



Select Committee on the European Union

External Affairs Sub-Committee

Corrected oral evidence

Post-Brexit foreign and defence co-operation

Thursday 6 July 2017

10.05 am

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Members present: Baroness Verma (Chairman); Baroness Manzoor; Earl of Oxford and Asquith; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Suttie; Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean; Lord Triesman.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 10 - 19

Witnesses

I: Lord Hague of Richmond; Baroness Ashton of Upholland; Lord Robertson of Port Ellen.

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Examination of witnesses

Lord Hague of Richmond, Baroness Ashton of Upholland and Lord Robertson of Port Ellen.

Q10 **The Chairman:** Good morning to our witnesses. You are very welcome here. I will just remind you that this session is being broadcast live and is in public. It will be transcribed, and if the transcripts are incorrect when they are sent to you, please put in any corrections and send them back to us. This session will last for one hour and 10 minutes. We very much hope that our witnesses today—Lord Hague, Baroness Ashton and Lord Robertson—have seen the questions that we predict noble Lords will answer. However, as with all things, I cannot always predict those questions. If my Committee members ask supplementaries, those might not have got to you beforehand.

In order to take advantage of your presence here today, I will start off by asking you how important you think the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy is to the UK in achieving its foreign policy goals. Who would like to start?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Lord Hague has notes, so he can answer first.

Lord Hague of Richmond: I am at a disadvantage. I will start then. It is very important to the UK. That is the first sentence to say in such a session, because it amplifies the weight of the UK in the world. That is a fairly conventional and obvious view, but it is certainly my view, having experienced more than four years working with the EU Foreign Affairs Council.

There have been many good examples of that in recent years. One, which my friend and colleague Cathy Ashton worked on for so long, was Iran. The ability to agree among 28 countries sanctions that were also co-ordinated with the United States made an enormous difference to world affairs. Twenty-eight countries left to their own devices would not have had identical sanctions, or brought Iran to the negotiating table. The ability to do that is very important.

Secondly, being part of this policy safeguards the British national interest in other ways. The position of our overseas territories or us having an argument with Argentina or any other country in Latin America over the Falkland Islands are not NATO matters. However, there is a solidarity among 28 countries, and Argentina or any other country in Latin America taking measures against the Falkland Islands know that. That is the second aspect of how it matters.

The third aspect that I would point to is that a crucial part of the hinge—I have always seen it as a hinge—in the western alliance between the United States and Europe is that the UK's participation in the EU's foreign affairs helps to keep the whole western alliance together. We are at a time of danger of fragmentation of the western world. We can see that for many reasons and in many ways, as the forthcoming summit in

Germany is demonstrating. So UK participation in influencing the foreign affairs of other nations is a crucial aspect of averting such a fragmentation.

Those three aspects amplify the effect of our policies, safeguard our national interest in various ways and help to keep the whole western alliance together. That is my summary answer from the limited notes in front of me.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I agree completely with everything that Lord Hague has said. I would just add a couple of points as president of the Foreign Affairs Council—or having chaired Lord Hague for four years, as I like to say.

When you have a group of countries working together, you inevitably have among them countries that have a long, deep history or expertise in particular parts of the world—for a variety of reasons, good or bad. They bring that knowledge and depth of understanding to that discussion or debate, so it is not just that your own policy gets amplified through 28 nations working together but that your knowledge and expertise get amplified into their knowledge, and they will defer to you with that knowledge.

Secondly, there are particular aspects of how Britain has engaged with the world that it has been incredibly important that Britain has led on in the EU. Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq are three examples, although I can think of many more, of issues not that the EU Foreign Affairs Council would not have discussed—they would—but where Britain's weight, power and strength enabled us to make sure that we thought about our continued engagement in and with those nations. In my time in office, before I left, we made sure that we put in place a long-term development programme in Afghanistan that probably would not have been as strongly pushed or as effective if Britain had not ensured that it was on the agenda. I would never underestimate the importance of making sure that you can project the weight of the issue through that channel as well.

Thirdly, there is no question—and I am sure this was Lord Hague's experience when, in his previous incarnation, he appeared on his first day at the Foreign Affairs Council—that there is a recognition among the 28 that Britain is a key partner and player, partly because of our transatlantic links, which are respected and understood, but partly because of our links to the Commonwealth and the role of the Commonwealth; I tried to enhance EU-Commonwealth relationships in my time in office. That was understood, recognised and valued very highly.

So in addition to Lord Hague's important points, I would make those points.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Of course, I agree very much with my two colleagues on these points. From the point of view of my NATO experience, although I do not want to limit myself simply to that, I would

say that the European Common Foreign and Security Policy is extremely important, and will continue to be important, to the UK. Brexit changes the political relationship with the EU-27, but it does not change the geography, it does not change the nature of the common threats that we face, and in many ways it does not affect the co-operation that is essential in handling future security threats. Given the nature of hybrid threats, cyber, international terrorism, and maritime issues, on which we are clearly in the lead, we are still part of Europe and the European theatre of operations. The joint declaration that was made between NATO and the EU is still vital, even though inside it there will be certain changes in the relationship, because we will no longer be both in the EU and in NATO.

The second reason why it matters is because American foreign policy is changing. That is graphically illustrated by what President Trump is saying. Although that changes from day to day, there is a marked relegation of the role of the transatlantic relationship. That actually predates President Trump. After all, it was President Obama who decided, when Prime Minister Cameron and President Sarkozy decided that they would take military action in Libya, to say that that was not an activity by NATO, although it was a NATO activity that the Americans were going to be involved in.

For the very first time in NATO's history it took its military commanders out of the integrated military structure, so that although the theatre that Libya was in was covered by the Allied Joint Force Command in Naples, which was always regarded as the jewel in the crown of the American 6th Fleet—people should remember that in the negotiation in 1996 to try to get France into the integrated military command, President Chirac said that the price of it coming in would be that it got AFSOUTH, the Naples position, but it was regarded then as so precious to the Americans that that proved to be a block, and it took another 10 years before France came into it—they pulled their commander out and a Canadian general took command.

So with American foreign policy veering away from the old relationship, Europe is going to have to do more in terms of capability, exercise and political priority, and we need to be part of that. The reality, today and in the future, is that European defence is actually Britain and France. That is what it is. We are the only two countries with the capability, the headquarters and the ability to do things. How we move forward on that is going to be complex and difficult, but you may want to explore that.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for your opening remarks. Many questions come out of them. We would like to maximise the questions that you have already been made aware of, but we may follow up those remarks up later.

Q11 **Lord StIRRUP:** Good morning to the brains trust. Perhaps I may pick up on a point that Lord Robertson made. Geography and interests are not going to change after Brexit, but many other things are. How, then, will Brexit affect our relationship with the remaining EU countries with regard

to the formulation and exercise of foreign policy? How much influence will we have? Clearly there will be political considerations, but there will also be technical considerations, with which you will be only too familiar. I would be grateful if you could elucidate on some of those.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: Foreign policy is brought together in the EU through the ambassadorial team in the Political and Security Committee working together. For the Foreign Affairs Council, that translates into Conclusions that the Council will adopt, but they are based on the work that is done by that group of senior ambassadors, with a lot of experience in getting to yes, trying to find a good, strong, solid basis for EU nations to agree—it is intergovernmental—and being able to act and, if you like, give instructions to me in my previous role and to my teams on how we should operate. That is what we would do.

Either those conclusions would go directly to the Foreign Affairs Council or, if we could not find agreement, agreement would be sought at the Council. That is a mechanistic but important political way of operating that requires you to be in the room in order to be able to participate. You can send as many briefing papers as you like, but if you are not in the room, you do not participate. Our colleagues in the US would send regular notes to ambassadors, Ministers and Governments about their views, which were always taken into account, but they were not in the room. Colleagues such as our friends from Norway, whose offices were very close by, would have very particular views on some issues and were important allies, but they were not in the room.

The most fundamental issue is that in the process of working out the way in which policy is developed and determining what Europe's policy will be, we will not be in the room to influence it one way or the other. That will be a loss to the EU and, potentially, to our capacity to develop policy. I do not believe that Europe will do other than consult Britain—I think there is a natural desire to do so, for the reasons that have been given; history and geography come into play in this—but it will not be the same.

Lord Hague of Richmond: I agree with Baroness Ashton. Brexit will be very damaging to our ability to work with other EU countries, on foreign affairs and in influencing our outlook overall. There is no doubt that we are a big player in the Foreign Affairs Council, as Baroness Ashton has said—bigger than we are in the financial and economic affairs of the EU, for instance. Usually we are one of the three or four big players in the Foreign Affairs Council. Just to temper the gloom a little, though—speaking as someone who was not in favour of leaving but accepts that we are—it is true, as has been said, that they will want to consult us. They will want our participation and support. We have the biggest military budget in the EU, the biggest development budget by some distance, and one of the equal biggest diplomatic networks, as well as a seat on the UN Security Council.

There are many things that cannot be done effectively by Europe without some degree of participation and support from the UK. Therefore the degree to which it is damaging depends on what we put in place to

enable the maximum co-operation, and that will require a lot of political commitment by Ministers. It will also require a specific framework designed for the purpose—one that is stronger than the one that, say, Norway has with the EU, which could include permanent membership of the Political and Security Committee. Without reinventing the wheel, the best proposal I have seen for what this could look like was a paper presented by Crispin Blunt, Chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, in Malta on 28 April, which set out an enhanced framework participation agreement between the UK and the EU on foreign affairs. Something of that kind would mitigate the damage that will undoubtedly be caused.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: On the military front, obviously in the past we had to find mechanisms for including non-EU and non-NATO allies. Finland, Austria, Switzerland and Turkey were not in the EU, so mechanisms were created at that time to allow those countries to be involved in NATO-EU operations. However, these depend a lot on good will. Everything William has said is absolutely right. Our role is pivotal militarily, diplomatically and in development terms, but it will require good will at every stage to make the mechanisms work. We cannot simply depend on institutional relationships, because, as Cathy says, if you are not in the room you are not part of the framework at the beginning, the concept of operations if it is a military operation, or the exit strategy. That is where we are bound to lose traction, even if all the other EU-27 also consider, quite rightly, that our role is pivotal.

- Q12 **Lord Triesman:** I have a feeling that in answering the last question you covered a lot of the topics that I was going to ask about, such as the informal co-ordination between the EU structures and third parties with the same interests and objectives. I have understood that they may submit papers and they may be all sorts of things, but they are not taking part in the framework, and I have understood what the implications might be for us. I wonder if I could extend that by referring to what Crispin Blunt has said or what you, Cathy, have said about the successful attempt to engage the EU with the Commonwealth, and ask you to perhaps flesh out what that kind of engagement might look like, even allowing for the clear impediments that you have all described.

Lord Hague of Richmond: I am sure the Committee is familiar with the proposal I referred to. Clearly from Lord Triesman's question you are familiar with it. It is very good. It suggests: an automatic right to participate in foreign and security policy initiatives; the possibility of seconding our national experts to relevant directorates of the External Action Service; guaranteed inclusion in force-generation conferences; the possibility of hosting operating headquarters, as of course we do in Operation Atalanta now; an agreement for sharing intelligence and planning documents, as the United States has with the EU; and permanent observer status in the Political and Security Committee.

It could look something like that. That is why I think the proposal is a good idea and why a lot of EU countries would welcome something of this kind. It would maximise our opportunities not to influence the EU

approach to foreign affairs as much as we do now but to participate when it is in our common interest to do so, as it often will be.

The informal co-ordination is also important and will always be important, because the EU is very good at some of the things that Baroness Ashton mentioned, such as the development programme for Afghanistan, and the sanctions against Iran that I mentioned. It is not as good—and this is no criticism of those who have led it—at physically responding to a sudden crisis. When a crisis erupts in Mali or the Central African Republic, this is a decision by the President of France to tell French troops in a garrison in Africa to get to those countries and then a phone call to London to ask for military transport aircraft to help. And it is capitals that are doing this rather than through an EU structure, although there might then be EU decisions that back that up, and so on.

So as well as creating a structure it will be important for the UK to have a posture and a willingness that means that we are ready to support other countries, particularly France, in military initiatives that they feel bound to take. It needs structure and political will at the same time.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I think that is right. There is no question that it is in the nature of trying to get 28 nations to work out the rules of engagement on a military operation that you cannot do it at the speed at which you need to operate when a crisis occurs. In the case of Mali, I think the French told us first and then London, but only because they needed the support to start moving around the 27 other nations. That is not because we are more important; we just were in that particular context.

The challenge with the proposals that will come forward is that although they are of course very sensible and in our interests, we will face 27 nations that might well look at them and say, "Why don't you just stay in, because what you're asking for is pretty much the status quo? If you're going to be a member of the club, that is great, that's what you get. If you're not going to be a member of the club, why should you get the benefits of the club?" That will be quite complicated. A huge amount of goodwill will be needed to keep Britain as close as possible on all these matters. However, we do not know how these negotiations will work out and what the end product will look like, so it might not be as hopeful in the end as I hope it might be.

That creates a problem not just when our interests are not being projected through but occasionally when Britain wants to take a different view, or wants to persuade the other countries of a different view, or wants to take action on something that it believes is really significant. That is why having permanent observer status is not the same as membership—and not the same as being in the room to argue the point, as I have watched various Secretaries of State, not least the one on my right, do very successfully on issues where a lot of other nations begin by not agreeing but end up with a pretty sensible position.

That is what you are never going to get in the same way, and that is what we have to be mindful of in thinking about the new arrangements and new structures. So a lot of goodwill will be needed to get this right, not least because we are an important military power. However, most foreign policy is not military; it is about those continuing relationships across the world, in Asia and beyond, where we are trying to develop the strength of our views to support our values, to project the things that we believe in, and in a sense to try by other means to avoid having to get to the military.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: The key words here, and the key weaknesses in the Crispin Blunt proposals, are the words “guaranteed” and “permanent”, because you have to assume that the EU-27 will think it right and proper that we are given these guarantees, which in the past they have never given to non-EU countries, and although we are vital and important, diplomatically as well as military, countries such as the United States, Norway and Turkey, which are on the outside of these arrangements, simply do not have them. The worry for me is that a whole series of issues concerned with security and foreign policy will be debated by people in the room who are unlikely to want to give permanent and guaranteed status to a country like the United Kingdom, because that, in a way, would establish a precedent that they might not be willing to give.

Lord Triesman: First, I am very grateful for the clarity of what has been said, because one thing that struck me about the debate about whether we should leave the European Union was that there was a huge amount of focus in various ways on the economy but remarkably little focus on the security architecture of Europe and our interests in global stability. I thought it was one of the tragedies that that was not debated.

Would it be right to say that one alternative that people are thinking of is trying to re-establish something that would be both efficient and effective but without the real mechanics to make sure that it is?

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I think they are trying to invent some new mechanics. That is how I would put it. The problem is that if you join a club, you get the benefits of membership. If you are not in the club, you have to find an alternative way of getting as close to that as you wish to be, and the Government will have to decide how close they wish to be on these issues. So the mechanics will have to be reinvented, but Lord Robertson is right that “permanent” and “guaranteed” do not come along with that, if you are not part of it.

There will be great goodwill, I am sure, but I do not really know—and I am sure my colleagues are in the same position—how all this is going to go, what in the end the relationships will be like and how far the others have moved away from us in their agendas in that period.

Lord Hague of Richmond: By the way, I am not saying that this is easy; I entirely agree with my colleagues’ points here. I am just saying that this kind of proposal is a good idea for all concerned. Of course, if

the remaining EU members do not want to give us “permanent” or “guaranteed”, it cannot be done, but it will be in their interests as well as ours to have the kind of special framework that we have just been talking about.

- Q13 **Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean:** You have talked about the mechanics and the way of mitigating the effects within Europe, and I think you said, Lord Hague, that being in the European Union amplifies the United Kingdom’s weight in the world. You have looked very closely at the European position, mitigation, not being in the room and therefore not having the same degree of decision-taking power that we currently have. Can you say something about our influence in the rest of the world? Are you saying that our influence will be diminished not only in Europe but when we go and talk to the United States if we are not a member of the European Union, or that our influence at the UN will be diminished? Are those important questions, too?

Lord Hague of Richmond: This is a more complex picture. On balance, I say yes to that question as well. It necessarily follows that if you are less influential in crafting the EU’s overall approach, you end up with less influence in the rest of the world. And I think that Britain will invoke less solidarity at the United Nations, for instance.

So, broadly, the answer is yes, but the picture is slightly more complex. A test of the new arrangement will be whether the UK can still do something like the leadership shown on Somalia in recent years. This is a key area of policy in the world, where globally there has been a complex mix of military operations to combat piracy, agreement at the UN to support a legitimate Government in Mogadishu, European funding for African armies to fight al-Shabaab, and development support where appropriate. It is Britain that has brought all those things together, and it is an example of how Britain still has a great convening and leadership power in the world when we choose to exercise it.

Will we still be able to do that when we have left the EU? That is one of the places to look at when it comes to whether we will still have the same influence. We will have to work harder to deliver the whole EU into supporting a united policy. The other components are still there, but it means there will have to be serious British political and foreign-policy efforts—even greater efforts, actually—in leading some of these situations. We will have to compensate a bit for the logical loss of influence that we face. We might still be able to give such leadership in a case like Somalia, and I hope that we can, but we will have to sweat a bit more to do so.

- Q14 **Baroness Suttie:** I turn now to specific foreign-policy areas. After Brexit, in which areas do you expect the UK to continue to have an interest in co-operating with the EU, and in which areas would you expect us to see a divergence emerging?

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I cannot speak for the British Government at all. None the less, there are obvious areas where

collaboration will be important, such as in the relationships in the East and with Russia. I am pretty sure it will be important to continue efforts in areas like Somalia, where, although I do not disagree that Britain led, it was the EU's mission, Operation Atalanta, that was hosted by Britain. It was an EU compact, and it was a great projection of British energy into Europe that enabled us to do it. That will be gone, though, which is going to be interesting.

I think there will still be collaboration on what is happening across the southern neighbourhood, from Libya through to Syria and Iraq and the nations engaged there. Where it might change is with China, the Gulf and the US.

Lord Hague of Richmond: I agree with those points. I would add that the Balkans are an area of great strategic weakness in Europe. Paralysis in the Balkans is a great danger to Europe. The lady on my left here did tremendous work on making sure that Serbia and Kosovo found ways to work together, supported by individual EU member states delivering strong messages in a co-ordinated way. There is a continuing danger of fragmentation and an increased danger of radicalisation in the Balkans, if countries in the western Balkans do not progress towards Euro-Atlantic institutions. So, strangely enough, the UK might have to be in a position of advocating EU membership for others while we leave the EU because it is in our strategic interests, as well as in the common interest of the EU, for countries in the Balkans to join NATO, the EU or both. This will be an interesting test of how well we can work together but a crucial one, right in our own neighbourhood. I would put that really high on the list.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I have been to Kosovo and Serbia recently to see both Presidents, and in their minds there is undoubtedly a concern about where we are now going. Although there are good relations here, it is quite challenging to work out exactly how to do what we need to, which is to push and advocate for the western Balkans to be part of the EU for its future prosperity and security, at the same time as we are arguing that we do not need to be part of it. That is a challenge that I know is currently in the Government's mind. I agree with Lord Hague, and I also should have put the Balkans high on the list. I am just not sure how we are going to be able to do what I have been describing easily and effectively, and we will have to rethink our strategy towards it.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: There are a whole host of areas where we are going to have to be involved or where we want to be involved. On the security side, as I said before, there are the questions of hybrid threats and cyber problems as well as the whole issue of maritime security. There is also energy security, because we are at the end of pipelines and we are as subject to the problems of energy security as anyone else. Turkey, Russia and especially Ukraine are areas where the British national interest is heavily involved. You rightly asked where we would not necessarily be involved. That may well be in certain African countries, for example, where the EU and maybe France have a principal interest. That may be an area where Britain's foreign policy will be less

actively involved but where the EU has been involved and will be involved in future.

However, I agree entirely about the Balkans. We are leaving a vacuum there at the moment, and Russia, among others, is trying to fill that vacuum at present. I was there last year. Baroness Ashton's role in bringing Serbia and Kosovo together is outstanding and quite stunning in diplomatic terms. Forgive her blushes here, but she does not get enough praise for that in this country. Those countries are making progress, with difficulty but remarkably, towards the mainstream of Europe, whether that is Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia or the other countries in that region. We really need to pay attention to them.

Baroness Suttie: Baroness Ashton, you named Russia as an area where you imagine continuity in our relationship with the EU. To what degree do you think the UK has been driving EU policy vis-à-vis Russia?

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: There is a misunderstanding sometimes about how engaged Britain is on certain issues because they are not seen to be on TV screens, if I can put it that simplistically. I certainly felt that in the context of what has been happening with Ukraine where, for a whole variety of reasons, which we could spend all day on, certain leaders of Europe were seen to be more actively engaged than others, again due to geographical and historical links and so on.

However, Britain's activities and engagement in how policy is formulated, and how strong and determined our response to signal issues is, are inevitably underestimated. The manifestation of it being an EU policy is a reflection of the strength of how countries are prepared to work together, but also in that mix there will be those who put in more of an ingredient than others. Sometimes there are issues in which Britain has less engagement or fewer interests in a strict foreign policy sense, but where it is engaged it is fully engaged.

In the context of how Europe is going to develop its future relationship with Russia, Britain has a huge interest in being part of that conversation, and Europe also has a huge interest in Britain being so.

Q15 **Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean:** If we can turn now to CSDP, and particularly to sanctions—Lord Hague touched briefly on sanctions in his opening statement—what advantages, and indeed disadvantages, would there be for the UK in co-operating in future on EU sanctions policy? I recognise the point that has already been made: that we are getting so close to saying, "How can we keep it very much like it is and still leave?" Nonetheless, sanctions are obviously a hugely important instrument of CSDP, and I wonder where all three of you see the advantages and disadvantages of keeping alongside on that.

Lord Hague of Richmond: There will be many advantages. Bearing in mind that over the years sanctions have become a less and less effective policy, as the size of the West's economy diminishes relative to the global economy, this might be a much less used policy in, say, 20 years' time.

But it is very important that we can work closely with the EU on sanctions. Here, there is no reason not to.

We will be less able to influence a sanctions decision inside the EU, such as on Russia after what happened in Crimea. However, we will be a big player in this, and when the United States and the EU are looking at sanctions together they will absolutely need and want the co-operation of the UK, given the huge size of our financial sector—we are the fifth or sixth largest economy in the world, and so on. That is a very good argument for the kind of permanent structures that we talked about earlier to be able to co-ordinate these things. Of course, it will have legal implications here in the UK, as you know, because we implement sanctions under EU law, and it will be necessary to pass primary legislation here in the UK to give us the powers to implement the same sanctions as the EU.

Our ability to do that is crucial. I do not believe that the Iran policy would have been as successful as it was without working with the whole of the EU and the United States, or that we would have any robustness at all to our policy on Russia without our ability to do that. There are only advantages in being able to do that.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I think this will be one of the easier areas, because European Union countries co-operate with many other countries on sanctions. The collaboration on Iran, for example, went beyond the EU and the US. There are mechanisms already in place to engage countries, and because we will be important there will, I am sure, be early engagement as if we were in the EU. It will be pretty much as it was before. That is one thing that I think we can be confident of.

I will add one thing on the effectiveness of sanctions. Sanctions are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Sometimes I think that we think of them as an end—“We’ve done sanctions. That’s it. We’re done”—when actually their purpose is to enable you to do something else, and I think we are going to have to explore better ways of increasing the diplomatic toolkit, as I would call it.

Baroness Suttie: To a certain degree you have already answered this in answer to my previous supplementary. I had understood that the UK has been instrumental in the sanctions policy against Russia, so my question is basically: once the UK leaves the EU, do you think the sanctions policy against Russia will continue?

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: Yes, because it is not the only country. As I say, we all agree that there is a huge strength to the British position. The first EU high representative was a Brit, which is not accidental in a way. There is a sense that Britain is seen to be a strong and determined advocate of taking action when it is necessary to do so. But it is not the only one, so while I think there will be less strength in some of the decisions that are taken, there will be other countries that will be perfectly willing to be strong and determined on these issues. We are not a lone voice in the Council.

Lord Hague of Richmond: I agree, but the balance in the EU will change a bit without the UK. There will be a regional or global crisis in which the EU considers sanctions but will be less likely to agree them without the UK. Most of what we have been talking about is the impact on the UK, but there will, in my view, be a weakening and a diluting of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy without the UK in it. There is that damaging effect as well.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: This is not an area that I want to go into at the moment. I agree with what has been said.

Q16 **Lord Stirrup:** May I switch the focus to CSDP military missions? A number of things that have been said in public over recent months, including by the Government, and some of the things that we have heard this morning, suggest that it will be in the UK's interest to continue to participate in CSDP missions post Brexit. Do you agree? If so, how will that work, because again, having had personal experience of, and playing back Baroness Ashton's points, if you are not in the room when the EU Military Committee meets, and if you do not have people on the staff, the formulation of policy and strategy and their implementation become much more difficult.

One example, although the scale is rather different, is that during operations in Afghanistan, Australia was an important player but it sometimes had difficulty getting into the building, not because people wanted to keep it out but because the arrangements were not there and the bureaucracy played against it. How will that work post Brexit with regard to CSDP missions? What arrangements can we make that will give us the necessary strategic access? Are arrangements such as those that Norway has sufficient for that, or do we need something extra?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: It will all depend on good will and what can be negotiated. As has been said, it will be in the interests of the EU countries to have Britain involved in these things. The question is whether that will lead to a permanent or guaranteed position in all these situations—when you determine a mission you decide the force generation and the concept of operations and even develop the exit strategy—if you are not in the room. There are countries such as Australia, Norway or Turkey, as you say, that are troop contributors in most of the NATO-EU missions, but it is second best.

Many people said, "We're coming out of the European Union but we're still in NATO, so we're still a big security player in that area", but that very much depends on how much the Americans are going to continue to invest in NATO. Statements by the President of the United States about NATO being obsolete and missing out the Article 5 commitment in his speech at NATO headquarters, although that was recanted a couple of days later, suggest that much more will have to be done on CDSP than was previously thought. Our influence will depend very much on how strong we are in wanting to participate and how willing the other countries are to do it.

I throw into the mix an example of the dilemma that is already coming out. According to reports in the press, and I believe they are true, the current Chief of the Defence Staff in the United Kingdom, Air Chief Marshal Stuart Peach, is being promoted as the British candidate for the chairmanship of the NATO Military Committee. The NATO Military Committee is made up of representatives of all the chiefs of defence, and the chairman of the Military Committee has a pivotal role. He sits in at meetings of the North Atlantic Council.

We have not held that position since Field Marshal Lord Vincent held it about 25 years ago, and one reason why we have never taken that position, which is a rotating position, is because we hold the position of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe—DSACEUR. It goes right back to General Eisenhower, who was the first DSACEUR, and to General Field Marshal Montgomery. By promoting our Chief of the Defence Staff to be the chairman of the Military Committee, we are in effect giving up the DSACEUR role, because that role is now designated to be the commander of any NATO EU operation. Therefore, people are asking generally how a non-EU country can hold that position. But the DSACEUR position is permanent. The chairmanship of the Military Committee rotates every three to four years.

Strangely, and I can find no justification for or explanation of it publicly, our Government are about to give up one of the most pivotal and influential roles inside NATO in return for a temporary position as chairman of the Military Committee. We seem unilaterally to be giving up one of the key influencers in the organisation that we claim will be the major security organisation when we leave the European Union.

Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean: From what you are describing, Lord Robertson, it looks as though we are taking up almost a lobbying role with the EU instead of a participant's role. I am talking not just about the point you have just made about DSACEUR but about the other points about wanting to put in papers but not being in the room. We are not participating but we are lobbying. I wonder what no longer having our diplomats operating from within the EU will mean in terms of expanding our Brussels embassy and so on. We will still want to do that influencing, whether on broader foreign-policy issues or on the specific CSDP issues that you have just been talking about. Are people such as you thinking about how we do this influencing and lobbying job once we have had to leave?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: On the security and defence side, we have to emphasise how important we are militarily. That is self-evident—it is not something that we would have to educate people on—but the question is where that takes you. There might be a willingness, a desire or a necessity for Britain to be part and parcel of these arrangements, but the question is whether or not that translates into an institutional arrangement. We need to be close to them for our own interests and they need to be close to us their interests, but the EU has institutional systems

that will become firmer as the assumption grows that the US is not as invested in Europe as it once was.

- Q17 **Lord Stirrup:** Do you think that part of the solution to this might be the fostering and further development of bilateral relationships? Lord Robertson referred earlier to France in defence terms. That relationship is a very strong one. Might continuing with that and taking it further give us a route into CSDP military missions? If that is the case, should we be developing other bilateral relationships further? If so, which ones? Does it not also have a policy implication? As Lord Robertson said, we might not want to participate in certain missions within Africa that France was interested in. However, if our bilateral relationship with France becomes even more important, might we not want to contribute to those simply in the sense of fostering that particular relationship and, through that, our connection to the EU and CSDP missions?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: I personally think that we will need to develop more bilateral relationships. Coming out of the EU, where we are sitting around the table with everyone, that is easy to do, so we will need to do it. The Franco-British defence arrangement is a good example of the defence side of that, but it needs to go beyond defence. I just make the point that post Brexit our diplomatic role in the world is going to be hindered so long as the Foreign Office budget is constrained in the way that it is. It is tiny and it is being reduced, so how we are going to play a part in the world post Brexit will depend very much on what our diplomats do and what our diplomatic efforts are. Building bilateral relationships takes up a lot of time and effort.

Lord Hague of Richmond: We certainly need to do that, in my view. We have very close co-operation with France—really, the closest ever outside the world wars—but Germany, Italy and Poland are also leading candidates for us to enhance bilateral relationships with, particularly in defence. It will be important for Britain to build up those relationships across the world. I have always believed in that. Even with the Foreign Office budget when I was Foreign Secretary, we managed to open nearly 20 new embassies around the world, including in Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America, and to expand Britain's diplomatic network. I hope that Governments of whatever party over the coming decade will continue to increase British diplomatic presence in the world.

We have talked mainly about structures, committees and attendance at things, but the other aspect of this is ideas. Britain—through Governments, political parties, NGOs and so on—is a country of great ideas about development and foreign affairs. This will matter even more in the years ahead. One of the greatest challenges for Europe will be the vast increase of population in Africa and the Middle East, which is well under way. Having the ideas about how we cope with that, and contributing to that, will make a big difference to how Britain is seen and how ready other countries are to work with us.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: The EU has a lot of agreements in place with other countries that participate in its military missions. It

would be relatively simple to create a bespoke agreement for Britain that would be an enhanced version of what exists in other countries.

My only note of caution is that in the defence discussions in the EU, which I chaired, there was a sense that Britain was unconvinced by many of the ideas that other European nations had to enhance their own co-operation. That was for all sorts of reasons. I deliberately use the word “unconvinced”; that does not mean that the ideas were right or wrong, but simply that Britain was unconvinced. Enhancing bilateral co-operation will be extremely important, but it will be worth watching how much more structured co-operation there will be between different nations of the EU, where you may have four or five nations working on a particular aspect of defence, and whether Britain will then also engage with that side of the house, as it were, to try to take that forward.

I think you are going to see big changes in how defence is thought about in the EU as a consequence of Britain leaving, which I do not think should affect relations with NATO because we very much strengthened the EU-NATO relationship as far as we could. Still, it is going to be interesting to see how Britain engages. Resources will have to be available, because instead of channelling your relations with 27 other nations through one structure you will have 27 structures. That is not going to be as deep or as cost-effective as the single structure, but there will be a magnification of other structures currently in place, so the costings of that will have to be thought about. It may well end up being more expensive to do that in the end.

Lord Hague of Richmond: We were not just unconvinced by some of the ideas; we were flatly against them.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: I was being diplomatic.

Lord Hague of Richmond: You were being very diplomatic. Cathy will remember me spending a long day at the Foreign Affairs Council—in 2011, I think—ensuring that the EU was not going to have a permanent military headquarters, because Britain saw that as duplicating NATO, fragmenting effort, unnecessary when we have our own headquarters, and so on. They will go ahead with those things now without the UK, so it will be necessary to create a relationship with the new structures that we previously prevented from coming into existence.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: I am not so sure that they will go ahead with it. Even though Britain sometimes argued on its own, a lot of other people hid behind our position because they were also unconvinced about the cost and duplication that might have been involved in.

Lord Hague of Richmond: They did.

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Still, developments will certainly take place without the pragmatic British input that has always been valued inside the EU, and that is a net loss.

Lord Stirrup: The pragmatic British input was that if you are serious

about increasing defence capability, you need to spend more, was it not?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Lord Stirrup and I know that it is not just a question of spending more. The European NATO countries spend \$300 billion a year on defence while the US spends \$600 billion, so this tiny part of the world spends half of what America does; it is just that it spends it on the wrong things. It is not a question of the 2% or indeed of paying more; it is about what we get for that. Some of the European developments, such as the European Defence Agency and some of the collaborations, have now started to focus more on getting the right capabilities, as Lord Stirrup will recognise, such as fast jets that fly day and night and that can deliver precision-guided weapons, which are the only ones that are going to be of any utility. It is about the things that we actually need to buy rather than a gross expenditure level that can hide weakness rather than strength.

- Q18 **The Earl of Oxford and Asquith:** That is very interesting, given your various responses this morning. Bearing in mind what Lord Robertson said earlier, that Brexit alters political relationships but obviously not geography, given your reservations about guaranteed permanent status in any enhanced relationship with the EU, and given Baroness Ashton's very cogent remarks about not being the room, do you think the UK will conduct more of its European security and defence policy through NATO, or are you saying—perhaps this is a supplementary question—in the light of what you have been saying about the deputy SACEUR, that actually rather less will be effective through NATO structures?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: We would want to do as much as we could through NATO. However, there is a question mark over American involvement, and that must be seriously worrying. The statements by the new President of the United States are deeply disconcerting. They might vary from day to day—who knows what he will say tomorrow?—but the very question mark over Article 5, which says that an attack on one is an attack on all, and a statement one day that NATO is obsolete and another statement that it is not obsolete the next, suggest that the Europeans as a whole will have to do more in future.

There are arrangements called the Berlin Plus arrangements, if you want to go into the theology of this. One of my greatest achievements in NATO was those arrangements, which are five volumes of procedures whereby the EU can access NATO—that is, American—capabilities and operations where NATO chooses not to be involved. They are stymied at the moment because of disputes over Cyprus and Turkey, which is sad, although they work in spirit rather than the letter. We as Europeans will have to look at our own back yard much more than we have been able to do in the past. That means that Europe has to do more, and therefore there is a premium on how involved we will be with these EU structures.

The Earl of Oxford and Asquith: But is that a premium on how we can be involved through NATO in these EU structures? If the Americans are not resiling but are having various complicated language difficulties regarding NATO, do you think we will actually be doing more through

NATO on our European policy?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: Yes, we will. Earlier this year there was a joint declaration by NATO on co-operation with the EU. That has led, even since the beginning of the year, to much closer co-operation between the international staffs of NATO and the EU on countering hybrid threats, dealing with maritime issues, cybersecurity, progress on defence capabilities, defence industry consolidation, joint exercises and joint capacity building. So progress has already been made, and the landscape is there for greater co-operation. The questions and concerns that we have raised here are to do with how we insert ourselves into the EU part of the NATO-EU relationship.

Lord Hague of Richmond: I agree, but unfortunately a natural strategic divergence is happening in the western world. It is not just that President Trump has been elected; the issues that Europe faces in Africa, the Middle East and Turkey are more particular to Europe at the same time as the United States has become energy-independent, so it is likely that a smaller proportion of the future crises facing Europe will be ones to which NATO has the answer and in which the US is automatically involved. The importance of creating these structures and having the political will to be involved, as we referred to earlier, is even more important when seen in that light.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: Britain's role in being a key player in both the EU and NATO when it came to defence and security issues is pivotal to how the organisation since then has worked together. It will be a key part of how Britain will be viewed that it was a significant player in both, was willing to contribute and indeed was determined to be part of whatever happened, but was also clear about the fact that it was not a question of either/or but both/and—each had very different functions and roles to play.

If you take one arm of that away, you have to think about how that is going to be re-engineered, who is going to take our place and how that will work. France may, for example, play a much bigger role in that way, but France has very different views on the future of how defence might operate. However close the French may be to us, their views will be different. We have to think about how we are going to engage with that EU bit so that we do not lose the important role and influence that everyone thinks we should have, but it is going to be harder to ensure that that happens.

Q19 **The Earl of Oxford and Asquith:** Lord Robertson said the EU may not be going ahead with the European Defence Agency structures. I would be interested in your views on our relationship with the EDA in future. How do you see that panning out?

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen: One of the priorities is to get more collaboration on defence procurement. We in this country have tended over the years to stand alone and to have what is called "full spectrum". No one can afford that any more. No individual country outside the US

can aspire to having full-spectrum capabilities, so collaboration and co-operation are essential. It is only the UK that has heavy-lift aircraft, the C17s that we initially leased from the Americans. There is need for some common collaboration on that. There is one project, the AWACS aircraft, which is collectively owned by a number of NATO nations to produce a capability that is essential and useful but which individual countries apart from France and the UK could not afford to have individually. So we are beginning to see the start of a rationalisation and collaboration that is going to be essential.

On the defence industry side, I think further consolidation of the ownership of companies will go ahead, and that can really be facilitated in a serious way by collaboration at the EDA and EU level.

Baroness Ashton of Upholland: In my previous role, I was head of the EDA. For me, the critical part of what it was seeking to do was the aspects of collaborative work, particularly on research and development, that would not only benefit European nations but would feed into NATO and other allies, such as work on helicopter training for Afghanistan. Mid-air refuelling became a particular issue during the response to Libya. Very few nations in the EU had that capability, and the EDA took on the responsibility for the training and necessary other works to do it.

Another example is research and development on improvised explosive devices, which is extremely important for a whole range of operations. These are ways in which you can get the collaboration of the EU nations—and Britain played a part in that—in order to enhance the capabilities, knowledge and research that are going to be much broader than simply the EU countries.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. As always, these sessions run so quickly, and there are so many questions that we could have asked. We thank you very much for coming in this morning and being very frank and candid in your responses. As I stated earlier, we will send you transcripts for corrections and inaccuracies.