

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Work of the Chief of Defence Staff - HC 295

Tuesday 7 July 2020

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Stuart Anderson; Sarah Atherton; Martin Docherty-Hughes; Richard Drax; Mr Mark Francois; Mr Kevan Jones; Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck; Gavin Robinson; John Spellar; Derek Twigg.

Questions 1-103

Witness

I: General Sir Nick Carter, GCB CBE DSO ADC Gen, Chief of the Defence Staff.



Examination of witness

Witness: General Sir Nick Carter.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this Defence Committee hearing on Tuesday 7 July 2020. We are delighted to welcome General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the Defence Staff, with responsibility for overall defence; setting overarching strategy for defence, including the future development of the armed forces; the conduct of operations; and leading relationships with other countries and armed forces—all of course subject to direction by the Secretary of State.

You are very welcome, General. We are pleased to have you here. You have had a distinguished military career to date—thank you for your service—and we are delighted that we are able to ask you some questions. We will cover some broad themes. As you will be aware, we have a number of concurrent reviews taking place, not least of covid-19, procurement, 5G and the integrated review. We will probably cover a lot of those aspects, so thank you for contributing to those particular studies as well.

I invite you to say some opening remarks, and we will move forward from there.

General Sir Nick Carter: Thank you, Chair, and for the opportunity to make some opening remarks and to be with you all this afternoon.

The first thing that I would observe is that, even before covid-19, I would have described the strategic context as being dynamic, complex and with the defining condition being instability. It has become a much more competitive playing field, and a US foreign policy that places America first as an abiding principle has changed things to one degree or another.

We see a more assertive Russian threat, and we see the challenge of China very vividly. Then there are other players, whether Iran or North Korea, who cause us to question what is happening. All of that is overlaid by the threat from terrorism, and radical extremism is not going anywhere; indeed, in places—in parts of the world—it is growing.

On top of all that, the political context of nationalism and populism has an effect on whether or not one is able to get together the international contributions you need to be able to do something about it. That has been very striking during covid.

For us in the military, there is a very important capability dimension to this, because while we have been somewhat fixed in the first couple of decades of this century on the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan—counter-insurgency, stabilisation and that sort of stuff—our opponents have thought quite carefully about the sorts of capabilities that might undermine some of our weaknesses and play to their strengths, so we see



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a significant amount of activity in the sub—underwater—surface area in terms of Russia. There is a lot of missile technology that is around now. People have developed cyber and so on and so forth.

What is interesting about some of this stuff is the extent to which it has been proliferated to their clients. That means that the freedom of action that we used to be quite sure of is now much harder for us to be certain about in strategic parts of the world.

What is also interesting about this is that they practise a form of what I would call authoritarian political warfare. For them, the strategic landscape is characterised by a continuous and never-ending struggle that encompasses everything from what we would call “peace” to nuclear war. That means that one’s response to this has to be somewhat different to what we might have done in the Past—hence, I think this era of constant competition and, perhaps arguably, constant conflict.

All this is about risk management. Nobody wants to breach what we would call the threshold of war, but it is the potential for unwarranted escalation that leads to miscalculation which we should all watch. Some of the hotspots in the world, whether it is what is happening in Syria, or the eastern Med—Libya more specifically—could easily become something that escalates beyond control.

We need to draw some big deductions from this context for our military input to the integrated review. First and foremost, it needs a strategic response. If you cast your mind back—many members of the Committee will be historians, I am sure—to 1946, George Kennan wrote his long telegram which suggested to the State Department that it would be impossible to live peacefully or in peaceful co-existence with the Soviet Union. That, of course, led to the Truman doctrine, which in due course led to what was a remarkably successful American-led western strategy throughout the cold war. That bears thinking about in the context we now find ourselves in, with the challenge of China and the assertive threat that is Russia.

Next, there is a big deduction about allies, because it is allies and our relationship with our allies that is our centre of gravity from a military perspective and, of course, from a national perspective as well. That is something we should reflect long and hard on. We are very good on the whole at building alliances, creating the intraoperability that goes with them and working closely with them.

The third deduction is that we need to take a slightly different view on deterrence. I would call it modern deterrence. We used to talk in deterrence terms about the 4Cs—comprehension, capability, credibility, particularly, and communication. We now need to introduce a fifth one, which I would call competition. That takes us to the requirement, which we will publish, shortly for a new integrated operating concept which recognises that you cannot distinguish between peace and war when you are up against the sorts of opponents I have described. What is actually needed now is to distinguish between your constant activity, which is



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operating, and what you might have to do if you have to breach the law of armed conflict and go to fighting, so it is more of a continuum. That is quite important, because it means that much of our force structure should be in use much of the time, because that is the way you achieve this competitive deterrent effect that I think you need in the world I have described.

I think it is still right—the next deduction—to talk about the requirement to mobilise, modernise and transform defence, and we might come on to that in a bit more detail during questions. It is right, as we look towards what our future operating concept might determine, which is a bit of a north star for how we might look in the 2030s, that we will need to reflect a bit on what this modernisation looks like, the sorts of technologies that will lead it, but, particularly, I think we will have to return to a former era of experimentation, which perhaps harks back to the 1930s, which I think is the last time we did this systematically.

That experimentation needs to be conducted very much with industry, because, generally speaking, that is where most of the technological edge is now found. How we integrate that in terms of our industrial strategy, how we play it into our modernisation more generally and the sorts of relationships that that creates will be pretty vital to us.

That also means that the amount of effort that we put into R&D in the future needs to be thought hard about, because there is going to be that R&D edge and we have so much value in this country that we should perhaps be pressing and pushing.

Next, I think, we need to talk firmly about the idea of transformation, because that is how you do things 10x better. Here, of course, it is going to be about digital, because many of the technologies that we need in order to modernise as I have described will be digital technologies. We do not know what the right combination of these digital technologies will be, hence the requirement to experiment.

There is much about people, and I hope we will get into that during this discussion. We have to reform the workforce and place it in the right place for the future. We need to take account of a lot of the very good inputs we have had from people like Mark Francois in terms of how we retain people and where we recruit them from. But we need to modernise the workforce, and that takes us very much into the work that one of your former members, Mark Lancaster, is doing at the moment on Reserve Forces 2030, which takes Future Reserves 2020, which I know Mark will remember from years gone by, to the next level. It's about how we build on the good work that FR20 set down about the reserve. We will touch on the reserve, I hope, when we talk about covid, because the reserves' response to this has been interesting and I think there are lessons that we should learn for the integrated review.

There is much on the acquisition side. The work that is going on at the moment on the defence and security industrial strategy will be very



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important as we think about the future, but particularly our relationships with British industry and how that all plays into our modernisation.

There is much that should be done on the support side, and there is a big transformation programme involved in that at the moment. We have learnt quite a lot of interesting lessons about this from covid and our experience in relation to resilience and supply chains.

There is then a bit on the Defence Medical Services. Again, we have learnt a lot from covid, particularly how we integrate our military medics into the NHS, but also how we deliver primary and secondary healthcare to our people as well.

That takes me back into the people bit, because it is people who are our adaptive edge and we have to modernise the skills framework. We have to make it more friendly for the outside world, so that we have better interaction with the outside world and indeed, perhaps, in certain specialities begin to encourage lateral movement and lateral entry. The career structure has to take more account, I think, of the specialisms these days and of the new things that we require, whether that is intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance or whether it is defence engagement and that sort of forward persistence that we are going to have to have in the Global Britain world. But it is equally what we do to improve digital skills, information skills and those sorts of things. How we manage talent fundamentally has to change, because we have a generation joining the military these days who have a different view on how talent management should work and we should accommodate that.

The last point I would make in relation to people is that we have much to do on diversity and inclusion. Indeed, the chiefs of staff met this morning for three hours to discuss our strategy towards diversity and inclusion and what we should do, on the back of recent events, to stimulate our efforts to do even better but actually to deliver something, importantly.

That is how I would set the context at the moment and what I think will be the key ingredients from our perspective, from the military perspective, in this. There are themes there that I know you will want to develop in the course of these questions.

Q2 Chair: Thank you. Can we begin by thanking all those in uniform for what they have done during the covid-19 period? As you have implied, there are some themes that we want to progress and look into. There was a flurry of headlines that came out of the last few days. We will quickly deal with those topical matters and then we will get into the wider themes.

The first had to do with the budget itself. What you have just displayed is not just a passion but a full understanding of where we are today—a realism about the fact that we are going to need to invest heavily into the future. My question today to do with the budget is this: can you manage now with what you are expected to actually do?

General Sir Nick Carter: On the first point, it is worth recording that there is a manifesto commitment to 2% of GDP—whatever GDP may look



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like this year—but there is equally a commitment to increase defence expenditure at 0.5% annually above inflation. Indeed, last year, the defence budget grew by 2.6% in real terms.

As far as I am concerned, we should live within our means, for understandable reasons, but you would never expect any chief of staff not to ask for more. Whomever you turned to, we would always be arguing for more, but the reality of course is that we live within the means that we have, and we are satisfied with that at the moment.

Q3 Chair: I think it is the asking for more that is the important piece. You spell it out, and anyone who hears you, tunes in today or is aware of what is going on with our defence posture will be very concerned that there simply is not enough money to do all things that we have, in particular with the changing character of conflict that you have outlined. My concern is that we do not promote that to the general public. The general public have a very different, perhaps dated, view of what our capabilities are, indeed what our size of armed forces is, or what insurance we need to deal with the threats, resilience and everything else you have spoken about.

My question therefore is, should the MoD be less shy, less reserved and less risk-averse in shouting out about the shortfalls? We will come on to the age of the battle tank, the limitations of our surface fleet or the reductions in the size of our fast-jet capabilities, but if the general public were more aware, do you believe that they would be more inclined to say, “Absolutely, that is where that money should go”? The Chancellor would be more conscious too, and we would therefore get the money to support, rather than—you touched on the GDP, and in April we saw a reduction in GDP of 20%—the fear that the MoD budget might be the first hit by the Chancellor when we come to the next Budget.

General Sir Nick Carter: Indeed, and that is why this integrated review of foreign security, defence and development is vital to all of us. That will determine the Government’s ambition for what they want defence to do, and that should determine the expenditure. That is where the MoD has a massive role to play, in making sure that that process genuinely starts with the threat and understands the risks to our country, and then that argument has to play out as that review develops.

Q4 Mr Jones: The budget is under strain. The NAO report on the equipment budget, for example, clearly demonstrates the problems. You now have enemies in certain parts of Government who want a different emphasis on different areas. Is now not the time to have a radical look at the equipment side, for example? Are there some programmes that, frankly, should just be ditched?

General Sir Nick Carter: That is absolutely what we intend to do in the course of this integrated review. The bottom line is that what we need is consistency in the budget. We would like to have a settlement that is long term, because then we can live within our means and take the decisions that have to be taken to achieve that effect. The difficulty that we have had over the past three to four years is that it has been very hard to



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mouth. We have had to rely on annual settlements to balance the books, and of course that does not make for good value for money, for consistency or for the future-proofing of plans. We are looking forward to a review that is aligned with the comprehensive spending review and that will give us the chance, we hope, to have a programme that is fixed to enable that long-term planning, which is critical for the country.

- Q5 **Mr Jones:** Even with that, the only way that the equipment budget will come anywhere near balance is if you start to take things out of it. Will we see that? Personally, having looked at it, I see no other way of getting to a point where we are putting the resources where we should, being realistic and saying, "Frankly, that piece of equipment is a legacy or should not go forward."

Chair: I am going to ask you to hold that thought, General, because we will be doing a big procurement chunk shortly. We need to burn through these questions, the numbers issue in the press, then we will do the procurement.

General Sir Nick Carter: I would very much enjoy answering that in due course, if I may.

- Q6 **John Spellar:** You talked quite a bit about the personnel, and yet a sizeable number of reports have talked about reductions in all the services, in the Air Force, Navy and particularly the Army—talking about it going down to 70,000. Do you think that that is sustainable? Once again, it seems as though they are looking at basically dismantling the Royal Marines, or very substantially downgrading them. This will obviously be of great concern to those already in those services, and those who may come in. We will end up with a force that is, frankly, below a sustainable number.

Chair: There is a bit of *déjà vu* here with the Royal Marines.

General Sir Nick Carter: The point I would make is, don't believe everything that you read in the newspapers—

John Spellar: But I might believe some of it.

General Sir Nick Carter: Well, none of what you put on the table in front of me do I recollect ever hearing in a conversation.

- Q7 **Chair:** The Royal Marines are safe.

General Sir Nick Carter: The Royal Marines are perfectly safe. If you want to talk a little about the Royal Marines, and I suspect that there is an MP at the top of this screen who might be interested in this particular question, the fact of the matter is that they are among the finest fighting formations in the world. I have a huge regard for what they do.

There is some interesting stuff that is going on at the moment about their future role, because we are turning them to a more maritime, true Marine profile, as part of the future commando force idea, which is a good idea, because that is very threat-informed. One of the big challenges that we



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have in relation to the threat at the moment is how we get through our opponents' anti-access area denial systems.

The sort of thinking that is going on with the Royal Marines is the sort of thing that might give us options for the future. I am absolutely delighted that we are modernising, looking at it like that.

Chair: They have just got a wonderful new uniform as well—another reason. Let us move on. Kevan, will you take us through fleet solid support?

Q8 **Mr Jones:** May we go through a checklist? You say that you do not recognise that, and what you said is very welcome, including your commitment on the Royal Marines, but one of the suggestions was that amphibious capability was going to be cut. Can you give a commitment on that, such as the one you gave on the Royal Marines?

General Sir Nick Carter: It depends what you mean by amphibious capability. What has to happen is that we need to have a capability that is able to match the threats that we have today, so it is how we use it. What we are absolutely saying is that there will still be a requirement for littoral manoeuvre and that particular skillset in the future.

Q9 **Mr Jones:** You will not be recommending that we reduce the Army down to 50,000?

General Sir Nick Carter: No, I won't be.

Q10 **Mr Jones:** May I ask you about one of the issues that came out of last week's NAO report, "Carrier Strike", on the fleet solid support vessels. Again, they have been delayed for quite a while, but they are obviously a need if we are to be able to deploy our carriers. Where are we at with that?

General Sir Nick Carter: The competition was cancelled towards the end of last year. The reason for that was that none of the solutions coming forward represented value for money. The idea is to re-compete it, and the requirement is being written at the moment. I would guess that the Secretary of State will ask for it to go out to competition relatively soon—certainly by the end of this calendar year, I would have thought, although that is not yet confirmed.

What does that mean for carrier deployment? We have sufficient logistic shipping to be able to support IOC of carrier strike in December this year. Importantly for the carrier's first operational deployment in 2021, we also have sufficient logistic shipping to be able to support it.

Q11 **John Spellar:** National or international competition?

General Sir Nick Carter: I do not know. Much will depend on how the requirement is written.

Q12 **John Spellar:** Is it not important? One of the great factors in support of defence out in the community is that many communities associate with it, some of them for military reasons, but a lot for industry. Is it not



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important to maintain that, quite apart from retaining that industrial capacity? Precisely, if you are going to engage with industry, there has to be an industry to engage with.

General Sir Nick Carter: Certainly, and I know that those will be factors that the Secretary of State will take into account when he issues the competition.

Q13 **Chair:** Are the fleet solid support ships warships?

General Sir Nick Carter: They will be painted in warship colours but they are logistic shipping.

Chair: That is not my question.

General Sir Nick Carter: Again, it depends how the requirement is written. Obviously, they will be part of a war-fighting capability, so—

Chair: If they are warships, they need to be built in the UK.

General Sir Nick Carter: Again, let us see how the requirement is written.

Q14 **Mr Francois:** Good to see you, CDS. You said in your remarks that we need to mobilise, modernise and transform defence. This Committee would probably argue that in no area of such a transformation is that greater required than procurement. We looked briefly at the Warrior capability sustainment programme in a hearing a few weeks ago. When will Warrior achieve initial operating capability in the British Army?

General Sir Nick Carter: The process that is under way at the moment means that the main gate business case for the next step of it will not be approved until November. Until that has happened, and we have had the integrated review, I cannot look you in the eye and say precisely when Warrior will have an IOC.

Q15 **Mr Francois:** The problem is, the programme has been running for over a decade. It has been unmitigated disaster. It is almost £0.25 billion over budget. When we inquired about that of the chief executive of Lockheed Martin, which is the prime contractor, over these screens, he was laughing—we saw him on the screens laughing. He thought that was funny. Do you think that is funny?

General Sir Nick Carter: Good Lord, no. Warrior will be a critical capability within the British Army for close combat.

Q16 **Mr Francois:** But after a decade, we still do not know when it will come into service, so let us try the Challenger 2 upgrade—

General Sir Nick Carter: Just to answer the question, that goes back to your point about procurement more generally. My point was that what is needed is a financial settlement over a period of three to five years—ideally, five years—so we can be clear about it.

Q17 **Mr Francois:** Sorry, CDS, we have limited time. With respect, this is



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nothing to do with the financial settlement. It is to do with the fact that people could not take decisions for years. This went round and round in circles. They changed the armament. The thing has been an absolute—to use a phrase you will recognise in a different context—car crash.

Challenger 2 has been running for almost a decade. What is the IOC for the upgraded Challenger?

General Sir Nick Carter: Again, it is on exactly the same timeline as Warrior, so November is when they will consider the main gate business case for the next step of the programme.

Q18 **Mr Francois:** We are told privately it is now December 2025.

General Sir Nick Carter: I had not heard that, not for when the main gate business case—

Q19 **Mr Francois:** Well, we have.

General Sir Nick Carter: What 2025 is, is this: if you do not take action by Christmastime this year, the tank will be obsolete by '25.

Q20 **Mr Francois:** Arguably it is already obsolescent, even though it has arguably the best crews in the world. It is outmatched by some others. It will be five and a half years from now before that new tank enters service. The programme has been going for nearly a decade. AS 90 is obsolescent. We are using FV432 vehicles in the Army; they are over 50 years old. You were the CGS for a while. Why is the Army's land equipment and re-equipment programme such an unmitigated shambles?

General Sir Nick Carter: First and foremost, I would say that if you go back to the 1990s—'80s and '90s—the Army's equipment programme was extremely good. What happened then was that Field Marshal Bagnall took a view about what air-land operations should look like and a whole load of very impressive pieces of equipment entered service. We had Warrior and Challenger 2, although it was Challenger 1 to begin with. As you will recall, we had Phoenix, the first drone, which was linked to AS 90 and to MLRS. The attack helicopter entered service. And all of this was very effectively integrated behind a doctrine.

Of course, what has happened since then is that we have had two decades of campaigning in theatres like Iraq and Afghanistan, where the requirement has been very different, and the Army has focused almost all its attention during those two decades on making sure that it did a decent job on counter-insurgency and stabilisation operations.

Q21 **Mr Francois:** I accept that, but we withdrew from Afghanistan in 2014; we withdrew six years ago—I oversaw part of it. Why, six years on from Afghanistan, is this still a shambles?

General Sir Nick Carter: It comes down to funding; it comes down to how much money you want to throw at it. I think the requirement is now pretty clear, and that is one of the reasons why Challenger 2 is taking a long time. It is because there was this realisation that the programme was not ambitious enough. It needed a smoothbore gun. It needed the ability



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to put a missile down that barrel to overmatch Armata, as you rightly describe. It needed its protection levels to be significantly enhanced. So the requirement has evolved. I think the Army now has a very clear idea of what it needs. The trick now is to find the resources to get behind what it needs.

- Q22 **Mr Francois:** I will have one more go, because this is a point raised by my colleague, Mr Jones. Lockheed, for instance, have performed absolutely appallingly on this, on Warrior, but partly it is also the Army's fault, because time and again it has changed its mind about what it wanted. There has been massive indecision on the Executive Committee of the Army Board. One minute we wanted light, flexible forces that could fly halfway round the world and intervene; then we want heavy armour that can take on the Russians; then we want something else, and the equipment programme has oscillated backwards and forwards between those different poles. We may want to look at this more closely. Can you give the Committee any assurance, while you are here, that this nonsense is going to stop and we are going to take some decisions and stick to them, because it would be nice?

General Sir Nick Carter: For the last five years, there has been absolute clarity on what the Army wanted by way of its heavy armour capability, Warrior and Challenger 2, and—

- Q23 **Mr Francois:** But why is it still years away?

General Sir Nick Carter: —and absolute clarity on what it wanted for the strike capability, which is a combination of Ajax and Boxer, which was announced earlier this year.

- Q24 **Mr Francois:** If there is absolute clarity, when will Warrior enter service?

General Sir Nick Carter: It comes down to funding.

- Q25 **Mr Jones:** What about the legacy vehicles from Afghanistan and Iraq that we have? Where do they fit?

General Sir Nick Carter: It's a question of how you see the world in the future. If you think it is inconceivable that there will be a stabilisation operation somewhere round the world, those capabilities can be pushed to one side. The question, of course, is whether you hedge for a stabilisation operation in the future and whether you feel you need platforms that are counter-IED-based platforms. A judgment needs to be made in the course of the integrated review as to whether or not you want to keep spending money on keeping them going.

- Q26 **Chair:** There is a general concern in this Committee—we have seen the longevity of this here—about the changing of the spec during the procurement cycle itself, which is compounded by the fact that the very people, the military personnel, who are assigned to that task then rotate out as well, so that expertise is lost. That has been a criticism, too. The Centurion is pointed to by tankies as one of the best second world war tanks because of its modularity—its ability to upgrade during its life cycle. You mentioned the smoothbore barrel. We understand that it was the



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argument as to whether it should be rifled or smoothbore that delayed it. I think the message really is to make sure that the kit is simpler and more modular, so that it can be upgraded, rather than waiting for the utopian prize which is often over the hill.

General Sir Nick Carter: I think the other ingredient to this, which is worth reflecting on, is that if there was a land defence industrial strategy that would be very helpful. We need to think really hard about how we are going to do something in partnership with industry over a period of 15 to 20 years, whereby you can build innovation and spiral development into the piece of equipment, so that it remains current and you don't have this awful cliff edge of an out-of-service date and obsolescence.

Chair: Thank you for that. We are now going to move to the enduring current emergency, covid-19, and the military's response to it. Martin Docherty-Hughes, do you want to take us forward?

Q27 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Nick, it is really good to hear a member of the senior chain of command voicing support for a multi-year budgetary requirement—something I have been slightly vocal about in this Committee. It is good to hear that. In terms of planning and preparations for a pandemic, can you tell us what the Ministry did in terms of undertaking preparations and planning within the Department itself and in conjunction with the Government?

General Sir Nick Carter: We have a set of contingency plans, particularly for a flu pandemic, which we obviously pulled off the shelf when this occurred; but of course, as we know, it turned out to be really rather more severe than the flu pandemic that we had planned for and, indeed, that Government more generally had planned for. What we were able to do, though, very quickly, because we do exercise it on an annual basis, was to put into place our Standing Joint Command UK, which is the three-star lieutenant-general level command headquarters we have in Aldershot, which sits over the top of all the regional headquarters that we have throughout the United Kingdom, and in the devolved Administrations as well.

That is routinely exercised. It has a number of liaison officers that work with it, so that when you need to turn in to the LRF—the local regional fora level— and, indeed, the level below that, most of the relationships have already been created and exercised, and you are able to switch on what you need to switch on in order to be able to get a genuinely joined-up or holistic approach, both at regional level and at national level. That was something that was relatively straightforward for us, just to mobilise it.

I think the big change that happened this time round, which I thought was a great success, was the Secretary of State agreeing, very positively, to delegate many of the authorities that were necessary down to local level, for local commanders to make judgments about what was the necessary support they should give to other Government Departments. Of course that made the process much more agile than it had ever been before, and I think that local commanders found that hugely helpful. That notion of



delegation, decentralisation, and the responsiveness that comes with it, is one of the big lessons that we learned from the whole process.

- Q28 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** That is good to hear, because I know at least from my perspective devolution—*[Inaudible.]*—for that type of decision to be made, so that is good to hear and I am sure it is reflected in other Departments across the rest of the UK. In terms of the full use of MoD capability, such as strategic planning, command and control, could you maybe tell us, was Defence brought into the response early enough? Could you have done things earlier within the Ministry? Could you have been brought in earlier, in terms of the pandemic planning?

General Sir Nick Carter: I think we were brought in in a timely fashion. We saw that particularly with the operations that were mounted to build and create those Nightingales, which happened relatively quickly, I would say.

I think the same applied to the support that we provided to Skipton House, the NHS England strategic headquarters. We were very quickly asked to come in and help with the PPE challenge, particularly the distribution networks and everything associated with it. Then, when eventually Defence Equipment and Support was brought in to help on the make and buy side, that was impressive.

This was an emergency like no other emergency any of us has had to deal with before, and inevitably there was a requirement for people to educate each other on what everybody did. I personally didn't have a clue what DHSC did beforehand, and I didn't have much of a clue about the NHS. I would like to think that I now have rather a good understanding and knowledge of that, and that is the same for all our people who have been involved. Equally, those other Government Departments needed to learn a bit about what we could do. There was obviously a learning process.

What we have learned from all of this rather more strategically is that, while I would not describe covid as a black swan, there will be black swans in the future, so thinking about these things in advance and genuinely exercising them and doing the sort of thing that we like doing a lot—what I would call a sort of war game—is a good idea, because that gets people thinking about each other's capabilities. You can learn about each other and what each other can contribute across an integrated approach.

- Q29 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Do you think there is an ongoing role for the armed forces in the pandemic at the moment? Maybe you agree with me that there are many members of the reserves who, while not on active duty, are frontline workers in the NHS and are already doing other jobs outside the armed forces' structure, which has not really been reflected in some of the discussion and debate over recent weeks.

General Sir Nick Carter: No, and you allude to an important point. Just over 14,000 members of the armed forces have been either directly involved or very closely involved in support of the Government's response. It has touched a whole range of different people, whether that is reservists or those on full-time service, or people from the Engineer and Logistics



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Staff Corps, which is quite an unusual organisation that I know this Committee will have heard of. What they have done, even if they are NHS employees, who have obviously been recognised, deserves great recognition.

What I am most proud of in terms of our response is that our involvement has not been one that has been proudly strutted as the frontline. We have exercised a degree of humility in supporting others on the frontline and that has been the culture that has been prevalent among all those in the armed forces that have been involved in this. That has been something that I have been rather proud of.

- Q30 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** General, forgive me, but may I ask a question about something that has just been made public knowledge in the last half hour? It would be remiss of me not to take the opportunity. There is a publication coming out today about Saudi Arabian-led coalitionists who received possible UK training for naval tactics to blockade Yemen, which would be described as “unlawful” under the UN. Would you like to say anything about that at the moment?

General Sir Nick Carter: No, I was not aware of what you have just announced, I’m afraid.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: It has just been announced through a freedom of information request. Maybe that is something the Committee and the General can take away, Chair.

- Q31 **Chair:** General, you illustrate the versatility of the armed forces—the ability to see a challenge and to rise to that challenge, because you have the best strategists and you are trained for emergency response. My concern is that you weren’t utilised as well as you could have been. There is a difference, as you are aware, between policy creation and the delivery of the operation. What we see is this Government not changing the dynamic and the construct in response to this enduring emergency; they decided to use the peacetime, Cabinet-led Government to respond. Do you believe that—to put this in a glass-half-full way—there is perhaps more that the armed forces could do to help in the operational delivery, in addition to what they have already done?

General Sir Nick Carter: I think it is always a fine judgment. Ultimately, I guess, it will always be a political judgment as to how you use the armed forces in support of the civil authorities. Going back to my point about how our role has been quietly understated but none the less very decisive and helpful in certain areas, I think that is a good thing. If there were uniforms everywhere, that might have been quite unsettling for people. In my view, it was done in a nuanced way and that that is probably the right answer in this particular set of circumstances.

- Q32 **Chair:** I was referring to the Cabinet and decision making—once the decision has been made, how you do the operational delivery and how you make sure that you then have the best strategists working out how to expedite decision making.



General Sir Nick Carter: Certainly, at the operational level, which I would call NHS England headquarters level, I think our input there in the way that they developed their plans was very effective—a combination of that and some intelligent management consultants and the bringing together of two interesting cultures. The NHS is a professional culture alongside our professional culture and I think those two cultures complemented each other rather well. The plans that were drawn up for how PPE was ultimately distributed were a pretty good example of operational level plans that did something really challenging. You will recall that when I did a Downing Street briefing, I said that this is difficult stuff—indeed, I said that it was the hardest logistic challenge that I had seen in 40 years of service—but I think that was pretty well done, looking back on it.

Q33 **Chair:** It seems a very trivial question, but I think it is important given the types of communication and the information war that perhaps we are in. You have a computer-generated operations' names system, and they are very unimaginative. Operation RESCRIPT, I think, is the domestic response to covid-19, and there is Operation BROADSHARE.

May I suggest that it would be far more invigorating for all personnel to be participating in a grand Operation Nightingale, Operation Soteria, who I think was the Greek goddess of safety, or maybe Operation Carter? That would really inspire characters to make sure that they did their best. I just think that that might be a bit more motivational. It is very bland and very dry.

General Sir Nick Carter: Actually, I think you raise a very interesting point. One of the things that I think will increasingly change, going back to what I described as the new operating environment, is that very rarely now is an exercise simply an exercise. An exercise now in many ways is an operation, because of course you are trying to have an impact with that operation in information warfare terms. I agree with you: how we describe our contribution can have an information effect. It is certainly one of those things that we should take away and show an interest in.

Q34 **Chair:** I look forward to the first non-computer-generated name with interest.

General Sir Nick Carter: It will be Operation Ellwood. *[Laughter.]*

Chair: Let us move to the integrated review, which has been stop-start. Derek Twigg, do you want to take us forward on this one?

Q35 **Derek Twigg:** Thank you, Chair. General, can I ask what work the armed forces did to prepare for the integrated review, and how will you ensure—*[Inaudible.]*—your voice is heard at the top table?

Chair: We have a comms issue. The question is to do with the preparation. What have you done so far in preparation for the integrated review? Maybe you could explain as well where we are, because it was postponed. Are you at it now? When will it report?



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General Sir Nick Carter: Yes, the work is well under way now. It was relaunched two or three weeks ago. In terms of what we did in preparation for it, that really started when our expectation of this review occurred, about this time last year. We certainly started work with a vengeance in the autumn, and it started with us wanting to get the integrated operating concept that I described earlier banked and agreed among the Chiefs of Staff, because that provided essentially the baseline against which we felt we needed to develop our thinking.

The next aspect of this was that we developed a future operating concept, which is the north star that I referred to earlier that will provide us with a path towards the way that we think we should fight in the 2030s. That was very much about the sort of digital technologies that will change things. As part of that we coined the expression “sunset and sunrise capabilities”.

I will give an illustration of what we feel sunrise capabilities are likely to be for the 2030s. We think that they will be smaller and faster, because it will essentially be about the competition for hiding versus finding. There will be much about low-observable and stealth technologies. Electronic warfare and passive deception will be there. We will probably trade reduced physical protection for increased mobility. The question about Warrior, of course, is interesting in that.

They will include a mix of manned, unmanned and autonomous platforms. They will be integrated into ever more sophisticated networks. They will have open systems architectures that enable the rapid incorporation of new capability and the rapid integration into the network. We anticipate them being much less dependent on fossil fuels, for obvious reasons, and we think that they will employ many more non-line-of-sight fires. Here, one is of course talking about long-range missile technology.

That gives you a sense of the sort of thing that you would find in that future operating concept, and the sort of thing against which you might judge, to your original question, the sorts of capabilities that you might take out of the programme now, and that you might want to have in the programme in the future if you are serious about fighting and winning.

What we then did was to bring the Chiefs of Staff together and get them to have a conversation based upon a sort of “food for thought” short paper on how we will fight. Then the Chiefs of Staff were asked to go away and think about how each of their domains—here I am talking about the new domains of space, cyber, maritime, air and land—would integrate into the broader concept of how we would fight in the future. That gave them a chance to think about what their operating concepts for their domains would look like.

We are now in the process of bringing their ideas into a common idea so that we have a sense, in terms of the broad requirement, of how we would want to fight in the 2030s. Of course, when you are talking about the period of this integrated review, it is 2030 onwards, so we would be positing an integrated force as distinct from a joint force for 2030.



Chair: Derek, do you have a follow-up?

Q36 **Derek Twigg:** Can I go back to the earlier comments about funding and personnel? Are you happy that you have enough people of the calibre of special forces coming through?

General Sir Nick Carter: The straight answer is yes.

Q37 **Chair:** Your gene pool of special forces is taken from the wider armed forces fraternity, so you are confident you have that capability.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes.

Q38 **Stuart Anderson:** General, very good to see you again. As I said earlier, it is great to see how your career has progressed. When I look back to the conflicts we were involved in together, such as the Balkans, and hear you talk about the 2030s and sunrise capability, it is good to see how we are preparing for the evolution of the battle space. I am keen to understand how our armed forces will contribute to the threat and risk assessment carried out as part of the integrated review.

General Sir Nick Carter: Thank you for the question and thank you for the compliment. I am trying to make sure that this is not a career-ending moment.

In terms of how we are contributing to that threat and risk assessment, we have, as you probably know, a very accomplished organisation based in Shrivenham called our Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, who produce a document called "Global Strategic Trends". The period of time that the "Global Strategic Trends" tends to cover is, handily enough, in the sort of timeframe, or the beginning, that the integrated review is involved in. So they have been very much involved in the process and their input has been helpful.

We also have a Royal Marine brigadier on the team that is doing the work. He is able to reach into the Chief of Defence Intelligence area, and he is also obviously able to reach out to DCDC and our military allies and so on. We feel reasonably confident that our perspective on the threat and the risks associated with that threat are properly represented.

The judgment, then, of course, is how it gets played by the Government into the broader review, and that is where, of course, we slightly lose control of what is happening.

Q39 **Stuart Anderson:** Could I ask you to expand on how important you think that contribution is to the integrated review?

General Sir Nick Carter: I think it is absolutely vital that we start with the threat. If you do not do a proper analysis of the threat, you will get into a muddle.

One thing that I have often argued for is the ability to do what I would call net assessment. There is always a risk that you look at the threat today, but actually, given the longevity of the defence programme and all that goes with it, and the length of time that it takes to bring some of the more



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sophisticated capabilities into service, you need to be looking ahead by epochs. You need to look at what it is going to be like in five years' time, 10 years' time and then beyond.

When you do that, you are looking at how your opponents' capabilities, or your potential opponents' capabilities, will have involved in the same period of time and then you match them to what your programme is going to deliver. You are forever making that judgment between their perspective and your perspective to make sure that no gaps are developing or, if there are gaps, you have a mechanism for filling them.

How we play net assessment into this is a really important set of questions. When you get experts in the room and talk to them about the threat, I very much encourage you to ask them about the future, not just today, and about the process of net assessment, so that you make those judgments about relative capabilities over time.

Chair: Richard Drax, do you want to touch on alliances with NATO at this point, and particularly the US footprint in Europe?

- Q40 **Richard Drax:** General, very nice to see you. I think the last time I saw you was in Scotland, which was a few years ago. I remember talking about your promotion even then, so many congratulations on where you have got to now.

The United States is pulling troops out of Europe, and I have had it reported to me at a recent strategic mobilisation war game that the European NATO countries apparently offered medical and support service but no frontline elements. The Americans' view was, "Right, we die and then you patch us up." Can you assure me, or perhaps reassure me, that with your work with NATO, and particularly with the United States, they are not heading off in a different direction—*[Inaudible.]*—NATO, as the key of our defence for the future?

General Sir Nick Carter: Obviously, speaking entirely from a military perspective, I have a relationship with my US opposite number, Mark Milley, who is an old friend. When he was head of their army, before he became chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, we worked very closely together on how we would interoperate within the NATO concept inside Europe. At no time has he given me any indication that his leadership will change the way they would contribute to what we do in Europe in all domains, whether maritime, air, land, cyber or space. I am entirely confident from a military perspective that my military interlocutors are committed to the alliance and are committed to delivering the sort of effect that we grew up with when we were both subalterns in western Germany—you up in Hohne or Fallingbostal, and me down in Celle.

- Q41 **Richard Drax:** What about our European allies, General? They do not seem to be quite so firm, do they? Is it fair to say they are a bit more wobbly?



General Sir Nick Carter: Yes, although one has seen some very positive indications of the sort of money that the Germans want to commit to defence looking good. We certainly have a very close relationship, in combat terms, with the French, who we have operated with closely in the past. When I look at our joint expeditionary force—as you know, it is the alliance that we have created within NATO but outside NATO as well, between the Baltics, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and of course the Netherlands—I see a fighting spirit and a desire to develop the sorts of combat capabilities that will be necessary to provide deterrence and reassurance looking forward.

Q42 **Richard Drax:** General, would you agree that the United States is going to be our main ally? It always has been and probably always will be. It is unlikely that we will operate on our own; we simply do not have the numbers to do that. In essence, if we do something or are asked to do something, we will have to ensure that all our kit is fully integrated with theirs. Is it?

General Sir Nick Carter: I agree with you, first, that it is a reasonable assumption that we will never fight without allies. I also agree with you that we are most likely to fight within a NATO context. Indeed, I would also agree that our most likely partner will be the United States. I can assure you that we exercise in all domains annually with the Americans. We have a number of interoperability initiatives, because you need to look at interoperability in a number of ways. Part of it is about your doctrine and your concepts, which we and the Americans are always aligned on. Secondly, it is about the human capability, and we have a significant footprint in the United States, as do they in our military over here. Indeed, we now have a deputy corps commander and two deputy divisional commanders in the US army. We are about to deploy our carrier group in 2021 with US marine corps F-35s on board and with our own F-35s. That is a level of interoperability that I think is rare for any country to achieve. To my mind, we are in a good place. Technology is key to this as well. Of course, that is where one has to break through some of the industrial dynamics in this, but our goal is always to try to make sure that we are technology-integrated as well as integrated on the human and doctrinal side.

Q43 **Chair:** Before we turn to Mark and more questions on procurement, I want to focus on the global strategic trends that you spoke about. My first question is on the good work that you are doing on the integrated view. How is it possible to advance too far without first understanding the foreign policy baseline? Forgive me, but I do not think you have actually received it yet. We have not had the study that says what our place is and what our vision is—what Britain's role and our ambitions are in this changing world.

General Sir Nick Carter: It is an iterative process. We spend much of our time talking to those who are designing and developing the foreign policy at the moment—for example, John Bew, who you would have come across in No. 10, and Alex Ellis, who is the deputy national security adviser who is responsible for the review. Of course what we are doing is iterating,



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and I think we are also working on the assumption—going back to my point about the importance of our integrated operating concept, which sees the need to compete—that we would expect the armed forces to be used, and to be used in a forward presence and forward-deployed type way.

So the sorts of activities that you might see with capacity building in Nigeria or wherever it might be, which I think you will remember, Chair, from your days as a Minister, are exactly the sorts of things that we would expect to provide capabilities that Government would be able to use if they pursue that type of agenda.

Q44 Chair: The big elephant in the room, if you are talking about constant political competition, is China. I think the reason why this Committee would be keen to see the integrated review take place as quickly as possible is because we are seeing a change in power—a shift— from the west to east. Perhaps covid-19 has actually exposed the limitations of the world’s architecture in the ability to challenge, but also the weaknesses of collective responsibility in standing up to any aggression. However, it has also shown and exposed a more assertive, more dominant China, not least in what we are seeing in Hong Kong, but also in the way it treats its own people, its expansion into the South China Sea and what it is doing to entrap countries through its infrastructure programmes.

I think that is the sort of power competition you referred to in your opening remarks. Should Britain be learning more about China, understanding it better, and preparing perhaps to insulate ourselves, or indeed to work with our allies on what will be a growing challenge to the way that the west does business?

General Sir Nick Carter: The straight answer is, yes, I think we should. I think that what we are describing here is the requirement for a strategic response. I talked about George Kennan in my opening remarks and how that prompted the Truman doctrine, and it seems to me that it is a strategic response that will have to integrate all the instruments of statecraft, whether it is ideology, diplomacy, finance, trade policy and of course military power.

In doing that, it is very important, and I would say this as a military officer, that we remember our Clausewitz. You will recall that Clausewitz said, “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of contest”—he used the word “war”, but I will use the word “contest”— “on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.” I think we need that clarity of purpose, as a starter for 10, and with that clarity of purpose, I think it will be very possible for us to help to catalyse a strategy that our allies will be able to execute alongside us.

Q45 Mr Jones: You mentioned two political advisers. I know John Bew very well; he is a very good author, having written “Citizen Clem”. But who is politically in charge of this? I know that when we did the review back in



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1998, which John Spellar was also involved with as a Minister, there was a lead Minister in charge of that. Is there a lead Minister in charge of this review, or is there a Cabinet Sub-Committee doing it?

General Sir Nick Carter: My understanding is that the First Secretary is in charge of it at the moment, but I suspect that what will happen when we get the new National Security Adviser is that he might well take it over, because you would expect that to be the sort of focus.

Q46 **Mr Jones:** Wait a minute—you just said you believe that is the case.

General Sir Nick Carter: Well, I think that people are in transition at the moment, so I do not think it is that clear. However, what we certainly know at the moment is that the First Secretary is leading the process on behalf of the Prime Minister.

Q47 **Mr Jones:** Is there a Cabinet Sub-Committee on this, or...?

General Sir Nick Carter: I think we could probably get back to you and confirm precisely what it looks like.

Q48 **Chair:** Can I just turn back to China, if I may?

Q49 **Mr Jones:** Can I just finish, because it is quite concerning, especially after the things that you did not recognise over the weekend, that things are being said that are obviously destabilising to members of the armed forces by people who are not elected? I think that, from your point of view, having clarity in terms of political cover is important, and it is a bit concerning if there does not seem to be a clear process of how, one, political oversight of that will happen initially, but also how then it is going to be, because you know what will happen—there will be jockeying for position between different Departments, when the ultimate paper is actually produced.

General Sir Nick Carter: The ultimate purpose of the National Security Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, is to guide and sit over this enterprise. As you know, the NSC is a sub-committee of the Cabinet, so in overarching political terms, that would be the way in which one would see this thing being delivered.

Q50 **Mr Jones:** Not at the moment.

General Sir Nick Carter: The NSC has considered it, and as a member of the NSC I have sat alongside and taken part in the debate. The answer is that the NSC is engaged in it. The question is when you get into the level of detail below that and how that happens. Of course, the review has only just been re-kick-started, so precisely what that looks like is probably slightly different.

Q51 **Chair:** I want to finish off on China and then move on to procurement. I want to focus on what, if anything, new is happening in the MOD, to understand the changing competition, if I can put it fairly, from China itself. China is growing its military capability; 20 years ago it was on par with the UK and now it is five times larger than us. It has overtaken Russia and is on course, I think, to have parity with the United States,



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probably in our lifetimes. It is clearly more aggressive, it is not transparent, it does not follow international rules and norms, so what is Britain's position? How should we deal with a changing attitude across the nation towards China, becoming more concerned than we were, let's say, 10 years ago, when there was a hope and a desire perhaps to see China mature into a responsible international stakeholder?

General Sir Nick Carter: Speaking as the head of the Armed Forces, any military response that one might make towards China can only be done with allies. How we create the alliances and the military structures to be able to deal with it if it becomes a threat is what I would recommend. At the moment, I think it is premature to describe it as a threat. It is a challenge, and we should recognise that as we adopt our strategic approach, which I recommended about two questions ago.

Q52 **Chair:** There are reports and allegations that China is seeking to influence elite figures in our military, in our politics, in our business and in our academia, to support its goals and influence using soft power capability. Would that be something that concerned you?

General Sir Nick Carter: They haven't come to me yet.

Q53 **Chair:** It is good to know you are still on side; the nation will breathe a sigh of relief. But we are seeing an advancement and a changing character of conflict. It is less about territory now and more about digital, influence and who you can have power over.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes. I have talked a lot, in various speeches in this role, about how the character of conflict has evolved. You are exactly right: what has happened now, given the rapid pace of technology and particularly the information environment, is that a whole new range of tactics, techniques and tools are now available to those who might wish to make mischief. That is particularly the case in the information domain, where it is much easier for people to be coercive. But it is all more nuanced than that, and one needs to recognise that; it is getting key appointments in UN committees, it is how you leverage resources, it is how you end up creating clients who may not be allies, but are perhaps indebted.

Chair: For example, China now has four of the top 15 agency slots, versus the United States, which only has one. Is that an illustration of what you are talking about?

General Sir Nick Carter: It is competitive, and ultimately you need to work out which of those things you are going to compete for, and which really matter to you.

Chair: Let us go back to more domestic matters. Mark, do you want to take us to the equipment plan?

Q54 **Mr Francois:** You mentioned Clausewitz and whether you are studying him at Sandhurst or at RCDS. He had a famous concept of the fog of war, and there seems to be an extremely deep and impenetrable fog above Abbey Wood, where, allegedly, we organise our procurement. The NAO



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report, which my colleague mentioned earlier, looked into the entire area of equipment capability and concluded that, of the 32 major programmes it forensically investigated—it is, after all, our national auditor—only five of them were due to be delivered on time. As the professional head of the Armed Forces, what is your view on that?

General Sir Nick Carter: Clearly it is disappointing that you do not make the timelines you need to make, for all sorts of reasons that you would understand, but one needs to recognise that often you are dealing not only with very rapidly evolving requirements, which have an impact on things, but importantly, as we have been certainly for the past five years, with a very dynamic financial situation. That is why it is extremely important that the integrated review, and in parallel the comprehensive spending review, deliver a multi-year settlement to Defence.

Mr Francois: I don't think this—

General Sir Nick Carter: No, this is really important. Please let me finish. The reason it is so important is that that then gives you planning consistency. One reason that programmes get delayed is that you have to take savings in year and you have to keep deferring things. If you keep deferring things, you inevitably end up with them not making the timelines that you want. If you have a defence programme that you can rely on, with a consistent set of funding over a consistent period of time, you are able to make the sorts of judgments you need to bring things in on time. One challenge that we have is this constant process of annuality, which causes you to have to keep taking savings and keep deferring things.

Q55 **Mr Francois:** I completely agree, but another fundamental challenge is the Department's inability to manage the contractors. Often, many of these programmes go over budget, and because of that you have to endlessly keep re-juggling the programme.

Only five delivered on time; many of them were over budget. I could reel them off: Warrior CSP, MFTS, Astute, Trident infrastructure and Crowsnest. It goes on and on. This Committee is conducting a major inquiry into procurement, which will hopefully be complete in time to inform the integrated review.

There have been 13 previous reviews into procurement, yet nothing ever seems to change. The programmes still run late. They still go over budget. Everybody gets promoted. No one gets sacked. Billions of pounds are wasted. The armed forces go without the kit they need. Yet nothing ever seems to change. We have had a number of witnesses, in the context of that inquiry, who have admitted that the system is broken or near broken. Is that your view?

General Sir Nick Carter: I think there is a great deal that can always be done to improve it. I imagine that during the course of your procurement inquiry, you will ask the chief executive of Defence Equipment and Support, Sir Simon Bollom, to come and give evidence. I think that he will give you some reassurance that his organisation is transforming itself.

Q56 **Mr Francois:** You could not be further from the truth. As you have



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mentioned him—I was not going to, but as you have put him in play—he has been before this Committee twice in recent years. He could not even answer the most basic questions about his responsibilities. He could not even understand the effect of exchange rates on balancing the equipment plan, particularly the pound-dollar exchange rate, because we increasingly buy off-the-shelf from the US, for which there may be good operational reasons, so the pound-dollar exchange rate becomes more fundamental in balancing the equipment plan, which is still out of balance. When the Committee challenged him on that—I paraphrase, but you could read the transcript—“This is nothing to do with me.”

To be honest, his performance was laughable. But he is not here today; you are. This review is an opportunity once and for all to grasp the nettle and there is no point in having an integrated review if it does not address the failure of the procurement system. We are an all-party Committee, and we might not agree with you on everything, but I think we would agree with you that we would like to see more resources committed to defence, particularly with a rising China, for all the reasons the Chairman has articulated. But it is very difficult to make that argument with conviction when the first thing the Treasury says is, “There is no point in giving them any more money; they cannot even spend what we give them properly. It is like a kid in a sweet shop. All they ever do is argue for more money and when we give it to them, they pee half of it up the wall.”

Will we finally change that, or will we go around in more circles with nothing ever improving? Surely this is our opportunity to finally do something about it.

General Sir Nick Carter: You were a Minister before, so I know you have a close, intimate knowledge of this from when you were Armed Forces Minister.

Mr Francois: They never let me do procurement. I had too strong views on it.

Chair: The nation’s loss.

General Sir Nick Carter: Anyway, we have a number of things under way at the moment. There is the defence, security and industrial strategy review, which will have a significant impact on procurement. It should set the way in which we want to engage industry. There are lots of parallel factors associated with that, which will play precisely to the question you want answered. That will be vital to us, not least because I think it will recommend that we need to have a slightly different relationship with certain parts of industry. That relationship should be less gladiatorial and competitive, but more collaborative, to a degree, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, because it allows you perhaps to build innovation into what you acquire, which is important to us.

It also perhaps provides some confidence in terms of the timelines on which things will be delivered, particularly on the timelines over which you will then end up addressing any obsolescence that might come into it, and



in terms of how you work together to deliver a different outcome. That is really important. The second aspect that I think it is interesting is what is being done as part of our acquisition review at the moment, which has taken several programmes and worked out how they can be delivered at pace.

One thing that I absolutely acknowledge that we have to do is to improve, within the military career structure particularly, our ability to hold industry to account. Increasingly, we need to have the sort of skills that are recognised in programming and project management, which is not something that we are particularly gifted at and we need to improve.

We also need to improve our commercial skills. When you join the military as a war fighter, you do not necessarily realise that you will end up having to be involved in the way that you and I are now having this conversation. We have to do something about developing the career structure and specialising people to become much more competent at being able to hold industry to account for what they need to deliver, but also understanding the possibilities that can be drawn from industry in exchange. We have work to do on that.

We particularly have work to do on what I would call contract management, which you see particularly in things such as facilities management. Of course, the average quartermaster is not necessarily that well gifted in holding an industry contractor to account. If that happens, it is always the god of extras that ends up pulling the floor from your affordability position, or indeed from the service that you get for the soldier, sailor, airman or airwoman.

Q57 Mr Francois: You made a good point earlier that we do not have a land system strategy, which the Committee have picked up on. We have a naval strategy and a sort of air strategy, à la Tempest and all that. We do not in land and that is something where you are right. We want to look at that in more detail.

I do not want to overrun my time, but I want to put two other questions to you quickly. First, given that that has been such a mess for many years, and given that we want to see more resources for defence, we are actually trying to help—believe it or not. The hint that we are trying to drop is that unless you reform yourselves quickly, someone is going to do the reforming for you and it might be easier to do it yourselves.

General Sir Nick Carter: I do not disagree with that. What I would say—you might think, “What on earth is he raising this for?”—is that the Defence Equipment and Support area is often given a poor vote in terms of its reputation. It is an organisation that mobilised remarkably for the covid response. On Friday a week ago, they passed their 10 billionth procurement of individual items of PPE and they have spent £5 billion in doing that for the Government.

There is no other organ of Government that was able to do that, and they stepped up to the plate to do that at extraordinarily short notice. Before



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we run them down, we should acknowledge that they have contributed massively to the nation's challenge over the last four or five months.

Q58 Mr Francois: I accept that. I am not knocking them for covid. I am knocking them for procuring military equipment. At the end of the day, as we both know, the role of the armed forces is to contribute to deterrence, but if deterrence fails, to fight and to win to protect our freedom. You cannot deter if lots of your equipment is old, tired, rusty and obsolescent because the procurement programmes to replace it are way over budget and years late.

My final word on the subject is that there have been 13 reviews and decades of failure. In 1986, Michael Heseltine and Peter Levene produced a report called "Learning from Experience" after the Nimrod debacle that cost us £1 billion of taxpayers' money and we had to buy AWACS instead. That was in 1986. We make a plea to you as the professional head of the armed forces: please nip back to the Department and ask them to sort their bloody selves out. If not, Cummings is going to come down there and sort you out his own way and you won't like it.

Chair: I think that message has been passed on. Looking back at the SDSR 2015, which is a good landmark document to take stock of, and whether that was implemented, I understand that it ran into the buffers as soon as the spending review came up. Promises were made in the document that could not be fulfilled. That plays into Mark's point.

The MoD needs to be clearer that if it agrees, or if the Government agrees to the next SDSR, this integrated review, the funding must absolutely come to support every single project that is in there. Clearly, having aircraft carriers in 2015 without increasing the naval budget was going to have an impact on the rest of the naval flotilla, and that is exactly what has happened.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes. I have made this point a couple of times today: if you have a multi-year settlement, and you therefore have the confidence to plan on a multi-year basis, it is extraordinary how much easier it is to manage procurement.

Q59 Chair: Is there a country that does exactly that, which we could learn from?

General Sir Nick Carter: The United States has a process of quadrennial review.

Q60 Chair: That is still done on a four-year cycle, and then you start from scratch again. I think each of the programmes Mark is talking about is over 10 years.

Mr Francois: Their project managers often stay for at least five years, don't they?

Chair: That is perhaps the difference.

General Sir Nick Carter: Continuity is important in all of this.



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Chair: I am now going to move to those other aspects, away from the conventional: maritime, air and land. Richard Drax is going to take a look at these new dimensions of war fighting.

- Q61 **Richard Drax:** General, as you have said, the nature of warfare is changing. We all know that: new weapons and innovation are going to change the way future wars are fought, if indeed they are—let us hope they are not. Our conventional forces are now circa 72,000; would you say that is the minimum to which you would be prepared to go, and that any new equipment—cyber, drones, and anything else innovative that is brought forward to fight future wars—would be in addition to, not to the detriment of, the existing number of men and women who serve this country with such distinction?

General Sir Nick Carter: I hope you will not mind me being a slight pedant to begin with. The first observation I would make is that the character of warfare is changing, not the nature of war. The nature of war is always violent, visceral, and about politics; it is the character that is changing.

My second observation is that our conventional forces are much larger than 72,000. You need to bring the regular components of the Air Force and the Navy into that equation as well, which takes it to a figure well over 100,000.

Richard Drax: I am talking about the Army, General.

General Sir Nick Carter: The answer is that if we are looking forward 10 or 15 years—you will recall my answer that provoked the conversation about sunrise capabilities—we do not yet know what automation will do for us. We do not yet know whether robots are going to have an impact. It is already possible, as we all know, to link up nine logistic trucks to one real driver. That would have a significant impact on how we deliver our output and our capability, so we should not ignore what technology might do for us. However, I will give you assurance on this: to my mind, for the next 10 to 15 years, the ability to generate mass in order to overwhelm people on a battlefield will still be a very important ingredient in future warfare.

- Q62 **Richard Drax:** General, the technology to which you refer is great while it works, but presumably our enemies are trying to find ways of countering that technology. If that technology is somehow countered to the extent it no longer exists, and we do not have the manpower anymore, we're going to look a bit stupid, aren't we?

General Sir Nick Carter: When you think about embracing modern technology, you always need to build in what your resilience is going to be and what your reversionary techniques are. You see that when teaching somebody to read a map. There is a real risk at the moment—I am sure you have seen this with your children—that they will follow the GPS and discover they are in the wrong village, because they have not looked at the map as well. The whole business of reversionary effort is something we will definitely put into the force structure. However, I think you would agree that it would be wrong of us to not consider the opportunities that



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will come with some of these technologies, which might save on some of the functions that are not frontline functions.

- Q63 **Richard Drax:** I understand that, General, You are not in a position to say that the numbers in the Army now are the minimum to which you are prepared to go. You are saying that the future may dictate that number having to change downwards, due to men and women being replaced by technology.

General Sir Nick Carter: Again, it comes back to what the Government want the Army, and the armed forces for that matter, to do. That is how we cut our cloth. I think that in this conversation—

- Q64 **Richard Drax:** Sorry, General, let me interrupt you. If you need that technology and that equipment to meet a modern battlefield, that is not up to a politician, is it? That is up to you—what you need to fight that battle.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes, but surely you derive it—as the Chair said earlier—from whatever the foreign and security policy of the Government is. That will give us a determination of what size of armed forces they need to meet that commitment.

The point that I would like to hammer home is that we tend to measure our capability through metrics of platform numbers or the numbers of human beings, and in doing that we do not necessarily get the whole capability that we can from the way in which we integrate everything together or indeed from what we draw from the reserve, for example.

We should not lose account of the fact that the Army particularly now has a reserve component of 30,000, who deliver a phenomenal amount of additional effect. I would far rather talk about an Army of 120,000—an Army that embraces all those who contribute to it. At readiness—whether two or six weeks, or whatever it might be—they deliver capability that can provide the mass that we need for the eventualities that I think we might be up against.

- Q65 **Richard Drax:** May I move on to 5G and the threat by the Americans not to base their F-35s here, which is linked to the 5G argument? As I am sure you have read and heard, it seems as though the Government are moving away from Huawei installing our 5G. Have you had any assurance from our US friends that they will install or move their F-35s here if, let's say for the sake of argument, Huawei does install 5G?

General Sir Nick Carter: My American opposite number, although I have not had this specific conversation with him, has certainly not warned me of this coming our way, no.

- Q66 **Richard Drax:** Why have we heard the Americans say—or the American President certainly saying—that that would be the case?

General Sir Nick Carter: I can only comment on my military opposite number. It is not my place to judge what the politicians are saying.



Chair: Very wise indeed.

Q67 **Richard Drax:** Do you have a view on 5G yourself, in so far as our security is concerned?

General Sir Nick Carter: I have a view of the fact that the technology is very useful. Indeed, we are already experimenting with that sort of technology on the battlefield—not from that particular supplier, I hasten to add—and how we would provide some wi-fi connection to make a headquarters work in the field is a very successful and thoughtful way of thinking about it.

Q68 **Richard Drax:** It is the supplier I am asking about.

General Sir Nick Carter: And I have said, we do not use that supplier in any of our sensitive networks.

Q69 **John Spellar:** Do you use them in any of your networks?

General Sir Nick Carter: None of our sensitive networks.

John Spellar: That was not the question. Do you use them in any of your networks?

General Sir Nick Carter: None of our sensitive networks—none that matter have Huawei technology.

Q70 **John Spellar:** This comes down to the argument that we have had several times in Committee, if I may say so, with respect, General. In the evolution of this technology, is there that separation and differentiation between sensitive, secure, core or whatever word one uses, and the rest of the network? That has been a crucial issue in this debate.

General Sir Nick Carter: Absolutely. From our military perspective, there is a distinct separation between their provision of technology and the stuff that we use.

Q71 **Chair:** We are concerned about our vulnerability as we advance and take advantage of telecoms capabilities to guide our missiles or communicate on the battlefield, and about how easy it would be to disrupt that in some form or fashion. The ultimate high ground, would you agree, has now moved into space itself? Without the satellites allowing us to communicate, our ability to fight and defend is completely impeded on the ground beneath. What are we doing to advance and protect ourselves in this domain, bearing in mind—going back to China—the massive investments that they are putting in, of \$10 billion a year? The Chinese have now landed a rocket on the far side of the moon and are putting more rockets into space than any other nation in the world. Are we not concerned that we are becoming more vulnerable in this digital domain?

General Sir Nick Carter: The answer is that we have now created space as one of our operational domains, alongside cyber, land, air and maritime. We have done that for good reason, which you allude to—it is a domain that you need to dominate if you are to be able to operate and fight on a modern battlefield.



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The challenge of course is how you do that. We are taking the early steps to find out what it means for space to be an operational domain. First and foremost, it is important to get some form of space situational awareness. It will also be important to work out what redundancy to build into it. We cannot have all our eggs in one basket. There is a big challenge if all our missile guidance systems are to be powered by GPS that is hanging above us, because others will find a way of outmanoeuvring that.

The trick is to get the right balance between the different domains. It may well be that the land domain provides you with some of the alternatives in the future. When you get into some of the modern technologies and things like atomic clocks, it may be that you can have some redundancy in relation to space. We are working our way through this at the moment, and an important part of the conversation we have in the integrated review will be to make sure that we get the right balance of investment to take space forwards.

Chair: I want to pursue a little further what the military are actually doing themselves—13 Signal Regiment, for example. John, do you want to take us forward on this? *[Interruption.]* Okay, Kevan, go ahead.

Mr Jones: I want to come back in because I was down for the question before, but I think Richard ate that sandwich early on. Can I ask a question in relation to Huawei?

Chair: Okay—very quickly. I want then to move on to 13 Signal Regiment.

Mr Jones: Not quickly—you seem to be dominating the bloody questions again, Chairman.

Chair: Well, we have only half an hour left and we have two big chunky themes to deal with.

Q72 **Mr Jones:** If you didn't go off-piste, it might help.

Can I just get this clarified, General? We have heard a lot of nonsense, frankly, from a lot of commentators about the vulnerability of our network if we have Huawei in it. Can you just repeat the point? We heard from a Senator from Arkansas a few weeks ago that, somehow, having Huawei in any of our equipment in the telecoms network would make our secure systems vulnerable. That is not the case, is it?

General Sir Nick Carter: No.

Mr Jones: Thank you.

Q73 **John Spellar:** General, what will be the role of the 13th Signal Regiment?

General Sir Nick Carter: It is described as a CEMA regiment—CEMA stands for cyber and electromagnetic activities—and the answer is that it will probably combine cyber and electronic warfare in terms of its capability. As you know, the Army has for a long time had an electronic warfare regiment. This is the first time that it has gone for a CEMA regiment, as we are now describing it. It will certainly be carefully



integrated into what we are doing with the National Cyber Security Centre. It will certainly be closely integrated into what we do with the National Cyber Force and all that. And I would see it being very much a growth area for the development of the sort of skills that we will need to have the higher levels of cyber-capability.

One thing that is very interesting in terms of the way defence is looking at cyber-space at the moment is how we are developing that career structure, because what we are learning from this is that it is a career structure that cannot be run by each of the single services themselves. It is one that needs to be run in a unified fashion, because by doing that, there is a reasonable chance that you will maximise the talent, but you will also be able to provide the sort of skill sets that you need to be able to do this properly. So we see this as an exciting opportunity to begin to build our cyber-capability to be even more than where it is at the moment. It will be an opportunity to really embrace the information environment.

It will be part of our 6th Division, and the 6th Division in the Army is the one that deals with information manoeuvre, so it also has the 77th Brigade, which you will have heard of and which deals with—

John Spellar: We have been down there.

General Sir Nick Carter: Indeed. So it will be alongside that and the other capabilities we have in that division, and the purpose of it, of course, is to give us information dominance, which is something that on the modern battlefield becomes ever more important.

Q74 **John Spellar:** Presumably it will have a substantial reserve component as well.

General Sir Nick Carter: In terms of the career structure, there will be a significant reserve component.

Chair: Can we turn to the culture of the armed forces? Sarah, do you want to take us forward on this one?

Q75 **Sarah Atherton:** Good afternoon, General. During your introduction, you touched on your greatest asset being your people. The Secretary of State for Defence wants more diverse armed forces, and last month was reported as saying that the Department had not done well enough. Female and BAME personnel are over-represented in the military complaints system and under-represented in recruitment, so General, are your diversity and inclusiveness initiatives failing?

General Sir Nick Carter: They are not doing well enough, I would absolutely concur. Indeed, this morning, we got together as a chiefly body—that is the three single service chiefs, myself, the commander of UK Strategic Command and also the vice-chief—and we had a very first principle conversation about how we can increase our effort and deliver some action that will actually take us over the bar.



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The thing that I think is really worrying is the culture. Despite a number of surveys and a number of efforts, not least stuff that I did when I was head of the Army in relation to leadership and all of that, we still stubbornly have a culture that does not recognise that diversity and inclusion need to be at the heart of teamwork. Teamwork, of course, is what makes the armed forces function as effectively as they should do. We are in no doubt that we have to change that, and that means that we have to get after this “laddish” culture that does not recognise that you have to be properly doing stuff, rather than having a sort of slightly apathetic view to it, and that has to change.

We also have to recognise that role models are going to be very important in this equation. It is simply unacceptable that in the top 150 or so of general officers across the three services, we have only three women, and that does not provide enough role models. That means that we are going to have to think really hard about positive action. We have a career structure that is still designed predominantly for men. The reality is that when you get to a certain point in your life and you perhaps want to create a family, you are massively disadvantaged if you take time out; that does not matter whether you are a mother or a father. The reality is that we have to change the career structure so that those with genuine long-term potential are able to satisfy their family needs as well as going on to realise their military potential. We are going to put in place a number of initiatives that will change that.

We are also going to put in place some initiatives that will get after the leadership culture, because the way in which we currently report on people—their annual assessment—I do not think provides nearly enough emphasis on the sorts of behaviours that we want to encourage. Too much of the time it is about people being upwardly-looking leaders and not being downwardly-looking leaders. What I am looking for is people being judged on their moral courage and their ability to look after the people that they have the privilege to command and to lead. If they do that, we have a much better chance of stamping out the laddish, and often much worse than that, thoroughly unacceptable behaviour that means that we undoubtedly push some of the really talented female but also black, Asian and minority ethnic people that we have in the armed forces out after only a few years. It is simply unacceptable that we are not moving the dial on this thing.

What will happen as a consequence of this session this morning is that the six chiefs of staff will sign a piece of paper that will make some really tough commitments to changing things. We will then hold ourselves to account, and those we lead will hold us to account for delivering against those commitments.

Q76 Sarah Atherton: What progress have you made on the implementation of the Wigston report into inappropriate behaviour in the military? It made 38 recommendations.

General Sir Nick Carter: I would say that about half of them have gone in the right direction and about half need greater work. One of the things



that has got to be improved is the service complaints system. It is simply unacceptable at the moment that this complaints system is, first of all, far too slow to deliver an outcome, and secondly, by the time it does deliver an outcome, it is often irrelevant in terms of the censure that comes with that outcome. Importantly, it is also very challenging for people to have the moral courage and the bravery to make a complaint. Invariably the complaint has to be made to the chain of command. While it is a very positive initiative that we have a Service Complaints Ombudswoman in Nicola Williams, the reality is that we need to review the service complaints system so that it becomes genuinely agile, it genuinely comes with censure that happens in a relevant timeframe, and importantly, it is a complaints system that makes it possible for people to have the bravery to make the complaint they need to make. That is something that we have to change, and it is one of the commitments that the document I referred to a moment ago will have in it. So that is the most important thing in Wigston.

To come to your point, Danuta Gray, our defence board non-executive who faces off on all our HR issues, has taken on a review of the Wigston report to see where we have got to with it. What she will also look at—I have great confidence in her to do this—is whether Wigston went far enough. I bet you Wigston did not go far enough. It was done in six weeks, it was done with a lot of momentum and it was a very good report, but I bet you it could probably go a bit further, and she will look at that as well. So the answer is you have my personal commitment and that of my fellow Chiefs of Staff to make a difference. I genuinely believe that we have got a body of people who realise that this is a no-mission-failure mission.

Q77 Sarah Atherton: General, you mentioned a document and a review. Have you got any timelines for this?

General Sir Nick Carter: Danuta will do this very quickly, she told me this morning. I would be amazed if we don't have it by the beginning of the autumn term.

Chair: Emma, did you want to come in on this one?

Q78 Mrs Lewell-Buck: Good afternoon, General. In relation to your comments made about the bravery and the moral courage to come forward and make a complaint, I want to just take that into the bracket of those children who were in the armed forces—the 15 to 18-year-olds—because I cannot find any stats or any figures that relate to the complaints made from that age bracket. Do they exist, and do you have any information you can share with us?

General Sir Nick Carter: Can you just repeat the age bracket?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: 15 to 18.

General Sir Nick Carter: The answer is I don't have the data in front of me, but I will happily write to you afterwards with the answer to your question.



Q79 Chair: On that, there is something we were talking about with colleagues earlier: one of the success stories that you have here in the UK is your cadet programmes. Right across the country these are being pushed out, and if you look at the statistics there—male, female, BAME, and so forth—they are absolutely fantastic. They are much better. Clearly we want to move forward on that. It is a difficult area to move from and encourage those in cadets to then consider a career in the armed forces, because of all the wider issues to do with child recruitment and so forth. We craft a very careful approach to this, with 16-year-olds able to wear the uniform but not go to battle. Is there more that could be done to take advantage of those people that clearly have signed up to something—an ethos, an idea, an interest—which perhaps could be leveraged as a potential career?

John Spellar: And, General, before you answer, if you take my constituency, the incredible diversity in the cadets should provide an area where you could achieve some of your other objectives, that we were just discussing earlier.

General Sir Nick Carter: No, and it is a very good question. As Mark Francois knows better than most, the reality of the cadet movement is that we have to be very careful not to describe it as a recruiting enterprise. Indeed, the vital adult cadet instructors who do that, some of them are ex-military but a lot of them are not at all, and they certainly wouldn't do their job if they were being regarded as recruiters. So it is a very delicate balance.

I think the reality is that we do gain a lot of recruits from the cadet movement, but it is not a statistic that we track particularly carefully, not least because often cadets do not want to acknowledge that they have been cadets when they join the military, which is a challenge in its own right. Interestingly, those that do acknowledge that they have been cadets—often if you track their progress you discover that they do attain very high ranks, because they are motivated in that particular way. So it is a nuanced and delicate thing, but I think the important thing is that we keep doing it.

I think it is very important that we have also rolled out the scheme now into schools, so the Combined Cadet Force rather than just the adult cadet force is now a burgeoning enterprise. I went and inspected a school the autumn before last in south-east London and I was massively impressed by the diversity and enthusiasm of the kids who were in that organisation.

Q80 Mr Jones: Isn't it the gatekeepers you need to get to—the parents in those communities? Often there is an enthusiasm among young people but the gatekeepers—the parents and guardians—are the ones you actually have to work on, as much as the young people themselves.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes, and actually it is also the headteachers. At the school I went to, Mossbourne, the headteacher was massively committed to the idea, and where you have a partnership with a headteacher you crack it; but he or she will then get the parents on board.



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So it is a triangular relationship and if you make it work, my goodness me, it is really impressive and rather inspiring to see what they all get up to.

The other angle, slightly, to the question was junior soldiers or junior leaders and, again, one has to be slightly careful with how that plays into this conversation, because that is when you get into potential suggestions of child soldiers, and all of this stuff.

Q81 **Mr Francois:** I entirely agree with your point. I visited Westcliff High School for Boys some years ago. They had started a cadet movement with, I think, a dozen cadets. They very kindly asked me to go to their passing out parade last summer and there were 130 of them.

Q82 **Mr Francois:** The Government had a programme to spread cadet units, particularly CCFs, into state schools—I think there was a target of 500 schools. As I understand it, you have either met that target or you are very close to meeting it. Because that has been so successful, is there any prospect that there will be a second batch or an attempt to go beyond that? And if there is not, are you still welcoming the establishment of new individual cadet units in schools that want to do it, even on a case-by-case basis?

General Sir Nick Carter: The straight answer to the last part of the question is yes.

Mr Francois: Good.

General Sir Nick Carter: I do not know whether there is a Government initiative to go beyond 500. As you will remember, the original initiative was a combined effort between the Department for Education and the Ministry of Defence, but I would be amazed if the current Education Secretary did not think that it was a good idea to take it further. So maybe that is something that we should all ask about, because I agree with you—I think it is an extraordinarily good way of developing the right sort of attitudes in society, and providing outlets and opportunities for youngsters who would not otherwise get them.

Mr Francois: Very quickly, I think the magic formula—you are quite right—is an enthusiastic headteacher who is, if you like, onside. The second thing is having a young teacher who does not need to have military experience but who wants to be the contingent commander, and then it is about finding a retired senior non-commissioned officer who actually spends a lot of time training the cadets. It is that magic troika that really seems to make it work. Following on from the point made by Mr Jones and Mr Spellar, it is a brilliant way of giving people who are perhaps from backgrounds that do not have a great deal of military experience some insight into the military ethos. So, again, I suspect that we would all encourage anything that you can do to encourage the DFE to do to expand the programme.

Q83 **Chair:** I presume that the cadet programmes have had to be curtailed because of covid-19, school closures and things like that. Do you know if they will get back up and running in September? Are you aware of that?



General Sir Nick Carter: Actually, there has been some really imaginative stuff done remotely with a lot of the cadet movement, in the same way that we are doing this particular session. So, the answer is that they have kept it ticking over in a pretty effective way. And we rather hope, in the same way that we are returning to physical activity again, that the cadet movement will also be able to do that, provided that the troika that Mark Francois just referred to are able to make that happen.

Q84 **Mr Francois:** May I ask one last question? You mentioned that you have learned a lot about the NHS by virtue of working with them, and I do acknowledge what defence equipment and support has done in terms of covid. We have reserves, and the police have reserves—the police have the special constabulary. The NHS has called up many people to return to the frontline from retirement to help out, and they have done a brilliant job. Do you think there is any merit—I know it is not your Department, but you do know about reservists and integrating them with the regulars—in the NHS trying to establish some kind of NHS reserve?

Mr Jones: It does.

Mr Francois: Yes, I know they are doing it ad hoc now, but I am talking about institutionalising that, Kevan, so that, perhaps, people who have worked full-time could work part-time as a reservist to assist the service. I ask the question, General, because you know a lot about reservists.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes. I think that when we all stand back and reflect on what we have learned from covid, we will ask ourselves, won't we, whether we need to build more resilience into lots of parts of the country and the Government in particular. I think one of the questions that we reasonably might ask is, "Do we want to have surge capacity in our health system?" And surge capacity would definitely come from rapid military reinforcement, which of course we have done, but equally it could come from civil society. So I think it is something that we should definitely reflect on.

Q85 **Chair:** Given the massive hike in unemployment that we are possibly going to experience, would you support the idea of the return of some form of national service?

General Sir Nick Carter: I think one has to be very careful with this as an idea, because, of course, it markedly changes the way in which your full-time regular service has to operate, and of course you need to give them work. When we had national service, we had the remnants of an empire, and there were places to be policed, and of course that is not the case any longer. So it would be a bit of a challenge with what work you would give them and how you would keep them occupied if you did bring it back.

Chair: Okay—interesting. Can we move to Gavin Robinson? Do you want to take us to the historic allegations issue, Gavin?

Q86 **Gavin Robinson:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, General, for what has been a very wide-ranging and useful exchange so far. Can I turn your



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mind to the overseas operations Bill and maybe inquire, in the first instance, what your involvement was in the proposals that have been brought forward, and ask how comfortable you are that, while the Bill may stop prosecutions, it will not stop investigations?

General Sir Nick Carter: Thank you for the question. The answer is that the chiefs of staff have been consulted on some of the propositions. We have all learned with the evolving character of warfare the way in which “lawfare” has become a feature of the modern battlefield. That is something that, as military officers, we are deeply uncomfortable with, as with anything that removes the opportunity and the motivation for leaders at every level, but particularly junior leaders, to take the sorts of risks that you need to take on modern battlefields to seize those fleeting opportunities. We really would not want to see that undermined, so we welcome this initiative as, I hope, a first step in trying to provide a better legal, moral and ethical framework in which we can operate on overseas battlefields. Whilst I have not personally taken soundings of what people in the armed forces think about this, the chain of command has certainly reported back that people are encouraged by the focus on it in the way that it has been applied.

Q87 **Gavin Robinson:** I don’t want to know the legal requirements for doing so—I don’t think it is fair to ask you to outline those—or indeed the political rationale behind separating out overseas operations and what we understand will be a subsequent measure that will attach to the Northern Ireland-specific incidents that are currently being investigated, with many more potentially to follow, but as CDS, are you assured that the protections that are outlined in the overseas operations Bill will be as protective, as impactful and as effective as what is outlined in the Bill for Northern Ireland?

General Sir Nick Carter: The straight answer is I don’t know. Obviously, as a military officer, my view would be that I hope so, but the answer is that I don’t know, because it remains a political issue at the moment, as you alluded to.

Q88 **Gavin Robinson:** Is it something that, as CDS, you would want to ensure?

General Sir Nick Carter: Certainly. I would want to give input to the outcome of it, and I would very much hope that my views would be listened to during the course of that discussion.

Q89 **Gavin Robinson:** Can I draw upon the Judge Advocate General’s reported concerns about the overseas operations Bill, in that it does not cover International Criminal Court offences and that it will likely encourage the police and prosecutors to focus on war crimes, rather than what may otherwise be considered domestic crimes? Are you aware of the Judge Advocate General’s concerns, and do you have a response to them?

General Sir Nick Carter: I wasn’t aware of those concerns specifically, but one of the points I should have made in answer to your previous



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question was that, as the head of the armed forces, I still firmly believe that it is right and proper that we are held to account for any immoral or illegal behaviour on the battlefield, because if we lose that moral high ground, then we are in a really bad place.

Q90 **Gavin Robinson:** Are you aware of any decisions taken further down the chain of command to reflect the structures of the overseas operations Bill in any proposals for training and doctrine?

General Sir Nick Carter: The answer is that we will evaluate the Bill and what it means for our doctrine and make sure that we issue the appropriate guidance, as we did post the Iraq war, when we were worried about how we did prisoner handling and things like that.

Q91 **Gavin Robinson:** Having made your assessment, will that be publicly available, or will it remain an internal document?

General Sir Nick Carter: I think the doctrine will very likely be an internal document, but that doesn't mean that some of it cannot be briefed to the Committee if you would like to see it.

Q92 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Hello again, General. Are you aware of the criticisms around the long-stop, in particular in relation to PTSD, which you know can take a long time to manifest and for the symptoms to show themselves? The criticism has been that the MoD is putting service personnel in a worse position than civilians and that this is actually backdoor legislation that is in direct breach of the armed forces covenant. Are you aware of this criticism? If so, what comments do you have to make?

General Sir Nick Carter: Is this specifically in relation to the overseas operations Bill?

Q93 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Yes. It is in relation to the six-year long-stop on veterans and serving personnel bringing civil claims for personal injury or death, and in particular to any of those claims that might relate to PTSD or conditions that do not manifest immediately within that long-stop period.

General Sir Nick Carter: My understanding is that the clock starts from the point of diagnosis.

Q94 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** That is the point of knowledge?

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes, exactly.

Q95 **Mr Francois:** As my colleague Gavin Robinson has said, we are dealing with two Bills: first, the overseas one on Iraq, Afghanistan and future conflicts, and secondly, to follow, one on Northern Ireland. On the day the first Bill had its First Reading and was published, there was some criticism that it did not solve the Northern Ireland issues. So, that day, the Northern Ireland Secretary issued a written ministerial statement assuring the House that Northern Ireland veterans would receive "equivalent protection", or words to that effect. That was a guarantee from the Northern Ireland Office, as it were, in the second Bill. As the



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Chief of the Defence Staff, do you welcome that commitment from the NIO?

General Sir Nick Carter: As a military officer, I welcome any commitment that looks after our veterans.

Q96 **Mr Francois:** Are you concerned that if these issues, for any reason, are not addressed—the Prime Minister has promised that he will address them; he was clear about that when he ran for the leadership of the Conservative party, and he famously signed a double-page pledge in *The Sun* to that effect—there is a risk that that could affect recruitment into the armed forces over time? People will think, “Why join if the politicians have not got your back?”

General Sir Nick Carter: I think it is the other side of the coin I mentioned, about seizing opportunities on battlefields. For the military instrument to be an effective instrument, there needs to be confidence that a Government is going to look after those people when they put their lives at risk in pursuit of that Government’s objectives.

Q97 **Mr Francois:** But, as the CDS, are you reassured that the Prime Minister has personally given his word that he will address this problem?

General Sir Nick Carter: Absolutely. I am reassured.

Q98 **Richard Drax:** If I may leave Northern Ireland for a second, General, and go back to the percentage of GDP that we are committed to spending, at the start of your interview this afternoon you said—I’ve written it down here—that you were “satisfied with what we have”. That was in answer to a question about what resources you had. I was a little surprised by that because when you and I were both in our 20s, the Government were spending about 5.5% of GDP on kit that did not cost nearly as much as it does today. As you have heard, we are still dealing with weapons systems that are outdated. Are you really satisfied that 2% is sufficient, or can you give us a figure that you would ideally like to have to ensure that you could provide our armed forces with all the kit that they properly need?

General Sir Nick Carter: The answer to your question is that Governments tailor their defence spending to what it is that they require of their armed forces. If the Government change their ambition for what they want of their armed forces, then I would imagine that the amount of money they spend on it will change as well. I am reassured that there is a baseline of 2% of GDP. I am equally reassured that there is a manifesto commitment to defence expenditure rising by 0.5% in real terms every year.

We are having an integrated review at the moment, which will come to a determination about what it wants our foreign, security and defence policy to be. On the back of that, I am absolutely confident that our resources will be delivered accordingly.

Q99 **Richard Drax:** I understand you had an awayday quite recently with the Secretary of State, with no Treasury figures. That must have been a relief



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for you all, I suspect. Have you got to the point where what you all want can be laid down beside what we can afford, or is that to come?

General Sir Nick Carter: No, that is part of work in progress.

Q100 **Richard Drax:** Just to go back to the point, you say this depends on the Government and what the Government want, so far as defence is concerned. Can I take you back to where we were, when we were young men, General? Five per cent. of GDP was spent on defence; it is now 2%. A lot of our accommodation is still not up to scratch, I am sure you would agree. The accommodation for our men and women is still not good enough, so many reports tell us. If we cannot afford the accommodation, how on earth can we afford to look after and equip our modern armed services?

General Sir Nick Carter: If you cast your mind back, as you keep doing, to when you and I were young subalterns together, you will recall that the size of the British Army then was around 155,000. You will also recall that it had over 3,000 main battle tanks. You will also recall that it had a massive Air Force and a massive Navy, and that it was up against a very clear and present threat. For all of those reasons, it was entirely logical that we spent 5% of GDP. What you will also remember, I suspect, is that when Active Edge—the exercise that mobilised us into our deployment areas—was called, rarely did more than two out of three tanks ever find their way to where they needed to get to.

There are problems with the analogy of what we did in the past. What it comes down to is what they expect of us today. As I said in answer to this question once or maybe twice before, what general—what chief of staff, for that matter—would not ask for more money? Of course we would do; our job is to ask for more money. But, equally, I am the agent of the Government and I deal with what I am given. I provide military advice to the Government based on what they give me, and therefore on what I think they should be asking us to do.

Q101 **Richard Drax:** We were up against a clear threat then, and I am not harping back to the past, General—don't get me wrong—but we are up against a threat now. You have admitted that. Although you did not say the Chinese are a threat, you certainly indicate that they could well be, and the Russians are. Things have not changed that much, and the kit we now need to buy—aircraft carriers and F-35s—is hugely more expensive than it was in our day. That is the comparison I am making—not necessarily with the situation per se.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes, I think the threat is different, because when you look back to the days of the cold war, you would not find it difficult to persuade the general public that there was a clear and present threat from the Soviet Union. It is much harder nowadays to describe the threat, given the evolving character of warfare, which you referred to, and given the fact that that threat manifests itself in the information domain, in the cyber domain and in wars that people simply do not see, under the surface of the Atlantic ocean. It is much harder now for us to explain the threat, and I am certain that if you went round your constituents, it would



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be very challenging to get them beyond terrorism as being the real threat to this country at the moment. The challenge we all have—everybody on this Committee is in the same place as I am, because you love defence and you love the armed forces—is that we have to make the case that the threat represents a challenge that we can't avoid. That case has to be made to the general public, who pay our taxes.

I have often said in the past that the extraordinary thing about the armed forces these days is that it is difficult to remember a time when they were more popular—a 90% approval rating last year—but it is also very difficult to remember a time when we were less well understood. Trying to explain what we do has been an opportunity with covid, but gosh, we need to carry on explaining it. It is only by doing that that you can bring this to life, and you can then genuinely bring on a view in the general public that there is a threat that needs to be dealt with.

Q102 Mr Francois: On that point, do you think defence is reported as an issue in the kind of detail that it was reported on perhaps 10 or 20 years ago?

General Sir Nick Carter: No, I don't. And I do not think there is the same academic debate that there would have been on nuclear deterrence and those sorts of things. I do not think it is a subject that people are particularly interested in. We have opportunities. I hope you will all be doing something for VJ Day on 15 August, because there are opportunities through some of the commemorative activity to bring this stuff to life. But we do need to bring it to life—that would be my judgment as the head of the armed forces.

Q103 Chair: That is the conundrum that we face. You said the Government sets out its ambition, but then it needs to come up with the spending to allow you to achieve that ambition. That is the difference. That is going back to the SDSR 2015. That was the challenge with that. It is about getting this right and making sure that we set out the next integrated review, but it needs the money from the Treasury to fulfil that; otherwise, we will end up repeating the mistakes that we made back in 2015.

I want to end by paying tribute to our veterans. I hope you would agree with me that, during covid-19, many of the charities that are able to collect funds on a normal basis have not been able to do so. Would you agree that there is a concern that the support, particularly in mental health areas, has perhaps been impinged because of the inability of those charities to do their work, and that it is something for all of us, collectively, to look at, to see what we can do to compensate? They are not getting the attention and support that they need, partly because of the lockdown, initially, but also simply because the funding through our fantastic veterans' charities has been hugely impacted.

General Sir Nick Carter: Yes, I would absolutely agree.

Chair: General, thank you very much indeed. It has been a wide-ranging discussion. There is much to be talked about. I think, as Mark implied, that we ask the difficult questions not because we are not on your side—we absolutely are—but simply because we want the best for those who have



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served and are serving, and those who intend to serve as well. Thank you very much indeed for coming to the Committee today, and I thank the Committee members as well.