



Oral evidence: [The UK's relations with Russia](#),

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Members present: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Mike Gapes; Mr Mark Hendrick; Mr Adam Holloway; Daniel Kawczynski; Yasmin Qureshi; Nadhim Zahawi

Questions 1-64

Witnesses: **Dr Derek Averre**, Senior Lecturer in Russian Foreign and Security Policy, University of Birmingham, and **Dr Andrew Monaghan**, Senior Research Fellow, Chatham House, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session. This is our first oral evidence session on the United Kingdom's relations with Russia. Gentlemen, I should be very grateful if you would identify yourselves for the record.

Dr Averre: Dr Derek Averre, senior lecturer in Russian foreign and security policy at the University of Birmingham.

Dr Monaghan: Dr Andrew Monaghan, senior research fellow in the Russia and Eurasia programme at Chatham House.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much indeed for coming to give evidence. Obviously, this is the opening scene-setter of our inquiry into our relations with Russia. We are planning a visit there fairly shortly, so this will be very helpful to us. Some questions will be quite general, but we are more than delighted for you to get into the weeds if you think it is helpful to go there to help educate us. I will start with an open question: without inviting you to read a book back to us, see if you can encapsulate the overall goals of Russian foreign policy.

Dr Averre: Shall I start?

Dr Monaghan: Yes.

Dr Averre: To start off, we need to take a broader look at how Russia sees the international environment: a shifting balance of global power. For many years the Russians have talked about their ideal being a multipolar world order; they now tend to talk about a polycentric world order, and a world order which is marked by anarchy, instability and an increasing tendency towards the use of force in international relations—importantly, in the context of what has happened in the last couple of years, a global environment in which

Europe in particular no longer really plays a central role, and in which Western norms and values are no longer seen as paramount. For Russia, they are no longer seen as a reference point, if you like, and in some respects they have been criticised by Moscow as not being legitimate. Moscow tends to see state sovereignty as paramount. It supports incumbent, legitimate Governments, as we see in the case of Syria, and it is very much against liberal intervention as a means of dealing with difficult situations with conflicts.

As far as overall goals are concerned—if you do not mind, I will continue and then Andrew will probably have plenty more to say—as we see in the case of the Syria conflict and to a lesser extent perhaps the Ukraine conflict, Russia seeks the status of great power once again, after a difficult period in the 1990s, independent from Western interests. It wants to further Eurasian integration, preventing the further encroachment of Western influence on its own sphere of privileged interests, as then-President Medvedev called it. It is trying, as a result of the estrangement from NATO and the EU, to develop, if you like, its own non-Western-led regional integration mechanism. The BRICs are obviously a classic example on a global scale. On a regional scale, a collective security treaty organisation and an organisation that has become increasingly important in recent years, the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, which was formerly Russia, China and four of the central Asian states, was recently joined by India and Pakistan, so is obviously a large grouping of states.

I have already mentioned the desire to counter Western intervention in sovereign states. In its dealings with Europe, Russia much prefers dealing on a bilateral basis with the major European member states rather than with NATO and the EU—both organisations that Russia has serious problems with. Obviously, it has had problems with NATO for a long time, and over the past decade or so—probably since 2004—a much more dismissive attitude towards the European Union.

Finally, as I alluded to before, Russia wants to manage international crises where possible through the United Nations. Obviously, it is still a member of the permanent five, so it can veto resolutions it does not like; it can, if you like, change the facts on the ground and dictate the parameters of any particular crisis, at least in most cases.

Dr Monaghan: Derek has been very thorough, as always. I would add some points to this. In my view, the overall drive of Russian goals on the international stage is first to meet their position as a ubiquitous power—that is, one that has Russia at the centre of the map, stretching across many time zones and many regions in the world. So it is a ubiquitous world power, but the Russian leadership also wants and is trying to create a position for Russia as an indispensable partner. In essence, this means they want and need to have a seat at the table; otherwise they are concerned they will be on the menu.

What does this mean? It means that they see a very different world from the one the UK sees. They have drawn different conclusions from the same international developments and the same body of evidence; they are working in an international environment dominated by regime change, colour revolutions and the Arab Spring. In specific practical terms, it means that domestic politics and foreign policy are very closely bound together.

There are three points to make as a result. First, the Russian leadership is trying to create a sovereign independent state, which would mean that Russia is prepared for, and looking ahead at, a 21st century of instability. Secondly, it means an evolution of

international architecture. The post-second world war architecture—Bretton Woods, NATO, the European Union—is no longer relevant in their view, or is becoming decreasingly relevant. Thirdly, Russian foreign policy is increasingly guided towards a counter-colour revolution: colour revolution-proofing Russia first, but also counter-colour revolution, counter-regime change, policy, diplomacy and operations more broadly—including in Syria, as we have seen recently.

Q3 Chair: May I follow up on one of your comments, Dr Averre? You said that Western norms were no longer seen as a reference point. Russia is a member of the Council of Europe, subject to the European convention. Where is that debate in Russia about asserting some kind of socially conservative, different view of the world that is in violent antithesis to modern Western liberal Europe? Is there not a part of Russian identity that would actually quite like to be accepted—to be part of the values we aspire to? Where is that debate?

Dr Averre: You have raised an interesting point. For many years there has been an ambivalence in Russian foreign policy—there still is, as perhaps we can get on to later. That ambivalence is between being a sovereign, autonomous global and regional power that looks after its domestic order and is projected internationally, and the recognition of interdependence, particularly with Europe but also with other centres of powers. That has really run through the last 25 years since the break-up of the USSR.

What is often forgotten in the wake of the Ukraine crisis is that for a long time Russia was genuinely negotiating norms, primarily with the European Union but also to an extent with NATO, and trying to find some kind of accommodation. But the political class saw a series of conflicts and crises, starting with NATO's intervention in Kosovo, which Russia did not have a voice in at all. That was a massive shock for the Russian political class. Then there was the US-led invasion of Iraq, the colour revolutions in Georgia and particularly in Ukraine in 2004, the war with Georgia over South Ossetia in 2008 and the Libya and Syria crises.

All that time, in their own view, the Russians were being marginalised and sidelined. They are increasingly seen by the US as being, to use a direct quote from President Obama, “on the wrong side of history”, and they do not accept that. The more conservative sovereign-statist trend in Russian foreign policy thinking has really come to the fore; it is monopolising not only the narratives—the rhetoric that the Russian foreign policy community comes out with—but to a large extent practical policy making. It is becoming increasingly difficult for Western organisations or political leaders to go to Moscow and come out with anything positive.

We were in Berlin three or four months ago, talking to the chap who heads the Russia and Eurasia programme on the German Council on Foreign Relations—obviously, Germany has more or less led the European response to the Ukraine crisis. This chap said that Foreign Minister Steinmeier goes to Moscow, tries to bring some constructive proposals to the table and is met pretty much by a blank wall when he talks to Foreign Minister Lavrov. At the moment, that is something that is causing difficulties. We can probably go on to talk about the potential political-military implications of that in a while.

Dr Monaghan: Might I add a footnote, please? It is important that it is noted here that neither in the Russian leadership nor, more broadly, in Russian society, is there an acceptance of Western values. I think you might meet that when you go to Russia.

On the one hand, the Russian leadership have stated on numerous occasions that they do not want simply to accept our values: that Russian democracy will come in its own time and in its own way—in the Russian way. Dmitry Medvedev has stated on several occasions that “we simply do not want to be embraced in those terms”, and that “we will come to it in our own course”. Mr Putin himself has stated, again on numerous occasions, that he looks at some of the developments within the European Union—European Union liberalism—and would think of them in antithetical terms to those that should be taking place in Russia.

At the same time, in society more broadly, I think it is worth noting that when we talk about socially conservative, we are talking about social conservatism—small c. A recent Levada poll—Levada is one of the robust polling organisations—had it that some 60% of the Russian population could be categorised as socialist; of those, 20% are communist. The Communist party is always the second party in the regional elections; not only is it a party of protest, but it represents a substantial group in the population. When we talk about our values, we often look at Russia, saying, “Are there liberal protesters? Are there liberal parties?” and that kind of thing, but unfortunately, from a British perspective and from a British parliamentarian’s perspective, those who are akin to us in seeing the world in the same way are very much in a minority.

Q4 Chair: So the Communist party, in its history, has been all over the place on issues of individual liberty.

Dr Monaghan: Well, the Communist party embraces a whole range of different points—in so far as we are talking about Russian domestic politics. They are a very long way from what we would assume to be our values, and they represent something rather different from a Western or European Union value.

Q5 Mr Holloway: You mentioned “our values” and this idea of being on the wrong side of history, but if you look at the recent Afghan war, the Russians have been saying far more sensible things than the West; they say far more sensible things about dealing with ISIS than any of these Western politicians do; and in Syria, where would the Geneva talks be without all that dreadful bombing recently? So is there an argument there on the right side of history?

Dr Avere: Should I comment, without seeming to ingratiate myself with your good self?

I do believe that the Russians have had a fairly strong argument on Syria. Back in 2012, the Action Group on Syria met in Geneva and issued a communiqué—I think that was June 2012. Roughly a year later, in June 2013, we had the G8 summit in Lough Erne and, again, the world leaders, including Putin—he was part of it, because this was before the Ukraine crisis—issued a communiqué talking about an inclusive transition in the Syria case. Everyone then goes home and the Western powers forget about that; the opposition comes back and says, “No, we cannot negotiate with Assad”—okay, we can talk about Assad in a moment. “We would not countenance any inclusive political transition.”

The Russian view is that you have to negotiate. However bad Assad is, there are elements within the opposition, too, and the Russians say that the opposition has been infiltrated by Islamic State three or four years ago—I don’t think we even spoke about

Islamic State then; it was Jabhat al-Nusra at the time. It was infiltrated by these radical jihadist elements, and there was no real opposition that could talk with Assad.

Both sides—the West and Russia—share responsibility for what happened. We then had two or three years of drift, with appalling loss of life and destruction, virtually putting an end to Syria as a coherent state. The Russians went in, as is quite blatant from the transcript of Lavrov’s recent meeting with Putin, to change the facts on the ground, and to effectively allow the Syrian regime, with Russia obviously standing behind it, to negotiate from a position of strength. That is a reversion, if you like, from the original principles of what Russia sees as traditional international law to, if you like, more of a power play. Nevertheless, you are right; it did change the facts on the ground, and now we are coming towards peace, though not a very happy peace. I am not a classical scholar, but there is the Tacitus quotation,

“they make a desert and call it peace.”

Syria is pretty much a desert at the moment.

Nobody comes out of this with particularly good credentials, but the Russians did have some points that they were pushing: traditional international law and the primary responsibility of the United Nations, which actually passed two Security Council resolutions that backed up the Action Group on Syria’s decisions and was just ignored. As I say, I think both sides bear a share of the responsibility.

Q6 Mr Holloway: But Russia also seems to have much more of a take on reality. We saw Assad a couple of weeks ago, and one of the things he said was that the Russians wouldn’t let the Syrian state fall—not him, but the state. It strikes me that they are on the right side of history, and they are seeing these problems in a way we could perhaps learn from.

Dr Averre: The problem here is that initially, and even now, the Russians are saying that they are not supporting Assad as such, but they are supporting the legitimate regime. That goes back to what I was talking about before, and what Andrew mentioned, about no colour revolutions and no Western-inspired regime change. There is a kind of, if you like, power principle at work there.

The problem is that Assad is insisting, in most of his statements, that he is not prepared to move on. I believe Assad bears responsibility, on the balance of the evidence I’ve read, for the majority of the death and destruction. The problem is that Russia might be on the right side of traditional international law, but Russia is on the wrong side of the normative aspect, and the idea of responsibility to protect populations, which is not an international legal norm but is an evolving international norm. I think that is really what the reference to being on the wrong side of history was about.

Q7 Mr Holloway: Isn’t the problem that we make the mistake of seeing things very much in terms of our principles, which is great, but actually it should be about interests? Their analysis, for now, of keeping the Syrian state there is surely rather more sound than that of most of the West?

Dr Averre: There is an argument there. I think that the Russians fail to bring much that is constructive to the table. That is the problem. They talk a lot about observing

humanitarian norms, but they are not always 100% behind them if they interfere with the principle of retaining the sovereign power in Syria. There are other normative aspects that the Russians talk about, and they have engaged with the “responsibility to protect” norm. They didn’t veto the NATO intervention in Libya, for example, but when it became a case of regime change, that is really where—what has happened in Syria is really a knock-on effect from what happened in Libya.

Q8 Mr Holloway: Dr Monaghan, I invite you to come in on that point.

Dr Monaghan: I think we have to be careful when talking about the right side of history and who is on it. If I can put it in this way, that is a rather Whiggish approach to history—the progressive nature of history—that we are in the right and that revolutions will always lead to a good thing if they are successful. I am not sure that, on our side, we should be thinking in terms of the right or wrong side of history and whether the Russians are on the wrong side. The Russians do not see it in the same way. They have made it very clear that actually they do not see history in the same progressive light of optimism as at the end of the Cold War, and so on. We could have a long discussion there, but there are two points that I would relate specifically to what you have said.

On the Afghan War, they said some sensible things—perhaps more than we did. They did say on numerous occasions, “Oh, you’re going into Afghanistan. We have some knowledge about that. Would you like to have it?” We said, “No thanks. No, we don’t need that.” When I say “we”—I used to be employed by NATO, but it was not just at a NATO level; it was also at a UK level. “No thanks. We’re all right, thanks very much.” Several years later, they said, “Oh, you’re leaving Afghanistan. Well, we’ve also done that. Would you like some advice?” and we said, “No thanks. It’s all going very well. It’s all fine.” So, on some occasions there are perhaps opportunities to listen to some of the things that the Russians say. That does not mean that we have to agree with them. Just because we listen does not mean we agree.

The second point, which relates to the point about Libya and Syria, is that from the very beginning the Russians have been sceptical about the progressive nature of the so-called Arab Spring and that it was going to immediately bring a flowering of liberalism and democracy in North Africa. Much of the Russian discussion has been along the lines of, “Well, that hasn’t really worked, has it? Look at Libya; look at Syria. There may be other countries that we might also wish to point to, but let’s take those two as primary examples.” In that sense, there is something to the Russian argument that, actually, when you go around creating regime change, what you do does not lead to a flourishing of democracy; this is democracy on the ends of gun barrels, and that creates a power vacuum, leading to wider instability. We can disagree over whether it is democracy at the end of a gun barrel, but that is the Russian position—and actually, the situation in Libya is not all that super.

Dr Averde: May I add a very quick postscript to what Andrew said about Moscow being sceptical about the Arab Spring? Foreign Minister Lavrov has repeatedly, in his speeches and articles, talked about the fact that this stems from Russia’s own history and their concern over the fact that sudden violent upheaval never really achieves its aims. You are really talking about going back to the Bolshevik revolution, which you could argue set Russia back six or seven decades. There is also a narrative in Russia that—

Q9 Chair: Is that a position that is taken by Mr Putin?

Dr Monaghan: If it is being stated publicly by Mr Lavrov, Mr Putin agrees.

Dr Averre: It is pretty much backed up by Putin, yes.

Q10 Mike Gapes: Didn't Putin say that the end of the Soviet Union was the greatest disaster of the 20th century?

Dr Monaghan: No; he said it was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.

Q11 Mike Gapes: Fine, but is that not somewhat inconsistent with what Lavrov has then said?

Dr Monaghan: No. What you have done there, if I may, is take a phrase from a much longer speech 11 years ago that was referring to several specific things about many Russians—ethnic Russians and other Soviets—being left outside their country. It was a very specific meaning that he had in mind, so I would be very careful about using that. If you want to use examples from Mr Putin, I would point you to the Valdai speech in 2014 and the March 2014 speech after the annexation of Crimea. Any of those more recent speeches since 2011 will guide you much more rigorously towards Russian foreign policy decision making.

Q12 Mike Gapes: So he does not want to recreate the position where Russian speakers are within the orbit of Greater Russia—

Dr Monaghan: He does not want to recreate the Soviet Union, no.

Mike Gapes: Not the Soviet Union, but a Greater Russian empire.

Dr Monaghan: No, not a Greater Russian empire, but a CSTO—collective security treaty organisation—a Eurasian economic union and creating Russia as a hub. That is not the same. I would distinguish from the very beginning that we are not going back to some form of Soviet Union. We may be going forward to some different kind of union in the 21st century, but it is not quite the same as some kind of Soviet empire; no.

Q13 Daniel Kawczynski: I am delighted to have you here. The ignorance in this place about Russia is breathtaking, so it is very good to get your perspective. Dr Averre, you mentioned the European Union. In 2004, when there were 11 new countries entering the European Union, Russia was consulted about them entering the EU because there were going to be ramifications for Russia. That has not happened over Ukraine—they have been excluded—but there will be an impact on Russia because there is a free movement agreement with the CIS and Ukraine, so any agreement with the EU would allow EU goods to come to Russia without any customs. Could you say something about that, please?

Dr Averre: There was one element of the question that I wasn't sure about. Ukraine will not be a member of the European Union, I think.

Q14 Daniel Kawczynski: No, but Ukraine has had talks with the European Union for some sort of an agreement. Russia has been excluded from those talks, yet Russia and the CIS have bilateral agreements with Ukraine for free movement of goods. So, basically, if Ukraine becomes a member of the European Union, we will be able to export goods—

Mike Gapes: No—

Daniel Kawczynski: Do you mind? I didn't interrupt you.

Chair: Order.

Daniel Kawczynski: If they were to become members of the European Union, we could export goods to Ukraine without tariffs and then those goods could be sent to Russia without tariffs, because of their agreement with the CIS.

Dr Averre: In negotiating the association agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine, which came into force on 1 January this year, the EU did meet on several occasions with the Russians to talk about the potential impacts on Russia-Ukraine trade. I think they gave the Russians a fair hearing, but in the end the EU was not prepared—the EU is quite a strong power when it comes to regulatory issues—to let Russia interfere with Ukraine's sovereign choice of the specific regulatory parts of the *acquis* that they were prepared to sign up to. The Russians were heard but, in the end, pretty much all their views weren't really taken into consideration. Moscow immediately projects that as the European Union effectively taking over Ukraine's sovereignty, when, obviously, Russia to an extent would like a voice in limiting Ukraine's sovereignty and Ukraine's ability to move towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Russians do have a point that they have trade agreements with Ukraine. I am not a great specialist on this, but apparently there is no incompatibility with Ukraine signing and operationalising the association agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, and some kind of free trade agreement with Russia—those two things can operate—but what Russia is ultimately after is for Ukraine to join the Eurasian Economic Union.

Dr Monaghan: Or remain neutral.

Dr Averre: Or to remain neutral, and not to move further towards Europe.

Q15 Chair: You talked about Steinmeier running into a brick wall with Lavrov, which was supported by our Foreign Secretary saying that having a conversation with Lavrov was not going to elucidate much further the Russian position. What does Russia want out of the west? In your analysis, what is there on which we could usefully engage with them in order to try to meet some kind of compromise? Where can we reasonably concede to the Russians, given your understanding of both the west's position and their position?

Dr Averre: Shall I kick off?

Dr Monaghan: Fine. Go for it.

Dr Averde: I think I am referring back to a paper that Andrew wrote last year—one of your Chatham House papers—in which he said that the problem at the moment is that this estrangement between Russia and the western organisations means that the dynamic is often projected as one of either confronting Moscow or, on the other hand, appeasing Russia. I think I am right that it was you who wrote that. I think there is a need to get away from that and to try to look at the roots of the problem and to begin again to negotiate the fundamentals, particularly on political, military and security issues. There is a danger—several authoritative reports have highlighted the potential problems—of some kind of inadvertent conflict sparking a greater conflagration. At the moment, arms control agreements, concerns over Russia’s use of hybrid warfare and access to area denial—all the kinds of things that nobody really talked about two or three years ago—are a big problem.

Fundamentally, we initially need to get back, even if it means revisiting the Helsinki principles and the CSCE/OSCE process, and try to lay down those fundamental political, military and security principles, including—again, probably through the OSCE—following up on the Vienna document on conference and security-building measures. How we go beyond that will depend to a large extent on how the Ukraine crisis plays out. If the two sides can come together—well, it isn’t two sides; the European Union and western Russia cannot do it over the heads of Ukraine. Both NATO and the EU have said, “We can’t do a deal. There will be no grand bargain. It has to involve the sovereign decisions of Ukraine,” so they have to bring Kiev in, but the two sides eventually have to get together to negotiate some kind of settlement to Ukraine’s constitutional crisis, in the sense of whether they have decentralisation or federalisation.

Q16 Chair: Before I ask others to come in, is there anything you want to add on Ukraine, Dr Monaghan?

Dr Monaghan: Yes, there are a number of points, if I may. First, we need to be quite careful about talking in terms of engaging or conceding. Engaging is something that we have talked about for about a decade—maybe a little more—and it’s not really led to any specific developments.

What does Russia want and what can we do about it? The Russian position on Europe is relatively clear: they want to have a new European security treaty. That has been advanced by numerous Russian leaderships—most recently by the Medvedev presidency in 2008, 2009 and 2010. They were called the “Medvedev proposals”, although in fact they were formulated under President Putin’s Administrations—it is his leadership team offering this idea. That was pushed into the Corfu process at the OSCE, and it was rejected broadly by NATO. It was rejected for a number of reasons, in particular because the basic idea of the draft treaty that was formulated and then circulated was full of legal holes and problems and was in clear contradiction to some of the fundamental points of Euro-Atlantic security.

What do we want out of this? It’s worth adding as a footnote that, although this has been moved to one side in the Corfu process, the Russians haven’t given up on this; they’ve been pursuing it in second-track diplomacy ever since.

Q17 Chair: What does the activity in Ukraine over the past couple of years tell us about their wider strategic goals?

Dr Monaghan: It tells us a number of points. The one I would really focus on here is that the Euro-Atlantic architecture is the real problem. Ukraine is, of course, a very serious problem in its own right, but it means that we view the European security order very differently. We talk of inter-state and intra-state security, and the indivisibility of security, in terms of the three baskets of security. The Russians view it rather differently. They take it to mean that Euro-Atlantic security is already divided; it is not indivisible. It is divided because there is an OSCE level of security, with political guarantees on the one hand, and a NATO-EU level of Euro-Atlantic security, which is political and legally binding. There is a distinction, so there is already a two-tier Euro-Atlantic security architecture. You see Russia in effect emphasising that distinction with the Budapest memorandum. It is not legally binding, for instance, unlike if the Russians had gone to war with a NATO member state.

Q18 Chair: Okay. Those are the lessons we should draw from Ukraine.

Dr Monaghan: That's one point from Ukraine, yes.

Chair: How about contrasting that with Syria, then? Can a contrast be drawn?

Dr Monaghan: I would draw a significant difference with that, but in some senses there are linkages, because what the Russian leadership sees, in my understanding, is the attempt to create regime change and a colour revolution in both states. The operation in Ukraine was, first, to ensure that Crimea did not fall out of Russian strategic control—hence the annexation. Secondly, there is the possibility, as the Russians have often said, of creating a federalised Ukraine.

Q19 Chair: Did they really think they were going to lose Crimea?

Dr Monaghan: Yes, and it's perfectly understandable why. The Ukrainian Government in Kiev was renting out the main base at Sevastopol to them at a very, very high fee. One of their main strategic concerns was either that the price would be raised yet further or that the deal would be cut entirely, and not only that but the Ukrainian Government might then say, "Well, we will have NATO ships." That is, I think, less important than the idea of the base being removed from Russian control. For me, that is the primary reason for the Crimean operation.

The second element is the federalisation of Ukraine, which keeps a more broadly diluted sense of power within Ukraine. I would reiterate that although Ukraine is a very serious problem and a very serious disagreement between Russia, NATO, the EU and a number of member state capitals, the real problem it demonstrates is the flaws that we have in the Euro-Atlantic architecture, because we are now worried about similar problems in Transnistria and so on.

To just draw the difference between Syria and Ukraine: the Russians, in effect, operated before the regime change could take place. What you saw entering Syria first was anti-aircraft equipment to prevent an Anglo-Saxon-led and French-led bombing campaign to remove Assad from power. That is why they went in there first like that. Secondly, they are in, propping up power. That is what you are seeing: a series of learning and experimenting and developing operations in how to prevent colour revolutions taking place. I think that if they had so much as a hint of a suggestion that there was the possibility of a colour revolution

taking place somewhere in the former Soviet space you would see similar kinds of operations.

Dr Avere: Can I add two words to that very quickly? Something that I think Andrew referred to, obliquely, if you like, is that NATO has never gone back on the pledge made at the Bucharest summit in 2008 that there was an open-door policy for Ukraine and Georgia to be admitted to NATO. Most of the main member states are against that now, I think, but in the recent period it was notable that that pledge was reiterated in the case of Georgia—not in the case of Ukraine, but in the case of Georgia. NATO is dragging its feet and likes to state this as a principle, but realistically it does not want to take on the foreign policy problems that Ukraine and Georgia contain. Nevertheless, that is something that Moscow looks at seriously.

Dr Monaghan: To answer your second question about where we can engage, the first point would be: decide what we want to do. As far as I am aware there is no clear, coherent policy at NATO level, European Union level or UK national level of where we want to be with the Russians in, say, 2020, so the end of this parliamentary term. There is no lengthy public discussion or detailed nature of that, so on what we are talking about—where can we engage or concede?—policy often seems to be very reactive, in a constant state of surprise, and that makes the discussion of negotiations and diplomacy quite difficult. If you are constantly being surprised—in 2008 we had the then Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, saying that the Russo-Georgia war was a “rude awakening”. I am sure you can guess the terms that were used when Russia annexed Crimea—a rude awakening. This is because we are not paying attention to what is happening in Russia.

Chair: Okay. We will come on to British policy later.

Mr Hendrick: With your indulgence, Chairman—

Chair: I’d like to roll everything in, so it’s all over to you now for the next few minutes.

Q20 Mr Hendrick: I get the impression that Russia wants to give away as little as possible about what its plans are politically and militarily, for obvious reasons. To link the hybrid warfare techniques that were used to get Russia into Ukraine and into Crimea with the unexpected and surprising—in my view—moves when it started to build up in Syria, do you feel that this is part of breaking up the sort of neighbourhood that was, more or less, very much under its control 20 or 25-years ago, and that there is a policy now of trying to create frozen states in many cases, as an alternative to seeing NATO and the EU move further east, and also encroachment of its interests in the Middle East?

Dr Monaghan: May I offer one or two ideas on that? When you say that Russia wants to give away as little as possible on its plans and military development, I must admit that I disagree with you very much. Russian strategic planning is made explicit. The May decrees of 2012 set out a strategic agenda that is ambitious but entirely clear. Please come back on me if you find it interesting, but as far as its military plans are going, the Russian system does not work well, and that is acknowledged by its leadership. Therefore, they are putting it under intense pressure to build it into a capable system. That is tantamount to a state mobilisation, but that is all made very public.

Q21 Mr Hendrick: What about the encroachments in Ukraine, where they denied point blank? I remember having lunch with the ambassador at his residence in London, with the then Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. The Russian ambassador said to me, point blank, that Russian troops were not in Ukraine. Two weeks later it was out that they were there and he was on TV explaining the fact. They were in Russian uniforms without Russian insignia.

Dr Monaghan: I think there are two separate things here.

Mr Hendrick: They did not make it plain what their intentions were; they just went in secretly.

Dr Monaghan: There are two separate questions going on here. When we talk about their strategic agenda and their operational agenda, those are stated extremely clearly. They are published in their foreign policy concepts and their national security strategies. If what you are asking is whether their special operations forces' operations are secret, then yes, of course they are. It was a surprise for some people that the special operations forces went in and did what they did. For those who were watching specifically—and I know this was the case—people were being briefed here and people were briefing that that was going to happen. There is evidence already that that is the case.

Mr Hendrick: There was satellite evidence and they still denied it.

Q22 Chair: Who was briefing the British Government?

Dr Monaghan: It was certainly taking place within the MoD, and I know that there were at least some in the think-tank community who were saying, "Watch out! Something's coming." Because there was a series of measures indicating that: the meeting of the Security Council—

Q23 Chair: Can you say any more about the sources? There is a question that we have to address as a Committee about whether the Foreign Office has the capacity to understand Russia properly. You are beginning to develop quite a strong critique that, from my reading of it, is that our capacity to understand Russia is woeful. I would, in a sense, want you to challenge that. Did we know this? Was it our own intelligence services telling us this? Was it think-tankers? Does the Government understand this?

Dr Monaghan: There are perhaps two questions to this and I am keen also to provide a secondary answer. This is a very important question. First, there is a serious limitation to Russian capacity in the UK, and throughout Western Europe and the US, at the moment. That is because for the past 25 years Russia has not been a priority, so resources have been wound down on it. There are still some resources and they are generally focused on civil society and democracy, because that is where the funding has been. There are very few people who are expert on the Russian economy, even fewer who are expert on the Russian military and fewer still—we can count on one hand—who are real experts on the Russian security system.

Q24 Chair: Would it be correct to characterise the system as being you, an acknowledged authority, and absolutely nobody in the Foreign Office to read what you are writing?

Dr Monaghan: Not quite, no. I think in the FCO—

Q25 Mr Hendrick: Who knew? In a nutshell, who knew? You said it was common knowledge. Who knew?

Dr Monaghan: There are now three or four balls in the air.

Q26 Chair: It is about the Foreign Office's capacity to understand what you know. Are they now so limited and stretched inside the office and have they ditched all the expertise they had?

Dr Monaghan: There are some people in the eastern research group and within the system. There are some new people in the embassy who are learning very quickly. There are also people in the MOD. An important point I would like to make is that it is not only the numbers with expertise. I know people are sending the information up but it hits a glass ceiling, where senior-level decision makers say, "We wouldn't do that, so the Russians won't do it." It is what I would call unknown knowns, if you will. There is much reduced expertise, and information that does not chime with our own understanding of the world is rejected when it goes up. I can perhaps offer some specifics in a different environment, but I would hesitate to name names as to how I know that was taking place.

Q27 Mr Hendrick: Clearly, Ukraine was still a big issue while the Syrian war was developing. Obviously satellites saw it and American intelligence knew about it, probably before anybody else did. Again, we saw the troop build-up from the air, but, again, totally out of the blue—no discussion with partners who were supposedly trying to stop the bloodshed in Syria—the Russian troops were straight in there. At the time I thought, "Well, if there's any way of deflecting attention away from Ukraine, that's certainly a great way to do it."

Dr Monaghan: I don't think it's about deflecting—

Mr Hendrick: That wouldn't have been the main objective, but I'm sure it did take a lot of attention away from the Russian activity in Ukraine.

Dr Monaghan: We have things to look at ourselves. They are two very separate issues in that respect.

Dr Averre: Andrew already referred to some fundamental principles—trying to avoid regime change and so on—so the two things are linked.

Q28 Mr Hendrick: I accept that, but I'm saying that as a tactical as well as strategic move, sending your troops into Syria is the best way to take attention away from Ukraine.

Dr Monaghan: Well, Mr Putin gave an hour-long interview on American TV saying what he was going to do before he went to New York. It was in English, yet people were still surprised when they did it. We have to be a little careful here about what we are talking about, because the Russians have been talking about Syria since 2011. If we are a bit surprised about what they say and do—I do not here include special operations forces, because obviously they tend to be surprising, as I would hope ours are, too—we have only ourselves to blame because we are not listening.

Dr Averre: One thing I would say if you want to make a bit of a link between Ukraine and Syria is that I talked to people in NATO around 18 months ago who were very surprised

that Russia now has the capacity to move something like 50,000 men in a relatively rapid-reaction force up and down borders and to do the kind of things it did in Ukraine, as well as being backed up by, if not the absolute top of the range then some very decent military kit in terms of anti-aircraft missiles—the S-400—and Russia’s offensive capabilities. That is something that has come up over the past five years or so. There has obviously been an increase in state procurement of modern weapons systems and, although they obviously have financial difficulties, the state’s armaments programme is set to continue until 2020. I take what Andrew is saying: really, we need people who are looking at this and taking the decision.

In response to the other question of whether we are able to absorb the knowledge that they have, I would like to give two examples. Andrew referred to the Eastern Research Group, which is staffed by excellent people who stay in the group for many years. They have a tremendous amount of knowledge about Russia—I would say on an academic level—but there is something like five or six of them dealing with the entire post-Soviet space less the Baltic states. They are looking at politics, political economy, security and so on. That seems to me to be pretty woeful. They engage with academia and the expert community—they try their best—but that is laughable really.

I was at the Ministry of Defence two or three years ago with a couple of colleagues talking to the defence economics department. A chap who had been there for 25 years, who joined at a time when there was something like two dozen people looking at the Soviet defence industry, defence capabilities and defence economy, was the last one working full time on it. He’s since retired to write a “Good Beer Guide”, apparently, so the Ministry of Defence is now seriously under-staffed as well. You’re talking about Russia, which is still the second-biggest manufacturer and the second-biggest exporter of armaments, and you tell me that the MOD has no real capacity to look at that. Academia can perhaps make up some of the shortfall and Chatham House can perhaps make up some of the shortfall, but if Russia is important, and I believe it is important again—it never really went away but it has certainly come back—then although I shouldn’t really tell you what to write—

Chair: That’s what we’re here for—that’s why we’re taking evidence.

Dr Avere: The Committee might want to make that point to the Government about what we really need to do in future. That comes right down to an LSE commission that wrote a report quite recently, which I would advise you to have a look at. It is really very interesting: it says that we need to pay attention to the kind of multidisciplinary knowledge that Andrew referred to, and to knowledge of the Russian language and minority languages. Obviously we can’t influence the Secretary of State for Education, but that issue is referred to time and again and the country never seems to do anything about it.

Q29 Mr Hendrick: We are pressed for time and we have to move on to counter-terrorism. Mr Lavrov said: “If it looks like a terrorist, if it acts like a terrorist...it’s a terrorist.” Clearly there is a difference between what Russia believes are terrorists and what we believe are terrorists. Does Russia have a clear policy on counter-terrorism?

Dr Monaghan: Yes.

Q30 Mr Hendrick: What is it?

Dr Monaghan: Finish it.

Dr Averde: And it is different from ours. In the third week of November 2013—I remember the date very well, because the week after that Mr Yanukovich decided not to sign the association agreement and everything kicked off, so there was no further collaboration—I organised a NATO advanced research workshop in Moscow, which was planned as the first of a series of workshops on emerging security challenges. This one was actually talking about counter-terrorism. There was a lot to say about the fact that between NATO and Russia there was actually some positive movement on joint threat assessments and on looking at how we might deal with terrorism together. But that workshop’s findings were that views on how to deal with terrorism differ. The Russians think that the European Union and NATO are not the best organisations to deal with it and that it needs to be dealt with by wider international organisations. The final point was that it is not something that can kick-start the relationship. There was a lot of talk after 9/11. Putin effectively said to George Bush “We can work together to defeat terrorism.” That idea has completely gone now. It is not something that can lay the basis for a deeper co-operative relationship.

Dr Monaghan: It is important to contextualise this in the slightly longer relationship, because the Russians define terrorism differently from us. They define the solutions and the outcome in Syria differently from us. The Russian counter-terrorism policy, shortly put, is to defeat terrorism by any measures possible. Mr Putin has implemented a series of robust measures in Russia, which I am sure you are familiar with, in Chechnya and the north Caucasus. People tended to speak of Mr Medvedev as being more liberal and perhaps more of a post-Soviet individual, but it is worth looking at his authority. He came in and said “Well, I am President and we must root this out. Anyone who is found, even the cleaners or those who cook for them, will face the full brunt of Russian power.”

Q31 Mr Hendrick: Is the definition “Anybody who is against the regime, full stop”?

Dr Monaghan: No. People who take up arms against the regime within the state are defined as terrorists.

Q32 Mr Hendrick: And they would define terrorists in Syria similarly?

Dr Monaghan: I think they would define Islamic State and the other organisations as terrorists. The difference with us that they would constantly point to is that they do not see a distinction between extremists and moderates. You may remember—perhaps it was in 2013—when someone released a video from one of the organisations that we supported, or did not view as terrorists, and Mr Putin pointed out that the individuals were indulging in cannibalism. They have a very different view of what terrorist organisations are and do. They are much more robust about it than we are.

I think it is worth pointing out that the example for how we differ is Chechnya. The Russians adopted a very robust series of measures: they went to war in Chechnya twice and have flooded it with money. But that often undermines the UK-Russia relationship—what there is of it—because we provided asylum for a number of Chechen individuals. The Russians have said “How can you be against terrorism if you are providing asylum for these

individuals?” You often find a set of concerns in Russia that the UK indulges in double standards.

Dr Avere: It is obviously Chechnya and the two Chechen wars, but it is a problem of the whole north Caucasus now. There are fewer problems in Chechnya at the moment and far more problems in Dagestan and Ingushetia, so it is across the north Caucasus. Something you might explore when you go to Moscow is how Russia plans to deal with the return of foreign fighters who have been in Syria—that is obviously something that has been very much on the European radar over the last couple of years—and to try to get some sense of what both sides might agree on in that respect.

Q33 Mr Hendrick: It sounds to me that you are more or less agreeing that the likelihood of some sort of consensus between the west and Russia, first over co-operation on radical Islamic terrorism, and second over which groups are terrorist and which are not, is pretty high impossible?

Dr Avere: It will depend upon threat assessment, and if there is some kind of joint threat assessment that the two sides can agree on. Maybe the experience of the west and Europe over the last two or three years might be something worth revisiting, but at the moment I don’t really think that there is that kind of solid basis for a far-reaching shared policy.

Dr Monaghan: On individual cases, perhaps. Islamic State? Yes. But, more broadly than that, I actually think a realistic discussion of real consensus, i.e. shared interests about identifying who these people are and how we will go about dealing with them, will be very difficult to achieve. It is worth noting that the Russians think about 4,500 people from the former Soviet Union are fighting in Syria and Iraq at the moment, and there is a concern that they will go home, and therefore measures are being taken to enhance security. I think those would potentially be more robust in Russia than here. There are domestic approaches that differ, too.

Q34 Mike Gapes: Do the Russians regard Hezbollah as terrorists, given that they are allies of Assad? What is their attitude to Hamas?

Dr Avere: That is a good question. Moscow has actually entertained, if you like, and has actually talked to Hezbollah and Hamas in the past. I wouldn’t say I could give an authoritative answer, but I think they maybe see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as something separate; it has separate terms of reference to what is happening in Syria and elsewhere in the middle east. Certainly, Moscow wants to be seen to be brokering—it doesn’t have as much influence as America and some of the European countries.

Q35 Mike Gapes: But they are signed up to the Quartet principles, which includes things that Hamas has not accepted. Leaving that aside, on the point about tactics: terrorism is a tactic that is used by certain political movements, isn’t it? Given the consistent Russian position in Chechnya and elsewhere, presumably they are against agitators that use of violent means?

Dr Averde: They have said that, yes. What I think the Russians are also prepared to do in certain cases—including with Hamas and Hezbollah—is to try to find, if you like, elements that are not overtly jihadist, but are perhaps fighting for self-determination etc., and then to get some kind of inclusive political dialogue under way. I think the difference between Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra is—

Q36 Mike Gapes: I understand that difference. My question, specifically, is what do they define as terrorism and terrorist organisations?

Dr Monaghan: The international security conference was held in Moscow last week, at which all of the senior Russian military turned up as well as many Defence Ministers from around the world. It discussed two primary things. First, global terrorism, and second, colour revolutions. There was an interesting link made between those two. I think it is well worth the Committee's time to find some of the speeches that were made, which will be online. I am not necessarily sure they will be in English; Foreign Minister Lavrov's speech is certainly already translated into English.

I think those will guide you towards a clearer indication of some of the ambiguities that there are in some of these questions. It is interesting, from my point of view as a British researcher, to see how they link terrorism and colour revolution together. That is what they see happening in, for instance, Syria.

Chair: May we turn to sanctions on the economy?

Q37 Daniel Kawczynski: As I'm sure you know, last week in the French National Assembly a motion was put forward by Thierry Mariani—it was a non-binding resolution—urging the Government to lift economic sanctions and other retaliatory measures imposed on Russia by the European Union. Although it's a non-binding article in the French Parliament, former Prime Minister François Fillon welcomed the vote. There is a general consensus that it may put pressure on the Government ahead of the next revision of sanctions in July 2016. Bearing that in mind, do you think that we also ought to be calling for a recession of sanctions against Russia?

Dr Averde: It's been quite notable, and probably testament to the shock that the Ukraine crisis had in Europe—we are two and a half years later—that the sanctions line has held pretty well. Even in Germany—obviously, Germany has the greatest share of trade among EU member states with Russia—the business constituencies might grumble and might want to see an end to it, but they have more or less supported that kind of line. It has held pretty much throughout Europe. How long it can last without some kind of resolution of the Ukraine conflict is open to question.

The problem is less to do with appeasing Russia and more to do with what sanctions are doing to the Russian economy. As a colleague of mine has written, they are attempting to push the Russians into a more state-controlled, state-directed, dirigiste form of political economy. The Russians are looking at a mobilisation of national capacities, import substitution and greater state support to enterprises to make up for what sanctions are doing, and that is a problem, because it tends to separate the Russian political economy from the European political economy in a big way.

The EU idea of a constructive relationship with Moscow, which would create stability, security and prosperity in the shared neighbourhood and on the borders, has pretty much come to an end. That's not an argument for immediately getting rid of sanctions and appeasing. It is an argument for the EU—the western member states—and Russia sitting down and saying, “Look, what can we do here?” Ultimately—to come back to the fact that there seems to be nobody to talk to in Moscow—they eventually have to find somebody to talk to, and if the Russians are unwilling to talk, the only thing they can do is to prolong the sanctions.

Q38 Daniel Kawczynski: But of course it's not the politicians who suffer in all of this; it's our producers here in the United Kingdom. I can give you a lot of examples. We in Shropshire have taken many delegations to Russia in the past and built up very good relations selling cattle, meat and dairy products. All of that has been washed down the drain. As you know, the dairy farming industry is in crisis at the moment.

I want to ask you specifically whether we can compartmentalise this between the implementation of Minsk and the separate issue of Crimea. I have been to Crimea on a number of occasions, and I can tell you without any fear of contradiction that I don't think the Russians will ever give it up.

Dr Avere: I agree.

Q39 Daniel Kawczynski: The purpose of sanctions is to do something tangible. You are actually trying to achieve something tangible. The Russians are never going to give up Crimea, so what's the point of having sanctions?

Dr Avere: I take your point. I pretty much agree with that. Even if you disregard the nationalist narrative, the Russians have basically annexed Crimea, and there's nothing we can do about it. Perhaps there can be some kind of longer-term agreement on how Ukraine and Russia—I'm probably getting myself into hot water here—could revive some kind of approach to Crimea that would allow some kind of shared influence, but I can't see a way out of it. If Europe is going to link the end of sanctions exclusively to the Crimean situation, we're in for a long haul. I can't see any way out of that.

Daniel Kawczynski: I went to see Mr Lidington at the time of the Crimea crisis to forewarn about this issue, so I am extremely glad that you agree with me that the prospect of convincing the Russians to change their policy on Crimea is futile.

Chair: Given that I think you have made that point, I will allow Mr Gapes to make a point.

Q40 Mike Gapes: Isn't what you have just said confirmation that Russia has basically torn up the Helsinki agreements and believes in the forcible change to borders in Europe? If that is the position, what is the point of having agreements of any kind with Russia if Russia breaches them?

Dr Avere: The Russians have come out with legal or quasi-legal arguments but, fundamentally, they redrew the borders. They would refer back to Kosovo and Kosovo's independence—

Q41 Mike Gapes: But the UK did not accept the annexation by the Soviet Union of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. We still had embassies in exile in London. Why should we accept the annexation of Crimea or other parts of Ukrainian territory? It may take 50 or 100 years, but ultimately the Estonians, the Latvians and Lithuanians got their sovereignty.

Dr Averre: I am not suggesting for a moment we should accept it. What I am suggesting is that if you use this as a primary instrument to try to change Russian minds, for a long period—

Q42 Mike Gapes: I am sure that Russian minds won't be changed now, but there might be an economic collapse or a completely different regime in 50 years' time, and then the people can have self-determination rather than being taken over.

Dr Averre: That is what I was trying to say when I was saying we need to keep on talking about it and try to find some kind of shared approach—

Chair: May we move on? Interesting as this diversion is, let us—

Mike Gapes: There is not one view on this Committee; I think it is important that you don't get the impression—

Chair: We are meant to be taking evidence rather than giving our opinion.

Q43 Daniel Kawczynski: On the issue of sanctions—I have heard anecdotal evidence of certain polling by western organisations in Crimea at the time—is it your understanding that, although they did the referendum differently to the way we would have done it, the people of Crimea consider themselves to be part of Russia? Under normal and fair circumstances, with a referendum conducted as we would do it, is it your analysis that the people of Crimea would vote to remain part of Russia? Yes or no?

Dr Averre: I think there are problems there. There are a lot of minorities. You may well get a majority vote in a free and fair referendum, but that could be seen in the context of the immediate euphoria after the re-joining of Russia. Crimea is not in the greatest economic shape. Russia has to support it. Exactly what are the Russians going to do in the future? Can Russia continue to subsidise what will be yet another drain on the Russian economy?

There is a little bit of a similar situation—not annexation but a similar situation—with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia now has strategic treaties with these two regions, which tie Russia in to subsidising them. It is almost like a creeping annexation and making them part of Russia. Russia has responsibility for those regions now. The Russians cannot do that kind of thing indefinitely, particularly if, as Mr Gapes said, you have a situation where the economy really does begin to suffer, which there are signs of at the moment.

In four years' time, we might be having a different conversation. If the situation changed in Crimea, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as it may well do in the next two, three or four years, and Russia was prepared to come back and talk with Europe more constructively about the broader things that Andrew was talking about—the European security treaty, the Meseberg memorandum on conflict resolution and a whole host of other political, security and trade issues—we might in three or four years' time be looking at a different situation. I think it is in Russia's interests to begin to engage with Europe again.

Chair: Okay.

Dr Averre: I probably am against 90% of expert opinion—maybe even Andrew—but I think that in the next two or three years, it may well happen.

Q44 Chair: The title of our inquiry is the United Kingdom's relations with Russia; I suspect I will trespass on the patience of my colleagues if we continue to tap your enthusiasm. We could go on all night. The session has been absolutely fascinating in terms of setting out the background. I do want to turn our attention to British-Russian relations, but I can see you are itching to make a point, Dr Monaghan.

Dr Monaghan: Is it possible just to add a small footnote to this?

Chair: Yes, of course.

Dr Monaghan: We should be careful about assuming that there might be a self-determination referendum in Crimea. Not every Government is given to holding regular referendums, and it is very unlikely that the Russian leadership at the moment will decide to offer a referendum on that in Crimea.

Since you asked the question about sanctions, it is worth pointing out that, first, there is ample evidence to suggest they are being circumvented. Secondly, there is ample evidence, as Derek said, to suggest import substitution is taking place, which is weakening the impact of future potential sanctions and therefore perhaps tools for dealing with Russia. Thirdly, sanctions are viewed in Moscow as part of economic warfare. I am sure you are all aware that we are at economic war with Russia, and that is what Moscow thinks. Fourthly, it is worth bearing in mind what it is we want to achieve with the sanctions. Is it to reverse Russian policy in Ukraine? Is it to punish them for it? Is it to deter them from doing anything else? It is somewhat unclear to me.

Finally, it is worth planning for a post-sanctions era, because unity across Europe has been impressive and probably beyond many people's expectations, but, as you have indicated, it is also clear that there are plenty of people across Europe, not only in France but in other member states of the European Union, who are not happy with the sanctions regime. Even if not this year, maybe we will see something else next year, so it is worth starting to think about what a post-sanctions environment would be like, both for the European Union and for the UK nationally, because I think that is where we will be in a couple of years' time. Starting to think in those terms will begin to shift where we are going, which hopefully, Mr Chairman, leads us on to the point of UK-Russia relations. Thank you for your indulgence.

Q45 Yasmin Qureshi: With your leave, Chair, may I just ask a few quick questions on—

Chair: I am perfectly happy to be here most of the evening, because this session is fascinating, but we might not be quorate if we take too long.

Yasmin Qureshi: I promise not to take long. I am just seeking clarification. May I start by saying that I agree with virtually everything you have said? Like myself and some other members of the Committee—

Chair: We can express our opinions in the report we write.

Yasmin Qureshi: Yes, I know, and we will.

Chair: It is the opinions of the witnesses we are seeking.

Yasmin Qureshi: I have three very quick questions. First, the Chair asked a question about the fact—as I think you said—that the Russians do not share some of the norms that we want to develop. I think you were giving an explanation as to what happened. Are the ordinary people in Russia in sync with their Government’s policy on most of these issues, or is there a big variation between what the ruling classes think about how Russia approaches international affairs and what the ordinary people think? Are the two in sync, or is there a separation of opinions?

Dr Averre: Putin has pretty much broad support. Whenever there are elections, people say that the elections are not free and fair. Certainly, monopolisation of media and so on, if not outright gerrymandering, is a problem, but even if there were a completely free and fair election, I think Putin would have a pretty healthy majority, because he has been seen as delivering on the two key things that a Government has to deliver on: security and welfare. The emphasis is a little bit more on security at the moment. Even though welfare is taking a bit of a knock because of the low oil prices—which, by the way, are much more detrimental to the Russian economy than sanctions, but there is the twin impact of the low oil prices and sanctions—there is still a reasonable amount of support.

Some of that is perhaps artificially supported by the Government, in the sense that the Government without a doubt have a lot of influence over the media—there are virtually no independent newspapers, and television is just a drip feed of patriotic stuff—but still, particularly among lower socioeconomic groups and the older generation that can remember the Soviet past, this is a very stable period compared with the ’80s and 1990s. We were chatting about this before we came in. The thought might be that the younger generation might be more liberal and open, but that is not necessarily the case. The younger generation probably does understand more about the outside world and Europe, but there is still a strong patriotic feeling among them. They believe in Russia, and if the West continues to query the legitimacy of Putin, that is the wrong thing to do. Putin is a popular leader.

Q46 Yasmin Qureshi: From what you have said, it is not the case that our Foreign Office or senior politicians in the UK or the rest of the world do not know, it is just that they are not interested in knowing because they have their own policies that they want to pursue, so there is deliberate evading of and not recognising the information.

Chair: I think we are covering that later.

Q47 Yasmin Qureshi: Dr Monaghan talked of information being passed up but people at the top rejecting it.

Dr Monaghan: There is a strong degree of mirror-imaging. The British leadership and many others in Western Europe, and perhaps the United States as well, think, as I said, “We wouldn’t do that, so the Russians won’t do that.” The fact that they have come to the

decision with a very different rationale and understanding of the evidence means that we tend to get it wrong.

In response to your first point, there are three points I would make quite quickly. First, Putin tends to work very hard on acknowledging what the Russian population wants and on responding to the Russian population. A very good example is the direct line twice a year when he holds an afternoon session and people call in. Yes, we can say it is stage-managed, but things actually happen as a result. Even during the conversation, we had people being arrested and so on this year—things being fixed—implementation. He does focus on what the population wants.

Secondly, he tends to work in terms of specific concrete ideas, such as financial support, economic questions—that kind of thing. Whereas the opposition tends to work in terms of human rights and values, and that is not what gains a lot of traction.

Thirdly, Mr Putin is supported but he is also busy learning how to mobilise his own population in support of him. Ever since 2004-05, you have the Russian leadership learning how to put people on the streets. It is worth noting that the largest demonstrations since the collapse of the Soviet Union have been pro-Putin ones.

Finally, there is actually an election later this year, which is worth pointing out. There is a distinction between Mr Putin, who is popular, and the United Russia party, the main parliamentary party, which is substantially less popular. That is a point you could explore. If you push this and point to the gap between the leadership and the population, that would be understood in Russian terms as the British Parliament talking about the possibility of regime change in Russia. Please be aware of that. It is a perfectly reasonable question sitting in London, but the signal received in Moscow will be, “They are looking for a gap between the leadership and the population.” Beware of the translation of the signal.

Q48 Yasmin Qureshi: They’ve got paranoia. On the Litvinenko report, what has been the impact of the Litvinenko affair and the report on UK-Russia relations?

Dr Averre: I think Andrew would be the better one to talk about that at great length, but it did not do us any favours, put it that way. It took a long time for the final report to come out but, in particular, there were those last 18 little words in which the view of the writer of the report was that Putin probably knew about and approved the killing of Litvinenko. That is a serious thing. For a Government to execute foreign nationals effectively on the streets of a foreign country is something that we have to talk to them about. Inevitably, eventually, we will have to—

Q49 Chair: Do you agree with the coroner, Sir Robert Owen?

Dr Averre: I have a lot of questions about the whole Litvinenko affair, from a range of points of view: why did he meet these two characters twice, what were they talking about, what was the role of Berezovsky in all this? Berezovsky, who was completely discredited—

Q50 Chair: Do you think the coroner’s basic conclusion was correct?

Dr Averre: I am not 100% sure. The writer of the report was careful to say “probably”. I am not 100% sure that Putin actually sat down and signed a thing saying, “We

will eliminate Litvinenko.” The reason I say that is because I think that the FSB has become, almost, a law unto itself—a kind of semi-privatised party—and the security agencies are slightly out of control. Plenty of people will disagree with that.

Dr Monaghan: Really? The security services are out of control?

Dr Avere: Yes. I do not necessarily think that some of the things that go on, some of the score-settling that takes place, in the current and former FSB are all sanctioned by the leadership. I probably will be in a minority and I will let you, Andrew, completely trash my whole argument.

Dr Monaghan: No, not at all. It is worth remembering that this is a decade-old question now: he was murdered in 2006. So, all of the responses that you see now, don’t forget what took place in 2006-07—the ending of a partnership, in certain areas, that was quite successful. Intelligence and security, in particular, is a very good example where, once the murder took place and once there was this flawed co-operation—if one can call it that—and the contention between the two sides, actually the British response was forthright. Yes, one can criticise it from outside; yes, we can say that not enough was done; but there were attempts to address the relationship and it has never recovered since. The Litvinenko affair has been a repeating iceberg for the relationship: each time we have tried to resuscitate the relationship, it has hit the Litvinenko iceberg and sunk. The relationship has worked economically, but politically it has hardly got off the ground again since 2006-07. I would say that is a substantial effect, and the issue keeps coming back to affect policy and attempts to revitalise the relationship.

Q51 Yasmin Qureshi: But do you think that was because our Government responded appropriately and the Russians did not like that, or was it the case that we did not respond appropriately? Do you think what we did was appropriate and if not, could we have done things differently?

Dr Monaghan: Teams went to Russia to try and pursue the evidence, and other actions and policies were put into play. There were certain limitations to what could be done. The Russians were not going to extradite him and send him here, so the UK Government could have continued to demand that and that would still have been rejected. Subsequently there have been difficulties in establishing in public what has taken place. The Chair asked, but not all of the evidence was made public, so it is difficult to say whether one agrees with the coroner or not because we know that there was evidence taken in private. I have read the report and it all looks very convincing. It is a shame that the word “probably” was used, because that meant that it was politically chopped straightaway by the Russians. It was a substantial document; “‘Probably?’ What does this mean?” was the counter-attack. There are things that could have been done better in delivering the message, yes.

Dr Avere: As Andrew and I were saying beforehand, after that there were also cases when the then British ambassador and UK journalists were harassed in Moscow. Generally there has been a bit of a campaign against UK figures. I do not really know how far that has gone, but it has certainly left a very unpleasant taste in the mouth as far as UK-Russia relations are concerned.

Dr Monaghan: If I understand correctly, I think the harassment of then Ambassador Brenton—perhaps you will speak to him later, so I do not wish to overstate this—was due to him turning up to opposition meetings. That was a bit earlier but yes, a lot of this became bound up in the relationship: there was a spy scandal, there was concern about the British Council—pressure on the British Council—there was pressure on Ambassador Brenton, there were questions and disagreements over governance in Chechnya, and many such issues. In many ways, the murder of Litvinenko was part of a fairly substantial collapse in relations, from probably early 2006—give or take—all the way to the Russo-Georgian war.

Mr Hendrick: I was working with Margaret Beckett when that happened—she was Foreign Secretary then. From my own recollection, I certainly agree with Dr Monaghan's view on these matters, rather than Dr Avere's. What has struck me since then is how long it has taken for the Litvinenko report to finally come out. That is my first concern. It was a fairly opportune moment when the report came out; the timing was quite interesting as well. Would you comment on that?

Secondly, you mentioned harassment—I remember Stephen Kinnock being harassed when he was at the British Council. Rather than show any form of contrition or regret about it, let alone accepting any responsibility for it, the Russian state went in the opposite direction and went out of its way to try to cause problems.

Chair: What is your question?

Q52 Mr Hendrick: My question is: don't you feel that the Russian Government could have handled this differently? The cold situation we have had between us for the last 10 years would not then have been as bad as it is.

Dr Monaghan: I think both sides could probably have handled it differently, with the benefit of hindsight. I am not sure that it would necessarily be wise to have expected the Russians to have acted differently or more sympathetically; I should not assume that they will necessarily handle similar instances sympathetically in the future. It would be nice to be able to say that if both Governments were able to go back and redo it, some sort of deterioration in the relationship might have been avoided, but I reiterate that the pressure on the British Council and Ambassador Brenton and the spy scandal all happened together within a year or two, plus the disagreements over governance in Chechnya and many other things. Those are all part of the problem; it is not just Litvinenko. But we should not forget that that was the murder of a British citizen.

Q53 Chair: In how many countries are you aware that Russians have carried out—or appear to have carried out—

Dr Monaghan: Allegedly.

Chair: —allegedly carried out an operation similar to the Litvinenko exercise? Where have they eliminated their perceived opponents?

Dr Avere: I think there have been several cases in Europe.

Dr Monaghan: In the Gulf.

Dr Averre: It is not entirely certain where the Russian Government's actions begin. Some of them have been a result of Kadyrov, the Chechen President. It is a very murky area. Somebody has probably written something interesting about it; I am not really too sure.

Q54 Chair: How exceptional was Litvinenko? There have obviously been accusations that other opponents have copped it.

Dr Monaghan: There was the killing of Mr Yandarbiyev in the Gulf: people were arrested and imprisoned for that. I would also say Qatar, at a guess, but I am afraid I would have to look that up. Russian agents were arrested for the killing of Mr Yandarbiyev, but, as Derek says, there have also been killings in other European states such as Austria. This is all alleged, naturally, and subject to process of court. Also, these things are sometimes quite difficult to prove.

Q55 Mike Gapes: How many other times have any of these people been given immunity by being put on Putin's party's list and elected to the Duma?

Dr Monaghan: Please do pursue the case of Mr Yandarbiyev. I think you'll find it very informative, because my understanding is that the Russian leadership lobbied for the release of the two agents who were imprisoned and that—again, allegedly—they were decorated when they returned.

Q56 Mike Gapes: So Mr Lugovoy was put into the Duma. That is the point I am making.

Dr Averre: It is a kind of thumbing the nose, I think.

Q57 Mike Gapes: Exactly. Can I take you back to your earlier answers to the Chairman about the lack of understanding here of Russia's internal position? What is your assessment of the vulnerability of the Russian economy and the Russian state? Do you think your assessment would be shared by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

Dr Averre: I think it probably would. Some of the best political economists agree on this, including a former colleague of mine, Phil Hanson, who has written a series of Chatham House papers and other papers. I would recommend that you read a current colleague's papers as well—Richard Connolly and his Chatham House and one or two other papers. They seem to be united in the opinion that the Russian economy can continue for quite a long period—it will not completely implode—but that, as time goes on, the potential for modernisation and reinjecting dynamism into the economy is receding.

Q58 Mike Gapes: To be specific on this, given the fall in the gas and oil prices, in the revenue of the state and in the GDP, the abysmal public health and declining population, or at least low life expectancy, the young people trying to go, and all the elite putting their assets into properties in London and elsewhere, is this kind of economy going to have any future except as a producer of raw materials for China?

Dr Averre: I think that is something the Putin Government is well aware of, that structural reform is needed. They have liberal economists—the former Finance Minister, Alexei Kudrin, is apparently now putting together some kind of strategic economic plan, and he is well known as a liberal economist—but the problem is fundamentally political, and that is whether Putin and the people who really make the decisions are prepared to tinker with the

rentier system of political economy, which is beset by corruption and inefficiency. Are they prepared to do something really fundamental to change that? The signs to date are that they have talked about it a lot, and they have maybe tinkered around the edges, but that there is not really the will to take it on. There is potential for some kind of reform, but at the moment the current core governing elite is not prepared to go down that route.

Dr Monaghan: I would only partly agree, I am afraid, on this case. My first question would be, vulnerability to what? If I was Russian, I would ask, “What vulnerability?” and, “To whom?” You mentioned the fall in oil and gas prices. Well, yes, they have fallen certainly, but they are generally easing their way back up, and we do not know what the situation will be in 18 months. You mentioned the decline in population. Well, that is true, but that has stabilised in the last three to four years. It will decline again in the next decade or so, but behind the United States, Russia is the second highest immigration state in the world. Let us not forget that somewhere near 5 million ethnic Russians have migrated to Russia from Ukraine, so, actually, the population has stabilised.

I offer those statements as food for thought. No one is saying that the Russian economy is in rude health. Of course not. There is obsolescence throughout industry; there are serious problems; there is decrepit infrastructure; and so on and so forth. But do not bank necessarily on the economy just continuing in decline. That may be the case, but if the oil price goes back up, it will be refloated. What we see is that the Russian leadership understands the problems in the Russian state rather well. It may not see reforms in the same way as we do—that is, implementing liberal reform—but what we do see is emergency measures to improve efficiency, so firings even of quite senior people, because they have not been effective in their positions; attempts to manage waste management, because there are huge amounts of waste in the Russian economy—not even addressing corruption—to try and find extra money; and a little bit of sequestration, which is taking place in the military also.

At the moment, there is a serious effort to put the economy on to, effectively, a mobilisation footing, which is tantamount to providing serious support for the hydrocarbons sector, but also using the defence industry as a locomotive for growth. That is not the kind of reform that we could call capital R reform, but it is still a version of small r reform.

Q59 Mike Gapes: So that is the old Leninist model, the permanent war economy, is it?

Dr Monaghan: I would agree with that—it is not a Soviet economy, because it is not centralised in the same way and is different in many ways, but it uses the defence industry as a locomotive, which is stated policy; using, and keeping, the strategic heights, which is a stated policy; import subsidisation; and that kind of thing. This is a country that is moving to protect its economy and to be able to conduct an independent and stable policy.

Dr Averre: May I just add two little—

Chair: No, no. We have to try to get through this. I have given myself an artificial target of 7 o'clock, otherwise I am going to lose the patience of my colleagues.

Q60 Nadhim Zahawi: To pick up on your view of whether the UK has been right to take a relatively tough stance towards Russia: there was an interview with Philip Breedlove, the top

commander of US and allied forces in Europe, in which he talked about the intelligence being effectively a fixed commodity, and for a long time the tactical focus was on the Middle East, Iraq one and two, Afghanistan, and terrorism and counter-terrorism, and only really strategically on Russia vis-a-vis the nuclear issue. He talked about Russia moving from not accepting the hand of partnership towards a belligerent stance.

My question is, first, is the refocusing of intelligence assets beginning to deliver? The general still thinks there is a way to go, but that there has been a refocusing. Second, have we refocused our own intel assets well enough to begin to better understand and analyse what is happening, and what could happen, in Russia? Is the language of belligerence the right language, and are we right to take this relatively tough stance towards Russia?

Dr Averre: Was Breedlove talking specifically about US intelligence, or—

Q61 Nadhim Zahawi: He was talking as commander.

Dr Averre: He is the deputy commander of NATO.

Dr Monaghan: He is the SACEUR, not the deputy. Is the refocusing beginning to deliver? I am slightly sceptical, I must admit. From my position, there are certain boxes being ticked, but I do not see any great shift of resources dedicated to this question. Yes, it is taking place somewhat in verbal terms, but in terms of real financial resources or equipment resources, it is not. There is a certain danger also about refocusing. Having not paid attention for the last 25 years, we are now overreacting to a surprise, which I think makes us very open to confusion. People are now talking about only specific aspects of Russia.

On the language of belligerence and a tough stance, if you want to hear belligerent language from the Russians, please feel free to use belligerent language. The Russians won't step back and return to the sympathetic response that we mentioned earlier; tough language will be met with tough language. As we build towards Warsaw I think you will see plenty of that coming through. If NATO says they are going to enlarge the alliance, develop the rapid readiness action plan and so on and so forth, the Russians will reciprocate. They will remind us that Russia is a nuclear state, as they have done in the past.

For me the point is not a question of the language of belligerence and a tough stance, it is working out where it is we want to go with the Russians and then starting to implement a policy that will lead us to that. If we simply say the Russians aren't being very nice and we disagree with them, good luck, but that is not going to take us anywhere. It will leave us in an unprepared position for dealing with some of the challenges and disagreements that we undoubtedly have with the Russians, both at a European level and at a national level.

I doubt, and I do not see substantive evidence, that a refocusing is happening at a UK level, even though there are some good people being put into specific positions. I am not sure, as a result, that we are necessarily understanding Russia better, because we are reacting to it.

Q62 Chair: I see you nodding, Dr Averre. I will take that as assent.

Dr Averre: I suppose what Andrew was saying is that, despite all of the rhetoric following Ukraine, and to an extent over the Syria crisis, I do not really get the sense that the

US, the UK and maybe some of the big European powers actually yet have Russia at the top of the agenda again. I do not really get that sense. If you read the US national security strategy there is very little on Russia there. They are concerned about the Middle East and North Africa and they are obviously concerned about the Asia-Pacific, where there is the potential for a lot of instability.

From my point of view on the language of belligerence, it seems to me that probably the most baleful result of the Ukraine crisis has been this kind of information war. It is not just the grandstanding of politicians. It is becoming ingrained in exchanges in the United Nations and the OSCE over Ukraine, where you have the Americans on one side in the OSCE supporting Ukraine, and on the other side, Russia. It is simply mud-slinging all of the time, and it is really getting in the way.

Q63 Daniel Kawczynski: The United Kingdom is not part, obviously, of the Minsk talks. We are not part of the Normandy four, and yet people are telling us—I also believe this—that the United Kingdom is the most vocally critical of Russia and the most hostile with them. The Foreign Secretary was challenged on that by the MP for Birmingham, Edgbaston, who asked him, “Are you going to be talking to Mr Lavrov on the phone?” His answer was, “Well, there’s not much point because my conversations with Mr Lavrov are never very fruitful.” Do you think that our own Foreign Secretary and our own Prime Minister ought to be doing more to engage with the Russian Government, such as the Germans are doing?

Dr Averre: I think we have lost something over the last 10 or 15 years. It is important for Britain—in the same way as it is for Germany, France and the other major European nations—to act with Russia through international institutions such as the EU. Still, there is no real substitute for the close political bilateral relationships that can lead sometimes to, if not a complete meeting of minds—that is the way politics and diplomacy is being done.

We have already spoken about Litvinenko and various other things. There were problems with UK trade—BP and so on—in Russia, but probably nothing that other countries have not experienced to an extent. Basically, we have lost sight of Russia, and Russia has been way down the policy agenda for Britain over the last 15 or 20 years. Quite how we recover that is a very difficult question. You need a senior member of the diplomatic corps to be in Russia as someone who really understands the country—not that I am saying the previous diplomats did not. We need to continue to put that kind of effort in.

Dr Monaghan: To do more to engage with the Russians—I am not sure that the comparison with the Germans is necessarily right, because the Germans had a much, much larger relationship with the Russians than we did, even quite recently, until the sanctions. German business and dealing in Russia was very substantial. Before we start to engage with the Russians for the sake of engaging with them, we have to work out what we want from the Russians and what the Russians might want from us. There is no point going to Moscow or trying to contact the Russians saying, “We want this from you,” because the Russians will say, “Well, we want this back.”

Q64 Chair: Let me now ask the final question. How do the Russian policy makers perceive Britain and our policies?

Dr Averre: I have read some stuff by the British experts at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, including a senior figure, Alexey Gromyko, who has had a lot to do with the NATO Science for Peace and Security committee. They seem to see the UK—not entirely fairly, I think, but there is something in it—as more or less an extension of the US. The UK and US positions are very close. Despite everything, the US attitude towards Russia is more negative than any of the European countries. From that point of view, we are seen as a country a little bit like the US, which is always prone to, if not a bellicose rhetoric towards Russia, then a very critical attitude—for reasons we have explored over the last hour or so. At the moment, Britain is not seen as a likely serious primary partner for Russia. That is the feeling I get.

Dr Monaghan: I think we are seen, as Derek said, in the Russian Federation as part of the Anglo-Saxon world and therefore part of a world that is in strategic decline. At the same time, there are certain surprises. For instance, when the UK cut back its military forces, as it did after SDSR 2010, there was some astonishment—why would we do that? Again, it is worth emphasising that the Russians often point to the British when it comes to questions of regime change, the use of soft power and support for colour revolutions. That is one element.

There is a certain ambiguity to be stated, returning in some senses to your question. On the one hand, there is the state and official policy, which is outlined in those terms, but generally, in the population, there is an ambiguity. There is quite a lot of sympathy for British culture, British literature and the British way of doing things at a popular or societal level. That does not mean they want to be like us. It does not necessarily mean that they want to do what we want them to do. It just means there are certain affinities—perhaps cultural affinities, personal affinities and that kind of thing, as well as some business affinities; Derek mentioned BP and Rosneft. Certain things happen beyond the state relationship, but the state relationship is a cautious one as viewed from Moscow—cautious and not very favourable.

Chair: Dr Averre and Dr Monaghan, that has been a really excellent session. Thank you so much for coming.