

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [Warsaw NATO summit and Chilcot Report](#), HC 579

Tuesday 19 July 2016

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[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 1-70

Witnesses

[I](#): Rt Hon Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence, General Sir Gordon Messenger, Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff, and Peter Watkins, Director General Security Policy, Ministry of Defence.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon Michael Fallon, General Sir Gordon Messenger, and Peter Watkins.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning everyone. Welcome to this special session of the Defence Committee to consider the 2016 NATO summit and the lessons of the Chilcot inquiry. Welcome, Secretary of State, and congratulations on your reconfirmation in post. Would our other two guests care to introduce themselves for the record?

General Sir Gordon Messenger: I am General Gordon Messenger. I am the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff.

Peter Watkins: I am Peter Watkins, Director General Security Policy.

Chair: The first question in our first section, which is on the NATO summit, comes from Ruth Smeeth.

Q2 **Ruth Smeeth:** Good morning. It has been a busy few weeks, but I wonder whether you can outline for us the most important new developments that came out of the Warsaw summit in terms of our security and that of NATO.

Michael Fallon: Thank you, Chairman, and good morning to you all. This was a successful summit. It demonstrated the unity and cohesion of the alliance. It was an opportunity for us to show British leadership and we made progress on further NATO reform and co-operation between NATO and the European Union.

If I may briefly touch on each, in terms of unity and cohesion, we agreed a clear posture on defence and deterrence that embraces NATO's position, not simply for the east, but for the south, too. We demonstrated British leadership by recording our achievement of again committing 2% to defence. We noted that 18 other members of the alliance are now increasing their defence expenditure.

We were one of the four countries to commit to lead a battalion in the enhanced forward presence that the alliance has now agreed to deploy in the three Baltic states and Poland. We are additionally contributing troops to Poland. We have played a leadership role in that. We saw some success in the communiqué with what we have been encouraging for some time, which is further NATO work on cyber and hybrid warfare and on closer co-operation—that is a key point of the communiqué—between NATO and the European Union. This was a successful summit for Britain, but more importantly perhaps, it was a successful summit for the alliance as a whole.

Q3 **Mrs Moon:** In the Warsaw summit communiqué, there is a significant emphasis on the challenge to NATO posed by Russia. You will be aware, Secretary of State, that we have just completed our report, "Russia: Implications for UK defence and security", which strongly advises an increased understanding and resourcing of the Russia question in the UK.

We used to have the Soviet Studies Research Centre. It later became the Conflict Studies Research Centre. Are you considering reinstating such a centre? Are you considering increasing our understanding, and capabilities of understanding, Russia's defence and security posture?

Michael Fallon: Generally, yes. We have seen that in your report, and we are looking hard at how we improve our understanding of Russia, both through our work in Russia and at home. In Russia, as you will know, there have been difficulties in bringing the defence section of the embassy up to full strength. They are not difficulties of our making, but we are working hard to restore that full strength, which improves our understanding of the Russian military but also of course helps to underpin a better relationship between the two militaries. At home, we are looking, again, at—I think your report particularly focused on this—the number of Russian speakers and the number of people we have specialising in intelligence on Russia. I can't commit to restoring the centre that there was, but you are certainly already seeing an increased emphasis on our Russian analysis generally.

Peter Watkins: Perhaps I could just add to that. As I think we said in the previous session, we have considerably increased the number of policy staff that we have working on Russia, as has the Foreign Office. We have increased the number of staff in defence intelligence. And through organisations like the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, the Defence Academy and so on, we seek to increase the access that we have to academic expertise. There are a number of particular organisations and individuals, in London and elsewhere, with whom we are actively engaged.

Q4 **Mrs Moon:** May I ask about the advanced research and assessment centre and the funds put into that centre? Are they going to be increased? Are you looking at how that can be utilised to expand our Russian understanding and capability?

Peter Watkins: Do you mean the Advanced Research and Assessment Group, which used to exist? There is a long story here. You mentioned the Soviet Studies Research Centre, which became the Conflict Studies Research Centre, which became the Advanced Research and Assessment Group, which was disbanded some time ago. As I think I have said in previous evidence, the work that used to be done in that group is now done by various organisations across defence, so there is more diversity, if you like, giving us wider access to a greater range of inputs from academia and so on. But no, we are not planning to re-establish it.

Q5 **Chair:** Before you move on from that topic, may I just check this point? Russia has famously been described as "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma" and that suggests that you really do need a unit or team of dedicated experts. That apparently is what you used to have, and it is perfectly understandable that as Russia went down in our list of priorities and concerns after 1991, you broke it up, but Russia has now risen back up, very distinctly, and although you talk about having its functions distributed around other parts of the defence establishment, is it not time to do a serious study as to whether a dedicated unit of Russia experts should be reconstituted?

Peter Watkins: As I said, in effect we have established a new policy unit within the Ministry of Defence that focuses on Russia and the immediately surrounding countries. As I said, we have strengthened the staff in the defence intelligence area. The unit that you refer to didn't used to solely focus on Russia. Russia happened to be an interest of one or two of its members, who were quite active in publications and so on, but it was not purely focused on Russia. My view would be that the arrangements that we have now give us breadth and depth across policy and intelligence, and broader outreach to academia.

Q6 **Chair:** How many staff does this unit have?

Peter Watkins: The policy unit? It is growing all the time; I think it has about 15 at the moment.

Q7 **Chair:** And how many of those would be Russia specialists?

Peter Watkins: We will probably write to you on that.

Chair: Okay.

Peter Watkins: But what we are seeking to do is to make sure that we make the best use of our specialisms. It is slightly invidious to pick out an individual, but for example, our recent naval attaché in Moscow has come back to lead the sub-team dealing with Russia inside that unit. So we are making the best use of the knowledge and experience that we are gaining.

Q8 **Mrs Moon:** I thank the Chair for coming in, because he has brought me to where I wanted to go next. We have been caught napping on Russia; our understanding, our intelligence, our whole capability on Russia has been let slip for far too long. I think what the Committee is saying is: are we doing enough? With the unit that we have now, with our 15, the need for Russian specialists is becoming increasingly urgent. I am a little worried that the replies that I am getting suggest that the urgency that the Committee feels is not reflected within the Ministry of Defence. Can we have some assurance that there is a recognition that there is an urgent need to have that wider and greater depth of understanding of what Russia is thinking and why it is acting in the way that it is? We were certainly caught napping over Ukraine and Crimea.

Michael Fallon: Let me give you that assurance. We need to do more on Russia, but we are doing more. We are building up our capability and our understanding. I certainly accept there is more to be done to continue to focus on what Russia's aspirations are and to better understand how Russia is likely to react: what its next moves are at home and the near abroad and indeed in the Middle East. We are doing more, but there is more we can do, too.

Q9 **Mrs Moon:** Then what do you expect Russia's response will be to the NATO Warsaw summit, both politically and militarily? How severe will be the implications for Allied defence and security and for the Baltics? Do we know? Do we have any understanding of how they are responding?

Michael Fallon: Yes, we do. Russia's reaction to Warsaw so far has been relatively restrained, but it may not be complete yet; there may be more

to come. There has been a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council since the summit, which I hope helped to explain to Russia the renewed posture of NATO. It is also important to remember that Russia's reaction to Warsaw actually began before Warsaw in response to prior announcements on enhanced forward presence and in response to the completion of the ballistic missiles site in Romania back in May. So far, the reaction has been relatively restrained, but there may be more to come.

- Q10 **Bob Stewart:** Presumably these experts are within CDI's empire, which links across to the security services where there is further expertise. Are there good links right the way across all methods of gaining information and intelligence on Russia with the security services, GCHQ and CDI? Is this policy or is it intelligence that these people are doing?

Michael Fallon: This is much more joined up than it used to be. When you ask whether there are good links, there are much better links and much closer working now between us and the agencies. Mr Watkins will tell you exactly where these officials are located.

Peter Watkins: To answer your question, they are both. The new unit that I mentioned is within my staff, so it is part of the policy staff. There have always been some Russia experts in CDI's area. Those have been strengthened. And, as the Defence Secretary says, there are extremely good links between my staff and the Russia experts in the Foreign Office and between CDI's staff and Russia experts across the community.

Bob Stewart: That is the reassurance I wanted. Thank you.

- Q11 **Jim Shannon:** My question is on the Russian language courses. There are 15 dedicated staff in the Russian section. Is 15 enough? Does that take into consideration the massive task that you have? It is not just the issue of language courses and intelligence, but the media: Facebook and Twitter. Will there be staff within the 15 made available for radio and TV interviews to put forward our case where it needs to be in Russia? The big question is: when it comes to NATO's task and our role within NATO, what is the No. 1 issue that the MOD is preparing for? Is it Russia, Iraq, Syria? Where is the No. 1 priority?

Peter Watkins: If I could answer your first question, clearly the staff in the units are military personnel and civil servants, so they are subject to the normal rules about dealing with the media and so on. They would not normally speak to the media, but many of the academic experts we talk to—they have given evidence to the Committee—talk to the media all the time. We share much of our analysis with them; indeed, we draw some of our analysis from their work.

Clearly we are focusing on developments within Russia itself—for example, the formation of the national guard and things like that—which we have discussed at a previous session, along with Russia's activities in its immediate neighbourhood, whether that be Belarus, Ukraine, or wherever, and also further afield, because Russia is obviously very active in Syria at the moment. Just so that you don't think we are taking our eye off the ball, the other thing that we are also looking at is what Russia is doing in

the Asia-Pacific and Far East. We are looking at all aspects of Russian behaviour.

Chair: It is very welcome that the MOD is using its officials in that way, but the Committee still feels that there is a role for a more independent group of actual experts. Rather than clever officials who are gaining expertise as they go along, there should be experts who could actually challenge the orthodoxy that might be prevailing at any one time. I think we will return to this topic, but we have to move on, so I am going to ask Douglas to discuss the rotational format that has been put forward for the Baltic states.

Q12 **Douglas Chapman:** Madeleine touched on some of the reaction that we might see from Russia, following Warsaw. Although NATO claims that the rotational format for the four extra battalions does not violate the NATO-Russia Founding Act, it seems obvious that Russia does not accept that, and is unlikely to. How will you prepare for the Russian response to the four new battalions being in situ?

Michael Fallon: First, we are clear that the deployment of the new forward presence does not contravene the Founding Act. There is no definition in the Act of "substantial forces", but I don't think there is any way you could claim that the rotation of a battalion in each of the Baltic states amounts to substantial forces. The forces there will be rotational. In each of the four host nations they are not going to exceed 1,000 personnel. You have to set that against Russia's decision, back in January, to form three new divisions in the west and five new strategic nuclear missile regiments. That involves tens of thousands of troops, whereas, as I said, each of our deployments is going to be less than 1,000 each.

It is important to refer back to one of the key principles of the Founding Act: the parties to the Act must respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all states. We are deploying in Estonia at the invitation of, and with the blessing of, the Government of Estonia, and likewise with the deployment of a company in Poland. That obviously cannot be said of Russian activity in either Crimea or eastern Ukraine.

As far as the deployment itself is concerned, we are deploying two British companies. We will supply enablers as well, plus a headquarters element. We are looking at adding to that some armed vehicles, some Javelin anti-tank guided missiles and some mortars, along with various other enabling capabilities, such as surveillance, reconnaissance and logistics. We would expect the other countries that are going to add to our battalion to add on top of that companies of their own, and the whole battalion to rotate its presence in Estonia, I hope, from the spring of next year.

Q13 **Douglas Chapman:** You have explained the case very well for what we are doing from our side. The issue is how our actions will be perceived on the other side of the border, from a Russian source. Our Committee report explained fully some of the discussions that need to be had with Russia going forward. Can you tell us about the discussions you have had post-Warsaw with, for example, the Russian ambassador in London and direct communications with your equivalent numbers in Moscow to explain fully what the intentions are from the Warsaw summit and how

we can avoid any misunderstanding that the small number of forces NATO have placed there are not an aggressive force but a protective force in terms of the Baltic states and Poland?

Michael Fallon: Sure. I do not have regular discussions with the Russian ambassador in London, nor do I have regular meetings with my opposite number in Russia. There is dialogue at the very senior levels of the Government, obviously, between the Prime Minister and the Russian President and between our Foreign Secretary and the Russian Foreign Minister.

The defence dialogue is conducted principally through the NATO machinery and after Warsaw there was a meeting of the NATO-Russia council on 13 July, which covered the situation in Ukraine and had a review of the current situation in Afghanistan, but it was principally devoted to the alliance explaining the measures that had been adopted at Warsaw. This is the essence of the alliance policy: to make sure that the steps that we take to reassure our members or to deter Russia are fully explained at each stage so that there is total transparency in order to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation.

So at that meeting on 13 July the alliance explained the various measures that were adopted. Obviously, there was a response from Russia and a concern about this particular positioning, but of course we did not have a proper explanation from Russia as to the three new military divisions that it was stationing on NATO's flank. What we did have from Russia was an openness to further dialogue on risk reduction. Russia has proposed deepening the military exchanges there are between the alliance and Russia, including the proposal by Finland that military aircraft flying over the Baltic should have their transponders switched on to prevent any likelihood of accidents or miscalculation. We welcome that. Any Russian interest in risk reduction is extremely welcome and important.

I would conclude by emphasising that although it is important to explain these measures to Russia and it is important to keep the pressure on Russia so far as their interference in Ukraine is concerned, we are not, as NATO, returning to business as usual with Russia. What has happened in Crimea and Ukraine cannot simply now be put aside and forgotten and it should not be forgotten.

Q14 **Chair:** I am keen to bring the Vice Chief into the discussion. Can you explain to us, please, how this rotational system will work in terms of the numbers? Why is it a rotational system—is this to try to send a signal that there is no great permanence about any particular body or troops? Would it be true to describe what you are trying to do as to make it clear to Russia there is no way in which they will be able to carry out operations in any of the Baltic states analogous to what they did in Ukraine?

General Sir Gordon Messenger: On your last point, the answer to that is explicitly yes. This is a show of solidarity. It is a commitment of NATO allies to those nations that feel vulnerable to exactly that sort of threat. We are describing it as a persistent presence and, as you say, we are rotating forces around. We think that that is the best way to demonstrate

that solidarity and we think it is the best way that we can extract capability value from that deployment. We are not doing this simply as a show of military force; we are doing it to extract benefits by working with allies, improving interoperability and developing the host nations' capabilities as well as our own. For all sorts of reasons, we have decided on that rotation model.

- Q15 **Douglas Chapman:** In terms of NATO, an openly expansionist organisation, what would be the effects of the accession of Montenegro to NATO membership? What do they actually bring to the table? From your point of view, what could be the potential concerns of Montenegro's accession?

Michael Fallon: I would not describe NATO as openly expansionist. We have always made it clear that membership of NATO remains open to those countries that can fulfil the membership criteria and command the unanimous support of all existing members for accession. It requires unanimity. This is not NATO simply opening its door to any country that fancies membership; there are a number of hurdles to go through. Equally, it is true that we do not accept that Russia or anybody else should have any kind of veto on NATO membership. Future membership is a matter for the members of NATO to decide.

As far as Montenegro is concerned, Montenegro has now met the criteria required and attended Warsaw as an observer. I hope its membership accession will be completed by early October. It has to pass through this House as well as the other place and be ratified by the other member states, including Congress in the United States. It will only be complete when all 28 allies have completed their national ratification process.

You asked me what this meant. I think it demonstrates that membership is open to those applicants that can satisfy the criteria. Also, I think fairly obviously, it sends a strong signal to the western Balkans about the benefits that membership in the alliance can bring, in terms of stability, to that much-troubled region.

- Q16 **Douglas Chapman:** Any concerns about Montenegro's accession?

Michael Fallon: No; we have wholeheartedly welcomed Montenegro's accession, as has the rest of the alliance. I hope that the ratification procedures will be completed as quickly as possible.

- Q17 **Mr Gray:** Secretary of State, can we touch briefly on Brexit and its consequences for NATO and NATO-EU co-operation? The joint statement at the end of the summit said something about ever closer co-operation, in a sort of distant echo of "an ever closer union". To what degree was Britain's departure from the EU discussed, and in what way do you think it will affect either how NATO works or how the EU works? Consequences: discuss.

Michael Fallon: There was discussion, obviously, of the result of the referendum in the margins of Warsaw. It wasn't one of the major topics, and I don't think it's any secret that not a single one of my Defence Minister colleagues would not have wished for a different result. They are all concerned about the security of our continent, and those who are also

members of the European Union have always seen membership of the European Union as complementing the strengths of the alliance.

On our own position now, co-operation with the European Union will remain important to our shared security interests. Those interests have not changed, and we also have a continuing interest—perhaps even more of an interest—in a closer relationship between NATO and the European Union, which is reflected in the communiqué. It has been a long-standing British preoccupation that these two organisations should work better together, should avoid duplicating each other wherever possible and should complement each other's strengths.

Finally, there are a number of interlocking missions in Europe, so far as migration in the Mediterranean is concerned. There is a NATO mission in the Aegean and a European Union mission in the central Mediterranean. They are both, in essence, doing the same thing: trying to break the people smuggling models and to rescue those at sea whose lives are at risk. We are contributing Royal Navy ships to both operations.

Q18 Mr Gray: For now, but if Britain is not a member of the EU, presumably we will not be taking part in EU operations or training or anything else, will we?

Michael Fallon: Let us be clear, first of all, that we remain members of the European Union until the moment we leave. We remain full members of the European Union, and we will continue to participate in what are called CSDP missions. We are not withdrawing anybody from those missions. The missions we have contributed to—

Q19 Mr Gray: I am sorry to interrupt. My question is not about now. Of course it is the case that we are still members, and of course we carry on as before. My question is, once Britain leaves the EU, to which the Government are now committed, presumably we will no longer play with the European Union, apart from, perhaps, in a bilateral way.

Michael Fallon: I am afraid what is happening now will influence our position in the future, because we participate in these missions because there is a British national interest in these missions; we don't just do it because we want to be good Europeans. We have a trading interest in suppressing piracy off the horn of Africa, for example. We have a very strong interest in trying to curb illegal migration from the African littoral into Europe. We have an interest in those particular missions. We have invested blood and treasure, as at least one member of the Committee knows, in bringing peace to the Balkans. We have an interest in making sure that EU mission is successful. I don't myself see the British interest in some of those missions diminishing. Of course, we will not be members of the European Union, and we will not be participating in the same way, but we will certainly have a national interest in the success of those missions, because if they are not successful our trade, security and immigration will be affected.

Q20 Mr Gray: All that is perfectly the case, and we certainly would not want to ignore those places or abandon them, but we will be participating on a

bilateral basis, with the UK agreeing with the EU to do so, rather than as a member of the EU.

Michael Fallon: Absolutely. We will not be members of the European Union, but we will have to look carefully at where the British interest is. I think there are already some examples of non-EU members participating in CSDP missions where it is in their national interest to do so. I am not going to prejudice—

Q21 **Mr Gray:** What sort of example?

Michael Fallon: We can get you some examples; perhaps Mr Watkins has them to hand.

Q22 **Mr Gray:** They are quite important though, because they would be the basis on which we would—

Michael Fallon: Before Mr Watkins answers, I want to be very clear about one thing: we have not yet set out our negotiating strategy. That is not entirely a matter for me; it is to be finalised across Government. I am not going to speculate now on whether we are going to join particular CSDP missions. I just make the point that with the missions we are in already, there is a British national interest in them being successful, whether we are there or not. Mr Watkins can perhaps help you.

Peter Watkins: I am just going to give you one example, which is Norway. I cannot remember precisely which missions it was involved in, but Norway does participate, or has participated, in CSDP missions.

Q23 **Chair:** So what you are saying is that Brexit does not inhibit our future co-operation, militarily, with EU military missions, whether in the context of NATO or not.

Michael Fallon: There is no reason why it should. We have not taken a decision. We are not at that point yet; the new Government is only a few days old. There is no reason why it should inhibit our co-operation bilaterally with our key allies in Europe—the northern group, the EU members that are members of the JEF, or the key alliances with France and Germany. There is no reason why it should inhibit future co-operation with missions that are in our direct interest. We have not taken a position on any of those individual missions at the moment. I simply point out that we do not join these things just to be good Europeans; there is a British interest at stake.

Q24 **Mr Gray:** Is there not a reasonable presumption that, if we are not members of the EU and we still have these bilateral agreements with the EU to take part in CSDP—or not, as the case might be—that increases the importance of our membership of NATO? The EU will presumably be lessened because we are no longer members. Presumably, therefore, that also means our presence in NATO will become more important.

Michael Fallon: I think as we leave one partnership it will be in Britain's interest to strengthen our commitment to our other alliances, whether it is NATO or the key relationships we have with the United States, or bilaterally with France and others, or other multinational relationships we have around the world—our participation in the coalition; our participation

in "Five Eyes"; the five-power defence arrangements in Asia Pacific. I think you can take it that as we withdraw from the European Union, we will have to demonstrate our international leadership by leaning more heavily into these other alliances. So the broad answer is yes.

Q25 **Bob Stewart:** Secretary of State, the question is how the summit has impacted on NATO intelligence methods. You have raised the matter of "Five Eyes"—we have actually got three eyes in NATO, as everyone knows, and that means that we can share intelligence pretty accurately among three NATO members, but with 26? Perhaps not. Having served in NATO for a number of years in two appointments, I know that one of the problems for gathering intelligence, and the use of intelligence in NATO, is that each officer within the intelligence organisation in NATO has a direct line back to his or her capital, and yet has to produce a NATO product, as it were, which is perhaps actually a lesser one than national intelligence would yield up. It is a big problem for NATO to produce seriously good intelligence assessments without compromising national security, sometimes.

So I go back to my original question. Have there been improvements, as a result of the summit, in trying to solve the dichotomy between the requirement to keep our own intelligence sources good and secure on the one hand, and the fact that we also want to contribute to the NATO alliance and give NATO some kind of decent intelligence assessment?

Michael Fallon: You are right, Colonel Stewart—there is a tension there between the intelligence capabilities, particularly, that those who are members of the "Five Eyes" community bring, and some of the restrictions on sharing that intelligence more widely because of the way it is sourced. But I am happy to report to you that the Warsaw summit adopted what is called the joint intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance initiative, which will, I hope, maximise the resources that the individual members of NATO have, and enhance the interconnectivity, if I can describe it like that, between the different intelligence systems. That will help improve the training and expertise of the intelligence functions in each of the different member states and, I hope, lead to better procedures for information handling and information sharing. There is quite a way to go on that, as you have drawn attention to, but we did make some progress at Warsaw.

Q26 **Bob Stewart:** The reason for my question is that as a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly I had to resist quite strongly, as did other British Members, the demand by some other parliamentarians in the NATO states that all intelligence should be shared equally among NATO members. That particularly came from countries like Belgium. I and others were quite robust in saying, "You must be joking."

There is a dilemma here. When I served in NATO we reckoned that when there was anything with "NATO—Secret—Classified" on it, it took half an hour before the Russians had it. There is huge leakage there. It is a big problem. I raise the matter because I know that you understand that, and I want Committee to understand the real dilemma, because when something says "NATO—Secret", that's the last bloody thing it is. Sorry for the use of the language, but I have seen it breached so many times.

Michael Fallon: That is quite all right. It is soldier talk, no doubt. Yes, there is a tension there, and of course as the alliance expands there are more and more members to consider, but what I want to assure you of is that everybody recognises the problems, not least because of the terrorism that members are facing now in western Europe and the need to share intelligence more swiftly. The problem is recognised, and we have this initiative now to try to improve the position.

Chair: From one soldier to another, Johnny Mercer.

Q27 **Johnny Mercer:** I think question 9 has been answered, so I am going to ask just the one question.

The Warsaw summit communiqué states that, in responding to the challenge of hybrid warfare, NATO has “adopted a strategy and actionable implementation plans.” Would you be prepared to share, in really broad brush strokes, what they are and, potentially, what our role in that might be?

Michael Fallon: So far as hybrid is concerned, NATO and the individual allies well understand that the threat of activity that is designed to introduce uncertainty and ambiguity below the article 5 threshold is becoming a real issue for the alliance. I think that the lessons of Ukraine have been learned. It is unlikely that the next use of hybrid tactics will be exactly the same as the tactics we saw in Ukraine, but it is important to develop the alliance’s agility and responsiveness, in order to be able to respond next time we see these kinds of tactics.

The alliance agreed a strategy on countering hybrid warfare back at the end of last year. There is an implementation plan—we can go into detail on that if you like—that is now being agreed. There was a joint declaration at the Warsaw summit between the NATO Secretary General, the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission in getting NATO and the EU, for which there is a role in dealing with hybrid warfare because of the forms that hybrid warfare can take, to work much more closely on a co-ordinated approach between the two different institutions. It is about dealing with the prevention, detection, analysis and information sharing of hybrid warfare; co-operating on the response, which is strategic messaging and communications; and building better resilience and hardening the targets—the institutions of our states that are most likely to be vulnerable to hybrid warfare.

Q28 **Phil Wilson:** What is your assessment of the next regions of potential conflict in Europe that may occur in the near future, and how has the summit prepared us for that?

Michael Fallon: One of the successes of the NATO summit was that we did not exclusively focus on the eastern border, where significant reassurance was required and was met by the deployment of enhanced forward presence, as we have discussed. We also looked—an entire session was devoted to this—at some of the pressures on NATO further south.

There are rising tensions in at least two areas. One is the Black Sea region, where the militarisation of the Crimea is causing particular concern

in Romania and Bulgaria—countries that are not that far away and are seeing increased naval activity in the Black Sea area. The other, of course, is the Mediterranean itself, where we have seen enhanced Russian naval activity off the coast of Syria. We also see the smuggling of arms by Daesh from Syria along the Libyan littoral to supply the franchises of Daesh along that coast, very much closer to the NATO border.

So there are those areas of tension. I don't think it would be wise of me to start speculating about where the next conflict is likely to break out, but there are these pressures, and the alliance recognises them.

- Q29 **Jim Shannon:** Minister, you referred to the joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. I suppose that many in this Committee question its effectiveness. In other words, there is a skeletal structure but there is no meat—it is lying there but it is not breathing. I am keen to hear your ideas to improve joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. The Crimea is a supreme example of where it fell down, and many of us wonder how effective it is and who sets the criteria and the priorities for it. I am keen to see how it can become more effective.

Michael Fallon: It needs to become more effective, clearly. The alliance and some of the leading members of NATO failed to predict what was going to happen in the Crimea, or indeed the intensity of the insurgency that Russia had fostered in eastern Ukraine. Those things were not predicted accurately, the surveillance was not there and the response was a little fragmented. That was a wake-up call for the alliance, not simply in intelligence but in getting the alliance to look hard at itself again and to reverse the decline in defence spending. That led to the commitments at the Wales summit, which led on to Warsaw. Mr Watkins may be able to answer more specifically.

Peter Watkins: To add to what the Secretary of State said earlier, one of the things we have been arguing for since Crimea, since Ukraine in 2014 and from the Wales Summit onwards is that NATO needs to become more adaptable and more flexible. It needs to be better able to anticipate and respond to these sorts of events. That affects not just the intelligence arrangements but the situation more broadly. There has been extensive work over the last year or so on improving NATO's intelligence arrangements—that is reflected in the initiative the Defence Secretary mentioned. It is an area fraught with difficulties, for all the reasons that have been set out eloquently already, but we are pushing ahead with it. We are very determined to change it and make it better.

- Q30 **Chair:** Can I just ask the Vice-Chief what specific assessment arrangements you have within the UK military? Did you feel, in the light of the fact that we were so surprised by what happened in the Ukraine and Crimea, that changes were necessary? Have such changes been made?

General Sir Gordon Messenger: That takes us back to the first question about how, as you yourself said, we had drawn down on Russian expertise and Russian intelligence specialists in the intervening years. But that is something we have been addressing for some time now, and the comments that the Secretary of State and Peter made earlier about

developing both in the policy area and the intelligence area are absolutely valid. They are areas of quite considerable investment. I also highlight the fact that NATO collectively is absolutely addressing the challenge—that goes back to Mr Stewart’s question on how we can best leverage that.

On the more recent question of the effectiveness of our ISR and how we can leverage the 28—nearly 29—nations more effectively, there is a precedent there. For many years now, we have committed our E-3D sentry aircraft to NATO. They have been tasked by NATO centrally, with those of other nations, to the objectives set by NATO. Even today, we are flying E-3 sentries in both south Europe and north Europe in support of NATO plans. So there is a way of doing this; one of the challenges is that, as NATO nations, many of us are quite tight on ISR capability, but there are many programmes in place across the alliance to develop that, and as we do so the opportunities for collaboration will grow.

- Q31 **Phil Wilson:** Can we turn to North Korea, which was emphasised strongly in the communiqué from Warsaw? How is NATO actively preparing for any military confrontation that might emanate from North Korea in the South China Sea?

Michael Fallon: There is no direct NATO role in Korea. Obviously we condemn any ongoing nuclear activity by the People’s Republic of Korea, and we continue to emphasise that that activity is in violation of the Security Council resolutions. We want North Korea to put a stop to these provocations and start re-engaging constructively with the international community. We, the United Kingdom, work within the United Nations to maintain that pressure. We were instrumental in drafting the latest resolution, 2270. You will see that that contains some of the toughest measures yet restricting the transfer of technology and doing more to impede North Korea’s efforts to develop a deployable nuclear weapon.

There was also the statement by the European Union on 22 June, which the UK supported. That, too, condemned the missile tests. Those are the forums through which we bring our particular influence to bear on what is happening in North Korea.

- Q32 **Phil Wilson:** Do you think there will be any point in the future when North Korea could be a direct challenge to NATO security?

Michael Fallon: Certainly its development of nuclear weapons is a very direct challenge and yet another reason why Parliament was right yesterday to endorse the replacement of our four Vanguard boats. There are too many nuclear weapons out there, and North Korea is a very good example of a rogue state developing these weapons in a most dangerous way, which is why we have to continue to protect ourselves.

- Q33 **Mr Spellar:** Secretary of State, may I first welcome the fact that the Commons yesterday was finally actually given the opportunity to vote? It was clearly always going to be a very substantial margin.

Looking at the part of the NATO summit communiqué that referred to security threats in the Black Sea region, what would you say is the breadth and severity of the threats that have caused NATO to deepen its focus on security in the Black Sea region?

Michael Fallon: First, I welcome what you said about yesterday's vote. It was a debate and vote that we promised in the strategic defence review before Christmas, and you will know that I have been pressing for it for some time. It had to be slightly delayed because of the referendum period.

The majority achieved last night was of enormous significance—a much bigger majority than the previous vote, which sends a very strong signal to our allies around the world. I am sure Mr Chapman would not want to delay my departure this afternoon to Washington to convey the full significance of the vote that Parliament took yesterday. I want the American Administration and all our allies who are meeting in Washington this week to understand, yet again, that Britain is not stepping back but stepping up to its commitments.

Turning to the Black Sea, we are seeing increasing militarisation of Crimea itself. We are seeing insurgency activity in the southern part of the provinces that are affected. There is obviously a real threat there to Romania in particular. We are seeing increased naval activity back and forward through the Bosphorus, and that is a concern. It is a concern for Romania, Bulgaria and other countries such as Greece. That is something we need to keep our eye on.

Last year, I think I was the first Defence Secretary for some time to visit Romania, and the Romanian Minister came here for a bilateral meeting earlier this year. We have looked to see what further reassurance we can offer countries such as Romania. We have seconded staff officers to the NATO Forward Integration Unit based in Romania, and we are looking at how we can deepen military co-operation with these particular countries.

Chair: James Gray has to leave us in a moment to attend a statement. James, would you like to make a brief point?

Q34 **Mr Gray:** That's very kind of you to bring me in early, Chairman.

You will be talking in a moment about Chilcot and his examination of the decision-making process in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Given that there were three parliamentary votes prior to the 2003 invasion, which Chilcot has been fairly plain in saying was the wrong thing to have done, do you think there is any merit in the argument that having parliamentary consideration of the deployment of troops in the way we did in 2003 demonstrably is not the right thing to do? The two options available are first, a straightforward return to the use of royal prerogative—a genie that I think is probably now well out of the bottle and cannot be done—and secondly, some form of UK war powers Act, under which the Prime Minister and the Executive would operate with the assent of Parliament through the Act without having to consult Parliament in detail. My question really is: is there some discussion to be had in the aftermath of Chilcot?

Michael Fallon: There is clearly academic discussion. I notice that some have published in this area. This is something to reflect on again after Chilcot.

I think you have answered your own question—the genie is out of the bottle, and I cannot really see a situation now arising where Parliament would not want to debate a combat deployment involving substantial numbers of British troops, planes or ships. I see real difficulties with a war powers Act, which might lead to definitional problems as to what was being deployed, how significant that deployment had to be before the Act was triggered and so on.

A convention has now built up that a substantial combat deployment should be debated and voted on where appropriate by this House, subject to the qualifications that the previous Prime Minister has always set out—where there is a vital British national interest at stake and it is impossible to consult Parliament in time, or where there is some humanitarian catastrophe that has to be dealt with very quickly.

- Q35 **Mr Gray:** I accept that that is the convention, but would you not accept there are two risks associated with it? One is that Parliament will vote in favour of things that turn out to be the wrong thing to have done—for example, in Iraq. Equally, it is perfectly possible on other occasions that Parliament would vote against doing something that actually will turn out to be the right thing to have done. You yourself might argue that that was the case with regard to the Syria vote in September 2014. I accept your definitional questions, and we would not want this to become a matter for the courts, but surely that is a question of drafting an Act in such a way that would then allow the Executive to act in the way they wish to act, with the authority of Parliament in the Act rather than by a particular vote.

Michael Fallon: I am always ready to keep thinking about these things, but in general terms I would prefer conventions that evolve, rather than the legalistic approach of trying to define in sub-paragraphs exactly what constitutes a particular mission or a deployment. That does lead you into difficulty and does involve the courts, I'm afraid.

I think Parliament took the wrong decision in the first Syria vote. A number of people who spoke in the Chilcot debate still believe that Parliament took the right decision back then, although they may have been misled about the extent of the intelligence about WMD, but it is probably wrong to start off by saying that Parliament cannot or should not debate and decide these matters.

- Q36 **Mr Spellar:** Before we revert to Chilcot, may I raise the announcement made on 17 July that the right hon. Mark Francois MP has been appointed by the Prime Minister to conduct a review into the use of Reserves in the Army? With the independent Reserves commission in 2011 and the Reserves White Paper in 2013, why is a new review necessary?

Michael Fallon: We have made considerable progress now in recruiting Reserves. We have put a lot of focus on that through advertising and by encouraging the Regular units to team up with the Reserve units in their area and so on. I think it is right now, as the Reserve numbers have increased, particularly in the Army, to look more broadly at the possibilities that open up as to how Reserves can be used in future, and also whether the boundary between Regulars and Reserves is the right

one—for example, whether it is too artificial and whether there might be ways at different stages of people's careers of encouraging more flexibility and movement. I notice that we have significant numbers of Regulars leaving the Armed Forces who want to be Reservists. We may have people who want to move from the Reserves to the Regulars. Is the boundary between the two too formalised? We have not finalised the terms of reference for Mr Francois, but that is at least one area—alongside where we should use Reserves—that it would be useful to have another look at.

Q37 **Mr Spellar:** Okay. Any idea when that is expected to report?

Michael Fallon: No. This was only announced a couple of days ago. We are finalising the terms of reference for Mr Francois. By the way, I cannot think of anybody better to do this. He is a former Armed Forces Minister and I think he served as a Reservist himself. He is ideally suited to carrying this out.

Q38 **Mr Spellar:** But will we still have a Minister for the Reserves in the new structure of your Department?

Michael Fallon: We will have a Minister who deals with these personnel issues, including the Reserves. The same Minister, Mr Lancaster, will be dealing with our people issues generally. That includes our Regular service but will also include veterans and Reserves. He will be able to look at all these issues together.

Q39 **Mr Spellar:** So is this review just looking at those issues that you have just described going forward, or is it in any way reviewing whether the number of Reserves coming forward has frankly been inadequate to replace the number of those who have been going out of the Regular forces?

Michael Fallon: I would not agree that it has been inadequate. We have some time yet to meet the target that was fixed. The numbers coming in have gone up and up in the past two years, and I pay tribute to the former Minister for the Reserves, Mr Brazier, who did a huge amount to drive up recruitment and to focus activity in this area. I want Mr Francois to look forward now at how we can find more opportunities to deploy Reserves and, as I say, to look at making the boundary between being a Regular and being a Reservist more flexible, but I have not yet actually finalised his terms of reference, so your input at this stage is very welcome.

Q40 **Ruth Smeeth:** On that specific point about the terms of reference, will one of the issues in the inquiry be about women coming in and out? One of the issues that we have is that women leave the service at a certain point and it is almost impossible for them to return, and that in turn affects the number of female senior officers. Will that also be part of the remit of the inquiry?

Michael Fallon: That is exactly it—I want to see exactly that explored. We need to do better in terms of recruiting women into the Reserves and we need to understand how women's priorities change at different points in their careers and why we are losing too many people that we would like to retain. Can we make it easier, for example, for them to come back again after a short break without losing some of the advantage they might

have had by staying in all along? Can we look again at the liabilities that a Reservist has to accept? Could those be more flexible at different stages of somebody's life? That is exactly the kind of area I hope he will look at.

Chair: In the remaining time, which is just over half an hour, we will focus on the Chilcot report and the lessons from it.

Q41 **Mr Spellar:** Secretary of State, what measures, if any, would you say the MoD is setting in train to absorb the lessons and the analysis of the Chilcot report?

Michael Fallon: First, we welcome the report. It tells a very important story about our recent history of a military campaign in which we could clearly have done better. It concludes that we did not achieve our strategic objective, however well our troops fought—and they did fight well in the initial part of the campaign. Clearly, we could have done better and we need to learn from that and establish why we didn't do better at the time.

We are looking at everything Chilcot said about the Ministry itself, about some of our own decision-making processes and the way in which advice is tendered both to Ministers and from military commanders to very senior Ministers. We are looking again at the Armed Forces and how we can improve the structures there and the ability to ensure proper challenge within the Armed Forces to avoid the dangers of groupthink. Of course, we will have another look at our equipment processes, some of which were improved for the Afghanistan campaign, but there may be further lessons in terms of getting the equipment that is needed for particular campaigns to the front more quickly. So there is an awful lot there that we need to pick up on.

I am quite sure, as I said when I spoke in the debate on Thursday, that we are not at all complacent about this. We believe the Ministry has improved since those days, but I suspect we have a lot more to do.

Q42 **Chair:** Will there be any dedicated unit within the Ministry that will trawl through this huge volume of material in order to extract the main lessons and make recommendations?

Michael Fallon: The short answer to that is yes. I have set up a team to do exactly that: to trawl right through the report and make sure that the proper lessons are learned. They are hard at work doing that at the moment.

Q43 **Chair:** Will there be any chance of its findings being made public, even if in slightly redacted form?

Michael Fallon: I am happy to look at ways in which we can report on how we get on in the findings and, more importantly, how we are implementing the changes that you would expect to see. I am happy to look at that.

Chair: Can you tell us who is in charge of the unit?

Michael Fallon: Can I add one thing to your earlier question? There has to be a Government response to the Chilcot report in due course. It may be that that will summarise some of our initial work on how our findings are going to be implemented.

Q44 **Chair:** Quite all right. That was a very helpful elucidation. Can you tell us who is in charge of the unit that is going to be trawling through it within the MoD?

Michael Fallon: I am in overall charge of everything. As you would expect.

Q45 **Chair:** Yes, I appreciate that, but even your superhuman capacity for work might not extend to however many million words. Are you able to tell us which officials are running this?

Michael Fallon: Sure. Mr Watkins will describe the structure of the team for you.

Peter Watkins: Basically, we have a directorate in the Ministry of Defence, which we call our directorate of judicial engagement policy, which has been dealing with inquiries and investigations and so on for many years. We have set up a team within that directorate, some of whose members are actually sitting behind us. They are doing just what the Defence Secretary said—they are trailing through all 2.6 million words.

One of the points that I think I should make about the report is that, as you will have noticed, it does not contain a simple table of recommendations and conclusions. The findings, conclusions and lessons are actually spread across the whole report, not just in the executive summary, but deep into some of the rather thick volumes. The team are going through every single volume line by line to pull out all that information.

Q46 **Chair:** Maybe they felt they didn't have enough time to prepare a summary. Can you just tell me who is in charge of this team and this unit?

Peter Watkins: The team is currently being led by Dr Roger Hutton, who is actually sitting behind us. He is taking forward the work on my behalf.

Q47 **Chair:** Thank you very much.

Sir John Chilcot judged that the decision to deploy a large-scale force for potential combat operations was taken without collective ministerial consideration of the decision and its implications. If it is not too early to ask this question, how are the MOD and the Government's crisis management organisations now better prepared to provide advice assessment, strategic options and appraisal of the consequences of potential conflicts? In other words, assuming it is not going to be sofa government next time, how is it going to work?

Michael Fallon: It is already not sofa government because in 2010 the then Prime Minister established the National Security Council, which meets every week—indeed, is due to meet this afternoon—and comprises not only the most senior Ministers in the Government but the heads of the

various agencies, the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office and all those you would expect. Briefing material is prepared by the National Security Secretariat for all those who attend, so there is no danger of a decision of that magnitude ever again being taken by a handful of people on a sofa in the Prime Minister's study.

- Q48 **Chair:** Would you say that this new machinery will be adequate for post-conflict planning and delivery, since one of the main findings of Chilcot is the hopeless inadequacy of preparation for what would take place after the initial military phase had been successful?

Michael Fallon: The Secretary of State for International Development is a member of the National Security Council, and one of the lessons of Chilcot, which we have already implemented, is that stabilisation planning has to be in the overall plan right from the outset. We have a cross-Government stabilisation unit and we see officials from that unit participating now in our exercises and in our training. One lesson that has been learned from the experience of Iraq is that this has to be central. We are thinking hard about that in relation to Libya, Syria and Iraq itself.

- Q49 **Chair:** You anticipate the next question: if this new machinery is so fit for purpose, why did things go wrong in Libya? Why was there apparently insufficient appreciation that removing that dictator in that country would lead to the same sort of mess as removing the dictator in Iraq?

Michael Fallon: Let us be clear that the initial action in Libya, which was fully authorised by the international community and was at the request of the Arab League, was successful in preventing the massacre that would otherwise have taken place in Benghazi. The view at the time—you will appreciate that I was not there at the time—was that thereafter we needed to respect the position of the new political authorities in Libya, which had little appetite for foreign assistance. They did not require it, they did not request it, and that led the West to overestimate their capacity for establishing the order that was required. Of course, as you now know, they essentially disintegrated into different factions by the middle of 2014.

- Q50 **Chair:** But is it not the case that the military advice that was given to the National Security Council by the Chief of the Defence Staff—I know we are not doing an inquiry into Libya at the moment—was that it was not in our strategic interest to remove the dictator and that was brushed aside by the Prime Minister at the time? What that leads to—it will not surprise you, because you have heard it from this Committee and from me before—is the question of whether or not the military representation needs strengthening when decisions of this sort are being made, so that the purely strategic considerations of whether it is always sensible to remove an unpleasant dictator without regard to the chaos that may follow can be more strongly put forward. That is why, although it seems a great step forward to have the National Security Council, this Committee has consistently suggested that the Chiefs of Staff, rather than just the Chief of the Defence Staff, should have an input into its considerations.

Michael Fallon: The Chiefs of Staff have an input through the Chief of the Defence Staff, who not only attends the National Security Council but

attends the meeting of officials that precedes it in the days leading up to the National Security Council. He will always be careful to ensure he has the advice of the Chiefs of Staff. I can't comment on what happened in the circumstances leading up to the Libyan operation. What I can tell you is that, sitting alongside the Chief of the Defence Staff in the years that I have been on the national security council, I don't think I have ever attended a meeting where his advice has been—what was your phrase?—"brushed aside". Absolutely not.

Q51 **Chair:** The widely reported phrase was something along the lines of, "You do the fighting and we'll do the planning," or something of that sort. We will leave it at that for the moment. Thank you. I fully appreciate that you were not involved at that time.

Q52 **Douglas Chapman:** Before I ask my question, can I just take the opportunity to wish you well in Washington? You might be surprised at the number of people in the Chamber yesterday who questioned whether we could actually trust the USA and France with a nuclear deterrent if we didn't have them. Maybe that is something you can keep to yourself when you are in Washington. From the look on your face I am sure you have got plenty of time on the flight to check out yesterday's *Hansard* to see what people on your side actually said.

Can I ask a question on Chilcot? The Chilcot report judged that the Government were not equipped to respond on post-conflict planning, and that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and DfID did not take responsibility accordingly. It also highlighted a lack of systematic evaluation of national options. Is there now a Whitehall code, or perhaps a doctrine, of crisis management for post-conflict planning that can be implemented?

Michael Fallon: I am not quite clear about your first point. As I understood some of the speeches in the debate from Scottish representatives, they would have been happy to have morally contracted out our nuclear defence to the United States or to France. I will certainly read the debate again, but something I simply couldn't understand was why we would want to cower under somebody else's nuclear umbrella when we had the capacity to defend ourselves and had the deterrent already to hand. Perhaps I will read the debate all over again.

Douglas Chapman: I am wishing you well. It will not be every Committee that will be able to do that. Good luck.

Michael Fallon: Good. Let me turn to the question that you asked. Yes, we have the stabilisation unit and that cross-Government machinery now at our disposal in a way that simply wasn't true back in the early 2000s. I have already told you that I have visited large-scale exercises with the French, such as Griffin Strike, to validate the combined joint expeditionary force. When I was down in the planning room I saw the stabilisation unit representatives already sitting there and working with the French on the implications for post-conflict and what would need to be done in that exercise to help to stabilise security in areas once the fighting had started. Mr Watkins may be able to add to that.

Peter Watkins: I would say that planning for post-conflict situations and stabilisation is now on a much more systematic basis than it was then. The stabilisation unit is clearly part of it but it goes more broadly than that. We have produced and refreshed our doctrine on this. We have a thing called Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40 on stabilisation, which is a very good read and I recommend it to you. The point of that document is that, although it was produced by the Ministry of Defence, it is actually cross-Government doctrine and it reflects the lessons and experiences not only of the Ministry of Defence but the Foreign Office, DfID and so on.

The only thing I would add is that one must be quite careful about imagining that there is some sort of set of lessons or precise playbook that you can learn and apply in every circumstance. Each circumstance is different. Afghanistan was different from Iraq and Libya was different from those two. What we have sought to draw out is a series of generic lessons, and the first generic lesson, which might seem a little bit glib, is about the importance of planning. Planning itself has a real benefit. Then there are other lessons about the importance of cross-Government co-ordination, careful co-ordination with the local authorities, involvement of local people and so on, all of which are reflected in documents such as the one I mentioned.

General Sir Gordon Messenger: Can I jump in on the back of that and support the comments that we have collectively learned a great deal? On Peter's last point, we have absolutely accepted that there is no generic solution. We recognise that it is a balance between security, governance and development, and getting that right and ensuring that you are advancing on all three axes is at the heart of stabilisation and tailoring that balance to the situation.

The second point I would make is that this is not just about getting our own national ducks in order. The stabilisation community is now in a much more mature and mutually understood place internationally than it was then.

The third component of this is our engagement with NGOs, which I think is a deeper one, with those NGOs that are prepared and wish to work with Government. I was in the FCO yesterday with a large group of NGOs, taking soundings from them on specific security issues. So in a number of areas we have improved collectively.

Q53 **Douglas Chapman:** I appreciate that there is no one solution that would fit every single situation, but does your planning include things like difference scenario planning and simulation gaming, where it is not just a manual approach but a process of training people and going through to make sure that the different scenarios are looked at and you can play that through?

General Sir Gordon Messenger: This is at the heart of the Secretary of State's point about needing to be very careful about groupthink so that when we have the planning process, not just for stabilisation but for other things, it is about challenging and introducing alternative viewpoints to ensure that the mainstream one is not the only one being heard.

Douglas Chapman: I am glad that there is no room for group-think.

Q54 **Mr Spellar:** One of the key findings in Chilcot was, as they saw it, the lack of defence intelligence validation of the material supplied by SIS to the Joint Intelligence Committee concerning Iraq's alleged WMD. Are you confident that this could not happen again, and if so why? Also, what mechanisms will now ensure that defence intelligence's analytical capabilities are properly integrated into the work of the JIC?

Michael Fallon: The JIC existed before Chilcot—it is important to remind ourselves of that—but it has been significantly enhanced since the Iraq campaign and there is more independence built into its assessment. We are regularly, as senior Ministers, briefed on its analysis of the various countries and issues that are in from of us on the NSC. It is also more widely based now; it has more access to other forms of reporting. I cannot see a situation now where the advice that we got, or the intelligence that we would be asked to act on, was ever limited to such a small number of sources as appears to have been the case in the intelligence, for example, on WMD.

Q55 **Johnny Mercer:** Secretary of State, expanding on what James Gray was saying, there seems to be a slightly crazy dichotomy at the moment of a general public opinion of a lack of willingness to engage in operations and that seems to be matched with an ever-increasingly dangerous world that we live in. Can you confirm to the Committee that there is absolutely no reticence whatsoever to do what is required to protect this nation, and that the people we are asking to do that have everything they require, including the ability to protect themselves wherever we may ask them to deploy?

Michael Fallon: In terms of Government, let me reassure you, we will deploy where we need to deploy to keep our citizens safe. There is no reticence on behalf of Government about that. You will have seen the retiring Chief of the Defence Staff's interview in *The Daily Telegraph* on Saturday where he picks up on exactly this point: that we need to learn the right lessons from Chilcot, that there may be situations where we intervened in the wrong way but, equally, we need to avoid a position where we don't intervene again.

That means we have to work harder at explaining the need for intervention and get over to the public that many of the issues we face, although these areas may seem far away from our shores, can become very direct threats unless tackled. That extends, whether it is peacekeeping operations down in Somalia or South Sudan, to our continuing presence in Afghanistan where you have transnational terrorist groups that, if they are not held in check, can bring terror to our streets.

I think as politicians, all of us—you included, Mr Mercer—have to continue to show our constituents that there is a very direct national interest in dealing with these issues much further back and helping to stabilise fragile states, aiding states affected by insurgency, improving the training of their soldiery and in professionalising and reforming their defence ministries

and helping to eradicate corruption. All these things are part and parcel further upstream in helping to keep our country safe.

Q56 **Johnny Mercer:** But at the moment, with the political situation we are in, can you confirm that between you, the Prime Minister, the service chiefs, the decision-making cycle at the top of Government at the moment, there is no reticence to do what is required to keep us safe from the sort of things we have seen in Nice and elsewhere across the globe at this time?

Michael Fallon: No. To give you examples: I have authorised the deployment of another 250 troops to Iraq—in addition to the troops we already have serving there—to do further training in counter-IED, deployment of engineers and medics and more force protection for the base in which they are going to be headquartered. That is an additional contribution to the fight against the Daesh. We have increased our deployment in Afghanistan by around 10%; we will be doing that over the summer. There is no reticence about making these additional deployments.

We have also made it clear to our friends in Europe that where we can assist in the fight against terrorism on the continent of Europe, we are ready to do so, offering to share intelligence, deploy forensic assistance and any other help that our allies require. I have repeated that offer to the French Government in light of the tragedy in Nice and the Prime Minister will be re-emphasising that when she meets the French President very shortly.

Q57 **Johnny Mercer:** Thank you.

"At the start of Op TELIC, the MOD knew that it had capability gaps in relation to protected mobility and ISTAR and that either could have a significant impact on operations." Sir John Chilcot concluded that "Known gaps in such capabilities should always be clearly communicated to Ministers." This resulted in Ministers giving less than accurate answers to Members of Parliament and, by extension, the public in response to questions. How do you ensure that practice does not persist today?

I must say, in my experience of this place, there is clearly no conscious decision by anybody to come and say the wrong thing to a Select Committee or the Houses of Parliament or Westminster Hall. But there have been cases we have seen over the past 12 months—whether it be the inquiry into mefloquine or how we look after our people going through the IHAT process—where Ministers have said things that have been patently not correct. There is no accusation of misleading or anything there, but how do we ensure that the Ministers who come and represent these facts to us and, by extension, the public are saying the right thing?

Michael Fallon: Ministers should be as correct as they can be when they appear in front of Committees and I am sorry to hear the specific allegations you are making. I will have a look at that. I am not aware of Ministers giving this Committee incorrect facts. If there is something you want to write to me about, I am happy to look at that.

I think your question really relates to whether there would now be examples of where people down the chain of command had requested capabilities or equipment and it simply wasn't being supplied and they then perhaps felt inhibited about challenging that. That is a question I have asked. I came in right at the tail end of the Afghanistan operation, for example, when a lot of the equipment was being brought back. But when I have asked it of people who served there, I am pretty clear that certainly towards the end of that campaign, the military got what they thought they needed. There weren't any restrictions on the equipment that was provided.

It is probably worth emphasising—you will know this better than anybody—that no force sets out with perfect equipment in each case. Each campaign can be slightly different and may require equipment to be slightly reset. That is why we have what is called the urgent operational requirement that enables us to reset equipment capabilities at relatively short notice to get the money out of the Treasury and to be able to move quite quickly to upgrade or reset what was originally planned.

- Q58 **Chair:** I don't think anybody is suggesting that there has been any intentional misleading of this Committee. What we want to explore is whether or not Ministers would know if there were gaps in capabilities at the outset before, for example, a force was deployed. Accepting the fact obviously that these are specific capability gaps that you would not under those circumstances wish to make public, do you have the internal machinery that would ensure that you as Secretary of State for Defence would be told at the outset, before an operation begins, "We have got deficiencies in a particular area"?

Michael Fallon: Yes, I am reasonably confident about that.

- Q59 **Chair:** How would that work?

Michael Fallon: We have a new post now, the deputy chief of the defence staff military capability—milcap in our jargon—who is tasked with ensuring there is a coherent equipment and support programme right across defence. He is responsible not just for equipment and support, but for capability as a whole. I am pretty confident that the current holder of that office would come and tell me if there was some urgent capability that was not being provided in one of the theatres where our people are at risk at the moment in either Afghanistan or Iraq.

- Q60 **Chair:** Let's take an example going back to where we were in the first part of our discussions today, namely NATO's very high readiness joint taskforce. This is a body that would be intended to be put into the field, as the name implies, at very short notice in the event of some hostile or aggressive move to one of our NATO allies.

Are you satisfied—I can possibly bring the vice-chief in at this point—that if that particular balloon went up and the joint taskforce was prepared for rapid deployment because of some emergency that had developed in, say, the Baltic states, that within the machine there would be people who would speak truth to power and inform their superiors what gaps there

might be in the readiness of the force to do what it is tasked to do in an emergency?

Michael Fallon: The short answer to that—the vice-chief will want to add to this—is yes. I am satisfied that I would be informed of any concerns about that. The overall requirement for the VJTF, it is important to emphasise, is defined by NATO. The decision to activate it is taken by the North Atlantic Council, the command and control responsibilities lie with SACEUR within NATO, and the kind of certification role—if you can put it like that—that the force is ready to deploy is really a matter for NATO. We would verify that we have supplied the right force, but I am confident that I would hear about it if there were any gaps.

General Sir Gordon Messenger: First, I think that it is important to say that the purpose of the VJTF is to deploy quickly to deter, not necessarily to respond. The aim would be to get it there during a period of escalating tension in order to de-escalate that tension and deter. Its capabilities are designed to bring with it a combat capability that is meaningful, that can pack a punch and that can defend itself. If we were in the game—let us not be theatre-specific—of responding to a threat, then we have the ability to tailor the force elements that we would put into that to the nature of the environment in which they might find themselves. As the Secretary of State said, we would do so with NATO to ensure that our collective capability was enhanced.

Q61 **Chair:** Are you absolutely satisfied that if there were any gaps in these structures and in these formations' capabilities then you would know about them?

General Sir Gordon Messenger: We have selected the capabilities that we are committing to on the basis of defensive deterrents, and we are absolutely comfortable that the force element that goes can pack that punch and can defend itself. If the threat manifested itself in a specific way—if this was about response—then we would be looking to bolster that capability both nationally and with allies.

Q62 **Chair:** But if there was any deficiency or shortfall, would it be something that you are satisfied that you already have measures in place to remedy?

General Sir Gordon Messenger: As you know, there is a pretty comprehensive and robust programme of capability enhancement under way. That is being delivered with a view to the likely threats that that force might face. That does include peer and near-peer competitors, so I can give you that assurance.

Chair: Excellent, thank you very much.

Q63 **Douglas Chapman:** According to Chilcot, the MOD was found to be less effective at providing support to service personnel and their families, especially those who were mobilised independently or individually as Reservists rather than going as a formed unit. I am sure that the duty of care is well up the Government's agenda, so what has changed to ensure that the MOD is ready to support both Regular and Reservist service

personnel and their families properly from the outset of any future conflict?

Michael Fallon: The support to service personnel has improved since Iraq. We now have in law the armed forces covenant, which commits us to ensuring that members of the armed forces are not disadvantaged compared to other citizens when they go out on military service, and that in some cases they get special consideration, especially those who have been either injured or bereaved in the course of their duty.

All of that has improved immeasurably since the initial campaign in Iraq, and there is also better support when there are injuries or deaths in service. There is better support for the families than there was before. A visiting officer is now always appointed to support the family of anybody who is killed in action, and to act as a focus for their concerns. Those visiting officers are trained and supported by the Defence Academy and the armed forces chaplaincy centre, and there are a number of other improvements, especially in the availability of mental health services.

There is better clinical knowledge, and there are better policies surrounding mild traumatic brain injury, for example. There is a Reserves mental health programme that did not exist before, and there is more welfare support and proper points of contact between the service welfare staffs and some of the wounded personnel who have returned home. We have learned a lot from these campaigns and continue to improve the services available to personnel. That was borne out in the latter stages of the campaign in Afghanistan.

Chair: We have just one more topic, Secretary of State, which is something in which the Committee has been taking a special interest with its sub-committee, chaired by Johnny Mercer, who will now ask our last question.

Q64 **Johnny Mercer:** It is essentially about the IHAT process that is going on at the moment, but before I come to that, in relation to what you have just said about the military covenant, it is a fantastic thing if it works. A study out today by SSAFA says that 17% of people think it works in the forces at the moment and that over half haven't even heard of it.

These things are fantastic, but we need to change how we look at this stuff—not what we are putting into the system, which is lots and lots of brilliant things, but how the blokes actually see it, what it means to them and how they can access this care. Once we change the way we look at these things, that is when we will get a real difference in how we look after people who fall upon hard times when they have left. However, that is for another day.

Ambulance-chasing lawyers—I don't particularly like that expression, because they will do what they need to do—in the UK played a significant role in the wake of Iraq. We also now have an IHAT investigation into allegations of unlawful killing and ill treatment by UK armed forces in Iraq. What needs to be done to maintain proportionality in these matters, and in particular to ensure reasonable judicial treatment of service personnel who have often had to make very hard decisions in extraordinarily demanding circumstances?

I know that on this particular issue you have worked extraordinarily hard to try to expedite this process, but the fact remains that the inquiry was set up by the commission. We are told one thing by the Ministry of Defence or the Minister—that no soldier will hear from anyone other than an MOD individual first, and that they will look after them through the IHAT process—yet we have hundreds of people getting in touch and saying that teams are turning up at bases threatening to arrest people, or going to old girlfriends' houses from 2009 or 2010. The impression is that this has got completely out of control as a Government investigation.

That touches on my previous point of what we are told by Ministers and the MOD. It is not a personal campaign, but we then receive an awful lot of evidence that points the other way. That places us in a difficult position in having to represent that. What is being done to maintain proportionality and, ultimately, fairness to our servicemen and women?

Michael Fallon: First, let me respond to your point about the covenant. I will read the SSAFA report. The covenant is new, and I think you are absolutely right that we must make sure it is working in practice and that more people are aware of it. The obligations under the covenant fall not just on the Ministry but on all those who signed it. It is very important to me that branches of government, whether local councils, GP clinics, health trusts or indeed the big companies that have signed the covenant, abide by it and do not gain credit simply by signing it, but implement it on the ground. We will continue to look at that implementation stage by stage. We need to make sure that more people are aware of it.

On IHAT, it is important to step back a little. We are obliged under the law of Parliament, as well as under international law, to examine any allegations against members of the armed forces. That is a legal obligation and we cannot escape it. We have to do it, and if we didn't do it we would expect the international criminal court to get more involved in investigating allegations against members of our armed forces. In successive rulings, our own judges have made it clear that that will become more and more likely if we don't demonstrate that these allegations are being properly looked at.

To my mind, what is really important is to separate out the serious allegations from a whole load of stuff that is clearly being concocted, and to make sure that the serious allegations have resources devoted to them, so that those things are investigated properly and we know exactly what happened.

As far as service personnel are concerned, we provide training to assist them in what is required under international humanitarian law in the first place, and then of course through a duty of care we offer further assistance when they are subject to specific allegations. No amount of training, of course, can protect a soldier against a false allegation. It still, unfortunately, has to be looked at to see whether there is any substance to it. What I think is important is that we devote the right resource to this to be able to deal with allegations that are manifestly false and do not have any prospect of being stood up in a court, and that we deal with

those as quickly as possible so that the team can start to focus on the more serious allegations.

- Q65 **Johnny Mercer:** May I ask you two questions on that? First, why is France or the United States not having this particular problem? Secondly, no one misses the point that we have to investigate allegations, because of course we do—if we are to uphold the standards that we sign up to and that we have worked bloody hard to achieve, we need to do that—but I find it hard to accept that the people who should bear the brunt are our servicemen and women, because of how long it takes to investigate claims or because of the practices adopted by the IHAT team. The truth is that there are many soldiers and officers, up and down this land—not just privates and lance corporals but commanding officers—who feel totally betrayed by this process, and they don't misunderstand the point that we must investigate allegations. Does that not suggest that something, somewhere has gone badly wrong?

Michael Fallon: As far as other countries are concerned, I think the United States does not recognise the International Criminal Court, so its armed forces are in a different position, and France, for example, has a reservation under the convention on human rights on its application to its forces. We have chosen in this country not to do that; we have chosen to abide by these international obligations. Had we done that, it might well have deterred a whole series of these particular claims.

I think it is important that where there are credible allegations of criminal conduct, they are properly investigated. I do not think that anyone in the Army would resile from that. They have to be investigated. As I have said, it is important that we clear away those that quite clearly cannot be stood up. At the moment, there have been no court-martials under the IHAT procedure. I believe that, so far, there has only been one summary hearing as a result of the investigations into a whole series of cases, so it may be that very few of them actually can be substantiated.

- Q66 **Johnny Mercer:** It is fair to say that you and the ministerial team, the last Prime Minister and the Attorney General are really trying to advance this cause, but it seems to be something entirely of our own making. We have found ourselves in a position that France, the United States and our other allies are not in, and we are essentially asking our men and women at the bottom of the chain to bear the brunt of a situation that we seem to have got ourselves into.

Michael Fallon: Well, we have subscribed to the International Criminal Court. There is advantage to Britain in that international machinery and in bringing people to justice and so on—there are the benefits to our country from being members of it. Other countries took a different view. Mr Watkins may want to add something on that.

Peter Watkins: It is an extremely complex situation. A number of factors have contributed to this. As the Secretary of State said, France was relatively late in signing the European convention on human rights, and placed a reservation, which does seem to have deterred these sorts of claims in France. There is also a factor here of the nature of the operations that we were involved with in Iraq and Afghanistan. They were classic

counter-insurgency operations. They involved a lot of contact with the populace, as those operations do, and that provided opportunities for people to make what have turned out in a number of cases to be false claims. There are factors like that. Dare I say that there may also be something about our own legal system? Certain companies have taken opportunities given to them as well.

Q67 **Chair:** But if the Secretary of State is right that only a very small proportion of these allegations are shown to have substance—

Michael Fallon: So far.

Chair: So far—we had the notorious Al-Sweady inquiry as a very good example of that. Is there any plan within the Ministry to develop proposals that could be put to Government to try to protect our service personnel from what is clearly an organised effort by a small number of legal firms, some of which are under investigation for misconduct? That has a terrible effect on individuals' lives, often after they have left the service.

Michael Fallon: There are such plans. Proposals were put forward in our manifesto at the election last year, on which we are working, to be able, for example, to better recover costs from the unscrupulous law firms that are benefiting from this industry of false allegations.

Q68 **Chair:** Will proposals be brought forward soon?

Michael Fallon: We are bringing proposals forward, I hope soon, in this area—for example, to limit the time periods, so that actions cannot be brought after a certain point, which applies in other litigation, and to ensure that those who are deployed in future have more immunity from this kind of prosecution. There is a package of proposals that we continue to work on.

Chair: Unless Johnny has any more questions—

Johnny Mercer: No, Chair.

Q69 **Chair:** I have one final very small but practical suggestion. It has been brought to my attention that whereas the Ministry is quite good at supporting service personnel, including those who have now retired from the armed forces, once charges have been brought, they may feel bewildered and uncertain what to do when simply approached out of the blue and told that they are subject to investigation. Is there any one-stop shop in the form of a dedicated number that people who find themselves being told long after the event that they may face charges for past campaign conduct can ring immediately before giving statements of any sort to anyone who might approach them? If there is such a number, can it be highlighted on the MoD website and publicised throughout the various service support charities, so that former service personnel who are approached and threatened with legal action immediately know to get in contact with advice sources by ringing a particular number before making any statements whatsoever?

Michael Fallon: That is an important point and an excellent suggestion. I believe there is such a number, but I will now go back to the Ministry and make sure that if there is such a number, it is properly publicised among veterans who may suddenly, as you say, be approached out the blue and be naturally anxious to try to recall something that took place many years before. That is a very good suggestion, and I will take it back with me

Q70 **Johnny Mercer:** There is an understanding within the Ministry of Defence that looking after people and helping them when they encounter these situations is a fundamental part of operations and combat power. The suggestion that has just come forward is extremely basic, but if it has not been done thus far, can you assure the Committee that there is a real understanding—like they have in America and elsewhere—that looking after our people is a fundamental part of performance on operations?

Michael Fallon: Absolutely. We have a duty of care to our people, and I am determined to make sure that that is demonstrated.

Chair: I thank all three of our witnesses today. We are very grateful indeed. It has been a very comprehensive session.