: I think it is very probably part of a general attitude towards Parliaments in NATO countries at the moment. Our relations between London and Moscow remain very cold, and this Committee is probably viewed as having a biased view of Russia and Russia's intentions. By the same token, they are giving you more time to go and talk to other people in Moscow which, frankly, may be much more useful.

Q113 Chair: Do you think there is any way in which we can try to impress on the Russian Government that they should not see us as a mirror image of their own arrangements, whereby organs of the state are somewhat more centrally directed than they are in this country? Is there any way in which you feel we could get that message across?

David Clark: I think it is just going to take time. I think Russia is in a place now where it wants to treat all foreign contacts, certainly contact with the West and with NATO countries, as something that is toxic and to think that the people they are dealing with are unreasonable and biased against them. The way they deal with the situation that they are in is to give themselves a moral alibi by arguing that it's not their behaviour that's the cause of their predicament, but the unreasonableness of others. I think it's going to take a long time for that to settle down, so I think we are in this situation for a while.

Q114 Chair: Ben, any further observations?

Ben Nimmo: I would agree with both those comments. I think that it is meant to be a signal of disapproval from the Russian side of UK policy and the UK generally. Something that I have noticed—particularly in the Russian rhetoric, and we can talk about this a little more later on—is a perception of being surrounded by enemies and not always a great clarity of the boundaries between who their interlocutors are. There is a perception of a monolithic West to which all western Governments, and to some degree all western Parliaments and large parts of western civil society and western media, all belong. There isn't necessarily the intellectual distinction between, "Well, actually, these are independent Members of Parliament, who are not the same thing as the Government." You don't always get that clarity of distinction. There is more this idea that there is the monolithic West out there and—

Q115 Chair: And yet they are ready enough to report any dissenting voice in the British Parliament, for example, when it happens to agree with their position.

Ben Nimmo: Indeed, but it's not the members of the Duma doing it and it's not the policy makers in the Kremlin doing it. In terms of the reporting, it's the editorial teams on the ground, who are looking for certain voices in the West that chime with the Russian strategic narrative, and as soon as they find one they will run with it, but it's not the people in the Kremlin who are showing the day-to-day awareness of the minutiae of each country; it's the people in-country or the people who are following the parliamentary debates.

Q116 Mr Gray: Just briefly, coming back to the question of appearances by politicians on Russia Today, I have been an MP for 20 years, I have been a junior and senior shadow Minister, I have been a Whip and I have been a special adviser to Ministers, and I can think of no occasion on which we have ever issued an edict to anybody either to appear on or not to appear on any television channel or any other form of media. Can I ask the panel, particularly David from his previous knowledge as a special adviser, if they remember any occasion on which a party—the Labour party in your particular case, David—would have said to Members of Parliament, "You should not speak to any media outlet."?

David Clark: No, certainly not in the time that I was working in politics, and I dealt a lot with foreign media in the 1990s, both in Opposition and in Government. There was never any point at which any foreign broadcaster, to my knowledge or recollection, was blacklisted in that way, nor even a domestic outlet. There were times when political parties came into conflict with particular media outlets and tensions were strained, but even then there are always channels of communication that are open. It may be that the Front Bench would refuse to speak to a particular outlet for a particular period of time because of some particular issue, but there was never any blanket edict against any media outlet.

Q117 Mr Gray: Would you not agree with me that if rebellious Back Benchers—the sort of people you meet around Select Committee tables—were given instructions by the Whips or the party leader that they were not to speak to X, Y or Z, that of itself would be a massive incentive for them to do so?

David Clark: That was certainly my experience, yes.

Chair: James, thank you for those really incisive questions.

Q118 Douglas Chapman: Just a couple of quick points. Ben, when we read through the evidence that you produced, we saw that you made reference to, in a few instances, the Brexit debate and the election of Jeremy Corbyn, and I think you made reference as well to the Scottish referendum in 2014, in respect of the influence that Russian TV had on these various campaigns. Are you actually suggesting that that made any difference whatsoever in terms of the discussion that either the Labour party had over their leader or the Scottish people had over their independence? Surely, the influence in this country of RT and other smaller stations like that is fairly insignificant. How are they actually making any serious difference to the political discourse that we have here?

My second point is just on the point the Chair made about our visit to Moscow. Do any panel members feel that the relationship might have been different if it had not been a UK Defence Committee asking for a meeting in Moscow? If it had been our equivalent number in either Germany or France, do you think that relationship would have been any different or that they would have got a different response from the one we received?

Ben Nimmo: The question of impact is one that gets asked a lot. I have not done all the digging into the numbers yet that I want to. My immediate, somewhat thumbnail, impression is no, it does not have an enormous impact.

There is anecdotal evidence that certain reports have spread quite far. The one that is most egregious is the quote from the Russian election monitor on the day of the independence referendum, saying that it did not meet international standards. That was a quote he gave to RIA Novosti, which then ran on the English service. This was before the Sputnik service came into existence, so it was the English wire of RIA Novosti that got picked up by *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. It eventually got featured as one of the top five conspiracy theories of 2014.

I was on Arthur's Seat three days after the referendum with my kids and, in a rather delightful scene, we found a chap up there wearing a "Yes" t-shirt and waving a saltire. My daughter, who was 9, pointed at him and said, "Daddy, doesn't he know he lost?" He turned around and said, "We didn't lose, we were robbed, and I know so because the Russian observer said so on RT." In that particular case there was a—

Q119 Douglas Chapman: That's a bit like people saying, "There's a guy I met in a pub." We can't base our discussion on that.

Ben Nimmo: Exactly, but if you put that together with the pick-up of the comment in multiple sources, then did it have a decisive impact? No. Did it feed into the debate? Yes. On other issues outwith that one, has there been a major impact of RT or Sputnik? No, I don't think so.

There is something that is very telling in this context. I'm sorry if I'm going on a bit, but, as an aside, Sputnik started up local language services in the Nordics last April. I follow the Swedish media market quite closely and they shut down in March this year. No explanation was given for why they shut down, but I know from Swedish journalist friends that as soon as Sputnik began reporting, all the other Swedish media started reporting on Sputnik as "the Russian propaganda channel". Subsequently they stopped using Sputnik as a source for their stories and so Sputnik sort of blossomed on the vine, existed in isolation, slowly withered and fell off again. I think that is quite telling.

There is a market force at work that is beyond the Russians' competence to control, and that is all the other media and how they perceive things. So I think, in general, the impact is low. There are specific cases where it has, as it were, seeded a concept into the wider debate, which has got some traction, but those are in the minority rather than majority.

Briefly on whether it would be different if it were a different country, yes it would. It would depend what country it was but, for example, a committee from Greece or Italy, perhaps Germany, would probably have a warmer reception because they are perceived as being less hostile than we are.

John Lough: Briefly on disinformation, it seems to me that the UK is a very tough environment for Russian disinformation specialists. We have a cadre of reasonably good Russia specialists in this country. There is a lot of knowledge about Russia and what it is doing. We have strong media. We have high standards of reporting. It is in fact rather difficult to insert distorted messages and then ensure that they are believed. There are other media environments that I think are a good deal easier than that.

However, where I think the danger lies is not so much with RT, but with the efforts of, let's say, other agents of the Russian state who are looking to influence the opinion of security specialists, people in think-tanks, academics and maybe even some journalists about these broader issues.

For example, there are arguments that Russia was badly treated in the 1990s. It has become an article of faith in certain circles that Russia was deceived over NATO enlargement. I had a conversation just a few weeks ago with a very senior former Russian official who said to me, "I come to London regularly, I talk to a lot of people, and they tell me that NATO enlargement was a mistake." It is that sort of message that starts to reverberate and play on certain—in some cases anti-American—attitudes and other prejudices.

Q120 Chair: Do you have any specific agencies in mind that we ought to be aware of as purveyors of attempted disinformation in this country?

John Lough: I think it would be inappropriate to name them in this forum, if you do not mind.

Q121 Chair: Despite parliamentary privilege.

David Clark: On the question of the attitude to western parliamentarians, just anecdotally, I happened last summer to sit next to a German parliamentarian at a conference in Bratislava. He was the German parliamentarian who had just been turned away at the airport in Moscow, having discovered that he was on a list of banned western politicians that had not previously been disclosed or revealed. He turned up to take part in some event in Moscow and was immediately turned away at the airport and put on the first flight back to Berlin. It is not just targeted at Britain; there were 70 or 80 people on that list, most of whom were not British. They were from all European Union countries.

The Russian attitude will depend on the country and on the individuals. As Ben points out, there are certain countries that they want to try to get close to that they think they will make progress with in getting sanctions lifted, for example, and they will take a different attitude to them. But we are among the countries that stand up to Russia when they are

behaving contrary to the interests of the international community and because of that, we are considered to be a threat.

Chair: I am keen to get on to the more military aspects, but I will take a brief question from Jim Shannon.

Q122 Jim Shannon: I am keen to get your thoughts on our own Government's response and how seriously we take the Russian threat. If you wanted to measure how seriously we take the Russian threat, you would measure it by the number of translators—those who could speak the Russian language. Have you any indication of just how seriously we are taking it and how many translators—how many people who can speak Russian—we have, just as an example of how important we see this serious threat as?

David Clark: John will be able to say more about this than I, but over a period of 20 or 30 years, along with a steady erosion of our military capabilities, there has been an erosion of capabilities in other areas—intellectual capabilities; linguistic capabilities; analytical capabilities—as they relate to Russia. That has been a big problem. All these things need to be rebuilt, and you are absolutely right to put your finger on it. It is not just about rebuilding military assets and military structures; it is about rebuilding our ability to understand Russia in order that we can prepare, hopefully, for a different kind of relationship with them in the future.

John Lough: David is absolutely right. Our capabilities became somewhat degraded through the 1990s, when we took our eye off Russia and did not seem to think that that country was going to be a problem, at least for a while, and other threats emerged. We have lost that older generation of Soviet specialists, for various reasons. It seems clear that after Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the Government have started to build up some resources again—at least, as far as I am aware, in the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence; I do not know about the intelligence agencies.

What is required now is perhaps different from what was required during the Cold War, when we were looking at a much more concrete threat from the Soviet Union. The type of challenge—or threat, if you want to call it that—that one faces from Russia at the moment is so multifaceted and is often very difficult to understand. It needs to be looked at as a whole. We need to understand what Russia's objectives are, the instruments it is using and how it is using them. To do that, you need a multidisciplinary team. You need people who understand Russian politics, Russian economics, Russian defence economics, and Russian military policy and strategy. You need information specialists like Ben and you need people who understand Russia's periphery as well. Russia is playing a very complicated game here, which is designed first and foremost to disrupt western institutions, to impact negatively on western unity and, through that, to reduce our ability to act globally and regionally.

Chair: Thank you very much. We need to crack on a bit, so we will move to the more military dimension now.

Q123 Mr Spellar: The Committee has heard evidence about the impressive deployment capabilities of the Russian forces. Do you think NATO can match this, given the timescales involved in responding?

David Clark: I am going to talk mainly about the nuclear issue; I will leave the conventional stuff to others.

Mr Spellar: Conventional forces.

John Lough: I do not profess to have the expertise on conventional forces, so somebody else can take that question.

Q124 Mr Spellar: Any bids?

Ben Nimmo: My internal knowledge of NATO is now two and a half years out of date. I think it would have been fair to say that two and a half years ago, NATO was inadequate to the speed required. I know that it has been putting a lot of work into accelerating not just the military deployment capability, but the political consultation that underpins that. The last I followed of that was the Defence ministerial team saying back in February that they had come up with mechanisms to accelerate the decision-making process and that the VJTF in particular had the ability to deploy within 48 hours.

I'm afraid I don't have enough of an inside track to know what has happened since then, but certainly my impression is that two and half years ago the capability was not there, and the efforts are now ongoing to make sure that it is. This is something that we need to keep chasing up with NATO at every opportunity.

Q125 Chair: So would it be accurate to say that all three of you are more comfortable today discussing the question of Russian policy, rather than Russian military structures and capabilities?

Ben Nimmo: Yes.

David Clark: The nuclear question I can answer and the question on capabilities I can handle quite well, but on conventional stuff I am not so—

Chair: We have got some questions on nuclear later, but I think we may have to look elsewhere for answers to some of our questions on conventional capability. I know Jim had a fairly specific question. We are not trying to embarrass you—obviously it is horses for courses and you may feel this next question isn't quite up your street—but we'll give it a try.

Q126 Jim Shannon: Indications are coming from Russia that it is going to create a new National Guard and a youth patriotism movement. It sounds like dramatic and incredible stuff. Is the National Guard going to be the same as in the USA? Is it going to be an expeditionary force? Or is it, as many of us feel, going to be an organisation that can control internal dissidents and groups that might be unhappy with Russian opinions, and therefore be another method, alongside the secret police, of controlling the nation? I would like to hear your thoughts on that.

David Clark: Personally, I think this is more in the realm of politics than military affairs. I don't see that this formation fills any military gap that I am aware of in Russia's capabilities.

I think it is to do with the long-standing preoccupation of Putin and the circle around him with the idea that they might suffer some kind of Orange revolution scenario. It is about

creating a cadre of armed personnel whose loyalty is not to Russia or even to the state, but to the regime. If it came to it, they would not go the way of Yanukovich, who in their view failed to follow through sufficiently with the use of force—had he done so, he would probably still be in power today, in their opinion. They are not prepared to make that mistake; they are prepared to fight to the last in order to preserve the regime if the scenario comes about that they have long feared, which is a western-inspired Orange revolution scenario to try to unseat them.

A lot of what we are talking about today is also inspired by that. When Putin came back in 2012, he was faced with significant protests; he feared then that the scenario he had always worried about was coming to fruition. His response was to create the impression of an external threat to Russia, in order to consolidate support behind him and delegitimise the opposition. Their attitude to you is part and parcel of that attempt to stoke anti-foreign paranoia as a way of bolstering their own domestic political position. The formation of the National Guard puts in place the armed element of that strategy for staying in power.

Q127 Chair: And it seems to be working, because Putin's approval ratings are said to be in the 80s. Is that right?

David Clark: I think there isn't a society in the world that hasn't encountered something similar. When you get involved in a foreign war, it consolidates domestic support behind you. It has happened in the United Kingdom and it has happened in many other countries, because the instinct of people who get the impression that they are involved in an external conflict is to rally round.

Q128 Chair: In the short run?

David Clark: In the short run, indeed.

Q129 Chair: Any other comments?

Ben Nimmo: I completely agree with David. I think it is something worth discussing more. I am hoping we will have time in this session to look at this Russian idea that the West is out to get them, because as David said, there is the fear in the Kremlin of a western-backed or western-staged Orange revolution. If you look at the list of so-called colour revolutions that the Russians attribute to the West, it starts with the Georgian Rose revolution. You then had the Ukraine Orange revolution, the Libyan revolution, the Syrian revolution, the 2012 demonstrations against Putin, and the Maidan in Ukraine. Senior Russian officials have labelled all of these western-staged plots.

I think the idea of the National Guard is that its effect is meant to be purely domestic. It gives the President a direct, effectively praetorian guard, which will enable him to stop any such western-inspired plots against him. It kind of misses the point that there is no such thing as a western-inspired plot; there are actually such things as spontaneous revolutions. This is where you have the interaction between Russian domestic actions and a Russian perception of foreign influence. I think it is the same with the foreign agents law. The effect of the foreign agents law is to make life much harder for NGOs within Russia, but the logic behind it is that these NGOs are foreign agents—they are the puppets of the evil CIA, which is trying to undermine Russia because Russia is standing up for the multi-polar world order.

I think so much of what Russia does, both internally and externally, is best understood when you look at that mentality of an overriding Hobbesian competition between the West and the rest of the world, with Russia as the champion of the rest of the world. Therefore, what we see from here as isolated incidents, such as the Maidan revolution in Ukraine, tend to be perceived in the Kremlin as part of a larger pattern of western destabilisation around Russia, trying to move closer to Russia. I think that is where the external and the internal tend to coincide.

Q130 Chair: What would the Kremlin regard as the end state of these western plots? Surely they do not believe that if something happened to change the complexion of the Russian Government, that would lead to some form of physical occupation by forces from the West. What do they think the western objective is in trying to destabilise them?

John Lough: I think they believe that the West's objective is to bring to power people in Russia who are sympathetic to western interests, and who will therefore kowtow to what the West wants. The more paranoid among them probably believe that is how Boris Yeltsin came to power in 1991.

On the National Guard, it is worth pointing out that this idea has been under discussion for many years, and it is very interesting that Putin should have taken action now, with Duma elections on the horizon. Back in 2011-12, they found that they in fact did not have sufficient internal forces for dealing with the problems they had on Bolotnaya and elsewhere in Moscow.

Some Russian analysts have pointed to a tipping point, namely the release of the Panama papers, where you saw this classic Russian reaction from the top which said that this is a US-inspired move to destabilise Russia. The next thing you find is that the National Guard has been established; coincidence, possibly, but possibly not.

Q131 Mr Gray: Leaving aside the linkage between domestic concerns and foreign policy, which we have talked about for the past few moments, how would you characterise Russia's broader foreign policy towards the West as a whole? What are they trying to do? We are talking about anything in the arc of steel running from Syria through Ukraine, through the Baltics, and out to the High North. What is Russia's real driving thinking behind its foreign policy?

John Lough: If I was to try to summarise that in a soundbite, I would say they are trying to establish new rules of the game. They want to move the West away from the post-Cold War settlement and encourage us to believe that this set-up is no longer sustainable, and that some division of labour is needed in Europe to manage our overall security. I do not believe that this is a new Yalta, as they put it. It is more complicated than that, because at the same time they would like to engage with us in many areas.

They want to have some de facto recognition of a zone, as they call it, of privileged interests on their periphery. But more broadly, I think they want to find ways of—this is of course a traditional aim—simply containing US power. They see that the world is a very fluid place at the moment. It is opportunity-rich for them, because they can see the western consensus breaking down. They see that the EU is in grave trouble. They can see all the cracks around NATO. They are starting to push on some of those to see what the reaction is. If they look at the correlation of forces at the moment, they will say, “Yes, the West is

economically much stronger, but does it have the political will to stand up for its values and principles?”.

Q132 Mr Gray: Given that that is the case, what are the consequences for, first of all, the Baltics? If that is the case, the Baltics is one of the places that is most exposed to that need to create a buffer between them and the expansionist West.

John Lough: It is certainly an area where our resolve is being tested at the moment. The buzzing of the US destroyer in the Baltic sea a few days ago is the latest evidence of that. So far, the Russians have seen a fairly robust reaction from NATO and from the US in particular that says, “We are going to reinforce our defence support to the Baltic states. We are not stepping away, so please understand that if the worst comes to the worst, we intend to defend the Baltic states.”

Q133 Mr Gray: Let’s now leave aside the Baltics, which of course are members of NATO, and touch on a couple of specialist interests of mine. What do you think—you may not know about this; you may not have a view—the threat would be to the island of Gotland, just off Kaliningrad, which is owned by Sweden, of course, and is unguarded and uninhabited, and/or to Svalbard? What do you think the Russian threat to Svalbard or the High North might be?

John Lough: I have to say that is something I have never contemplated. I can’t give you an answer straightaway.

David Clark: I would need to find out more about those specific things. For me, the most troubling innovation or development of the last two or three years is Vladimir Putin’s enunciation of the concept of “*Russkiy Mir*”—the Russian world. This is the idea that Russia has an ethnolinguistic responsibility to people beyond its own sovereign territory, particularly Russian speakers and ethnic Russians—anybody who identifies in some way with Russian civilisation. Putin talks openly about the idea of this *Russkiy Mir*, Russian world, being in civilisational competition or conflict with a hostile West, and claims for Russia a right to intervene, on behalf of those sorts of people, outside its borders.

There are a significant number of Russian speakers and ethnic Russians in countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, and not just the Baltic states. Watch Kazakhstan, particularly when President Nazarbayev goes. There are a lot of very hawkish Russian policy makers at senior level who eye that quite jealously; that is a potential flashpoint, too.

This brings us potentially, of course, as a NATO country, with the Baltic states as NATO members and an Article 5 guarantee, into conflict with Russian ambitions, which are primarily geared towards the reconstruction of a sphere of influence. Basically, Putin’s concept of how the world should work is a 19th-century concept of great powers that respect each other’s spheres of influence, that do business with each other, that overrule the interests of the smaller countries that lie in between them and that come to arrangements on the basis of power bargaining. That is the world that he would like to see. His hostility to the West is not an instinctive dislike of us culturally or ethnically. It is because he sees us and the kind of world order that we have pursued for the last 20 or 30 years as an obstacle to the achievement of that vision of the world based on spheres of influence and great powers, because our attitude to the world is one that is constructed around values.

Q134 Mr Gray: I accept the general principle, but my question relates to the particular. Leaving aside Kazakhstan—I think you are absolutely right there—am I right in thinking this? The tanks are not going to roll into Latvia tomorrow. That would be an obvious Article 5 moment and create a third world war, so even Mr Putin is unlikely to do that. Surely he will do what he tried to do in the Ukraine and Crimea—in other words, do things that NATO does not expect and which, apart from a bit of mild tut-tutting and a spot of sanctions, would throw the NATO lawyers into consternation as to what to do about it. Where will he strike next?

Ben Nimmo: If I can lead up to the answer slightly, something that occurs to me is that, if we look at what they have done so far, there seem to be two trends in Russian thinking. There is a strong trend of defensive thinking, verging on paranoia—that something that happens near to their borders must be triggered by the West and therefore they have to intervene. In a lot of cases, it is a mistaken perception, but the perception is there.

There is also a very strong opportunistic streak. Whatever may have happened after Yanukovych fled, Putin did not cause the flight of Yanukovych. That happened, he saw the opportunity and he took it. In the same way in Syria, to a certain extent, he saw an opportunity to take action there and he took it. In Georgia in 2008, there was a series of Russian provocations which then triggered the Georgian overreaction, but that was the opportunity that was then taken.

To answer the question of where he is going next, he is going wherever the opportunity comes up, coupled with going wherever he perceives there to be a threat to the Russian sphere of influence as it is or a threat of a US coup, as he says he saw in Kiev. To come back to the example, if Nazarbayev goes and there is a genuine pro-democracy movement, it is highly likely that Putin would see that as something staged by the US and therefore go in.

On Gotland, it is hard to see what could serve as an opportunity or provocation there. As far as I know, the Swedes are actually starting to station a small force there again. There is at least a population in Svalbard, so there is more potential for something to happen. Ultimately, where he goes next will be defined by the opportunity and what he perceives to be the likelihood that it is a US-staged plot against him.

John Lough: Very briefly on where next, let us remember that Mr Putin has not finished in Ukraine. The Russians are waiting at the moment quite patiently to see what might happen there. What they are probably conscious of is that there is already a weakening of the reform effort. There is a re-constellation of political forces taking place in Ukraine. It is by no means assured that Ukraine is going to achieve its goals on the current reformist path.

Secondly, there is the issue of Belarus and the longstanding presidency of Mr Lukashenko. How long is that going to continue, and does Russia in fact need to find some sort of more durable solution to supporting its interests there? I would say that what Russia is going to do next will probably focus on issues closer to home.

Q135 Johnny Mercer: The UK signed a new defence agreement with the Ukraine. What do you think the implications of that are, from both sides of the argument—from NATO's perspective but also from Russia's viewpoint?

John Lough: The UK, among others, has signalled that it supports Ukraine's reformist course. It supports Ukraine's sovereignty, despite the fact that we did not act on our commitments under the 1994 Budapest memorandum. What we are doing is important for Ukraine and Ukraine's leadership. Of course, this has been noticed in Moscow. I am quite sure there is still concern about the one line that was contained in the 2008 NATO communiqué to the effect that Ukraine and Georgia "will" become members of NATO.

Q136 Johnny Mercer: What specific commitments in the Budapest agreement are you referring to that the UK is falling short on?

John Lough: We were a signatory to that agreement. That was at the time to uphold Ukraine's territorial integrity. When Russia annexed Crimea and then sought to destabilise the east of the country, the UK was a bystander.

Q137 Chair: What good could the UK reasonably have done?

John Lough: First, the UK could have become actively involved in finding some sort of solution to the crisis, but that was left to the countries in the so-called Normandy format. I personally, as a citizen of this country, would like to have seen the UK much more actively involved.

Ben Nimmo: I very much agree with John on that. The diplomatic signalling is important. I suspect Russia will tend to see it as a confirmation of a stealthy attempt to get Ukraine into NATO via the back door.

On the military level, having looked at the press releases on it, my concern is really the question of whether it is supplying to the Ukrainians what the Ukrainians need most. I looked through the MoD press release and it said we are helping with counter-IED work, combat in an urban environment, medical care, logistics and operational planning.

I was at a conference of senior Army officers last year and they talked about some of their experiences coming back from Ukraine. The Ukrainians had been saying, "It's nice to know how to deal with an IED, but how do you deal with a Grad bombardment?" One of the European officers in the room said that he wanted the Ukrainians to come to his country so they could teach them about how you deal with a heavy artillery bombardment and a mass tank assault, because that is what the Ukrainians had been dealing with and that is a skill that certainly his military felt it had largely lost. So, on the military side, are we actually providing what the Ukrainians need most and is there stuff that the Ukrainians can teach us?

Q138 Johnny Mercer: There is a bit of a theme emerging here of a continual pushing at the boundaries, matched by a terribly underwhelming response and then an enhanced and emboldened Russia, or is that too simplistic?

Ben Nimmo: There is a lot to be said for it. I think there is a sense of, "Push and see what you can get away with; you can always retreat a little bit if necessary."

The Ukrainian situation is not yet played out. There is still conflict going on. There is still a lot of evidence from social media channels of the Russian presence there. It is really not clear where this is going to go. I have read a lot of analysts saying, "Now that the Russians are scaling down in Syria, they will scale up again in Ukraine." We will have to wait and

see. There is certainly a lot of questioning going on as to whether the western response really has been robust enough.

I know that, in a parallel channel, the EU has set up a group to deal with this, StratCom East, including by rebutting the Russian propaganda. I have heard various comments to the effect of, “It’s not funded by the EU. It is budget-neutral, so it is funded by the countries that supply it.” There is a feeling of, “Don’t do too much to annoy the Russians.” Particularly in the multinational institutions, there is the tension between those whose priority is to support the Ukrainians and those whose priority is to not annoy the Russians too much. That tends to mean that the lowest common denominator is what comes through.

Q139 Johnny Mercer: Thank you. Mr Clark, over to you.

David Clark: Russian objectives in Ukraine have not been met. That is important to understand. Russia was not interested in seizing Crimea particularly. It is not interested in carving off a little bit of eastern Ukraine. It wants control over the whole country. It is part of Putin’s geopolitical vision for how the world should be that Ukraine should be part of Russia’s sphere of influence—as a whole, possibly excluding some of the western parts that were never part of the Russian empire, but ideally the whole country, certainly Kiev, the centre and the south and east of the country. It has not got Ukraine under its sphere of influence.

It is preventing Ukraine, for the time being, from functioning as an effective state and from integrating more closely with the West. The Dutch helped them with that, much to my chagrin, unfortunately. So he has got it in a state of limbo, and that is okay as a holding position for the time being, but as soon as Ukraine looks as if it might be able to move forward again as a country, further destabilisation from Russia will follow.

Johnny Mercer: Thank you very much.

Q140 Mrs Moon: Very quickly, I wonder whether the UK sent people to deal with counter-IED because that is the expertise that they have after Iraq and Afghanistan. Do we have a lack of capability to train in dealing with Grad bombardment? Is that a problem for us, too?

Ben Nimmo: I suspect it may well be. I cannot give chapter and verse on the British Army in particular, but again, at the conference of European army officers where I was last autumn, one comment was, “The problem is not that my forces are having to re-learn manoeuvre warfare; they are having to learn it.” Everything has been geared towards Afghanistan and Iraq for the last decade. That is where the expertise is. When was the last time there was intensive training on what to do in a high-intensity combat environment, where you have tanks and heavy artillery bombardments?

I do not know the state of the British Army. I know that in other European armies, there is a lot of concern, and I have not seen anything coming out of the British Army to tell me, “No, it’s all right, they’ve really got that one covered.” I think there is a gap, and I think this is something that the Ukrainians could potentially teach us.

Q141 Mrs Moon: So our focus has shifted too much to counter-insurgency rather than land warfare or state-on-state warfare?

Ben Nimmo: I think that is where the need has been for the last 10 years, so the focus has been there. I cannot say the exact position of the British Army today, because I don't know, but if you look at what we have been doing and the kind of training we are providing to Ukraine, we do not seem to have the skills in high-intensity armoured warfare, because we have been doing other stuff. I know that across the European armies, there is a concern that the skills were so Afghanistan-focused that the smaller armies, certainly, could not do both. They could not keep training for high-intensity warfare and for Afghanistan. I do not know to what extent that is true of the British Army, but I think it is definitely fair to say that the focus has been elsewhere for the last 10 years, and I think we need to refocus.

David Clark: If you look at the defence reviews that have been conducted since 1998—in 1998, 2003 and 2010—they have all said pretty much the same thing, which is that the main function of the British Armed Forces now is expeditionary warfare, and that the threat to native territory is remote. In 1998 and 2003, they were talking about a 20-year perspective within which the threat to NATO might return. It has come about a little sooner than that. I think that is what needs to change.

There needs to be another defence review quite soon and a new NATO strategic concept to turn that on its head. We are now in a situation where we need to think seriously about how to defend the NATO area as our primary defence focus, and to regard expeditionary warfare, if we do it at all, as something that we do if we can, rather than something we prepare for as the main priority.

Q142 Douglas Chapman: If I can follow on from that, in terms of multidimensional warfare, do you think the UK and NATO sufficiently recognise and understand the concept and Russian usage of it? What mechanisms should we be employing to have a good, coherent response to some of these activities?

John Lough: My impression is that we are starting to understand the issue much better. However, it is highly complex when you factor in, for example, that Russia is such a significant energy supplier to several EU and NATO member states. I was amazed just a few days ago in Kiev to hear a senior German diplomat describe a new project to bring gas directly from Russia to Germany—it is called the Nord Stream 2 project, the second expansion of an existing pipeline—as a private sector initiative, despite the fact that the consortium is 51% owned by Gazprom, which is majority owned by the Russian state. People are occasionally not computing what is out there.

That, I think, is one of our really big problems: trying to integrate all these elements, and to co-ordinate an overall position for dealing with Russia. It is not a question just of our military defence policy, but of our security policy and our engagement with Russia in the broadest possible sense.

Ben Nimmo: I agree with John, but I would add something to the mix. Yes, NATO is aware of this—if I remember rightly, the February defence ministerial approved the NATO policy on what they call hybrid warfare, so there has been discussion and thinking there—but NATO can do only what the individual Allies provide. If you don't have the specialists in the Armed Forces of the NATO member states who can do what is necessary to deal with hybrid warfare, non-linear warfare and multi-dimensional warfare, there's not

so much that a strategy can do. A lot of this needs to come back to the national militaries and what capabilities they have.

NATO has only the capabilities that are placed at its disposal, so it's a question of whether this needs to be top-down or bottom-up. NATO is the top-down approach: you have the NATO strategy and then it trickles down to Allies, but the Allies have to have the capability, which they then provide to NATO to do the job. It's a dialogue that happens between NATO and the Allies about who is actually going to provide the capability. There, the national capabilities are a very mixed picture. Some Allies are very far ahead on information warfare—basic public affairs, apart from anything else. Other Allies find it very difficult to generate a large capability.

It's a very patchwork effort, and a good place for the UK to focus its effort is—purely in the UK defence sector, in the broadest sense—on what we do and on whether we have the capabilities we need to deal with this kind of warfare. Once we have them, we can then share those examples, experience and information with the other Allies, but if we don't have the capability to start with, there is very little we can do. A lot of these questions need to be focused very specifically on national capabilities and how we generate them.

David Clark: One of my concerns is that NATO was constructed to deal with a binary peace or war scenario. It knew what would trigger an Article 5 intervention on behalf of one of its members. We're not dealing with that any more. We're dealing with so many different grades or shades of stages between war and peace that Russia is exploiting. Some of them were explored in the scenarios that Mr Gray was describing, starting with a cyber-attack or information warfare, or attempts to covertly destabilise countries using internal proxies or little green men—all those sorts of steps of escalation.

I'm not sure NATO understands at what point its Article 5 commitment kicks in. There is a risk that it kicks in too late for us to be able to intervene effectively. I think that when NATO comes around to revising its strategic concept, it really needs to get a handle on how it responds to all of these different forms of warfare, short of conventional-style military attacks, to be able to deal with them early enough to have an impact. If it doesn't do that, there's a risk that NATO will get caught with its trousers down and Putin will exploit its unpreparedness in dealing with scenarios that stop short of a full-scale conventional military attack.

Q143 Richard Benyon: I think I should say that the reason why some of my colleagues have left is that the Government, in their wisdom, decided to have a statement at this time on Libya. That's where they've gone.

I want to ask you about disinformation. To set that in context, there are two distinct narratives that are talked about, in terms of how the West operates with Russia. One is that we sometimes blame ourselves—"Has NATO appeared too impressive here in trying to increase its membership?", "Has the EU been a bit strident there?" and "Do we understand Russia enough?". The other narrative is to say that nearly everything external that Russia tries to do, either in hard power or soft power, has to be seen in the context of corruption. It is the largest kleptocracy in the history of kleptocracies. Do you think we credit them

with too much strategic analysis? Are we tough enough on the corruption, in terms of how we view their position?

David Clark: Personally, I feel there is little point in investing any hope or time in the idea that the current Russian elite, or the governing clique around Putin, can return to the path of co-operation and partnership that we talked about so much in the 1990s and since—it was stated as the ideal in NATO’s 2010 version of the strategic concept. I think all of that is now pointless. They are so embedded in a certain way of behaving that the only choice for us is to try and limit the amount of damage that they can cause to the world outside Russia, and to wait for an opportunity to engage with a future Russian leadership. A big part of that is to do with the self-interest of the elite—their corruption and their personal interests—which, ultimately, is the real reason why they fear political change: they fear the accountability that would follow political change.

John Lough: I completely agree with what David has said. The notion of co-operative security with Russia, which we developed in the 1990s and experimented with, in retrospect looks like a complete pipe dream. I do not think, to argue with myself slightly, that it was inevitably going to fail, but we did not anticipate that we were going to have people with a KGB mindset running the country for 15 years, beginning from 2000. That has had such a profound effect on the way Russia has developed over that period—the way it views and treats the outside world—that until that goes away, or is reduced in intensity, we are not going to achieve very much, because we are dealing with people who are so extraordinarily distrustful—not just of us, but of their own people and even some of their closest associates. That is the biggest obstacle.

What NATO has tried to do, and has done very successfully among its own member states, is to build trust and confidence to do things together. We were making little bits of progress in the 1990s even with the Russians. One practical example is the very good co-operation we had with the Russian brigade in Bosnia, but others in the Russian system wanted to wipe that slate clean as soon as possible, because it looked like some form of collaboration with the possible enemy.

Q144 Richard Benyon: To understand a bit more about how disinformation works, is it right to look at the Berlin rape case as an example of the classic agitprop gameplay, in that a story was created—it turns out, totally fictitiously—of an ethnic Russian person raped by a migrant in Berlin? The lies got halfway around the world before the truth had got its boots on and, before we in the West were able to show that that story was rubbish, you had nationalists on the street and right-wing anti-immigrant people protesting—not the rules-based order that exists in the West. Is that classic disinformation, or just a rare example that perhaps does not relate to how disinformation works?

Ben Nimmo: Everyone looks at me! I think it is an extreme case, both in the extent of the effect it had, and in the gravity of the allegations. Something that was interesting to me was that it was most successful on the Russian language media in Germany, from what I saw when following the case—I had to flip in and out, because I was doing other analyses at the same time. The initial impact was from the ethnic Russian minority in Germany, who saw this reported on the Russian language TV and ran with it. The German language media followed on from that. So it was playing to a particular audience.

More generally, the way you can look at the disinformation campaign that is going on more broadly is as an echo chamber for views that resonate with the Kremlin narrative. The RTs and Sputniks of this world do not necessarily need to create a story. They will not make up out of whole cloth, if they can avoid it; what they will do is to find a commentator who espouses a particular view and give him a 15-minute interview, feeding him nice soft questions.

The classic example is from an RT thing that I saw not long ago, when they were interviewing an entirely genuine human rights campaigner on the migration issue. The question from RT was, “Tell me about the killing that is being made by multinational corporations out of the suffering of these refugees by running refugee camps.” It is outrageous and breathtaking, but the comments from the human rights guy were entirely his own. It is not that the Russians are creating a puppet who says what they want. They find people who genuinely believe what they are saying and then give them an audience. What they don’t then do is give the other side of the story.

Again, the classic example is the Ofcom case last September. What happened was, RT did a 15-minute documentary on the Ukrainian genocide in eastern Ukraine—as in, the genocide committed by the Ukrainian Government against the people of Donbass. It was a 15-minute documentary including this very serious allegation against the Ukrainian Government and one caption at the bottom of the screen at one point saying, “Kiev denies the claims,” and that is it. Thinking about the amount of time it takes for a journalist to go out, interview the people on the ground and find the people who are accusing the Ukrainian Government of genocide, if you can’t even have a clip of the Ukrainian Government, there is no way that is credible journalism. What it is doing is giving a platform to one side of the story.

It is not often that you will find manufactured stories. Far more often, what you will find is the choice of a particular commentator. Some of the commentators are of questionable reputation and some of them are entirely genuine in what they believe, but the context is that they are being given a platform on which to air their views and there is no countervailing view being presented. That is the way the great majority of the disinformation is working; it is not creating a story, but amplifying one small segment of the overall spectrum of views and just not mentioning the other ones. Does that help?

Richard Benyon: Yes.

John Lough: I very much agree with that. I think the so-called Lisa issue in Germany was very unusual. The only other parallel that I can immediately think of is the story about the crucifixion of the three-year-old boy in eastern Ukraine by Ukrainian fascists that then turned out to be a complete lie, or the idea that rights sector activists were heading down to the capital of Crimea and Russian forces—Russian proxies—needed to defend the entire Russian population from about 30 lightly-armed guys on a train, which seemed somewhat improbable.

I think one has to look at the blowback, if you like, for the Russian side from this. First, the Lisa project seems to have been very badly co-ordinated, because the Russian Foreign Ministry bought into it big-time, including at the level of the Russian Foreign Minister.

Ben Nimmo: Lavrov, yes.

John Lough: Lavrov was severely embarrassed at the Munich security conference as a result. The fact that the German Government saw that as, effectively, an attack on Germany did not really help Russia's cause at all, I think. Sometimes it seems a little bit of the system gets a little bit too enthusiastic.

Q145 Richard Benyon: Ben, you have done an analysis of how they are covering the debate in the UK on the EU referendum. I can understand them wanting to have a campaign that tried to weaken NATO and tried to show differences between different countries. What is in it for them? What is in it for the Russian Government? How do they see Brexit?

Ben Nimmo: Having watched the panel in the last session of the Committee when this question came up, I am going to be very careful in my response.

Q146 Richard Benyon: There are different views. I am interested in it from the security point of view. They clearly view the EU as a rule setter that they want to weaken. Is that accurate?

Ben Nimmo: Yes, that is. On the very general level, the more cracks and divisions that appear in the West, and in the western institutions, the better. It is not an EU-specific thing because Russia is particularly EU-fixated; it is a very convenient thing—an opportunity—that Russia sees. For example, there has been a lot of hostile coverage of TTIP, because it is not in Russia's perceived interest for there to be closer economic ties between Europe and the US, since that would probably weaken Russia's influence and cheaper US shale gas coming into Europe would be bad for Gazprom. So TTIP is another example.

In terms of hard security, the UK is one of only three or four really serious providers within the EU, so taking the UK out would make the EU less of a hard security provider. The UK is seen in Moscow as being one of the more hawkish states within the EU; if you remove the hawks, the doves have proportionately more representation, so it might be easier to deal with the EU.

It is all part of the overall preference for division: it is not limited to the EU or to Brexit, but it is a very attractive opportunity. An EU of 27 that does not include the UK, with all the power that it has, would be easier to deal with than an EU of 28 including the UK. I suspect that a UK of one would in some ways be viewed as easier to deal with than an EU of 28 on issues like trade, gas and market actors. I don't know that, but in general, and far beyond the EU issue, there is a Russian preference for seeing more division in the West and less rapprochement, be it in trade, be it politically, be it militarily or whatever. This fits into that broader context.

David Clark: There has been a significant change in Russia's attitude to the EU in the last five or six years. Before, it was relatively sanguine about European integration—it focused all its hostility on NATO—but it now sees the European Union as a regulatory and normative threat to its interests.

Three things have brought that about. The first is the third energy package, which has effectively broken the Gazprom model of vertical integration and the ability to segment the European market and control Governments by using energy supplies very effectively. That has been an extraordinarily effective instrument for containing Russia. The second thing is the association agreements with Ukraine and other countries that it regards as part

of its sphere of influence and would prefer to see as part of the Eurasian economic union. The final thing is the ability of countries to use the European Union to combine their geo-economic weight and use sanctions to punish Russia for its aggression in Ukraine.

So Russia's attitude to the EU now is completely different from five or six years ago. It would much rather deal with a fragmented Europe of nation states that it can pick off, using energy supplies, threats and other instruments. It would particularly like to see Britain outside the European Union, because as part of its Eurasianist mindset, it wants to reconstruct European power around a triangular relationship with Berlin and Paris—the Alexander Dugin view of the world. It wants to hive off the Atlanticist elements of the West, particularly the UK and the US, and drive a wedge between them and the rest of Europe, in order to divide and rule. That is what it wants. There are many reasons for and against membership of the European Union, but nobody should be in any doubt that Vladimir Putin wants Britain to leave the European Union.

Chair: We will move now to the other end of the military spectrum—though, Madeleine, I think you said you had an earlier point to make.

Q147 Mrs Moon: The earlier point has been well covered in the answers we have just had. I want to ask about nuclear doctrine—whether you see Russia's posture as having changed, particularly since the Cold War, after Georgia and the shift towards a more confrontational foreign policy, and whether you see Russia trying to influence the debate we are having in this country.

David Clark: Russia's nuclear doctrine has changed since the end of the Cold War. In 1993, it dropped the Soviet Union's long-standing commitment to no first use, which was logical given its experience and its significant loss of conventional military power. Nuclear weapons have been seen in the West as a compensating capability for lack of conventional military power, so it was logical in that way. The 2000 military doctrine formalised that and made it clear that they would be prepared to use nuclear weapons first against a country deploying conventional weapons “in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation.”

Another iteration of their military doctrine was published in 2010. As that was being prepared, there were some rather alarming statements made by Nikolai Patrushev, who is secretary of the Security Council of Russia and the former head of the FSB. He gave an interview to Izvestia in which he said: “We will adjust the preconditions for using nuclear weapons to repulse aggression that employs conventional weapons, and this applies not only to large-scale wars, but also to regional and even local wars.” On the surface of it, that seemed to be a very serious lowering of the nuclear threshold.

There were big sighs of relief in the expert community when the doctrine was eventually published in 2010. It didn't contain that language—if anything, it seemed to slightly raise the nuclear threshold. But we need to say two important things to qualify that. First, a separate document was signed at the same time called the “Foundations of Government Policy in the Area of Nuclear Deterrence Until 2020”, which remains classified. It is an annex to the military doctrine that nobody outside senior Russian circles has ever had access to, so we don't know what it contains.

Secondly, Russia's behaviour, certainly since the start of the Ukraine crisis, has been much more consistent with the Patrushev doctrine than with its own officially declared doctrine. That is to say that around the Ukraine crisis, which we can consider to be either regional or local, depending on your perspective, Russia has been quite willing to issue in some cases very overt nuclear threats to make it clear that were the West to intervene in any serious way, they would be prepared to escalate to the use of nuclear weapons to, as they would see it, de-escalate—they would use tactical nuclear weapons to dissuade us from going any further.

We are now dealing with a Russia whose nuclear doctrine can be described as one of offensive deterrence. Not unlike defensive deterrence, which is designed to prevent an act of aggression against you, offensive deterrence is designed to prevent others from responding to your acts of aggression—Ukraine being the paradigmatic example.

Q148 Chair: Can I just check on a very small point of clarification? Am I right in remembering that during the intense Cold War years it was well and truly a part of Soviet nuclear doctrine that theatre nuclear weapons would be used as part of their military offensive capability? I thought that, after the downfall of the Soviet Union, plans were discovered that confirmed that.

David Clark: That may well be right. I think that for political purposes they stuck by a “no first use” policy, but whether they would have done so in practice had their conventional offensive, in certain circumstances, run into difficulties is another question.

All I can say is what I observe about Russia's behaviour today, which is that they see nuclear weapons very much fitting into their national security concept and having a role in which they are used to consolidate gains that they make using conventional power. That obviously poses significant questions for us, particularly in relation to the Baltic states, where you could see a Ukraine-style scenario being played out again, in which they sponsor a local insurgency or rebellion among Russian speakers and then send in some conventional troops to grab a small piece of territory. NATO is then obliged to choose whether or not to respond in the face of threats to use nuclear weapons if it does.

For me, one of the most disturbing things, apart from Vladimir Putin talking openly about the West not forgetting that Russia is a major nuclear power in a very pointed way, was the news that came out of a meeting of the Elbe Group in Germany in 2014. It was a meeting between retired American and Russian senior military personnel. The Russian delegation turned up with what they claimed was a private message that they had been asked by the Russian Foreign Ministry to convey, to the effect that Russia would be prepared to use military force, including nuclear weapons, if the West either tried to help Ukraine to get Crimea back, armed Ukraine, or built up its presence in the Baltic states too much. For me, those are all consistent with the Patrushev doctrine, rather than their officially declared national doctrine.

John Lough: Just to add briefly to David's excellent summary, we are seeing comprehensive nuclear modernisation. On Russia's part, that is land-based and sea-based systems. It is believed that the Russians have been testing a new ground-launched cruise missile that violates the terms of the 1987 INF treaty, so there is a lot of activity here. It is said that the Russians saw a trap in President Obama's quest for comprehensive nuclear disarmament because they felt that it was aimed at exploiting the US's conventional

superiority. I think the old Russian saying that there is only free cheese in a mousetrap was in evidence again.

Q149 Chair: But surely that is a rather strange approach on the Russian side, given that whatever conventional superiority the Americans might have worldwide, that is certainly not the case on the European landmass, is it?

John Lough: In theatre, no. That is correct. That was the perception at the time.

Q150 Mr Spellar: But is it not also a complete inversion of the Cold War argument in favour of the nuclear deterrent, which was that the American and British nuclear deterrent were therefore the counterweight to prevent Russia going for a lightning strike across the north Germany plain towards the Channel ports?

John Lough: That is absolutely correct, but in the intervening 20-plus years you saw a very rapid degrading of Russian conventional forces, which has only started to be addressed in recent years.

Q151 Mr Spellar: Is that equipment and people?

John Lough: That is both equipment and people, yes.

Q152 Chair: That is a dimension, as you saw earlier, that we were hoping to touch on in this session, but we will have to come back to it.

Q153 Mrs Moon: Can I just ask my other question? In relation to propaganda, do you think that the Russians are playing any part in the discussions about the renewal of the British strategic defence capability?

Ben Nimmo: From what I have seen—I had a look at “Sputnik” and RT on this over the last couple of weeks—there is a similar trend to what we have seen in other areas. There is an amplification of the anti-Trident voice. It is not the biggest thing on their website, but I have seen, for example, a number of interviews with people who oppose Trident, with people who oppose all nuclear weapons and with people who are calling for unilateral disarmament, and nothing like a comparable attention paid to the other side of the debate. So you will have a 24-paragraph story on the fact that Trident is extremely costly and discredited, and then you’ll have two paragraphs at the end saying, “Oh, and the Government says it isn’t.” I have seen a similar pattern of behaviour on Trident as on other issues. I don’t think they have made it their main issue, but it is definitely there.

Let me just add two other quick points on the last question. I utterly agree with David and John, but the other thing we have seen is a much greater willingness on the part of Russia just to talk about the nuclear option. Russian disinformation basically falls into four categories: dismiss, distort, distract and dismay. Those are the four things they will do, and almost any piece of Russian disinformation will fit into one of those four categories. I have been tracking that for a number of years now. In the dismay option, it is entirely about instilling fear. A classic example was a couple of years ago when the Russian ambassador to Denmark said in an interview, I think to *Jyllands-Posten*, “Incidentally, you realise that if you contribute a radar frigate to NATO missile defence, you will of course become the target of a nuclear strike, or you would be on the list of nuclear strike targets, because you are degrading our capability.”

So there is an extent to which simply the rhetoric of the nuclear option is being used to instil dismay and hesitancy. It is impossible to know to what extent it is meant. For example, in the Danish debate that was all about spreading fear among Danish voters, who were then to think, “My God, if we contribute a radar frigate—not SM3s, but just radar—we will be on the Russian nuclear strike list.

On the question of what the Russians are afraid of and the cheese in the mousetrap—Obama’s idea of total disarmament—don’t underestimate the Russian fear of the US doctrine of the prompt global strike. This gets mentioned surprisingly often by Russian leaders, including Putin. There is this fear that the Americans will have such a technological edge that they will be able to achieve an equivalent to nuclear effect without going nuclear, and that is scattered through their doctrines.

There is effectively a new category of weapons. You have nuclear, you have conventional and then you have conventional weapons that approach the capability of weapons of mass destruction, particularly in terms of precision and the amount of damage they can do. The Russian fear—“Why is there free cheese in the mousetrap?”—is the idea that the Americans have such an ability to strike anywhere at any time that they do not need to go nuclear any more. The Russian perception is therefore that if America and Russia got rid of all their nukes, the Americans would have a technological advantage that the Russians would not be able to match. That is part of the dynamic going on there.

Q154 Mrs Moon: Can I just ask whether you think any element of preparing is part of this—it is a bit like the frog in the pot when you turn the heat up—such that if they ever did use nuclear weapons, we would think, “Right, they finally did it,” rather than being totally horrified? Is there an element of preparing for actual use?

David Clark: I don’t think so. I think it is mainly about creating this offensive deterrence effect. Basically, what they have done in Ukraine when they have talked about nuclear weapons is say to western audiences, “Ukraine is not worth it. It is not your problem. It is part of our sphere of influence. It is certainly not worth getting nuked for.” That is the message that they want to get across, and they do it in so many different ways.

The nuclear component of their information warfare campaign is extensive. One example from last year was a spate of news stories about how Russian state television had accidentally revealed plans for a new nuclear torpedo during a meeting between military officials and Vladimir Putin. The document had been seen on television. The missile apparently could devastate an enemy’s coastline from 10,000 km with a nuclear strike. Of course, this thing does not exist and the whole thing was stage-managed. We know from the last couple of years that 20 or 30 people have been imprisoned for high treason for revealing military data that is public domain information. They have been prosecuted as spies for revealing anodyne public domain information about Russia’s military capabilities, yet a television producer in Russia can reveal the existence of this top-secret military project and apparently not be prosecuted for it. The whole thing was stage-managed as part of their information warfare endeavour.

John Lough: If I may quickly answer that question, part of the posture is for domestic political purposes. It is to demonstrate to the Russian population that the country is under threat and that to some extent it may even be at war. The Russian leadership is defending the country by all means possible and by using the most robust approach. There is a “feel

good” element there among the defence chiefs and others, saying, “We are really showing the West what’s what,” and that of course goes down extremely well at home; there is no question about it.

Chair: I am hoping to finish at 1.15 and we still have a few questions to go.

Q155 Ruth Smeeth: Given the links between nuclear and other aspects of strategy—especially propaganda, as Mr Nimmo outlined—does NATO have the right mechanisms in place to respond to Russian nuclear threats and/or use? Are we prepared? That is an easy question from me.

David Clark: I think we need to see deterrence as a continuum, rather than seeing conventional nuclear deterrents as being separable things. I worry that our apparent lack of ability to make good on our Article 5 commitment to the Baltic states, in particular, creates the possibility that what should be a weapon of last resort ends up becoming a decision that we have to take much earlier in an escalation with Russia. Building our conventional capability in a way that makes clear that we are capable of realising our Article 5 obligations is incredibly important to the nuclear question. Otherwise, we risk increasing Putin’s potential to miscalculate the consequences of his actions in a way that would be very bad for everyone.

NATO’s conventional defence posture needs to change. It needs to get back into the business of forward defence, instead of defence in depth, because by the time we have defended in depth the battle will already be lost. We need to deploy assets much further forward. We need to look at where we deploy what is a very small stockpile of NATO tactical nuclear weapons, and make sure that they are in place where Russia might conceivably imagine that they would be a factor in their decision making.

And our doctrine needs to change. The strategic concept is completely out of date. As I said before, as things stand, we have no idea at what point along the spectrum of escalation that now exists Article 5 becomes a meaningful thing that we have to trigger. I think we need to have a clear understanding of what the different steps of escalation are, and what NATO’s response is at every particular point in those steps, and the response needs to be credible.

John Lough: Just to add a brief gloss on that, communications is a big part of crisis management and I frequently worry that we don’t have systems in place to communicate clearly and effectively with the Russians. You saw the problem that Russia and Turkey had on the Syrian border not so long ago. We have had the buzzing of this US ship recently, where things can very easily go wrong. We have got a meeting today, after an interruption of almost two years, of the NATO-Russia Council, at ambassadorial level. That may be a start, at least, in re-establishing some form of dialogue, but it is very easy for people to misunderstand each other.

I will just give you a small recent example. President Obama—some of you may have read this very interesting interview in *The Atlantic* on the Obama doctrine—said that Putin is “not completely stupid”. In other words, he is a rational thinker about certain things. Putin took personal offence at that statement and complained to Obama. So one can start to see how things can very easily go wrong, despite the fact that that phrase translates very easily

into Russian and would be perfectly well understood. Somebody, for whatever reason, chose perhaps to tell Putin that it said something else.

Ben Nimmo: If I may, the one thing I would add to that is this: don't underestimate the shift in thinking that has happened over the past 12 to 18 months in the military, and on the military side of the House. Commands in many European countries are starting to talk about deterrence again, and that is really a first. NATO's deterrence and defence posture review came out in, I think, 2012—I think it was the Chicago summit. Essentially, it put deterrence first in the headline, but there was very little new thinking on deterrence, because it just was not seen as necessary in the context between 2010 and 2012.

Now there is serious thinking going on about deterrence in Europe, in the context of a possible ground campaign or all-arms campaign triggered by some action of Russia. So there is actually serious thinking going on about deterrence, which is the first time in a very long time that that has been brought within that context. So the debate has begun. There are many more steps that need to be taken, but there is now an awareness of the word "deterrence" and that it is important, and that it is something that needs to be discovered, or rediscovered, depending on whom you are talking to.

Q156 Ruth Smeeth: Thank you. From deterrence to getting rid of our nuclear arsenal, is Russia respecting its nuclear arms control obligations?

David Clark: It depends on which treaty we are talking about. Certainly in terms of New START, Russia appears to be moving towards meeting the ceilings on warheads and delivery vehicles set out in the treaty by 2018. There has been an uptick, I think, in Russia's declarations in March, but that is because of the way the phasing between the introduction of new systems and the phasing out of old systems works. Certainly the Americans take the view that Russia is meeting its commitments under New START.

The big problem comes with the INF treaty. For the last three years, the US State Department has declared Russia to be in violation of its INF obligations. Just to recap, the INF treaty bans the deployment of ground-based nuclear missiles with a range of between 500 and 550 kilometres. There's been a lot of speculation about what the violation consists of, but it's apparently been going on since 2008—we seem to know that much. The Americans have been very tight-lipped about exactly what the system that they've been testing is. The two most plausible theories are that it's either a sea-launched cruise missile that's being tested from a mobile ground launcher—you're allowed to test them from fixed ground launchers, but not mobile launchers—or a new generation of ground-launched cruise missile.

The Russians are denying that they're in violation of the treaty. At the same time, they're complaining that the treaty doesn't meet their interests anymore. The Americans are treading softly because they don't want to force a situation in which Russia abrogates the treaty and that minor problem becomes a major problem. What we don't want is a situation in which a whole class of weapon—particularly a destabilising class of weapon—is reintroduced, particularly at a time when the Russians are doctrinally experimenting with the idea of nuclear use in a way that everyone finds quite alarming. That is a big problem, and it isn't clear yet what the Americans and others plan to do to fix it, but there is a potential there for breakout in quite a destabilising way.

Q157 Ruth Smeeth: What do you think we should do as a NATO response?

David Clark: The Russians have got two different kinds of complaint. One is about missile defence and global strike. They say that new technologies are undercutting their deterrence capability, and they complain about the proliferation of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in countries around their southern and eastern border. They want a deal that will bring in other countries to provide them with greater reassurance. I don't know to what extent they are genuinely worried about that, but there might be a way to experiment. A wider arms-control agreement that would bring in other countries would deal with not just intermediate-range nuclear weapons, but shorter range nuclear missiles, of which Russia still retains a very large number, in a bewildering variety of different formats and technologies. That is probably something that should be explored, but that would take a long time to achieve. As I say, Russia relies doctrinally on the idea of the use of tactical nuclear weapons, so it may be reluctant to go down that route, but it is certainly worth exploring.

Q158 Chair: Isn't it usually the case, though, that arms control agreements depend upon a reasonably improving trajectory of relationships, rather than one that at the moment is heading for the deep freeze?

David Clark: That's certainly right. Apart from New START, which Russia was willing to accept because of the prestige that goes with appearing to be America's only serious bilateral partner for the purposes of strategic arms reduction talks, it is not enthusiastic about disarmament or even arms control in any serious way. Two things: first, Putin boycotted the nuclear summit in Washington earlier this month—he refused to turn up. Secondly, Russian co-operation with the nuclear threat reduction programme has been halted—it was one of the casualties of the Ukraine crisis—so it is not co-operating on nuclear safety and dismantling in the way that it has been since the 1990s. Its attitude is a rejectionist one on arms control at the moment. It may take some time before it comes back round to being a co-operative partner again.

Q159 Chair: We know that there are good intelligence-sharing relationships within NATO member countries in relation to terrorism. How good is NATO intelligence-sharing at the moment in relation to more traditional military dangers, as might be posed by a reversion to Cold War confrontation?

David Clark: I don't know for sure. My impression is that, on very serious things that come up, there will of course be communication, but on a routine level it is probably not very good. Relations generally are not very good. The routine co-operation that allows you to anticipate and deal with threats before they arise isn't there, but co-operation when threats arise probably is there. I don't know for certain; that is an impression.

Q160 Richard Benyon: This is my last question. As you said earlier, there were a lot of Russia experts littered around SW1 at the height of the Cold War, many of them in Government Departments or advising the Government. Most of them have not gone away, and there is a new cadre of experts that the Committee has benefited from. Do you think the Government and the Ministry of Defence make enough use of the Russia experts who exist in the United Kingdom, or indeed who pass through the United Kingdom? Is there more that we could do, and are there any institutional changes that the Government should make to try to harvest information about Russia in a better way?

John Lough: My impression is that the Government are probably going to need to hire more Russia hands, and not just people who understand Russia, but people who understand Russia's periphery as well. I think that is critically important. We found, when events started in Ukraine, that we had very few people who were really competent on the issue of Ukraine. We are likely to have leadership changes in both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the relatively near future. What happens there is going to be important for Russia, particularly Kazakhstan, as I believe was mentioned before. We have still got a very tricky issue in the Caucasus, so we need all the expertise we can gather and grow for the future.

In terms of how expertise is used, I can't judge that definitively, but I have been invited on several occasions to talk to people at senior level in the Foreign Office, to debate issues and brief ambassadors who are going out to post. I think it is positive that people from the think-tank world are invited in to do that.

David Clark: I think the Government are generally very open in their relationship with experts outside and the expert community in general; I wouldn't have any complaints about that. I, like John, have had frequent contact with the Government over the past 10 years, but I have noticed that there has been a decline in in-house capability, particularly of Foreign Office research analysis. There used to be quite a few very capable research analysts in the Foreign Office handling these issues. I think they have all gone now; maybe there are one or two left. There are certainly not as many as there used to be. The Government's investment in that capability needs to increase, as it does across other Departments and international organisations as well.

Ben Nimmo: This is my first invitation to a Committee like this, so it is an uptick in interest as far as I am concerned, which can only be a good thing. I agree with John and David that there is a lot of expertise out there. I think there has been a loss of expertise within the FCO, the Government and the civil service, and they have gone elsewhere. The question therefore becomes what is the best way of actually tapping back into that expertise and tapping into the expertise that is out there? It would be great if the FCO was to hire 100 seasoned Russia hands and reconstitute from scratch the capability that it used to have and which was whittled down, but that doesn't seem particularly likely. The question, then, is what kind of networks can you set up on a more informal, ad-hoc basis, so that you are not massively increasing headcount at a time when there just isn't the money to do it? Also, how do you bring in the expertise without necessarily hiring it and making it in-house?

I think it's a question of how you tap into the expertise that is there, and if necessary how you feed it. I don't know the figures on how many people are studying Russian in the UK at undergraduate level, but I doubt it's in the hundreds of thousands. There might well be a call to look not just at the level of existing expertise, but at what is coming through. How much expertise are we developing from the very early stages? To become a Russia expert you have got to have the language at some point. What are the facilities for creating that very basic level of knowledge? The more you can grow the overall knowledge base, the more you will then find the experts coming through the system.

Richard Benyon: I take that as a very good recommendation for a recommendation.

Chair: We are at the end of our formal questions. I think Madeleine has a brief point.

Q161 Mrs Moon: Is there a need for Government or Parliament to be more honest with the British public about the threats we are facing?

David Clark: This is not just a problem for the UK. Last year some polling was done on the appetite of western societies for acting in support of their declared obligations—through NATO, for example. I think that the public and politicians need to come to a decision about whether or not the kind of world order that was constructed after the Cold War is worth investing the time, resources and effort into protecting and defending.

There is a deal to be done with Putin, if we want to do one, based on spheres of influence and carving up Europe in a 19th-century way, but I suspect that most people do not want to go down that route. What we have created, although it is fraying at the edges and under siege, is worth perfecting, defending and rebuilding—a Europe whole and free. But that does not come cheaply, especially when faced with someone determined and aggressive, like Vladimir Putin.

So we have to make good on our commitments, and we have to do so in a way that has credibility behind it. That requires investment of time, money and resources, which means increasing defence budgets where we have to. That is a difficult argument to have with people in difficult times, but it is a necessary one—so, yes, more honesty and clarity, and really talk to people about what is involved.

Q162 Chair: Just before you answer that, I want to squeeze in another question for perhaps the last comments of the sitting. You have just referred to pre-20th century concepts such as spheres of influence. There is also the concept of the balance of the power, where you can shift your alliances according to which threat you regard as more dangerous at any one time. Could there be a role for a balance-of-power concept? In the testimony we have heard today you have talked about opportunism on the part of the Russian leadership, and the one serious threat that they do face is the threat of Islamist terrorism? Is there an opportunity that we might actually find some cause to co-operate on with Russia, on the issue of Islamist terrorism and, on that basis perhaps, while standing up to the Russians in Europe, co-operate with them where we have common interests in other theatres?

John Lough: I suspect that over the coming years we probably are going to co-operate in certain areas—

Chair: Such as?

John Lough: And agree to disagree on certain things.

Terrorism is probably a fertile area. However, past experience is not encouraging, because our experts have not been able to find a common language with the Russians for a variety of reasons. Should the problem become more acute in Russia, which is perfectly likely, there might well be another window of opportunity, but sometimes when we see these possibilities we have to be realistic about what is really the art of the possible, because at the moment we are dealing with a leadership that has a very specific mindset, which might even see danger in those sorts of contacts simply given how conspiratorial they are. Sometimes one can wonder at the conspiratorial nature of their thinking—reading articles published in the Russian press by Mr Patrushev, as has been referred to before, is just

mind-boggling—but maybe they really do believe some of this stuff, in which case it makes this task extremely difficult.

David Clark: The thing to beware of when we are contemplating co-operation with Russia in fighting Islamist terrorism, which may and probably should happen at some level, because there is an overlap of interest—it is not an exact correspondence of interest, but it is an overlap—is Russian attempting to make trade-offs elsewhere. In particular, they might say, “We are co-operating on fighting Islamism in the Middle East, so why don’t you give us a little bit more in Ukraine? Why don’t you respect our sphere of influence? It would be so much easier for us to get along and to co-operate effectively in this area if you were giving us a little bit more in that area.” That is where we need to draw a line, I think, to be very clear about what the extent of our co-operation with Russia on the Middle East entails and to set very clear limits.

Ben Nimmo: On the question of being more honest, I don’t think there is a need to be more honest; I think there is a need to be more passionate and to be more clear about how firmly we defend our principles. Very briefly, something that has been talked about a lot in the strategic communication community is that the Russians have their narrative, so why don’t we have a narrative? I always take exception to that, because we do have a narrative. Our narrative is that we stand up for the Helsinki accords, the rule of law, small countries having the same rights as big ones, and so on. What we do not have is leaders going out there and saying passionately, “We really believe in Helsinki, so no, you can’t just sell Latvia to the Russians because it is convenient. Just because it only has 2 million people, you cannot just ship it down the river, like what happened at Yalta.”

The thing is that NATO cannot do that, because NATO is the lowest common denominator of 28; ditto with the EU. So the NATO Secretary-General cannot, because he would be called in by individual nations; Mogherini cannot, even if she was inclined to, for the same reason. So the only place that that can come from is national political leadership—to stand up and say really passionately, “We believe in the Helsinki accords, and we still do, and that is why what happened in Ukraine is wrong, and that is why what was done to Georgia is wrong.” There is not that clarity of passion in the narrative. We have the narrative, but we do not have the people who are delivering it.

Chair: A very good point on which to finish. Thank you all very much indeed.