

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [Russia: Implications for UK defence and security](#), HC 107

Tuesday 24 May 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 24 May 2016

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Ministry of Defence \(RUS0006\)](#)

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dr Julian Lewis (Chairman), Richard Benyon, Douglas Chapman, Mr James Gray, Jim Shannon, Ruth Smeeth

Questions Q163-247

Witnesses: **Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP**, Secretary of State for Defence, **Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach GBE, KCB, ADC, DL**, Chief of the Defence Staff Designate, and **Peter Watkins CBE**, Director General Security Policy, Ministry of Defence, gave evidence.

Chair: Welcome to this session on our study of Russia and the implications for UK defence and security. A warm welcome to our three panel members: the Secretary of State; the new Chief of Defence Staff; and Peter Watkins, the Ministry of Defence's head of strategy. We would like to ask James Gray to start by talking about Russian military capability.

Q163 Mr Gray: Not talking about it, Chair—asking questions about it; that is the important thing. Congratulations to the CDS designate. When do you drop the “designate”?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: In July.

Q164 Mr Gray: We are, obviously, extraordinarily concerned about what Russia might or might not do next. Of course, it might well be that it does nothing next; that is what we all hope will occur, and no doubt the NATO summit in Warsaw will be considering how to make sure that Russia does do nothing next. However, leaving that hope to one side, to what degree would you accept that Russian armed forces are smaller in number than NATO but significantly more able to deploy in large numbers at short notice on their eastern flank? In other words, what is the threat from Russia to the east of the federation?

Michael Fallon: Let me start off; I think the Vice-Chief will want to add to this. Clearly, Russia has invested recently in its armed forces and has modernised its armed forces. To that extent, the threat from Russia has increased. That is why we have to take account of that in looking at our own capabilities and capacities. The decisions at the Warsaw¹

Summit on a Readiness Action Plan and the formation of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, which begins this year, are very clear evidence of how the NATO Alliance is going to face up to any kind of threat in the future.

You asked a very specific question about how much we could deploy and how quickly we could deploy it on the eastern flank. The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force itself is a multinational brigade of some 5,000 troops in five manoeuvre battalions. It will be supplemented by two more brigades for rapid reinforcement in a major crisis and, once activated, that force will be ready to move immediately following the very first warnings and indications of potential threats.

By “immediately”, I mean that the first elements will be able to deploy within hours and establish that crucial initial presence, with the full force following on, in order to do its best to deter the build-up of any tension and threat on the eastern flank. On capability, perhaps you will allow the Vice-Chief² to say a little more.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: What you say is true, Mr Gray. It is true that Russia has made no secret of modernising her forces. It is true that she has continued to both upgrade existing systems and develop new systems—particularly to upgrade, perhaps—and those systems encompass a wide range of capabilities. All that is true. That is why the measured response by NATO, through the Readiness Action Plan the Secretary of State spoke to, includes not just the land element that the Secretary of State described but the maritime forces, land forces and air forces; where special forces might be appropriate, it would include those too.

NATO, of course, has a Response Force in addition to the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, and that is regularly exercised. Regular training and exercises are vital to the Alliance in order to provide a sense of reassurance across the Alliance and to provide the obvious presence that the Secretary of State has described.

Finally, we of course continue to monitor Russian capabilities, and many of those capabilities will feature and be factored into our thinking as we develop Future Force 2025 for the United Kingdom.

Mr Gray: That is all very reassuring.

Michael Fallon: Mr Chairman, may I almost immediately correct the record? I think I referred to the Warsaw summit taking the decisions on the VJTF, but I meant the Wales summit. It was the wrong “w”; I do apologise.

Q165 Mr Gray: We will come back to talk about the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force in a moment, but our information is that Russia has of the order of 60 brigades, or their equivalent, in immediate readiness for deployment to the eastern flank—roughly six to eight hours’ readiness. Russia could do something in, for example, the Baltic states, Gotland—that is my favourite place to worry about; I am very worried about Gotland—or even Svalbard, at a moment’s notice, and NATO could do absolutely nothing about it at all. It would take weeks and weeks of thought and deployment before anything occurred. Is that not the reality?

¹ Should read Wales Summit, as noted in the evidence at the end of question 164.

² Refers to CDS designate, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: We are aware that there are various scenarios and various organisations that conduct war games. That is precisely why NATO has modernised its command and control. It has a brand new, state-of-the-art command and control system in the Supreme Allied Headquarters in Mons in Belgium, and that is fit for purpose. That is precisely why NATO is modernising its indications and warning system—so that it can understand what is happening and react to it—and that is precisely why NATO is continuing to add to its joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, which I suspect will be a feature of future discussions within the Alliance.

Q166 Mr Gray: All right. I accept that, but let me ask you about one little exemplar to see what sort of reaction we would get from the person who will by then be the Chief of the Defence Staff—and, indeed, the reaction we would get from the Secretary of State.

I am Mr Putin—I am not, I hasten to reassure you. I have realised that things are not going terribly well in Ukraine, Syria and Crimea. That has all been done. I am looking around for something else to do. I have put two airborne brigades into my two ready-prepared military bases on Svalbard. There are two there already. What does NATO do about that? Barentsburg and—the two Russian bases on Svalbard.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: Those are on Russian territory.

Q167 Mr Gray: No, they are not; they are on Norwegian territory.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: In which case, that would trigger Article 5.

Q168 Mr Gray: Ah—that is why I asked the question. Svalbard, of course, is not owned by Norway; it comes under the Svalbard treaty of 1926. It is an international territory, which is demilitarised. The Norwegian Government run it, but they do not own it.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: But this is speculation.

Q169 Mr Gray: You were saying that you were ready for what Russia might do next and I am giving you a little scenario. What do you think NATO would do in the extremely unlikely event that Russia were to put in two airborne brigades into Svalbard? There are two huge, brigade-sized bases where they could put in troops tomorrow.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: Well, my understanding is that Svalbard is forbidden for military activity.

Mr Gray: That is correct.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: And that is an international norm that has been observed since the 1925 treaty. I do not think I have come prepared today to speculate about individual scenarios.

Q170 Mr Gray: Okay. I am being naughty. Forgive me; that was rather off-side. All right, let us say just the three Baltic states. I had lunch with the Russian ambassador this week who said that there are 250,000 Russian speakers with no passports in Latvia. Let us imagine that Russia does something in Latvia. What on earth would NATO do about it?

Michael Fallon: Let us be very clear: the Baltic states are members of the Alliance. They are covered and entitled to the Article 5 commitments in the NATO treaty and those are commitments that Russia respects. We have seen a pattern of behaviour involving sudden

and proactive military action, but an attack on a member of the Alliance, of course, would immediately trigger a response.

Before it gets to that stage, we are taking measures to ensure that the Baltic states are properly protected. We already have our own Typhoons in the Baltic, carrying out an air policing mission this year, as in previous years, from May through to August, and we are enhancing our presence on the eastern flank of NATO through the deployments we have already mentioned: the preparation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force—

Q171 Mr Gray: On the eastern flank or the western flank?

Michael Fallon: On the eastern flank of NATO. We have the force integration units in each of the Baltic states as well as in Bulgaria, Romania and Poland, and you will know that in the run-up to the Warsaw Summit we are considering Enhanced Forward Presence of stationing additional troops on the eastern flank to ensure that that flank is properly protected.

Q172 Mr Gray: Yes, but the Zapad 13 exercise, which might well have been repeated more recently and might be in the future, involved tens of thousands of Russian troops and included tactical nuclear weapons within 100 miles of the border of Latvia. If that were to occur—something might be wrong, or it might be an accident—it would take NATO weeks to counter Russia. Russia would be in the Baltic Sea. Kaliningrad is the most armoured oblast in the world. They would have taken over the Baltic states while the lawyers were still sitting in NATO, wondering what to do next.

Michael Fallon: I absolutely do not accept that. First of all, NATO is already present on the eastern flank. We conduct exercises there and I think some 150 NATO and allied exercises are scheduled for this year. We in Britain will have around 4,000 service personnel on these exercises this year. And since the Wales summit we have been preparing our readiness action plan to ensure that we can get the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force deployed as rapidly as possible. We have looked precisely at the decision making and the ability to move across the internal borders of NATO to move forces quickly and ensure that the political decision-making process that you referred to is as rapid as the military deployment that we want.

Q173 Mr Gray: Okay. An Article 5 one is probably quite easy. I think you are probably right: it would not be difficult, because NATO and the world would be outraged and urgent action would be taken. But what about some form of Ukraine-type hybrid action? What if Mr Putin chooses to freeze the Baltic states' bank accounts, as he has done before, to take over the radio stations and take a couple of men in green uniforms in a wood somewhere? Is that an Article 5 moment?

Michael Fallon: I think it is important for NATO not to try to define Article 5 too closely or to start listing a whole series of categories or thresholds in Article 5. That might make it easier for our adversaries to move up to the level just below the triggering of Article 5 itself. But the Secretary General has already made it clear that a cyber attack, for example, would be considered a breach of Article 5.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: And we do test command and control through a series of sophisticated exercises—crisis management exercises—within NATO and so

those exercises within the Alliance continue to develop into meaningful tests of command and control.

Peter Watkins: If I may add to that, I think that your questions go to the heart of deterrence in that NATO has a strong deterrent posture, and it has strong armed forces. The Russians know that if they were to attack any NATO country, they could potentially trigger a response encompassing the whole of the Alliance. That is why the Russians say that they respect NATO and that it would be foolish to attack NATO.

Q174 Mr Gray: Right. Finally on the hybrid side of things—my Chairman tells me that I can have only one more go.

All right, the Secretary General has said that if there is a cyber-attack on the Baltics, that would constitute an Article 5 moment. But what if a cyber-attack occurs and you do not quite know who it comes from? Could it be from China? Could it be from Russia? Could it be that the computers have all broken down? Could it be that the men in green suits are in fact forerunners carrying out legitimate tasks? Could it be a breakdown in the TV things because of an internal dispute with the unions? What happens if you can't quite tell where the hybrid attack is coming from, which is extremely likely?

Michael Fallon: Well, as you know, we are doing an awful lot of work on cyber. As a result of the SDSR, we are investing some £2 billion on cyber here to improve our understanding of cyber, and our defensive capabilities to resist it. The Vice Chief may want to add something on the nature of a cyber-attack.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: NATO is taking cyber seriously, and is thinking about cyber within a full range of responses. The Secretary of State has indicated that there is an uncertainty around Article 5 that puts doubt in the mind of those who wish us harm. We continue to work with our allies and partners on how to counter the scenarios that you postulate. That is precisely why—in addition to the Government's investment—we are bringing it to life with entities such as the National Cyber Security Centre here, which will not just be a stand-alone thing for the UK. We will talk to our friends and allies. We are also investing in military capability through people as well as civilian capabilities to make sure that we understand these risks and threats.

Q175 Chair: Before I bring in Jim Shannon, I just have a couple of points. On the Very High Readiness Task Force and how it would operate in practice, can you give us an idea of how many troops it would actually be able to deploy within 48 hours, and the reach to which we could extend that deployment in that timescale? When will the taskforce be operational?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: The taskforce is in the process of becoming operational this year under Spanish leadership. The UK will take the leadership next year. As the Secretary of State suggested, there would be around 5,000 troops—five manoeuvre battalions—supported by maritime forces and air forces where appropriate and enabled by NATO force integration units. The initial response—the NATO language is “within hours”. We are not going to go into the specific readiness criteria here because they are—obviously—discreet. Those have been tested by much more meaningful exercises; I have made that point before and apologise for the repetition.

Q176 Chair: In relation to James's questions about the Baltics and an incursion and so forth, you did refer to triggering Article 5 and you said something about not wanting Article 5 to be too specific.

You made the point about uncertainty being of value. Surely we want a considerable degree of certainty, so that where there is an infraction of the sovereignty of any NATO member state, the potential aggressor need be in no doubt that Article 5 will trigger a response by all. Presumably, we are still looking at the sort of situation that we used to face in the cold war years, in which territory might be lost at first but the person who was seizing that territory would have to face the prospect of conflict with all NATO members.

Michael Fallon: Let me first of all repeat that I really do not agree that we should be revising Article 5. A revision of Article 5 would be counterproductive. I think it is more likely to result in activity being deliberately targeted just below the new threshold that you have set. I would caution the Committee against promoting that. The definition of specific thresholds within Article 5 would actually weaken the article rather than strengthen it.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: I agree.

Mr Gray: Can I take you back to the point?

Chair: Briefly, James.

Q177 Mr Gray: That argument is, of course, correct. The counter-argument, however, is that if you don't define Article 5 particularly, it will take lawyers and others a significant time to come to the conclusion as to whether or not it applies. There are two sides to that particular sword, aren't there?

Michael Fallon: Well, I prefer the side you said was correct. I think that is the way to go. It will not be a matter for lawyers; in the end, it will be a matter for the Governments of the NATO Alliance to decide whether Article 5 has been breached or not.

Peter Watkins: If I can add to that, as you said, Mr Chairman, there is certainty about the response. The issue on which we maintain a correct degree of ambiguity is the exact circumstances, so we cannot be gamed, as the Secretary of State said, and the precise nature of the response, which clearly must be appropriate to whatever has happened. But the language is quite clear: it talks about an armed attack. I think that between the countries concerned, we can work out what an armed attack constitutes pretty quickly.

Q178 Chair: And the certainty of response is that it is treated as an attack on all NATO members, although the specifics of the response will depend on the circumstances. Is that what you are saying to us?

Michael Fallon: That is what the article says. Once an armed attack is deemed to have taken place, it is then up to each of the members of the Alliance to assist by taking such action as each state deems necessary.

Q179 Chair: But it is considered to have been an attack on all the members?

Michael Fallon: Absolutely.

Q180 Jim Shannon: Following the Chairman's and James's theme and in relation to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, NATO takes at least a week to react to anything that takes

place. Politically, they have to make a decision. We need the capacity to respond, the capability to respond and the desire politically and physically to respond. Logistically, it takes almost five or six days to lift and shift the organisation. What has been done to shorten our response time, both from a political point of view and, more importantly, physically, to get the troops on the ground at the time that we need them?

Michael Fallon: Well, from the military side—the Vice-Chief may want to add to this—NATO has always had some kind of rapid response corps. The decision taken in Wales was to develop this Very High Readiness Joint Task Force; a taskforce that is ready to move within hours and to deploy significant numbers of troops immediately to an area of tension. The military side has certainly speeded up and is much faster to deploy than previously. What we have to ensure is that the political decision making is as rapid. We have been testing that through a series of exercises to make sure that when the taskforce moves, for example, as I said earlier, all the necessary permissions fall into place when it has to cross internal borders and has to liaise with other forces as it heads to its designated area. The Vice-Chief may want to add to that.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: Precisely as your question implies, we have paid deep attention to logistics in order to make sure that what the Secretary of State and the leadership want can happen. That is a lot of detail. The key word is interoperability, so that we can support each other across the Alliance and we can manoeuvre forces quickly. We can have all the access, basing, over-flight, host nation support arrangements in place. I spoke at a conference on this very subject in London recently. That work has gone on apace to support the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force concept.

Q181 Douglas Chapman: Secretary of State, we have been told about the Russian's nuclear strategy of escalating to de-escalate in certain circumstances. How likely is Russia to use a nuclear arsenal in this way and what would be the UK and NATO response to such a tactical use of nuclear weapons?

Michael Fallon: Well, first of all, any use of nuclear weapons by an adversary would fundamentally alter the nature of any conflict. We have been clear that we would only consider the use of our nuclear weapons in the most extreme circumstances of self-defence, and that includes the defence of our NATO allies. But it is important that we remain deliberately ambiguous about precisely when and how and at what scale we would contemplate the use of nuclear weapons in order not to simplify the calculations of any potential aggressor. Peter, do you want to add to that?

Peter Watkins: I think you are right to draw attention to a number of statements made by Russian commentators. The language around nuclear weapons in their military doctrine and published national security strategy is relatively limited, but there have been a number of statements that suggest they would use nuclear weapons or contemplate the use of nuclear weapons in circumstances that we certainly wouldn't. They will be as aware as we are, as the Secretary of State has just said, of the potential consequences of that. Whatever some of the rhetoric, I don't think they would contemplate the use of nuclear weapons at all lightly.

Q182 Douglas Chapman: It would seem that you are making a case not to have a deterrent at all. You are saying that in these circumstances it would be doubtful that you would actually use them or respond to the use of tactical nuclear weapons, yet we are spending a huge amount of money on Trident submarines and so on. What you are saying is that you cannot

foresee at the moment an end game where you would actually bring these nuclear weapons into use. Is that the true position?

Michael Fallon: Absolutely not.

Q183 Douglas Chapman: Obviously, we have Article 5. If a NATO nation is attacked by Russia's tactical nuclear weapons, you are saying there may not be a response that would come from the UK or NATO in these circumstances.

Michael Fallon: No, I've said that we are deliberately ambiguous about precisely the circumstances in which we would respond in order to make sure our adversaries keep guessing. That, I think, is an illustration of how our nuclear deterrent is used; how it works. It is used every single day and every single night. It is there precisely to make sure that our adversaries have to weigh in the balance very carefully what our response might be.

Q184 Douglas Chapman: In terms of more conventional forces, is there not an argument to invest more heavily in preparing conventional forces, rather than a nuclear force, to meet the challenge that Russia might pose? Are we at a stage where the UK is prepared to start to change the language around our relationship with Russia? You have mentioned a couple of times that you still see Russia as a threat; you have used the word "threat" a lot, and that was the Government's starting point. We have seen in other parts of the discussion in Russia, in Moscow and so on, that that is an unhelpful place to start from. How can we start to change that language, so that we can make sure we have a better relationship with Russia? That needs to be not just within the UK, but across NATO as well.

Michael Fallon: Okay. There are two points there. First, we need to continue to invest in our conventional defences as well as our nuclear. The SDSR that you have been studying bears that out. It does now commit us to bigger and stronger defence: more planes, more ships, more troops held at readiness, better equipment for our special forces and much more to be spent on counter-terrorism. You will have noticed, Mr Chairman, that the defence budget increased for the first time in six years. It is going up 3% this year, and it will go up every year of this Parliament, so we are spending more on the conventional side.

So far as the relationship with Russia is concerned—I know the Committee has recently visited Russia—let me be clear that, long term, of course we want a better relationship with Russia and a better relationship between the British and Russian peoples. We continue to seek constructive engagement with Russia. We worked with them on the nuclear deal with Iran, and we are working with them today on seeking a political settlement in Syria. Most recently, we have been engaging with Russia on the future security and stability of Libya. We want a more constructive relationship with them.

Equally, we need to continue to deter any threats that come from Russia, and we need to protect our people. That means that we have to play our part in the Alliance. We play a leadership role in the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force that we have been talking about. We contribute where we are specifically asked to do so, such as with the Typhoon jets that we have sent to the Baltic and the enhanced forward presence that we are considering in the run-up to Warsaw. So we need to do both. We need to have a constructive relationship with Russia where we can and where we have interests in common, and we need to keep our lines of engagement open to Russia, but we also have to

be very clear and consistent. Above all, we have to be united. The one thing that Russia would certainly welcome is any sign of disunity, either in the Alliance or, indeed, in the European Union.

Q185 Chair: I think we will resist the temptation to explore the European Union and the prospect of a third world war resulting from British exit and concentrate on the task in hand, which is our defence policy in relation to Russia. We are going to leave the nuclear topic and come back to Jim Shannon for a comparison of the modernisation of forces and respective strengths in that field. Before we do so, given what you have just said and the strong support that you have expressed for the role of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent, can you confirm whether the much delayed debate and vote on the question of the future of the British nuclear deterrent and the successor submarines are definitely going to happen this year, and preferably sooner rather than later?

Michael Fallon: Yes, I can.

Q186 Chair: And does that mean that as soon as the great Brexit debate is concluded, we should be limbering up to hold this debate?

Michael Fallon: Yes. I hope that a debate will be scheduled: it is important that the new Parliament does endorse the commitment set out in the SDSR in November and continues to back the principle of the nuclear deterrent and the four boats that are necessary to sustain it, as all previous Parliaments have done.

Q187 Chair: So we will not be having this discussion about the holding of a debate by January next year, as it will have taken place?

Michael Fallon: I very much hope so.

Chair: Thank you.

Q188 Jim Shannon: I believe that Ukraine showed that Russia was able to deploy on a significant scale and to significant effect, and many of us feel this. They seem to have a greater number of weapons and resources to call upon. Russia's motto seems to be that quantity has a quality all its own. They quite clearly seem to adhere to that. I am keen to get the panel's thoughts on where we in the UK are strong and where we are weak in relation to military capacity, and where Russia is strong and where it is weak. There are a couple of supplementary questions to that as well.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: Direct comparisons of numbers are sometimes misleading. Of course, many of them are in the public domain, published by various well-respected research institutes. But the fact is that modernisation is important. The campaign in Ukraine certainly indicated a high use of weaponry, if not necessarily always with precision. The first point to lodge is that different types of weapons employed accurately have a different type of effect, so trying to compare numbers is often not necessarily the most effective way of comparing how to achieve effects on the battlefield.

Of course, you have seen the use of Russian military power in recent conflict, and you have seen the use of Western military power in recent conflict. You can see how the use of precision by the West—by NATO—is real, and you can also see how casualties have been caused when that precision is not applied. We stand by that principle of precision. Russia invests in a traditional range of weapons, which the think-tanks and other organisations

publish every year, and it upgrades them—so do we. Russia also invests a lot in land warfare. On the second part of your question, NATO has particular strengths in maritime, in air and in special forces. All those are arguments, if you stick to numbers, but in terms of quality, it is really about how you organise yourself as a military force, how you command and control and how you employ your forces.

Again, NATO continues to modernise the way it exercises and trains. NATO continues to put great store in interoperability, regardless of flag of ownership, and that is something we work on, particularly in the maritime and air environment, to give us strength through combination. As Mr Watkins said earlier, the combination of NATO's capabilities still gives any potential opponent pause to think.

Q189 Jim Shannon: Some of us feel that the weakness for NATO is in air defence. Russia has a strength in air defence and in the logistics of getting supplies from the rear to the frontline quicker than we can. NATO is stronger on the battlefield in terms of medical care. We have some strengths, but what are we doing to address our weaknesses? What are we doing to address the issues of air defence and the logistics of movements from the rear to the front? Many in this Committee, and perhaps outside of this Committee, feel that those are our weaknesses.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: Those qualitative issues, I agree, are real. Russia has invested heavily in air defence systems over decades. That is not new; it is not a secret. We would respond with electronic means, and we continue to re-emphasise electronic warfare, precisely for that reason. As I said earlier, we have already re-emphasised through the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force initiative the importance we place on logistics, and making that manoeuvre force sustainable is a very high priority for us in the Alliance, both now and in the future.

Q190 Jim Shannon: Are we dependent upon the US and our other allies in NATO for electronic defence, or do we have a good capacity ourselves within the United Kingdom?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: It is a blend of capacities, and we continue to work with our allies on electronic warfare exercises, as we do with other exercises, to ensure that capabilities add value to the whole Alliance, which is the NATO strength.

Q191 Jim Shannon: Can I ask a quick supplementary? Air Chief Marshal, you did not respond or were maybe unable to respond to the point in relation to the logistics of getting supplies from the rear to the frontline, which is something we are falling down on. What has been done to address that issue?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: We continue to invest in new methods of sustainment. We continue to invest in all forms of communication—not just air lines of communication, which we demonstrate our efficiency in on a daily basis, but also ground lines of communication. The Secretary of State mentioned that we are making sure host nation agreements are in place and are exercised. Our attachés make frequent use of them, so that we can move weapons, ammunition, people and equipment; we can pool fuel; and we can interoperate common fuel types. All the great strengths of NATO, historically, are around standardisation, and we continue to build on that strength.

Q192 Ruth Smeeth: Good morning. I am happy to have a conversation about Europe and how important defence is, much to the objection of the Chair, but for the purposes of this

conversation, I am more interested in NATO's abandonment of the comprehensive approach, which was designed to respond to hybrid warfare, in 2012. Following on from Jim, in hindsight, was that a mistake? Specifically, given that Ukraine seemingly took us by surprise, why did we not learn from Russia's actions in Georgia and Crimea?

Michael Fallon: I hope we will come back to Europe, because one of the principal weapons the West has for the aggression we have seen in Ukraine is, of course, the sanctions that are due to be rolled over at the end of July. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind just how critical that decision, and the British leadership involved in the European Union to ensure that it happens, is. We may come back on that.

Q193 Chair: Can I just say, Secretary of State, that I am more than willing to add that dimension to our discussions, providing we all exercise enough discipline to allow enough time to do so after we have followed through our set tasks concerning the military capability of Russia? Hopefully, we will do it.

Michael Fallon: I understand that, Chairman. I mention it simply because we were asked about Ukraine, and I notice that you have taken evidence on it. It is an important part of our response on Ukraine. To that extent, I hoped you would allow us to respond.

Peter Watkins: I am mystified by your suggestion that NATO has abandoned the concept of comprehensive approach. It may have changed its terminology, but the idea of a comprehensive approach is that one seeks to use all levers of state power to address conflicts and to try to deter and manage the aftermath of conflicts.

Q194 Ruth Smeeth: So spin, rather than reality, is what you are telling me.

Peter Watkins: Well, if somebody has said that NATO has abandoned the comprehensive approach, that would be spin. But I could mention a whole raft of things that NATO is doing at the moment to address, in particular, the concern about hybrid warfare. It is seeking to strengthen the resilience of its states and to strengthen their cyber-security. There is a NATO centre of excellence, for example, around Strat Comms³, which is seeking to deal with the propaganda and the soft end of hybrid. There is also, without incurring the Chair's wrath, a lot that NATO is doing together with the European Union.

Ruth Smeeth: You won't get my wrath for that.

Peter Watkins: The European Union does take—and, as far as I know, has not abandoned—the concept of a comprehensive approach with all the levers that it can use to deal with hybrid threats, such as reinforcing energy security, cyber-resilience and so on. Indeed, Ms Mogherini published a paper on this back in April.

Q195 Ruth Smeeth: Okay. Specifically, in terms of what Russia's current approach, why did we miss what happened in Ukraine?

Peter Watkins: I'm not sure that we did entirely miss it. There was a sequence of events that we all recall. I remember that we have given evidence previously on hybrid warfare. Hybrid warfare is not terribly new. Many of the techniques and so on have been around for a long time. It covers a broad range of activities from propaganda at one end, through corruption, extortion, subversion and then conventional military assault at the other end.

³ Strategic Communications

Crimea was almost a perfect laboratory for the hybrid approach, which is why it seemed to work rather well and quite quickly. Interestingly, when a similar approach was tried in Eastern Ukraine, it turned out to be much more difficult. In terms of understanding, we have done a lot of work on this over the past two years. We have done a lot of work to understand hybrid warfare, where it can be most effective or not—some circumstances are more propitious to it than others—and how we can deter and counter it.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: And you could argue that, in the military sense, the UK has led the way on that thinking. To answer many of the questions posed by the Committee, one element is that the conceptual component of warfare remains very important. The UK, with its Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, which strongly supports the Alliance and the European Union in that thinking, has led the way in thinking through the consequences of cyber, hybrid and all those other new phrases. But there is very little that is new in warfare itself.

Q196 Chair: It is just a little bit surprising that when we visited NATO, we were actually told that NATO had not anticipated what happened in Ukraine and Crimea. Are you suggesting that, in fact, it came as less of a surprise than it seems to have done at NATO headquarters?

Peter Watkins: Well, it was a surprise. As we said at the time, it was an egregious breach of international law. It was the first time that anything like that had happened since 1945. In that sense, what happened on about 1 or 2 March 2014 was a surprise. How it developed afterwards was, perhaps, slightly less so.

Q197 Chair: Well, in that case, we have to acknowledge—do we not?—that Russia has certainly developed a capability in non-kinetic or ambiguous warfare techniques that we really have not done anything to match. It is not yet clear that we have a strategy adequate to deal with that. At the same time, Russia is dramatically modernising its armed forces. I hear what you said about the 2%, Secretary of State, and we know the extent to which some of that new money is a reallocation of categories that we used not to count towards the 2%. Nevertheless, is it not a fact that, looking back to the period when we last faced a serious confrontation with Russia, we were not spending 2% of GDP on defence? We were spending about 4.8%. No one is suggesting we go back to those levels, but are you satisfied that we are keeping pace with the changing potential threat in all these different dimensions?

Michael Fallon: Well, I think the Wales Summit really marked a watershed in arresting the decline of defence spending right across Europe. It is notable since that not only have we committed to the 2% but other countries are increasing their budgets now, reversing that historic decline. Britain is leading the way on that, as I said, with the real-terms increase that you see in our budget this year. But perhaps Mr Watkins wants to come back to the earlier point.

Peter Watkins: On hybrid warfare or ambiguous warfare, sometimes referred to as the Gerasimov doctrine, and so on, clearly it contains a number of elements that, frankly, we would not want to emulate: action that is basically illegal under international law, other activities such as the use of troll factories for propaganda and all the rest of it.

Q198 Chair: But we need strategies to cope with it.

Peter Watkins: Absolutely. What we have sought to do is to develop an approach that copes with it, to use your word, without simply trying to emulate it, because that would be wrong. In the SDSR, we have a short section on deterrence—I think it is the first section there has been on deterrence for some time. It sets out that we are taking what we call a full-spectrum approach to deterring threats, using all our levers of power from hard military through to softer things like building resilience, strengthening our cyber-defences, offensive cyber where appropriate, and so on. So I would say that we are developing a strategy to address the Russian doctrine, if you like, but it is not identical to it and it would not be correct for it to be identical.

Q199 Chair: Thank you. Let me ask Sir Stuart this: relating to the more conventional areas of the armed forces, in what specific areas of military capacity is Russia superior to NATO, and vice versa? What are the areas in which we feel that NATO has the military advantage and what are the areas in which Russia has the military advantage?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: I think, in technology terms, NATO retains an edge in software development and command and control integration, to provide—as I said in answer to an earlier question—an effect that can be measured and the precise application of kinetic power. I have already acknowledged, in answer both to Mr Gray’s and to previous questions, that Russia has a long history of investment in air defence systems, which require us to respond in Alliance terms for security, as well as for defence in terms of electronic warfare. It also has a long history of investment in artillery systems; of course we have our own artillery systems, but there is no doubt that the level of stockholding is significant. I return to the fact that how a force is organised, commanded, controlled and sustained becomes the bedrock of modern operations, and that is still a NATO strength.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q200 Mr Gray: Can I drill down a little into two aspects of what you said about alternatives to cyber-warfare? First, you indicated, quite rightly, that we wouldn’t necessarily do the same as they are doing if those things are illegal or obnoxious, but are we not developing our own cyber-capability to be operational—in other words, to be offensive? Do we have an offensive cyber-capability, and if so how are we using it?

Peter Watkins: Well, we do have an offensive cyber-capability. The previous Defence Secretary acknowledged that in September 2013. In the SDSR, we reaffirmed that, and we also said that we are developing it. That work is under way now.

Q201 Mr Gray: But if we dislike what they are doing with regard to cyber, why should we use similar capabilities against them?

Peter Watkins: I think that if we were faced with that sort of situation, we would examine it and determine which is the most appropriate response.

Q202 Mr Gray: That is a very careful civil service response.

Peter Watkins: Absolutely, but it’s not necessarily a simple tit-for-tat approach. The right response, whether it is to a cyber-attack or something else, could be a different measure. You might want to respond diplomatically in the first instance.

Q203 Mr Gray: Okay. Another tit-for-tat area is propaganda. If they tell blatant, outright, straightforward lies that everyone knows are lies, how do we counter that? What role does NATO have in countering it, and what role do we have within NATO in countering it?

Peter Watkins: Well, NATO does not exist to be a propaganda organisation. Again, this is a case where we are not simply going to emulate the behaviour of others. What we seek to do—NATO, as I mentioned, has set up a centre of excellence in strategic communications in Riga—

Q204 Mr Gray: It's very small.

Peter Watkins: It is, but quality is important. What we seek to do is to ensure that we put out as much information as we reasonably can so our intentions are not wilfully misinterpreted. In accordance with the Vienna Document and so on, we publish all of our big exercises months in advance, unlike Russia, which now has the habit of calling what are called snap exercises. We have also done some work within the British Government to assist the Baltic states—in particular, Estonia and Latvia—and to provide alternative sources of Russian-speaking information, so they are not completely dependent on Russia Today.

Q205 Mr Gray: It's all pretty small beer. We visited the centre in Riga a couple of years ago, and it's pretty small—I think one Brit was working there, if I remember rightly. It may have got bigger by now. Russia has vast resources that are dedicated to misinformation, propaganda, spin—a whole range of things. Some of those things are not telling lies, but spinning. We ourselves have been on the receiving end of it once or twice in recent months. Surely NATO should have a much bigger stratcom capability to counter some of that stuff and try to avoid moving to hard warfare. If we can win the propaganda battle, there's less likelihood of there being an exchange of shots.

Peter Watkins: Well, NATO is developing its capability. Certainly, that centre has grown since you were there two years ago. There is a risk of trying to match what the Russians are doing, when in fact there are better ways of dealing with this. We have a long tradition of free media and a free press. There are many means other than those controlled by NATO or Governments by which the truth of particular situations can be made known. The key thing is to ensure that people can get access to those alternative sources of information.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: In answer to your previous questions, the key point is that, inside the Alliance, we now see strategic communications as part of the exercise and preparation of all NATO forces. NATO's Centres of Excellence are there to keep monitoring the specific subject, but if you take an exercise such as Trident Juncture last October/November, there were significant elements of what Peter just described as part of that exercise, which involved everybody from the commanders downwards and exercised the chain of command up through NATO into SHAPE. We should acknowledge that the Alliance is modernising its sense of how these things work in the modern world.

Q206 Jim Shannon: To follow up on what James said, when we were at NATO we were clearly made aware that there is a lot of work for NATO to do in relation to propaganda and misinformation. I feel that we are the poor relation, the United Kingdom in particular and NATO generally. Because it is impossible to measure the effectiveness of your propaganda

and misinformation, is it very easy then just to cut the budget or not to work too hard on it? That's how I feel about it.

Michael Fallon: That is a good question. We do need to develop metrics by which we measure the communications effort. We have started to do that now in the communications effort against Daesh in the Middle East. We and our partners in NATO, and NATO itself, do need to do better on that. Do you want to comment on that?

Peter Watkins: I agree. It is inherently difficult to measure but that does not mean, as the Secretary of State said, that we should not try.

Q207 Chair: But you do accept that in the Cold War years we had whole departments, such as the information and research department at the Foreign Office, that were dedicated to countering disinformation. We are not yet near doing anything on that sort of scale, are we? As one of my colleagues just whispered in my ear, Russia Today, for example, is a pretty slick operation that purports to be news media but in reality has a strong propagandist agenda, has it not?

Michael Fallon: You will have noted the agreement that the Government have reached with the BBC about the enhancement of the BBC's Russian Service, which I think is an acknowledgement of exactly that development and use by Russia of all these different communications channels. I agree that there is much more to be done. We urge it on our partners in NATO and on NATO itself.

Q208 Richard Benyon: How many Russian experts are there dedicated to working on Russia in the Ministry of Defence?

Michael Fallon: The number has increased quite markedly. I think it has doubled⁴ in the time that I have been at the Ministry. We have some 40 full-time equivalent staff who are working directly on Russian issues. They are supported by other analysts across the defence and intelligence community, and others helping on the technical side.

Q209 Richard Benyon: We took evidence from Dr Bobo Lo of Chatham House who said that he had recently been to Japan where he found in their foreign ministry about 200 dedicated Russian-speaking Russian experts, and that he would be surprised if there were 10 in the Foreign Office. Obviously, you are not responsible for the Foreign Office, but can you confirm that you have increased our analytical ability to assess and understand what is going on in Russia, and to support the military officers dealing with the threat?

Michael Fallon: Yes, I can confirm that. As I said, we have increased the number of Russian specialists. We have established a specific Russia, multi-disciplinary intelligence analysis team. That effort has roughly doubled in the past two years.

Peter Watkins: If I could just add on the Foreign Office side, I think they may have said in their written evidence to you that they have substantially increased their capability in dealing with Russia as well, in terms of the research analysts and in the number of civil servants dealing with Russia and related issues. They have set up a cadre—they call it the east European cadre⁵—of experts and people who are learning to become experts, which is pushing 400 strong now, so it is growing rapidly.

⁴ In Defence Intelligence

⁵ Eastern European and Central Asia Cadre

Q210 Richard Benyon: Are you aware of the size of the team supporting the UK defence attaché in Moscow?

Michael Fallon: Yes.

Q211 Richard Benyon: What would your estimate be?

Michael Fallon: The Defence Dection in Moscow is normally around four officers, supported by two non-commissioned officers, so it is around five or six. There are issues at the moment, as you will know, in securing visas for our posts there, and there are discussions ongoing with the Russians about how to improve the number we have currently in post.

Q212 Richard Benyon: Our information was that there used to be a team of 12 and it is now just the defence attaché.

Michael Fallon: Well, the normal—

Richard Benyon: Will you be able to write to the Committee—

Michael Fallon: We can certainly let you have a note on that.

Q213 Richard Benyon: Because those who visited Moscow from the Committee are of the strong belief that the defence attaché's job has never been more important.

Michael Fallon: We agree with that. I do not think that the size was normally 12. As I have said, I think it was about five or six. This is important. The Russians say that they want the ability to communicate with us. They want more lines of communication and engagement, and that is why we want to press them to make sure that the section can be fully staffed. But we are happy to supply you with a note on that.

Q214 Richard Benyon: There is widespread concern that what must have been a fairly telegraphed action, such as seizing Crimea, seemed to be a complete surprise. We have been here before, with the Falklands and with 9/11, and we are not the only country that suffers surprise. This was not a coup de main operation; it was a military build-up and then an action. Have we got analysts in your Department who really are looking at where the next threat might emerge and whether that might be an Article 5 attack?

Michael Fallon: Absolutely. As I have said, we have doubled our effort. We have recognised that we need to strengthen that in the light of the Russian aggression we have seen in the past two or three years and that is why we have recruited more specialists.

Q215 Richard Benyon: Are you using external experts? London is full of Russian experts and they do not necessarily have to be badged by being civil servants.

Peter Watkins: Absolutely. I do not want to embarrass them, but we talk to a number of the people who have given evidence to you before. We have discussions with them; we have conversations with them; we learn from them. As you say, there is a wide range of Russian expertise in this country, and we draw upon that. We also draw on Russian expertise in other countries. There are some very good people at the Brookings Institution in Washington, for example, with whom we talk. We are drawing on all those sources of information.

Q216 Richard Benyon: Finally—I am trying my Chairman here—the strategic positioning of Putin’s defence posture is not just about how NATO forces are deployed, it is about the geopolitics of Europe and everything that goes on in its western boundary. We have had a lot of evidence from people who have said that he has taken a very clear view about weakening the European Union and the place the European Union has as a rule-setter on its western boundary. What is your assessment, Secretary of State?

Michael Fallon: You have taken some evidence on this, and I am looking forward to seeing how that is reflected in your final report—if I can put it like that.

Richard Benyon: So am I.

Michael Fallon: But let me be very clear. The principal response on Ukraine was the sanctions that were imposed. Without the power of the world’s largest market, there would not have been any sanctions; Russia would not have had to pay a price for Ukraine. And without the leadership of Britain, within the European Union, those sanctions would not have been imposed and would not continue to be rolled over. The decision to roll over the Tier 3 sanctions comes at the end of July.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that a British exit from the European Union would be applauded in Moscow. As I have said, a smaller, weaker Europe is pay day for Putin. Your evidence, I think, has shown that Russia is not neutral about Britain in Europe. Britain has championed the open energy market that has reduced the dependence of the eastern states on Russian gas. Britain has promoted association agreements, through the European Union, with former Soviet bloc countries, and we have taken the lead on sanctions. So to walk away from that kind of leadership exactly when we need to be strong against Russia seems an extraordinarily irresponsible thing to do, and this is a very dangerous moment to do it. Putin would certainly be voting leave.

Q217 Chair: Well done, Secretary of State, on getting that slightly prepared oration so neatly in. Are you suggesting that if the United Kingdom were not a member of the European Union, it would not be possible to put sanctions on Russia for aggression in a place like Ukraine?

Michael Fallon: Absolutely. You would never have had sanctions if it had been left to a fragmented Europe, if there was not a European Union. You would have had some countries that wanted to take a hard line. You will know that the countries of the European Union divided on sanctions when they were originally proposed: there were hard-liners led by us, there were those in the middle and there were those who wanted a much weaker response. Had there been no European Union, you would never have had Russia paying any kind of price for its intervention in Ukraine. *[Interruption.]* Let me finish.

The fact that we were there meant that we were able to lead the debate on sanctions and ensure that the tougher sanctions on assets, travel and the access of Russian banks and companies to international financial markets were imposed. We are in the lead in making sure that those are going to be renewed. That would not have happened if you had not had the European Union, and would not have happened if Britain had not been in it.

Q218 Chair: So you are saying that even though we are not voting on the European Union ceasing to exist, but only on whether the United Kingdom remains a member of it, it would

not have been possible for the United Kingdom and the European Union that remained to have put sanctions in place in the way that they have done.

Michael Fallon: You're right. We could have imposed our own sanctions, but I am quite sure that without us the European Union would have imposed weaker sanctions. You would then have seen our own companies at a significant disadvantage when other commercial interests across Europe took advantage of the fact that we were taking a harder line, and picked up the business that was available with Russia. It is only by our standing up to Russia as a union of 28 that they are paying any kind of price at all for what they did in Crimea and Ukraine. It seems to me that Russia would absolutely want to see a smaller, weaker and fragmented Europe.

Q219 Chair: So you are saying that the sanctions are going to reverse what Russia has done in Ukraine and Crimea.

Michael Fallon: The sanctions are making sure that Russia pays a price. They have had an effect on the Russian economy: they have almost certainly reduced its GDP and they have increased its inflation. There has been the drop in the oil price as well, but the sanctions have made it much more difficult for Russia's economy and the way in which Russian companies operate in financial markets. Russia would certainly want to see the sanctions relaxed; we are determined that they should not be relaxed, and are leading Europe to make sure that they are not.

Q220 Chair: And you do not feel that the European Union's role in seeking to sign its own association agreement with Ukraine may have played any part in what happened in east Ukraine and Crimea?

Michael Fallon: The negotiations on the association agreement with Ukraine began some eight or nine years ago—as long ago as 2007—and we have been very clear with Russia, through the European Union, what the purpose of those negotiations were. It is not for us in the West to confine Ukraine, or any of its neighbours, to a particular path. It is for them to decide what kind of trade relationship and what kind of agreements they seek with others. We have been completely transparent about that particular agreement, but we have to respect Ukraine's sovereignty in wanting to develop a relationship with the European Union. We have been one of the countries championing the rights and sovereignty of countries like Ukraine. If we were outside Europe, that influence would be lost and that in turn would maximise Russia's strength and power. So there is a huge amount hanging on this vote on 23 June, not just for the people of this country but for the collective security of Europe and the West.

Q221 Chair: But you do accept, don't you, that there are some countries that it is not possible for us to defend? Under those circumstances it is not in their interests for us to encourage a degree of alignment, when non-alignment might keep them safer.

Michael Fallon: There I agree with you. It is very important that the Alliance, unlike the Union, does not admit to membership those who are unable to take on the obligations of membership, not just to accept the defence of partners, but to be able to come to the defence of the existing members. But it is equally true that we cannot allow Russia to exercise any kind of veto over who should join either the NATO Alliance or the European Union. That is why we have welcomed the proposed accession of Montenegro, which will take observer status at the Warsaw Summit, and why we emphasise that the NATO

Alliance and the European Union remain open to new candidates. It is up to those candidates to decide their future and to be eligible for membership of the NATO Alliance, and we will have the decision in due course as to whether to accept them. It is not for us to say that they can't even try.

Q222 Douglas Chapman: It is great to see the Conservative Party at play on some of these issues. Can I take you back to some of Richard's questions in terms of the numbers of supporting staff on Russian studies and so on? There is background to this. In the SDSR, we are looking at a cut of 30,000 personnel in the MOD civilian staff. We heard last November that many of those who are destined to go, or who have already gone, were people who had not just years but decades of experience in dealing with the situation in Russia and further afield. Some of the numbers you are talking about seem fairly small beer. I think Mr Watkins said, "These are being recruited," which suggests to me that they're in training, with probably not as much experience as the people who you have let go.

There has been the closing of the Conflict Studies Research Centre. There is a question mark hanging over the head of the Russian Military Studies Archive at Shrivenham. These all point to things moving in exactly the opposite direction to which we should be moving, in terms of understanding Russia. That is one of the things that has come out of our investigations: the capacity and capability of the UK to understand Russia is an issue. It is a problem. We need to have good people on the ground to try and understand Russia a lot better than we do at the moment, if we are going to move forward to a much more beneficial relationship between the two countries. I just wondered if you regret, for example, the fact that the Conflict Studies Research Centre has closed and we have lost that level of expertise through the actions of the Government.

Michael Fallon: First of all, let me accept your premise. It is important that we build up this expertise again, or indeed rebuild it, as the Chairman has indicated. I have explained that that is what we are doing and that is what we will continue to do. Of course, we had hoped five or 10 years ago that Russia might have chosen a different path. Clearly, for the moment that is not possible. We have to reassert our expertise in this particular area.

Let me just say something broadly about the 30,000 and then Mr Watkins may want to talk about the specific centre that you mentioned. It was not possible in the SDSR negotiations and the overall expenditure negotiations, at a time when our budget was increasing, to exempt the Department entirely from the cuts in the administration budgets of other Departments whose overall budgets were being reduced. We had to take some of the pain, if you like, that was being applied across the rest of Whitehall.

So far as the 30,000 are concerned, let me say two things. First, we have to meet that 30,000 target over the lifetime of this Parliament, so we have at least four years to programme that reduction. Secondly, that reduction was already under way. A significant proportion of that 30,000—we can let you have a note about this—were already scheduled for redundancy under various schemes. Let me ask Mr Watkins to talk specifically about the centre.

Peter Watkins: As you probably know, there is quite a back story to this. The Conflict Studies Research Centre became the Advanced Research and Assessment Group. That must have been back in the early 2000s—I have given evidence on this to the Committee before. That group was closed in 2010, for a number of reasons that I think I have set out before: it had become unsustainable, there were various issues with it, and so on. Those

decisions were taken and I think they were the right decisions at the time, but over the last few years we have taken considerable steps to strengthen our capability in languages and culture—Russian in particular—through the establishment of the Defence Centre for Languages and Culture as part of the Defence Academy at Shrivenham. We have also strengthened our capability in Defence Intelligence, as the Secretary of State said, and have used the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre to reach out to academic advisers and to people in other countries who have a very good understanding of Russia, Russian culture and so on. One can regret the passing of certain organisations, but frankly things have moved on and those capabilities have been replicated in different ways.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: I can also add that we have made Russian language studies a priority in the military. We are also using the Government's Reserves expansion programme to make better use of reserve units, where we could perhaps bring in more experienced officers and senior NCOs back for a second go as reservists, working with that network that Mr Watkins outlined. Regardless of where we have been, I am very confident now that we have a good look at this and a good sense of capabilities, both within our own whole force structure and with our allies.

Q223 Douglas Chapman: I hear what you are saying about use of Reservists and the line of skills that they already have, but I think I was told in reply to a parliamentary question that there were only 15 or 18 serving personnel in the armed forces who were actually Russian speakers. It was a very low number.

Michael Fallon: 125 is our estimate, to varying degrees of proficiency.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: I do not want to get into a lengthy debate, but 15 to 18 reservists who are experts add a lot of value.

Q224 Ruth Smeeth: We were recently in Russia, as you know, and it became quite clear that relations are at a low—probably the lowest in my lifetime in terms of how we can talk and how we are engaging, not least because I am not sure that we even have a shared understanding of history or language at the moment. When we talked about Crimea, they raised the British Crimean war. It was an extraordinary experience for all of us. What became quite clear, though, was that they are desperate for a level of engagement, even when we push them, but they do not really want to engage. They are in a Catch-22: they really want to speak to us, but they do not know how. Given that there is currently a suspension of engagement from a military-to-military perspective, is it working? What processes are we putting in place, especially given some of the incidents that we are having, to try to combat some of that?

Michael Fallon: Certainly in my lifetime, relations have been worse, but that is because of your youth. There have been worse periods. But I think you have put your finger on something: they say they want better engagement with us and more communication, but they have restricted the number of people in our defence section, they have put restrictions on the way they can travel, and so on. As I said at the beginning, we want a constructive relationship with Russia and certainly with the Russian people. Where we identify common interests, as we did over the negotiations on Iran and the need to get a political settlement in Syria and now stability in Libya, we do not hesitate to talk to them. The Foreign Secretary has discussions with his counterpart all the time; as you know, there were discussions between the Prime Minister and President Putin last year, and so on. Beyond that, we are developing closer military links. I would like the Vice-Chief to say a little bit about that.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: We took the initiative to go to Moscow just before Christmas: Mr Watkins went and I followed a week later. That was primarily to talk about safety—within the rules laid out, not a return to business as usual—and it was a successful engagement. The safety concerns apply not just to the obvious places around conflict but also in the protection of our own air space and maritime security. We agreed that we would establish links between our command and control centres in the United Kingdom and the appropriate Russian equivalent, and we have done so. We have used them this year. That does not imply a strategic reset or a return to any form of serious military engagement, but it is a start. We are also committed to talking to the Russians about maritime safety and security in a wider context.

You mentioned history. There are small steps where we can at least commemorate the history we agree on, such as the Arctic convoys. I would not see those as trivial issues: they are important. There is a strong link between the Imperial War Museum and Russia. There is a strong link on the Arctic convoy commemoration. Those are not trivial issues for the Russians or the United Kingdom. We are trying.

Q225 Ruth Smeeth: May I ask what level of engagement you personally had when you were out there?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: I was engaging with my opposite number, and I engaged in uniform with my opposite number in Moscow.

Q226 Ruth Smeeth: Has that communication continued at any level?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: We agreed that we would then continue the communication headquarters to headquarters, which we continue to do.

Q227 Ruth Smeeth: On Ukraine, we announced a significant amount of support for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. I wonder if you could go into what support that currently consists of, and what its objectives are.

Michael Fallon: Yes, certainly. We can probably find you the exact figures in a moment. We took the decision to help Ukraine in two very specific ways. The first is to very directly offer training—not lethal support or lethal arms or ammunition—to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. We began that effort last year. I have roughly doubled it over the last 12 months. We continue to run a series of short-term courses throughout the year to train a large number of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. That training has been particularly welcomed by the Ukrainian Army. I have been out there myself to see it at first hand and to discuss it with the Ukrainian Defence Minister and the then Prime Minister. It is very much welcomed by Ukraine.

Secondly, we have been assisting Ukraine in the process of reform and improving the way its own Defence Ministry works, where there are serious issues about procurement. There has been corruption and so on, and they need our technical assistance in reforming the administration of their defence. Each time the NATO Defence Ministers meet, I have taken the lead in convoking a meeting of the five countries that are most involved in training, which we call the Quint—the United States, ourselves, Poland, Lithuania and Canada who do most of the training effort. We meet on a regular basis to make sure we are not duplicating and that we are running similar courses. Mr Watkins may have found some numbers for us.

Peter Watkins: We are aiming to train over 2,000⁶—that is the figure the Secretary of State has announced. I should emphasise that it is, in many respects, what some people might call a “train the trainer” approach, so the people we train will then go back to their units and be able to pass on what they have learnt to their colleagues. We are training across a number of disciplines, including urban tactics, communications, medical and so on.

I noticed in some of the previous oral evidence you have been given a suggestion that we were training the Ukrainians in things that they did not want. That is not the case. The training we have provided has followed an extensive dialogue with the Ukrainians to establish what they wanted. They have particularly welcomed the fact that we have given them training in what they wanted and in the locations they wanted.

Q228 Chair: In relation to other countries that are at similar risk to the Ukraine, such as Moldova, Georgia and Kazakhstan, are we resigned to the fact that if Russia chose to behave in a similar fashion there, there would be little we could do about it? Are we focusing any attention on the area? Would we similarly impose further sanctions if the worst happened, and a similar abuse of their would-be sovereignty were to take place?

Michael Fallon: Those are not members of NATO, as you know Chairman, and are not therefore entitled to the protection of NATO. Georgia is an enhanced partner of NATO and benefits from that partnership package that was agreed back at the Wales summit. I met the Georgian Prime Minister in London about two weeks ago, and we are increasing our military links with Georgia. Again, we are offering training and we have people assigned in Tbilisi. In answer to your question, we would not be able to deploy, if there were interference or aggression by Russia in any of those three countries, the immediate weapon of sanctions, if we were not inside the European Union.

Chair: I congratulate you on that segue, but I want to focus—

Mr Gray: Ludicrous. Talk about Project Fear.

Chair: I know that one can put on record, by referring to sedentary heckles such as “Project Fear”, the fact that they have been made. James, is there a point you wish to make at the moment?

Q229 Mr Gray: Yes, the sedentary interventions was: what a ludicrous point; talk about Project Fear. However, let me ask one question on this—since it has come back to me, though I was going to skip it—and that is Putin’s approach to Brexit.

The Committee had an interesting lunch last week with the Russian ambassador and he advanced an interesting counterview, namely that Britain exercises a moderating influence in the European Union and keeps it under control. Actually, Britain leaving the EU would make a much stronger EU and that Russia would fear that far more. He said, “I hope that you won’t leave because that makes Europe weaker rather than stronger.” That was the ambassador’s view.

Chair: I shall reply on behalf of the panel.

⁶ In August 15, the Defence Secretary announced an initial target of training 2000 Ukrainian Armed Forces personnel. The Defence Secretary announced an extension to the programme, having exceeded this target in March 2016.

Mr Gray: No, Chairman, I don't think you will, actually. It is a serious point that the Russian ambassador made over lunch. You were not there. The Russian ambassador made a serious point, namely that he felt that the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU would make the EU stronger and therefore more worrying from the point of view of Russia. How do you react to that particular view?

Michael Fallon: That is clearly nonsense. It would be much easier for Russia to deal simply with Berlin and Paris. It would tip Europe back to being a Eurasianist bloc that was much more eastward facing than it is at the moment. Let me repeat: it is Britain that has led the charge on sanctions. I am in no doubt at all as to the result that Putin would prefer on 23 June.

Q230 Chair: Clearly, I was expecting the reply that it was just a typical example of Russian disinformation. Hopefully, we can get away from the controversial aspect of the EU to the much simpler question of Russia and Syria.

In the case of Russia and Syria, do you accept that there may be some common interests between Russia and the West regarding the threat of international Islamist extremism and terrorism? Is there any way in which you could see NATO, while standing up to Russia where our interests clash in central and eastern Europe, actually building some grounds for co-operation with Russia where we have common interests caused by the spread of extremist Islamist terrorism?

Michael Fallon: We do have a common interest with Russia. Russia does see Daesh as a growing threat, not simply in Syria, but in areas along and possibly within its own borders. I think we have a common interest in combating Daesh terrorism. That is why we have been trying to involve Russia in the search for a lasting political settlement in Syria, and to bind Russia into the need to get a proper ceasefire, to get humanitarian aid in, and to lead Syria towards a more democratic future.

The implication that that can be done only through the NATO framework is more difficult. This international coalition against Daesh is not a NATO-badged coalition, for fairly obvious reasons: it involves the Gulf countries and many others. It is yet another example of how we work in different coalitions in different parts of the world—with NATO in Afghanistan, in the international coalition in the Gulf, and with an EU badge in dealing with migration in the Mediterranean. We work in these different alliances in the framework that suits best.

Q231 Chair: Do you accept, then, that it might be conceivable that if we wish to try to open up some lines of communication with Russia, there is no reason why we cannot take a firm stance in one theatre where our interests clash, while having a degree of co-operation in another theatre where to some extent our interests overlap, even if they do not coincide completely?

Michael Fallon: I agree with that, and we have already evidenced that in the way Russia was involved in the agreement that was reached in Iran and in the way Russia is involved in the ongoing talks on Syria. Very recently, Russia has joined the discussions about how we stabilise the new Government in Libya. There are areas—Daesh may well be a fourth—where we do have common interests with Russia but, as you said yourself, that should not divert us from taking an extremely firm line where Russia has clearly transgressed, as it has in Crimea and Ukraine by doing something I didn't think I would

see again in my lifetime: trying to change international borders by force. That is clearly wrong. Thank goodness that, through the European Union, we are able to apply sanctions to correct it.

Peter Watkins: We must also be very clear about Russian behaviour in those areas where we might potentially co-operate. Back in February and March, when the Russians intensified their air strikes, they said they were attacking Daesh targets but they were not—very few of their targets were Daesh targets. Going back to Mr Gray's comments about the ambassador, one should judge them by their deeds as well as their words.

Chair: We will be having a separate session on the Middle East and the extent to which there are forces fighting on the ground other than Assad's on the one side and the Islamists on the other, but that's not for today. Ruth, could you move us on, please?

Q232 Ruth Smeeth: This is something that is very relevant after our meeting with the ambassador, which did not go well. Obviously, we are about to have the NATO Warsaw Summit. This subject was touched on by everybody but not discussed by anybody when we were in Russia. They were very nervous about it but didn't want to make it clear how ambivalent they were towards what was about to happen.

Evidence we have taken elsewhere suggests that, going forward, we are likely to have a permanent NATO force somewhere on the eastern flank. Do you expect that to be agreed at Warsaw? If it is agreed, how long do you think it will take for us to get that up and running? Russia is quite clear that it would contravene or violate the NATO-Russia Founding Act. What is the Government's official view on that?

Michael Fallon: I think there are three questions there. So far as the preparation for Warsaw is concerned, yes, we are considering what is called "Enhanced Forward Presence", which, in addition to the actions we are already taking through Baltic air policing and so on, would help to further reassure.

We are considering Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic states—not only in the Baltic states, but along the eastern flank more generally—in the run-up to Warsaw. We don't think that contradicts anything in the Founding Act. We are perfectly entitled to continue to position, exercise and rotate forces through those particular territories. I hope that agreement can be reached on the details in Warsaw.

On how quickly we would be part of that forward presence and how quickly we would deploy our own troop contribution, perhaps Mr Watkins can assist.

Peter Watkins: This is a matter that is still being discussed in the Alliance at the moment. It would obviously have to be agreed with the potential host countries. It would be premature for me to give a timetable, but I imagine it would be within a year or so, or less than that. Of course, it is not a completely new thing. This Enhanced Forward Presence would be building upon, and in some ways regularising, the series of exercises, short-term deployments and other activities that the Defence Secretary mentioned right at the beginning.

On the NATO-Russia Founding Act, there is a lot of debate about what it means and what it doesn't mean. We are pretty clear that Russia itself is now in breach of that Act through its action in Ukraine, because the signatories to that document said that they would not behave in that sort of way in future. In terms of our proposals, the NATO-Russia Founding

Act contains some wording on not permanently basing significant forces, and what we are proposing is not permanent basing. You can argue about “significant”, but these are not very large forces.

Michael Fallon: And it would deploy when?

Peter Watkins: When? I think about a year afterwards.

Q233 Ruth Smeeth: The Russians—the ones who were prepared to talk about it—made it clear that there would be significant consequences, although no one could articulate what “significant consequences” actually meant beyond its being threatening language. What preparations are we making in advance of whatever those significant consequences would be? In the same meeting, they also told us that the sanctions were working for them.

Michael Fallon: Were working?

Ruth Smeeth: Working in favour of the Russians by helping them to develop their own industry. It was a wonderful meeting with the ambassador.

Peter Watkins: In terms of the claimed significant consequences, we are obviously watching very carefully what they might or might not do. They have already made some pre-emptive announcements. Mr Shoigu, the Defence Minister, announced a reorganisation of their forces in western Russia, for example, back on 4 May.

We think that was probably a re-announcement of something that had been previously announced, and it is basically a reorganisation. That was presented as being in anticipation of decisions that might or might not be made at the Warsaw Summit, so we are watching those things very carefully, but it may be that they have already given an indication as to what the “significant consequences” are.

Michael Fallon: So far as the impact of sanctions is concerned, the IMF estimates that the sanctions reduced GDP growth in Russia by between 1% and 1.5% last year, which is separate from the fall in oil prices.

Peter Watkins: I should mention that the sanctions particularly affected exports of arms and dual-use goods. There have been some comments by President Putin himself and others that indicate that the sanctions have caused significant problems for Russia in relation to machine tools and things like that, necessary to maintain their military prowess.

Q234 Chair: You have stressed that these forces that are rotating through are, in a sense, not meant to be substantial. Would it be fair to describe them in terms of being a sort of tripwire strategy in order to send a signal that, if the Baltics have their sovereignty infringed, it automatically wouldn’t just be the Baltics but also countries whose forces were rotating through at any one time, thereby triggering Article 5 of NATO as a whole? Would that be the thinking behind this?

Peter Watkins: They are designed to send a message of resolve, and therefore deterrence. I broadly agree with the way you put it, Mr Chairman.

Q235 Chair: Thank you. Assuming that, as this policy develops, the Russians can be fairly clear on the purpose of the message, they presumably will not react well to this, even though they brought it on themselves by their conduct. Is there anything we can do to mitigate their

bad reaction to it, other than to remind them that they brought it on themselves and suggest that it is not designed to lead to a process of mutual escalation?

Michael Fallon: As I said earlier, the principal way in which we mitigate the risk involved in your question is by being absolutely transparent about what these forces are there for, as we are transparent about the exercises that we have carried out. These are defensive forces that are there to protect the territory of our allies.

We match that with the kind of engagement that we have talked about—not simply the visit and the new communications channel; more recently, we have reactivated the NATO-Russia Council, which met for the first time. So, again, we are prepared to be absolutely open and transparent with Russia as to what these formations are there for.

Q236 Chair: It appears, then, that when Russia does something which we cannot really stop in Ukraine or Crimea—presumably you accept the fact that they are unlikely to hand back Crimea to Ukraine any time soon or, indeed, ever—we then react with sanctions and ramp up other measures but, at the same time, we still try to keep some sort of dialogue open to ensure that we don't get into a cycle of increasingly intense hostility between the two sides. Is that a reasonable summation of the Government's position?

Michael Fallon: Not quite. Let's not forget that the sanctions aren't being imposed as a punishment. They are there as an incentive. They are there until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented. Once those are implemented, then the sanctions can be lifted. That is the power of a European Union sanction. It is there for a very specific purpose: to incentivise Russia and to put on the pressure that a sanction can exercise to make sure that the Minsk agreements are respected.

Mr Gray: We had better ask the Armed Forces Minister to see what she thinks.

Chair: Okay. I will come to you in a second, James, but first did you want to make a brief intervention at that point, Jim?

Jim Shannon: My comment has already been made.

Chair: James, would you like to carry on with the enlargement? We had a few words about enlargement earlier.

Q237 Mr Gray: I think that what you say about not being dictated to by Russia is absolutely right regarding enlargement, and nor should we be. In very open discussions in Moscow, Russia made it very plain that they would view Sweden and Finland becoming members of NATO as a major act of aggression, not dissimilar to the approach that NATO made to Georgia and elsewhere some years ago. Without accepting that threat, is it not wise nonetheless to be cautious about it?

Michael Fallon: I am surprised that you are so easily intimidated by this Russian propaganda that you seem to have been exposed to, both in the London embassy and in Moscow, but let us be serious about this. This is a sovereign issue for countries such as Sweden and Finland to decide. It is not for us to decide. It is for them to decide whether they wish to apply and for the rest of the Alliance then to decide whether or not they meet the criteria and whether to admit them.

What we support is that NATO's door should remain open. The accession of Montenegro demonstrates our commitment that President Putin should not have a veto on who is entitled to join and who is not. We support the aspiration of any country that wants to move further towards the protection and prosperity of the Western Alliance and, indeed, of the European Union.

Q238 Mr Gray: Can I bring you back for one second to the island of Gotland? It is one of my favourite places that I have never been to, but I would love to go there.

Peter Watkins: The Swedish island?

Q239 Mr Gray: It is Swedish. Precisely. And therefore not protected by Article 5 of NATO. As I asked a moment ago, supposing there were to be Russian aggression from Kaliningrad against Gotland: would NATO react?

Michael Fallon: Sweden is not a member of NATO, but obviously we would see aggression like that in that part of the world—I hope we would be picking up an escalation of tension there and do our best to ensure that Russia understood the consequences. Do you want to add to that, Mr Watkins?

Peter Watkins: This issue came up in earlier sessions, and it was suggested that the island was uninhabited. It was subsequently suggested that the Swedes have now put some forces on it. The seizure of territory—whether inhabited or not and whether defended or not—is in contravention of international law, and I am pretty sure that there would be a response. The precise nature of that response, as ever, would be determined at the time. Obviously, it would have to take into account the views of the Swedish Government, as it is their territory.

Q240 Mr Gray: The reason why I raise this is that if Gotland enjoys the protection of NATO—effectively, that is what you are saying—isn't that the same as Sweden actually being a member of NATO?

Michael Fallon: No. Sweden is not a member of NATO, although it has the advantage of having the status of enhanced partner and we work very closely with Sweden. The exercises that NATO has undertaken in the Baltics, which I have witnessed, have included Swedish and indeed Finnish troops.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: We have a close bilateral relationship with both countries. Their sovereign choices are for them to make, but we continue to have very warm relations for training and exercise purposes, and very fruitful discussions.

Q241 Mr Gray: Given all that, what steps can NATO take to reassure Russia that these sorts of discussions and partnerships with Sweden, Finland and other places around the periphery are not a threat to them? What steps can we take—perhaps we are back to StratCom again—to try to reassure Russia that these things are not a threat to them?

Michael Fallon: We have been open with Russia about the nature of these enhanced partners. There are only five, I think, all together: Sweden; Finland; Georgia; Jordan; and Australia. But we have made it clear to Russia that these are not preliminary relationships, preliminary to accession. Accession is a completely different process and the signature of these enhanced packages does not imply that the country itself is setting off on the path

towards accession. We have made that very clear, to Russia and to the countries that have the partnership status themselves.

Q242 Chair: We are drawing to a close and we have got about two more topics, but I just want to explore a little further with you the question of the unlimited expansion of NATO. Do you believe that it should be the right of any country that wants to join NATO and that is recognisably a western-oriented democratic country to join the Alliance, or must the Alliance have some regard for how realistic it is to believe that all its members would be prepared to engage in an all-out conflict if that country were to have its territorial integrity invaded and compromised?

What I am saying is this: do you believe that NATO can go on indefinitely stretching its umbrella to cover more and more countries—such as, one day, Georgia and Ukraine—without at some point the Article 5 guarantee losing credibility, thus putting us back into the situation before NATO existed, when a potential aggressor could chance his arm by thinking, “If I pick off this country or that country, the other countries of NATO, and in particular the United States, will not initiate a conflict in order to protect it?” Are there limits, or are there not?

Michael Fallon: That has not happened yet—the circumstances that you describe—and I don’t think as a matter of principle that there should be limits, because again I think you would be telling countries that aspire to a more prosperous, more democratic and more secure future that they are not entitled to join either NATO or indeed the European Union. I don’t think it is for us in this room, or as a Government, to say who should be entitled to join or not.

We set out criteria for membership and it is very important that those are respected. Possibly some aspirant countries at the moment would like to join but do not yet meet the criteria. And then, when they do join, it is important that all members understand exactly what you have said: that their joining means that they are then entitled to the protection of all the other member states.

So I do not accept that there should be a limit. NATO has shown in recent years that it is able to operate with a larger number of members as well as it did originally with a small number. At the time of 9/11, when Article 5 was invoked, NATO had 19 members and they were able to operate in a unified way very rapidly and consistently. At the time of the Crimea invasion, NATO had 28 members, and again they were able to adopt a unified position. The kind of exercises that we have done this year have involved, I think, 30 countries—28 plus two of the partners. So I do not think that there should be any numerical limit on the number of countries involved in NATO.

Q243 Chair: With respect, Secretary of State, that is not quite the point I am making. I am not saying that it is too cumbersome, or that it is not mechanically possible to have a lot more countries in NATO. What I am asking you is—and I find it surprising when you say it is not for us to say whether a country can or cannot join—

Michael Fallon: Cannot apply, Chairman.

Q244 Chair: Oh, cannot apply. All right. I accept that refinement because surely it should be the case that, given that Article 5 commits all the existing NATO member countries possibly to go to war for the sake of any country that is attacked, it has to be for them to

decide how far they are willing to take this and whether it is credible that Russia or another adversary would believe that they would go to war for a country as far distant as, shall we say, Georgia, or even Ukraine, before Ukraine suffered its present dismemberment.

Surely there has to be a point reached at which it becomes unrealistic to say to countries, much as they might like to join, that they can join, because if the effect of too many countries joining is that Russia will not believe that Article 5 will ever be invoked on their behalf, that takes us back to the uncertainties of the pre-NATO era, does it not?

Michael Fallon: I accept most of that, but it is up to each existing member of NATO to decide whether that credibility can be extended to a potential new member, whether they meet the criteria and whether they are able, indeed, to explain to their own electorates and people that they are now committed to come to the defence of that new member. We have seen that over the past year, as we have considered the accession of Montenegro. So it is up to not just NATO as an organisation; each country will have to think very carefully as we consider any future application.

Peter Watkins: Perhaps I could just add something on the criteria. What we are looking for there is the ability of that country to be able to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area as well as to receive, if you like, the security. So those criteria relate to things such as standards, interoperability and so on. In the event of an application, that is all worked through in some detail before a decision is taken.

Chair: Jim, you have a question about Russian internal security.

Q245 Jim Shannon: Yes, it is to do with the national guard. Many of us, Secretary of State, will see Russia's creation of the new national guard not as something that would help with earthquakes or pestilences, or problems that might happen internally, but as a Putin oversight of the people of Russia, as more monitoring, more regulation and more control. Would that be your opinion of the creation of the National Guard as well?

Michael Fallon: We are concerned about this. Russia has become more aggressive and more authoritarian in recent years, and the space for civil society, voluntary organisations and those who do not support Putin's own power to operate and express themselves has been considerably reduced.

Two things particularly worry us about the formation of the national guard: one is that it comes under the direct control of the President, and not through a normal ministerial responsibility; and the other is that although it is there to help to combat terrorism and deal with organised crime, it also has a remit to control protests, which, I think, sends a rather chilling message to wider Russian society that the regime is no longer prepared to tolerate any kind of overt opposition. There is an implicit threat there, that force itself, rather than the legal system, could be used to silence legitimate protests, and that is worrying.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach: You also now have the prospect of many different types of armed group in Russia, armed by the state. So it is a worrying development.

Peter Watkins: One with a long history, if we look back to the Cheka, the Okhrana and so on.

Q246 Richard Benyon: In 2009, someone called Sergei Magnitsky was murdered in a prison in Russia. He is one of many who have met their end at the hands of a brutal regime.

The people who perpetrated that murder prospered in Russia and in some cases were promoted and even decorated, but Sergei Magnitsky had determined friends: they have ensured that the US Congress has passed the Magnitsky Act, which means that those directly responsible for his death cannot travel or conduct business or any other activity that they may wish to conduct in the United States.

Other countries are looking at extensions of the Magnitsky Act, but the British Government have always resisted it, despite growing evidence that people quite close to those who perpetrated this crime are active in investing in and travelling to the United Kingdom. Can I ask whether you have had any discussions with ministerial colleagues or whether you have any understanding from within the Government that there is an intention to address this issue?

Michael Fallon: We are obviously aware of the Magnitsky Act, the effect it has had on Russia, and the constraints that are being exercised there on relatively minor figures in the Administration who have been involved in something like Magnitsky and are now finding it more difficult to travel and to access the United States financial system. That is not too different from the travel bans and sanctions that the European Union is applying.

Work is going on to ensure that the European Union sanctions are co-ordinated with the United States sanctions so that both the great economic unions in the world are working together to punish this kind of behaviour. Our sanctions, which I referred to earlier and we have already discussed, include a ban on travel for some of the major figures in the Russian Administration, and it is very important that those sanctions are rolled over when we get to the end of July.

Q247 Richard Benyon: The Chairman has allowed me one minute to ask a question related to something that Sir Stuart mentioned earlier: your trip to Moscow last year. Many of us think the Government are right to be robust in their relationship with this regime, but there are avenues where greater dialogue could exist. If there is a problem politically between the Governments, perhaps more relationships at General to General, Air Marshal to Air Marshal or Admiral to Admiral level—there is the ability to have greater understanding among our respective military leaders. Are there plans to extend those kinds of relationships? Should Nick Carter be meeting his opposite number? Should other chiefs be doing the same?

Michael Fallon: Yes, I do want to see those military-military links developed. They are important, because they increase our understanding of the Russian military position. They are valuable in that sense and I have encouraged them. I am not myself, for example, banned from travelling to Moscow—

Richard Benyon: Mr Dunne is, for some reason.

Michael Fallon: —but one of my Ministers is and the Chief of the Defence Staff is. They have drawn up their list. Former Foreign Secretaries and so on are on the list, but given that neither the Vice-Chief nor the other Service Chiefs are on it, these sorts of links should be encouraged.

Chair: Thank you. On that positive note, may I thank colleagues, who have enabled us to get through a vast range of topics, including a few excursions into EU politics, on which this Committee is as evenly divided as the rest of the nation? Thank you, Minister, for a marathon session and for answering so clearly and competently—even adding the odd

extra topic that we had not originally intended to ask about. That is much appreciated. The session is concluded on time.

Michael Fallon: Thank you.