

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: The indispensable ally? US, NATO and UK Defence relations, HC 387

Tuesday 31 October 2017

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Members present: Dr Julian Lewis (Chair); Leo Docherty; Martin Docherty-Hughes; Mr Mark Francois; Graham P. Jones; Johnny Mercer; Mrs Madeleine Moon; Gavin Robinson; Ruth Smeeth; John Spellar; Phil Wilson.

Questions 29-89

Witnesses

I: Sir Adam Thomson, former UK representative to NATO, and Elisabeth Braw, Atlantic Council.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Dr Catarina Thomson and Dr Andrew Mumford](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Adam Thomson and Elisabeth Braw.

- Q29 **Chair:** Good morning, and welcome to this session in our inquiry entitled “The indispensable ally? US, NATO and UK Defence relations”. We have two experts with us today to answer our questions and, hopefully, leave us much wiser. I would be very grateful, Sir Adam and Elisabeth, if you would each say a few words to introduce yourselves.

Elisabeth Braw: My name is Elisabeth Braw. I am a non-resident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council. Thank you very much for having me. My particular interest is in NATO logistics, which I would argue is the pillar of successful collective defence. I look forward to answering any questions about that and about NATO collective defence in general.

Sir Adam Thomson: My name is Adam Thomson. I am now the director of an NGO called the European Leadership Network—some 180 heavyweight public figures from right across Europe who are working to build better security. Until last November, I was the British ambassador to NATO, which is in part why I am here. Before that, I had a British diplomatic career including at least 20 years working on European security, so I am quite invested in the success of the North Atlantic alliance.

Chair: Thank you both. John Spellar will start.

- Q30 **John Spellar:** What is your assessment of the current threats and challenges to NATO, and indeed its member states?

Sir Adam Thomson: NATO faces two very big simultaneous challenges, and perhaps it has never before in its history had to confront two. One is the new challenge represented by deteriorating relations with Russia, and the other is the whole plethora of difficulties, from instability to NATO’s south. An organisation that, after the cold war, focused on out of area—first on the Balkans and then further afield, particularly Afghanistan—has been quite challenged since 2014 in redesigning itself to address these two new challenges alongside its continuing commitments to co-operative security and to crisis management, including its operations in Afghanistan.

- Q31 **John Spellar:** You talk about deteriorating relations with Russia. Isn’t that a bit euphemistic for what is actually a renewed and increasing threat from Russia?

Sir Adam Thomson: The threat from Russia is rising because Russia’s capabilities are growing, and Russia is increasingly alarmed by what NATO is doing. Russia’s behaviour is completely unacceptable to NATO allies, so we have an action-reaction cycle that is pushing the relationship further into something we might recognise as a 21st-century version of cold war.

- Q32 **John Spellar:** You say action-reaction. Is it not an initial assertiveness by Russia that, for example, is a matter of huge concern to the Balkan states



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who may be very vocal about it? They are not acting, they are definitely reacting to a significant threat as they perceive it from Russia.

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes, and assertive would be an understatement for the first annexation of territory in Europe since the second world war and the Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine. These are alarming developments in Europe's security, and it is perfectly natural for NATO to want to reassure its Baltic allies and to deter the possibility of Russian action against them. At the same time, it is worth recognising that Russia feels, erroneously, very threatened by NATO expansion.

Q33 **John Spellar:** Okay. Taking the problems that you just described, do you see NATO's decision-making and command structures as adequate to the task? Do they need to be reformed, and if so, how?

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes, they do need to be reformed. As you will have read in the press recently, NATO launched a process last year of reviewing its command and force structures, and expects to reach conclusions at next February's Defence ministerial meeting, with the upcoming Defence Ministers meeting on 8 and 9 November as an important way point. I am no longer close to the detail of NATO considerations, but it seems to me absolutely right, if the media is correct, that NATO should be looking at reinforcing its logistics command and control and at reinforcing the security of its sea lanes by concentrating greater command focus on the Atlantic and Arctic.

Q34 **John Spellar:** This has become a bit of a dialogue. Ms Braw, do you want to come in on any of that?

Elisabeth Braw: Yes. If I could come in on what you said earlier about the perception of Russia as a threat, perception is a subjective thing, but if we measure it in terms of exercises and activities, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* had a very illuminating article the other day showing that Russia has exercised three times as often as NATO in the past three years. Since the beginning of 2015, it has conducted several hundred inspections each year, whereas NATO has conducted none. That is an objective way of measuring Russia's activities. What can be summarised from that is that NATO is behind Russia in terms of mobilisation and preparation, and that is where our current challenges come from. That also includes the plans for new commands that Sir Adam mentioned earlier.

Q35 **Chair:** Can I ask you a question on that? We get conflicting reports. From time to time, people suggest that the size of Russia's economy and the state of its resources are such that in many respects, it is weaker than NATO as a military proposition. Other reports, and the example of history, show that people underestimate Russia's strength at their extreme peril. Where do you both stand in assessing the relative military strengths of NATO and Russia in the present days?

Elisabeth Braw: If we look, for example, at the number of main battle tanks in the most recent IISS strategic assessments, Russia has 2,700 tanks, compared with the US's 2,831, the UK's 227, Poland's 985,



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Romania's 437, France's 200, Germany's 306 and Greece's 1,341; I will not bore you with the smaller allies. It shows that NATO has capabilities that go far beyond Russia's, just in this one example.

The question then is what we do with those tanks. Does it make a difference that Russia is weaker—or, I should say, that NATO is stronger than Russia—when measured in the number of tanks? That does not mean we are stronger. The difference between civilians and military people is that we civilians like to think of capabilities as the number of blocks in our box—if we have so many tanks, that makes us stronger. But how do we use those tanks? Can we actually move them across Europe? How can Russia move its tanks to where they need to be? That is where they are stronger—in mobilisation and preparation—and that is where we as NATO have fallen behind.

- Q36 **Mr Francois:** On the numbers, is the important point that the vast bulk of the American tanks are in the United States, not deployed in Europe?

Elisabeth Braw: That's right. They would have to be flown in from the US, arrive in Germany and be transported across Germany and several other national borders to their eventual destination.

- Q37 **Chair:** Boiling this down a bit, Sir Adam, if—heaven forbid—Russia took it into its head to make a military move against eastern and central Europe, as things stand in Europe today between Russia and NATO, what would you expect the outcome to be?

Sir Adam Thomson: As things stand right now, you are addressing a complete hypothetical, but if you take a worst case and assume that Russia, from a standing start, wanted to try something on, it would take the Baltic states and would make significant inroads into eastern Europe. NATO would be confronted with the challenge of retaking NATO territory, which would be a long effort because it takes time, as Elisabeth has said, to assemble the American military weight that is available but not in Europe.

- Q38 **Chair:** The reason I ask this is that one of our main terms of reference for this inquiry is the question, to what extent could the UK and continental Europe deter an aggressive Russia, or defend themselves from a nuclear threat or a conventional attack by Russia, without US participation in NATO? At the moment there is US participation in NATO, but it is a matter of interest as to what the military balance on the continent of Europe currently may be in your professional opinions. Are there any further comments you would like to make on that?

Elisabeth Braw: If I may bring in the third leg of the stool, which is the public—we have the armed forces, the decision makers and the public—they would play a crucial role in such a scenario. If the US were to decide not to get involved it would send out the idea that all hope is lost, whereas our armed forces, while they have been subject to cuts, are not hopelessly incapable of defence. However, our reliance on the US is such and the role of public opinion is such in the West that that would send a message to the public that maybe Europe is not worth defending.

Q39 **Chair:** Anything to add, Sir Adam?

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes, I would like to make a couple of points, if I might. One is to suggest that Europe on its own has in quantitative terms a still quite formidable capability, if measured against what Russia can muster, even without the United States. The challenge is to assemble that into a formidable force, but let us remember that it does include a British and a more independent French nuclear capability.

My second point is to draw a distinction—I am sure you will see it—between “defend” and “deter”. I have said that NATO from a standing start could not on the Lithuanian or Estonian border with Russia stop a determined Russian attack, but NATO’s modern deterrence posture is designed to deter such attack from taking place. The alliance has chosen the least confrontational posture possible towards Russia, which means putting into each of the Baltic states and Poland a very small quantum of force that is multinational, as a tripwire. That might be enough to deter Russia, because it engages the alliance—with or without the United States, but currently with. However, NATO is not convinced that that is enough, which is why it is concentrating on its logistics and reinforcement capacity.

Q40 **Leo Docherty:** On that note, may I ask, Sir Adam, if in a worst-case scenario NATO needed to move, say, 50,000 troops to one or more of Europe’s borders as part of a rapid response, could it do so? How long do you think that would take?

Sir Adam Thomson: Elisabeth is as well qualified as me to answer this. NATO could do it, but it would take quite a long time. The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, which the United Kingdom leads this year, is the so-called spearhead brigade that would be involved in that effort. I think that the United Kingdom is finding it quite difficult to move in the timelines envisaged in NATO planning for some of the reasons that Elisabeth has set out.

Elisabeth Braw: Yes, the US Army Europe estimates that the spearhead force that Adam mentioned would take three to four weeks to reach the Baltic states. That is obviously the spearhead force. We are talking about the second wave which would take even longer.

Going back to some of the issues involved in getting there, of course NATO will tell you that the red tape is no longer in place in case of an article 5 situation, so the conditions are not as difficult as they are in peacetime.

Currently, if I can give you some numbers here, if a NATO ally’s bus with weapons wants to travel across the border into the Czech Republic, it takes 45 calendar days to get diplomatic clearance. It takes 20 working days to get diplomatic clearance for that bus to enter France. It takes 45 calendar days for a convoy with hazardous materials to enter the Czech Republic, and 30 days to enter France. These are quite significant delays. I would argue this is unnecessary red tape. There is no operational necessity for those delays. It is just something that has worked itself into the system because there has been no need for rapid movements across the continent for the past couple of decades.



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Sir Adam Thomson: Might I add that that is only the start of NATO's challenges for rapid movement? It also faces very practical infrastructure challenges. It does not have the ability at the moment to move large quantities of force quickly by land. It is very heavily dependent on scarce strategic airlift. It is also challenged in delivering military equipment by sea, because the old 20th century cold war roll-on/roll-off ferries have all been retired and most of the capability is now in the private sector.

- Q41 **Leo Docherty:** Given that Russia is conducting exercises such as ZAPAD involving some 70,000 troops, what do you regard as the nearest comparable effort from the NATO side in terms of exercising at large scale?

Sir Adam Thomson: NATO does a triennial exercise—the last was in 2015 and the next is next year—called Trident Juncture. That is the nearest equivalent.

- Q42 **Leo Docherty:** How many troops will that involve?

Sir Adam Thomson: I am not sure I can confidently recall what the numbers were in 2015. It was certainly less than 70,000.

- Q43 **Leo Docherty:** Was it 10,000, 20,000—what scale?

Sir Adam Thomson: I am guessing a little bit, but I would say it might be closer to 20,000 than 10,000; possibly slightly higher than that.

Elisabeth Braw: During the cold war, NATO had the Reforger Exercise, which I am sure you are familiar with. That was around 115,000, I think, on average. I think that is a comparable exercise. If NATO were to reinstitute such an exercise, I do not think it could be seen as an aggressive move, given that Russia has one similar in size already. It could arguably be seen as a corresponding exercise.

Adding to what Sir Adam said about the ferries, we have the additional challenge of rail cars. You might say, "Well, rail cars, what does that matter?" Rail cars transport tanks and are the only possible way of transporting tanks. Since the cold war ended, what has changed is that most European countries have privatised their rail companies. Armed forces would have to rent cars at commercial rates from privatised rail companies. In many cases, the cars that are required to transport tanks—for example, the weight of an Abrams tank with armour is 72.6 tonnes—are not available in large numbers anymore, even though the exact number is classified information. The fact is that they are not available in large quantities anymore. These are practical considerations that impede NATO activities.

Sir Adam Thomson: Forgive me for adding further to this list of NATO challenges. There is also a question mark, at any rate, over the physical infrastructure for the reception of NATO forces in eastern allies, whether you are talking about ports or rail bridgeheads or simply the strength of bridges to take modern heavy weaponry. There are quite a number of aspects of the logistics of reinforcement that NATO needs to consider. That is why, I assume, they are looking at creating a logistics command.



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- Q44 **Mr Francois:** Under the Reforger concept, the United States would stockpile military equipment for several brigades in Europe and then troops would be flown in in time of crisis to marry up with that equipment and take it into the field. Do those American stockpiles still exist or have they all been taken back to the United States?

Elisabeth Braw: There are some stockpiles. For example, in Norway, the Marine Corps has a couple of famous caves where it stores equipment for use in such a situation, but a lot of the equipment has been taken back.

Perhaps I can also return to what Sir Adam just said. Sorry to go on about bridges and railheads, but if the bridge collapses, the troops will not be going anywhere. This is a blind spot for NATO planning because they call the logistics bible has not been updated for many years. The logistics bible contained every detail of every logistics asset—infrastructure, bridges, railroads, roads, tunnels—across the alliance. I know it is being updated again but the fact is, at the moment, we have very spotty information, so NATO planners will not know which Estonian bridge would hold an Abrams tank, for example.

- Q45 **Chair:** Is it true that the individual states—a dozen of them in Germany—have their own clearance regimes as well, as a further obstacle?

Elisabeth Braw: They certainly have different regimes. We also have to take into consideration environmental rules, which are a new addition to all the rules that a logistics officer has to bear in mind. There are also different rules with regards to when you can take a convoy on the road on summer weekends. Some countries and states do not allow military convoys, obviously for the benefit of holidaymakers, but it is yet another obstacle to efficient NATO exercises.

- Q46 **Chair:** One would assume that there are procedures in place that, in case of emergency, all these things can be overridden and disregarded, are there not?

Elisabeth Braw: That's right. In the case an article 5 situation, none of this applies. So you could take a military convoy through Germany on a Sunday.

- Q47 **Chair:** That's a relief!

Elisabeth Braw: But if you haven't exercised, it is like a violinist who buys himself a Stradivari violin and thinks "With my talent and my violin, there will be a spectacular performance," but he hasn't done his scales for years. He turns up, he gets flustered and it is a shambolic performance.

Sir Adam Thomson: Excuse me, Chairman, it is quite an important point to build on, this distinction between a peacetime scenario and an article 5 one for the movement of NATO reinforcement. It is not difficult to imagine a crisis situation where NATO does not know exactly what it is dealing with but is alarmed, and yet it is reluctant, for political reasons and for consensus, to declare that it is in an article 5 emergency.

- Q48 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** For those of us who live in the north and also



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our allies, such as Norway, it is not just our eastern flank that seems exposed, but our northern flank. I am sure you would agree that, in terms of rapid response, an essential element is the open sea lanes of communication with Canada and the United States. While we might be able to fly in a lot of stuff, we are going to be bringing a lot of stuff by ship.

I posed the question to the Ministry of Defence last week in a parliamentary question and it has replied to me today that United States and Canadian MPAs were deployed out of Lissiemouth last week to track Russian submarines. How exposed are we in our sea lanes of communication as part of that deployment process and rapid response?

Sir Adam Thomson: The British Government's decision to procure P-8s was a fairly eloquent expression of concern about the degree of coverage that the United Kingdom nationally and NATO as an alliance has in the North Atlantic. It is not an area that the alliance paid much attention to in the early 2000s, and it is now having to play catch-up.

Q49 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** They actually abolished the command in 2003, didn't they?

Sir Adam Thomson: In 2002, yes. So it is not a surprise to me at all to see Defence Ministers being asked, in the next couple of weeks, to consider an Atlantic and Arctic command to refocus alliance capability in this area.

Elisabeth Braw: Russia has been quite active on Svalbard recently. You may have seen that there was an incident last week where a Russian helicopter crashed, and Russia is suggesting that there should be a Russian search and rescue command on Svalbard. One might argue that that goes against the rules that govern Svalbard, because it is a demilitarised zone administered by Norway, but it is what one might call an incremental step towards some sort of militarisation. How does NATO respond to that?

Martin Docherty-Hughes: On the last point, there was, again, the issue around the Russian submarines off our western coast—around the coast of Scotland. Russian activity on Svalbard and off the coast of Scotland is clearly linked.

Chair: Do you want to move on to the question of technology, Martin?

Q50 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Yes. I do not know whether you want to answer this, but what do you perceive are the dangers presented by the growing technology gap between the United States and its European partners?

Elisabeth Braw: There is a sense that Europe is risking being left behind. I do not think it will happen, simply because it is an alliance and the US is committed to it, but there is certainly the impression that we will be left behind. That is my point.



Sir Adam Thomson: I would say, without claiming any deep expertise, that this is a huge problem for the alliance, because US R and D and US defence spending are just so massively higher than that of any of the US's allies, and the US commitment to moving constantly up the technology chain—there was a drive under the Obama Administration on Third Offset—must risk taking them further and further away from what allies can themselves afford and deliver. That is not to say that the Americans are unaware of the challenge. As Elisabeth says, they will be as committed as anyone to alliance interoperability, but I would think it was getting more and more difficult.

Elisabeth Braw: That is why pooling and sharing among European NATO allies is so important.

- Q51 **Chair:** But if the United States were seriously concerned that they were developing truly effective advanced weapons systems that could make a big difference to NATO's deterrent posture, surely they ought to have a policy in place for feeding these in to the NATO order of battle so as to be able to benefit the whole alliance. Or are you suggesting that, as they develop these more and more advanced weapons systems, they are keeping them to themselves?

Sir Adam Thomson: No, I am not suggesting that, and there is of course integration of modern technology into the alliance in multiple ways. For example, the United States has underpinned the development of NATO ballistic missile defence capability and a number of European allies are buying F-35s, to take two quite different examples, and NATO collectively is procuring ISR. But there is bound to be a growing challenge for smaller NATO allies to procure increasingly expensive items of equipment—F-35s, for example. At any rate, it is a political question whether Europe should be entirely dependent on the US defence industry, which is not notably a free-trading industry.

Elisabeth Braw: For Estonia, just procuring a single piece of high-technology equipment could edge it towards the 2% already, whereas for the US it is obviously a smaller share of GDP. The growing expense of high-tech equipment also puts some question marks next to the 2% guideline.

Chair: We will come on to that side of things in a few moments.

- Q52 **Mrs Moon:** I did not declare an interest at the start, so perhaps I should here: I am a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Defence and Security Committee.

You talked a little about deployability problems and challenges, and mobilisation. What about interoperability? I am concerned in particular about logistic support, repair and maintenance, perhaps as forces move east, and stockpiles of weapons. Is it a major problem that we are not planning for that? It was raised slightly by my colleague in respect of the US, but should major contributors like France and the UK also be looking at it? What are the challenges, and are we addressing them?



Elisabeth Braw: Interoperability is a huge challenge and has been for decades, but I would argue that it is crucial that it be dealt with now. Our forces have contracted over the past couple of decades, so we no longer have the luxury of not making them interoperable. Interoperability is a force multiplier; we get more bang for the buck if our forces are interoperable.

I am glad you mentioned this issue, because I have a couple of examples from recent military activity. The Americans and the Poles were recently on an exercise together in Poland, and the American units discovered that their fuel nozzles did not fit into the Polish vehicles' fuel tanks, so in a conflict scenario the Polish vehicles would have been stuck with no fuel. In this case, the Americans went and bought adaptor fittings and solved the problem, but you can only identify such interoperability problems through regular exercises where the people on the ground can discover them. As another example, the US and Estonian forces have radios of the same brand but use different crypto, so they still cannot communicate with each other.

Those examples illustrate why interoperability problems can put missions at risk. If in a crisis situation allies cannot fuel their vehicles, there is a distinct problem. Wilton Park had a conference last month called "The future of European militaries", and I happened to be in the interoperability group, so I am happy to share our findings and recommendations later if they are of interest.

The bottom line is that it is crucial that interoperability be made a priority, simply because we have lots of missions or exercises where smaller groups participate from each member state, rather than the large chunks that essentially operated on a parallel plane during the cold war. I am talking about land forces; in the air forces and navies, it is much less of a problem.

Sir Adam Thomson: Easy to say, hard to do, as you have just heard. It has been a preoccupation for the alliance for decades, and there are all sorts of initiatives that try to address it. Smart defence was, and still is, a concept that the alliance pursues, but the difficulty of overcoming national defence industries, national procurement schedules and concerns, and the power of domestic constituencies make it quite difficult for Europeans to grow more interoperable.

I believe it tends to be easier at the tail end—so looking at things like logistics repair and maintenance—but NATO, as it has looked at enhanced forward presence, has done very little about pre-positioning, and I believe that part of the reason for that is because it is not really worth while. By design, these are multi-national forces. If you were to pre-position further the full array of NATO allies who might cycle through a Baltic republic or Poland, you would have to pre-position a plethora of different stock, because the alliance is not very interoperable.

Q53 **Mrs Moon:** Is there a problem with pre-positioning in terms of the British withdrawal from Germany in 2019? For example, you raised the issue of



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bridges and the blowing of bridges, or the security and stability of bridges. At the moment, according to a reply that I had from the Ministry of Defence, 38 of our M3 amphibious bridging vehicles are in Germany.

Germany and Britain are now the only ones who have the capability that would provide the capacity to replace bridges and to move heavy equipment fast across rivers. If we are going to withdraw those in 2019, is that not something that we should be planning in advance to leave behind, or at least considering with the joint brigade that we have in Germany to actually use the M3 amphibious bridges? We should be talking about that. Are we doing any of that? Are those future problems actually being addressed and tackled?

I am concerned as well about the interoperability of munitions. You did not raise anything on that. Could you just say a few words about that?

Elisabeth Braw: The interoperability of ammunition is great when it works. For example, when it works, Europeans will often ask the Americans if they can borrow their ammunition, because the Americans have larger quantities. It is a little bit like the wise and foolish virgins in the Bible. The foolish virgins did not have any oil so they went to the wise virgins and said, "Can we borrow some oil?" That is what is happening with standardised ammunition.

Obviously, it would be a lot more efficient to have it all standardised, and it would be efficient to have aircraft parts standardised so that, for example, a Norwegian crew could borrow parts from their Dutch allies. So much of it comes down really to repair and maintenance, where we are just wasting money. Okay, maybe we should spend more, but we could also—

Q54 **Mrs Moon:** Spend wisely?

Elisabeth Braw: Spend wisely—exactly.

Sir Adam Thomson: I assume, but do not know, that the UK Ministry of Defence, as it considers withdrawal from Germany, is looking at precisely the sort of question you raise about what could and should be left behind. I can't address bridging capability specifically, but I imagine that there is a trade-off between the costs for the UK MoD of storage in Germany as opposed to storage in the United Kingdom and the lift of that bridging capability back into Germany or beyond if it were necessary.

Elisabeth Braw: If I can come in on Adam's point, that also highlights the need for a logistical hub within NATO. Amazon is the example that I would maybe use to explain it to my daughter. Amazon has warehouses where it pools the resources from its sellers and then dispatches the goods out to their eventual destination. Germany was such a logistics hub during the cold war, where both troops and equipment were essentially centralised for the event of a conflict. As you all know that is no longer the case to that extent and maybe we need to think of a logistics hub again.

Q55 **Johnny Mercer:** Can we talk about 2% for a moment? Particularly in this country, we focus on making the 2%, and NATO have cleverly revised, in



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2010 and again in 2015, what 2% means. Is there a better way of signalling a country's commitment to its defence, or its attitude to its commitments to NATO, than simply measuring the 2%?

Elisabeth Braw: Personally, I think there should be a chart that shows how much a country spends on defence, but also how much it contributes to NATO missions—how much money, how many troops—and that chart would show a very different line-up from the current star performers of the 2% chart.

Q56 **Johnny Mercer:** How would that change at the moment? What is the situation with 2%? How much is America contributing of its GDP?

Sir Adam Thomson: 3.6%.

Q57 **Johnny Mercer:** Heading down that list, how would that change if we were to relook at how we do NATO spending?

Elisabeth Braw: For example, Italy looks like a complete free rider if you look at its defence spending, at 1.12% of GDP, but at the same time they have around 7,000 troops on foreign deployment, which is higher than the majority of NATO member states. They have, in addition to the EFP in Latvia, where they have 162 troops, they have around 1,300 or thereabouts in Afghanistan, as well as 1,600 expected in Kosovo and troops in Lebanon, although those are not NATO missions, but it is a very tangible contribution to collective security.

Q58 **Johnny Mercer:** Particularly when you were in NATO, Sir Adam, have these nations ever made gestures towards the fact that they do not like being picked out all the time for not contributing to NATO, when they are actually contributing more troops than others? Have they made moves towards getting that calibration relooked at?

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes. The whole negotiation of the 2% language at the Wales summit, in which I was hotly involved, saw plenty of pushback from allies who realised that they would be fingered if this language came through. There are a whole range of arguments and metrics available, which say that just quantum of defence spending is not what you should be measuring. NATO looks at deployability, for example. Availability of assets to NATO is also regularly measured, although it is classified—for reasons, I think, of excessive caution. Wales produced a separate metric, apart from the 2%: whether allies were spending above or below 20% of their total defence budget on equipment and R and D. I think there are nine NATO allies above that 20% line at the moment.

There are a number of different measures available to the alliance and, in principle, to Defence Committees like yours. Every one of them has a problem, and to illustrate on deployability, if a small ally goes from making one vessel available to NATO and deploying it, to two vessels, it has suddenly gone up in NATO metrics by 100%, which does not tell you very much. In the end you are left with something more impressionistic that is a collection of measures and an expression of the amount of political will and commitment that an ally visibly brings or fails to bring to the alliance effort. I think that Elisabeth Braw has written about some of the smaller



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allies such as Denmark and Norway, whose level of defence spending is not quite what you would expect from rich countries, but who none the less make a considerable effort to be engaged.

Elisabeth Braw: I want to bring up the issue of caveats, which would be another, perhaps not so palatable, way of measuring NATO commitment. There is a caveat game where countries will commit troops, but only under certain conditions. We come back again to the US, as the indispensable ally, because it is fair to say that the Americans are the only ones who will regularly commit troops without caveats. In essence, that says that an American life is worth less than a European life because European allies will make caveats that mean, essentially, that their forces are exposed to fewer dangers. In Afghanistan, that meant that a number of allies committed troops but only to safer provinces.

Q59 **Chair:** If we were in an article 5 situation, what would really matter would be the totality of a NATO member's potential rather than what it does in peacetime—perhaps selfishly holding a proportion of its forces back, rather than involving them more in either exercises or assignment to the alliance. Therefore, even though one accepts that there are some allies that spend below the desired minimum target levels but that actually commit more, whether to ongoing operations or other NATO activities, presumably one still has to look at the total size of their defence budgets when estimating their potential in an emergency article 5 situation, does one not?

Elisabeth Braw: If I understand correctly, your point is that the peacetime picture does not reflect an ally's potential contribution during a conflict.

Q60 **Chair:** Absolutely. So in other words, you seem to have been saying that if a country spends a higher percentage of GDP than another country, that does not mean that in normal times that other country is not actually a better participant in making a stronger effort to support the alliance and contribute to it. But I am saying that if we were in the situation for which NATO primarily was designed—namely, an all-out war on the European continent—what really would matter would be a country's overall potential, and that would depend on their overall investment in defence and the size of their budget.

I have just one more point to suggest. While fully accepting the fact that there are differences when comparing one country to another in terms of budget size and willingness to be involved, would you not agree that the percentage of GDP is a very good way of comparing a single country's defence investment and effort against its own record in previous times? For example, there was a reference earlier to the cold war. When the UK was in the cold war situation in the 1980s and facing the threat of terrorism from Irish republicans, we were spending between 4.5% and 5% of GDP. Surely, that is a valid way to compare what we spend today. I cannot think of any other measure that is as easily quantifiable for purposes of comparison. That is why I would have thought that we should be reluctant to let that measure go.



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Elisabeth Braw: You are absolutely right. It is the only easily understandable measurement that we have. I would just wish for there to be additional metrics so that countries did not have to live with this shame of not making the 2% club, when in fact they put their soldiers in harm's way in difficult situations in Afghanistan. But you are absolutely right that it is also a useful tool to measure a country's current performance against its past performance.

Sir Adam Thomson: I also completely agree that if you are looking for a single measure, this is probably the best one you can choose. It has the added merit, because it is simple, of having great political force, so it has a mobilising power to it, which was precisely why I and my US colleague negotiated that language for the Wales summit, and it has worked. But I would add that other metrics are helpful. Some of those who spend above 2% are not very capable militarily, for example. The 4.5% that the United Kingdom spent in the cold war may still be what the United Kingdom is spending on the totality of its security effort if you take in counter-terrorism, cyber and so on. The world has just grown more complicated, and defence is now only part of the security spectrum.

- Q61 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I think, Sir Adam, you have more or less answered my question. The reality is that there are three sides to the truth: there, there and somewhere in the middle. And that 4% that we might be spending in totality is a very useful thing. Elisabeth, you not only mentioned Italy; in a recent article, you also mentioned Denmark's spend. But when we look at their lower spend compared with Greece—maybe, Sir Adam, that is who you are talking about in terms of spending on tanks that are of no use to anybody; we don't know who they are against—how do we get around this steadfastness on 2%? My concern is that the larger parties in the alliance will be spending over 2%, but it is about a global defence reach and not necessarily about defence of the north Atlantic and continental Europe.

Sir Adam Thomson: That is a fair and important point, if I may comment. The United States beats Europeans with the stick of much higher US defence spending, but the point that was most regularly made in negotiating that Wales language was that the United States is global and not all of that 3.6% of GDP goes into Europe or is necessarily readily available to Europe, even in an article 5 situation.

Similarly, I think I am right in saying that, in terms of NATO defence planning and major allies, only a proportion of, for example, the United Kingdom's total defence capability is actually committed to NATO force planning; it is somewhere around 70% to 75% of total UK capability. In an article 5 situation, it would all be available, but for the planning of a major joint operation, plus NATO's level of ambition, the UK does not make all its capacity available. Therefore, a proportion of what the UK spends—of the total GDP percentage—is not actually incorporated in the NATO plans. Does that help?

Martin Docherty-Hughes: It certainly makes sense, yes.

Sir Adam Thomson: I think that 2% is the best available; it is what we went for at Wales, along with the 20% metric, but it is not perfect.

Elisabeth Braw: Can I add to Adam's point about the different levels of ambition between especially the large NATO member states? The US, the UK and France all have global military ambitions, whereas a country like Germany really doesn't have that ambition. While it does participate in out-of-area missions, it is really a European military power, so the question is whether the 2% metric also makes sense for Germany, which in addition does not have a nuclear arsenal and thus does not have those expenses.

Sir Adam Thomson: I would make one further point. It does not directly address the 2%, but I do think it is relevant, and it is about how NATO goes about its defence planning process. I think this may get to the indispensable ally question a little bit. You will all be familiar with the process: NATO sets targets then allies are allocated their share and challenged to meet that. NATO's rough rule of thumb is that the United States should be expected to produce only 50% of any given capability, which is a reasonable proportion given the size of the US economy compared with that of European allies in aggregate. In some categories the US is above and in others it is below, but it is a very different picture from the scale of defence budgets where the United States outspends European allies by some distance. So another way of measuring contribution is what the alliance actually asks of allies internally and what proportions are sought from each ally.

- Q62 **Graham P. Jones:** There is a lot of discussion about article 5 and NATO commits itself to collective defence. It also commits itself to counter-terrorism, in which it has been particularly involved in the middle east as well as elsewhere. Can it perform both roles at the same time with the resources that it has?

Elisabeth Braw: NATO has a 360° mission, as we all know, but at the moment—as I think for most of its history—it is mostly a mission directed towards the eastern flank. It is no surprise that southern flank members are a bit concerned about the lack of attention to the southern flank. I know that Italy is working on a proposal for enhanced forward pressure on the southern flank, but the question is, what would that EFP look like? What can you do with counter-terrorism other than wait for something to happen and then respond? It would be very different from an EFP on the eastern flank where there is a traditional enemy that you deter with that measure.

Can NATO do everything—its 360° mission—at the same time? An Italian-proposed EFP on the southern flank would be a good test of that. Which allies would commit troops to a presence in Libya, for example? Would the countries that currently benefit from the EFP—Poland and the Baltic states—commit troops to a corresponding effort on the southern flank? It would be an interesting outcome to watch.



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Sir Adam Thomson: NATO plans for concurrent operations. It tells itself that in principle it can walk and chew gum—do two things at once. It has the capability to do collective defence and counter-terrorism, if it really puts its mind to it. In fact, it is doing both right now. It is doing enhanced forward presence and looking at beefing up the response force for collective defence while it continues the at least quasi counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan that was triggered by 9/11. Could it do Afghanistan at full stretch, as it was in 2008, 2009 and 2010, and a collective defence crisis? It would need a lot more US capability in Europe to achieve that.

- Q63 **Mrs Moon:** On the 2%, do we fail to factor into that the money that European allies also put into domestic issues such as border security, policing and counter-terrorism through their police and security forces? Are we perhaps allowing a miscalculation of how much European allies are spending when we don't factor that in, not to mention the work that they have done across the European Union to increase the rule of law, for example, and domestic policing? And where some nations are doing particularly onerous work—in particular Italy, which was mentioned—in dealing with the major migration and refugee crisis, are we forgetting to factor that in when we stick to a rigid 2%?

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes we are, I think, and European allies such as Germany or Italy, who are well below 2%, will make exactly that point about the contributions they make in other ways to the stability of Europe and of its periphery. So, to repeat, 2% is imperfect. It measures only part of the spectrum and it doesn't even tell you quite how much defence capability you get for that spend.

One of my colleagues, Joseph Dobbs, quite recently produced a paper building on Wolfgang Ischinger's thought that we should be measuring 3% and looking at a wider spectrum of security metrics. There is some validity to that, but it is quite slippery to try to agree what should go into that calculation.

- Q64 **Mrs Moon:** Moving on from that, may I suggest that one of the problems that we have is that our public do not understand what NATO is and what its responsibilities are? The Parliamentary Assembly has a working group under the chairmanship of Karl Lamers—the UK representative is Alec Shelbrooke—that is actually looking at how we publicise and raise awareness of NATO. We tend to think in silos of national defence, whereas, in fact, the alliance is far more important to our defensive capability than the public is perhaps aware of. Is there more that NATO needs to do to raise that awareness, apart from what the Parliamentary Assembly plans to do?

Elisabeth Braw: That is a very good question. If I may add to what Sir Adam said earlier about defence spending, of course we live in an era of hybrid warfare. How much of that expenditure should count towards defence spending? Some countries, including Estonia, spend an enormous amount on defence, for example on cyber-defence.



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With regard to the perception of NATO among the general public, I think it is a deeply misunderstood organisation. Part of the reason for that is that both think-tank experts and the media tend to talk about it in terms of a building in Brussels where bureaucrats reside. We forget that the most important part of NATO is the many hundreds of thousands of troops who serve as part of NATO every day. So, every single soldier who works for the armed forces of a home country that is a member of NATO himself represents NATO every day. That is many, many thousands of young men and women, who are out there working as NATO every day, and I don't think that gets reflected in the public debate, which is very much focused on what happens in Brussels.

If you look, for example, at EFP in Latvia, you have Canadians, Italians, Spaniards, Slovenians and some others. They don't even have a common language and yet that is NATO at work. The commander is making it work with around 1,000 troops in Latvia.

What could NATO do in addition to what the Parliamentary Assembly is planning? I think it should just shift the focus from NATO as an institution in Brussels to NATO as an organisation that consists mostly of men and women in uniform, who, just like the rest of us, go about their daily work, but carry out a crucial mission that we just don't see, because most of us rarely, or never, interact with a soldier or officer. We see doctors and engineers and teachers, but we just don't see soldiers and officers as part of our daily lives.

Sir Adam Thomson: NATO is not a supranational organisation, unlike the EU. It is a collective of 29 nation states. I feel really strongly that it is for the nation states, not the institution, to publicise why they feel it is important to be members of this alliance. It is really for Governments, and maybe even for defence committees, to explain to publics why NATO matters, why you want still to belong to this particular alliance.

Elisabeth Braw: If I can come in—

Chair: I am a little concerned that we need to move on a little more rapidly. By all means do, but I think all of us are going to have to be a little more concise.

Elisabeth Braw: Very quickly, I would argue that a very important side benefit of NATO is that it is essentially a military Erasmus programme: all these young men and women who go out and serve, for example, in Germany and other member states, come back committed transatlanticists, or committed to transatlantic security, at no additional expense to their home Governments. The EU spends a great deal of money on the Erasmus programme but NATO gets this for free. That is something to publicise.

Q65 **Mr Francois:** How important to NATO's force structure in the coming decade are the UK's military capabilities?

Sir Adam Thomson: Extremely. I find it difficult to quantify exactly, but if you take a few guidelines, the UK's total defence spending, compared to



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NATO's total defence spending, is about 6.5%. If you assume that the US is contributing only about 50% of total capability, then you could perhaps double it and talk about the UK being responsible for 12% to 14% of total NATO capability as part of the NATO planned force structure. So it is a pretty indispensable ally too.

Elisabeth Braw: I have a couple of numbers that I will give very quickly. Looking at the number of deployable troops, in 2014, which is the latest year that EDA has available, the UK had 69,800 deployable troops while France had 63,350 and Spain had around 43,000. The UK deployed an average of 2,300 while France deployed 8,752. Those are the countries with the highest number of deployable and deployed soldiers, although Italy also deployed a large number of soldiers. It is an important country also in that respect.

- Q66 **Mr Francois:** What do you think will be the effect on NATO planning of a reduction in the United Kingdom's amphibious capability?

Sir Adam Thomson: Again, I hesitate to quantify because I do not have available what total NATO amphibious capability is. It would clearly have an impact. NATO, I assume, has the capability to take up slack if one ally, such as the United Kingdom, drops in amphibious capability, just as allies covered the North Sea and the North Atlantic when the UK dispensed with Nimrod in 2010. One of the advantages of being in an alliance is that you have a bit of flex, but I should think that NATO defence planners would be keen to retain that UK capability.

Mr Francois: They would not be alone.

- Q67 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Following on from Mark's question, how would the Netherlands feel about the UK losing its amphibious capability, given our joint amphibious capability? Would the Netherlands be engaged in any discussions with the MoD about consideration of our getting rid of it, with the impact of the Netherlands having to take up the slack?

Sir Adam Thomson: From knowing how these things work—I do not know how hypothetical that scenario is; I have read the Defence Secretary's recent evidence to you on this—if the Ministry of Defence was considering getting rid of amphibious capability, it would talk to other allies about the implications of that, including the Netherlands.

- Q68 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** How quickly do you think it would be doing pre-discussions with someone like the Netherlands if getting rid of our amphibious capabilities was a possibility?

Sir Adam Thomson: I can't really address that. It is so specific to the particular capability and relationship with the given ally. It depends, is the answer.

Chair: I am going to come to Phil next, who will ask about the European deterrence initiative.

- Q69 **Phil Wilson:** Has the EDI improved NATO's resilience? I know the inspector general of the Department of Defence published a report in



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August of this year that basically said there were still problems with some of the things we have discussed, such as the ability to transport troops over bridges and the difficulties and diplomatic issues in deploying troops into other countries in eastern Europe. Do you think it has been and continues to be effective? What improvements can we make to it?

Sir Adam Thomson: My understanding is that the EDI of the United States is spending money primarily on US forces, bases and capability in Europe. To the extent that that is relevant to NATO capability, it is improving it, but it is not bringing sums of money to NATO collective spending or to other allies in their purely national resilience and capability.

Elisabeth Braw: The big question right now is for how long it will continue. Will it become a permanent feature? I know Congress is in discussions about moving the funds for the EDI from the overseas contingency operations to the Pentagon's baseline budget, which would make it a longer-term feature. They are also thinking about whether to build permanent housing—having troops based there permanently—which would also indicate its being a longer-term commitment. However, the question is then what the strategy is and how long the commitment is, because it started as a rather improvised measure.

Q70 **Phil Wilson:** Moving on, how would you interpret the attitude of the current US Administration to NATO? Do you think it is changing fundamentally, or do you think they have just discovered a new way of communicating long-standing US commitments—through Twitter, basically?

Elisabeth Braw: It changes by the minute on Twitter. I think the great asset, and what NATO can count on, is the resilience of public administration in any country, and in this case, in the US, where the wheels will keep turning along as usual until a major policy change happens. Fortunately, that does not happen on Twitter, even though public perception may change.

Sir Adam Thomson: The expression of frustration that you hear from President Trump is a widely held American view of long standing. There is a strong American feeling that Europeans do not pull their weight for their own defence. I do not think that will go away; in fact, I think it is likely to grow. On the other hand, so far as I know, nothing has changed about US force posture or US commitment in NATO defence planning since President Trump took office. Indeed, as you have heard from Elisabeth Braw, there is the possibility that the increased US investment in European defence might actually be put on a longer-term footing. I think, however, that Europeans neglect American frustration at their peril.

Q71 **Mrs Moon:** I wondered, from the other perspective, how confident European allies—and to some extent, the Canadians—feel about the commitment of the US to come to their defence and how much there is almost a movement towards building a European defence capability to offset any anxieties about what is coming out, again largely from Twitter, about the attitude of the US towards supporting Europe. Do you pick up



anything on that?

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes, indeed. My answer might not be a short one. While on the ground I think you can say Europeans would have to say the United States is behaving impeccably, that they have stepped up and put forces into enhanced forward presence and that they have, under ERI, increased their training, the number of brigades present and so on, it was very concerning for European allies that at NATO, in front of NATO leaders, President Trump could not stick to script and recommit to article 5. That sends a certain and disturbing political signal.

Whether that is driving European interest in greater defence or not, I think it is not surprising, and perfectly appropriate, to find the EU's European Global Strategy talking about strategic autonomy. You have to ask why, 70 years after the second world war and 25 after the cold war, the richest economy on the planet is not really capable of its own collective defence and depends, to a heavy extent, on contributions from an ally 3,000 miles away. So whether it is President Trump or it is European ambition, the fact that Europeans are addressing their capacity—or lack of it—to look after their own defence is, I think, an entirely healthy step. Healthy in transatlantic terms, because this is what Americans want to see: they want to see Europeans getting serious about their own defence and their ability to look after themselves.

Elisabeth Braw: I think there is also recognition among defence contractors that we have too many manufacturers of the same equipment. For example, why do we need several types of submarine in Europe? Would there be such a thing as an "EU-boat": a pan-European submarine? That consolidation may come from the industry rather than from institutions forcing us to do more with our defence budgets, simply because the industry sees there is little efficiency in competing against each other in the same market.

Q72 **Chair:** When the Americans look at European initiatives of this sort, are they seeing a willingness to create Europe-wide defence institutions but no willingness at all to spend more on the defence infrastructure and capability that is available either to the existing institution of NATO or the new institutions being constructed as part of the European integration blueprint?

Elisabeth Braw: To give an example from the ground on how that might work, we were talking earlier about bridges, railroads and bridgeheads, and here is an example of where NATO and the EU are beginning to work together productively for the defence of Europe. The EU has a structure of funds for infrastructure, especially in central and eastern Europe, and NATO is working with the EU to insert its requirements for that infrastructure so that it wouldn't have to be a retrofit and would fit NATO demands. That is a good start on the ground, and maybe Sir Adam can talk about the institutions. The two organisations do not have to compete against one another, but fulfil the same goal for the security of the continent.



- Q73 **Chair:** The key question I am asking is: it's not much good, is it, creating new institutions and at the same time being unwilling to spend more on real defence capacity?

Sir Adam Thomson: I couldn't agree more, although I would observe, from my own diplomatic experience, that the United Kingdom has carried more of the water on this debate than the United States has in recent years. I infer that the United States is somewhat less concerned, or at least is happy to let HMG do the heavy lifting.

On the other hand, I think the Americans are seeing increases in European defence spending as a percentage of GDP. They are seeing the European Commission at least hold out the prospect of a substantial European defence fund to incentivise more collaborative R&D. They are, at the moment, and I cross my fingers on this, hearing the right sort of noises coming out of the European Union about meshing with NATO defence planning, so that the CARD process that the EU is beginning to get off the ground to review the capabilities of its member states looks like it might be coherent with the process those member states go through at NATO. Although there is a lot of talk about institutions—a new Security Council and so on—I think that Americans will also see some progress on capability.

- Q74 **Leo Docherty:** Sir Adam, which military capabilities are most lacking among European NATO allies?

Sir Adam Thomson: I hope that the European Leadership Network will be able to tell you in some detail by early next year, because we are looking at that issue, but because the NATO information is classified, it is difficult to assemble a clear picture. My belief is that there are about eight of the 21 capability shortfall areas where Europeans are particularly dependent on the United States. They include ISR, strategic lift, precision-guided munitions and four or five other sharp-end areas. I suspect, as we look at this, that we will find that it would be difficult to imagine modern collective defence without those capabilities. My answer to your overall question is, yes, for the moment the United States remains a truly indispensable ally. There is a further point that NATO force planners make to me, however, which is that if the United States is happy to provide a particular capability, it is not necessarily sensible for European allies to invest heavily in that area as opposed to making up shortfalls in other areas.

- Q75 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** May I take that a wee bit further? How do they formulate if there is an issue about capability? There must be some process by which they formulate decisions; for example, we discussed our amphibious intentions in the next while. Say that work did appear in a hypothetical situation, how would the NATO leadership in Europe identify, or formulate a process by which they identify what is lacking? That gets taken away. How do they formulate who picks up the slack? Again, this goes back to that previous question. There must already be a process for this.

Sir Adam Thomson: There is, indeed. In fact, it is nerdy, but the glory of NATO is its defence planning process. It is a four-year cycle. It is well set

out on the NATO website. It agrees political guidance for what you are trying to achieve. That is converted by the military commands into hardware requirements—capability requirements. The NATO international staff then allocate those requirements to nations. There is then a challenge process where nations have to explain whether or not they can meet the capability they are being asked to provide. The only circumstance where NATO does not operate by consensus: it is consensus minus one. If the 27 others think you really should provide a capability, you can't block that.

Then there is a continuous process of adjustment and facilitation to try to find the capability to fill all the gaps. So if, in the middle of that four-year cycle, a capability that has been allocated under NATO force planning drops out—for example, UK amphibious capability—there is flexibility in the process to look around the alliance to see where that shortfall could be made up, if at all.

Q76 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Has that plus one ever been used?

Sir Adam Thomson: I don't honestly know the answer to that, but its power is latent, that it could be used.

Q77 **Chair:** If you both had a magic button to press to say what two or three main additional contributions the UK might make to increase the military effectiveness of NATO, do you have a wish list? What would be on that list?

Elisabeth Braw: A very promising development is the framework nations concept where, essentially, a larger country teams up with a smaller country to share troops and equipment. Typically, it is an area where the smaller country lacks the equipment. So, for example, in the case of the Netherlands and Germany, the Netherlands did not have any tanks, so they have integrated a brigade into a German tank division, which means that both countries benefit. The Dutch get a tank capability and the Germans get more troops.

I think the UK could play a really important role. I know there is already a more modest version of the framework nations concept in existence, but you said "push a magic button". If you push a magic button of the UK playing an important framework nations role in integrating units with smaller allies, that would be a huge benefit to the alliance.

Sir Adam Thomson: In no particular order, and intended to be slightly provocative, I think more British military planners at SHAPE and Norfolk could make a significant difference. NATO is facing a huge planning backlog as it tries to design for itself collective defence in the 21st century. British planners are among the best, and that is a real bottleneck in NATO capability.

A couple of others. Lift is in terribly short supply, for all the reasons that Elisabeth Braw and I have set out, and it is a multi-purpose capability: it can be for expeditionary, as well as collective, defence.



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I would like to see the formidable British intelligence capability provided more fully—even more than it already is—to the alliance, because we are second contributors after the United States but a long way behind. I think that an ISR command and control capability that helps integrate multinational forces is really precious.

- Q78 **Gavin Robinson:** I wonder if I could build on some of the contributions. In response to Mr Docherty-Hughes, we heard that there were planning processes in place and that there was a stocktake midway through the four-year cycle, which allows for picking up the slack that may emerge. We have had comments about amphibious provision, going back to Nimrod in 2010. At what point, when we pool resources and further integrate with one another, does the alliance lose that flexibility and some credibility because resources have been constrained or integrated and pooled to such a degree?

Sir Adam Thomson: I am not sure I fully understood the question.

Gavin Robinson: If we rely on the assumption that we do not need two or three of everything within the alliance, and if we integrate and pool our resources continually, at what point do we reach a tip in the scales where we start to diminish or lose the availability and credibility of an alliance response? For example, we have heard from you this morning that many on-paper assets may never be deployable or available at a given time. Do you see a tipping point where there is too much pooling and integrating of resource and therefore a lack of capacity?

- Q79 **Chair:** Just to illustrate the point a little more, you said earlier that if, for example, there were to be—heaven forbid—a Russian attack, at least in the early stages it would not be capable of being stopped until some significant parts of NATO territory had been overrun, and therefore there would be a triggering of article 5 and a long-term campaign to regain the land that had been lost. Obviously, if your defence supply systems have been totally integrated so that many NATO countries are involved in the joint creation of a certain defence capability, you can see what would happen if some of those countries were temporarily knocked out of the picture: the remaining countries would be hampered in their ability to generate further defence capability in order to continue to rectify the situation—an over-dependence on each other, in other words.

Sir Adam Thomson: That is the counter-argument to interoperability.

Chair: Indeed.

Elisabeth Braw: If we were to take that argument, which is extreme, we could just have one joint pool of equipment, probably American-made, that we would all avail ourselves of in a crisis situation. Each country still has the ambition—in fact, a contractual commitment to NATO—to have a particular set of capabilities. For example, the Netherlands could not get rid of every single capability because they could just integrate with the Germans. The fantastic advantage of interoperability is that it is a force multiplier of the equipment that is already available. Rather than an excuse for scaling down capabilities, it allows us to do more with what we



have. But I see your argument that it would be a very convenient way to cut defence budgets if you could say, "Actually, we can share with somebody else."

Sir Adam Thomson: I find that argument too abstract to be persuasive. What makes Russia formidable is the fact that it is a single, cohesive decision-making but also military force. That is not what NATO is. If NATO moved more in the direction of real interoperability—a single standard throughout—it would become progressively more formidable. There is a risk of over-dependence and lack of resilience that one can think of, for example, in cyber. If all NATO communications are on one channel and those can be taken down, you are in trouble, but I do not think the solution to that is to have 29 different communications systems that cannot speak to each other.

Q80 **Gavin Robinson:** We have talked about European integration. Previously, Sir Adam, you gave a figure of 50% for the US contribution. If there is to be further European integration, do you imagine that the aspiration is to get up to a 50% overall NATO contribution from European partners? Do you envisage that step up or equilibrium with the US? Given that it is not a supranational organisation, does that help in having one European block, the UK and the US?

Sir Adam Thomson: Those are multiple questions. If Europeans inside the European Union or as a European pillar of NATO could be militarily more formidable, I believe that that would be welcome to the United States. It would strengthen the transatlantic linkage and would probably lead over time to Europeans taking a larger share of NATO force commitments. We are a long way from that, but I can imagine over time that, post-Brexit, with a stronger Franco-German motor, there will be progressively more attention to the question of strategic autonomy for the European Union.

I think that as the European Union addresses itself to that, it will discover that even with a very strong political will and a clear road map, it would take 25 years of sustained and expensive procurement to begin to approach anything approximating autonomy, and that might be quite a salutary discovery. However, by and large, depending on how the diplomacy and the politics was done, that drive by Europeans to take more responsibility for their own defence would be a healthy thing, including for NATO.

Elisabeth Braw: The German role in Lithuania is important to highlight. It seems like a very minor role with 450 soldiers in the EFP in Lithuania, but it is the first time that the Germans have volunteered for a NATO leadership role, so it is perhaps more symbolically important than militarily, but it is still a major step by the Germans.

Sir Adam Thomson: It is interesting and heartening that the United States consciously stepped back and Europeans consciously stepped forward on enhanced forward presence.



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Chair: We have two more topics to bring us to a conclusion. First, Mark.

Q81 **Mr Francois:** How important is the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent to the UK-US alliance and to NATO generally?

Sir Adam Thomson: It is important. In the US-UK relationship, the intimacy of the nuclear arrangements surely lies at the heart of anything that you might call a special relationship. This is understood in the United States as well as in this country. As far as nuclear deterrent in NATO goes, of course it is the US nuclear deterrent that is preponderant. That is not just because of capability, but because of politics. It is the ultimate expression of and guarantee of north America's commitment to Europe's security. None the less, the UK's deterrent and, in a different way because it is less committed, France's, are genuinely seen by the alliance and the nuclear planners in the alliance as an important component of NATO's overall deterrence posture because of—you are familiar with the arguments—other centres of decision making. So it gives the UK a quite special place in the alliance mix, even if that is not acknowledged day to day.

Q82 **Mr Francois:** Do you see that changing in any way under the new presidency?

Sir Adam Thomson: Under a new US President?

Q83 **Mr Francois:** Do you think that Trump in some ways would think less of our deterrent than his predecessors?

Sir Adam Thomson: No, I don't. It is very hard to read President Trump on nuclear matters, as on some others.

Q84 **Mr Francois:** I don't know: you could read him every night.

Sir Adam Thomson: He appears to have an interest of long-standing in nuclear capability. There is no suggestion that I am aware of that the current US nuclear posture review will review any leg of the triad. On the contrary, the noises coming out so far from that review suggest a beefing up. President Trump made very clear—I cannot remember if it was in an interview or a tweet—that he wanted the United States to be top nuclear dog.

In terms of the US commitment to nuclear, I think that is undoubted. In terms of making nuclear in principle available to NATO, we have talked about whether US posture is changing under President Trump or not, and there is no sign that it is.

As I am sure you are aware, NATO is actively looking at adjustments to its nuclear posture in the light of Crimea and Russian sabre rattling, including nuclear. The US is intimately part of that.

Q85 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** It would be interesting to ask a further question about the new President. Do you think that President Trump recognises the extent to which the United States and the UK co-operate around nuclear issues? If we go back to Eisenhower and Macmillan



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signing the 1958 mutual defence agreement, do you think he recognises the issues around, for instance, shared warheads?

Sir Adam Thomson: I have no idea. I can see what you might be driving at.

- Q86 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** My premise is this: say that the President of the United States were in a situation where he sees there is leverage—he likes to put himself out there as a deal-maker. We have a trade agreement coming up and everything is on the table, including a mutual defence agreement.

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes, I can see that proposition. At the same time, President Trump has an unusually large number of advisers who are military men, every one of whom is well aware of the importance of the UK-US military relationship and values it. I think we have seen in quite a number of areas President Trump take advice on defence and security matters, including the eventual commitment to article 5, for example. I can see the point you are making but it is not one that would concern me at this stage.

- Q87 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** This is a scenario we clearly do not want to reach, Sir Alan. He might have a lot of good military advisers, but he also has a lot of people at the back in terms of business. If we take his speech at NATO in terms of article 5, they had a dinner later and we all know that what came out of the dinner discussion was an absolute catastrophe. What we see in public with how he is reined in is one thing, but behind the scenes that might not really be happening. Therefore, these scenarios that we do not want to think about should be thought about.

Sir Adam Thomson: Possibly. I do not think I am well enough informed on the recent months of the Trump Administration to offer you more than I have already.

- Q88 **Chair:** Finally, can I ask you both about arms control treaties that already exist and to what extent dialogue is, or should be, continuing? Even in the worst depths of the cold war, there was a constant undercurrent of trying to negotiate with one's adversary, culminating in the conventional armed forces in Europe treaty, the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty and so forth. To what extent do you think these treaties are unravelling? To what extent, to the best of your knowledge, is there an ongoing dialogue? Do you feel that continued or renewed engagement with Russia on arms control measures is a channel in which we ought to invest more effort?

Elisabeth Braw: Sir Adam is closely involved with this, but I will just start with an observation that builds on that. We are obviously in an era of hybrid warfare, which raises the question of whether we should think about additional treaties that will essentially establish a rulebook for this new kind of warfare, and whether that would offer potential for talks with Russia. We are talking first about cyber-attacks and other forms of warfare that we are already experiencing. Would trying to establish a rulebook be



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the next step in arms control? I will let Sir Adam answer the question on the CFE treaty.

Sir Adam Thomson: I am deeply concerned about this. I think it is something that NATO Governments need to devote more attention to. I believe that the arms control regime in Europe is unravelling and has been for quite a long time.

Q89 **Chair:** Could you be a little more specific? For example, do you believe Russia has broken the INF treaty, as Dr Franklin Miller strongly suggested in a previous session, for example?

Sir Adam Thomson: It appears to be the settled conviction of the Americans and the US intelligence system—I believe the conviction is shared by the UK Defence Intelligence service—that Russia is in violation of the INF treaty with its Kalibr missiles. Not all NATO allies are persuaded of that, in my experience.

If INF were to fail—we now have the US Congress urging the US Administration to spend money on research and development of non-compliant systems—I think it is easy to imagine that the extension of New START, which is the strategic US-Russia nuclear relationship, would not take place. If it is not extended, it is quite hard to imagine a successor treaty being negotiated between the United States and Russia.

With that would therefore go, in potentially quite short order—a matter of months, if the US-Russia relationship over INF falls apart—the nuclear regime, not only for Europe but globally. In Europe, we have Russia systematically gaming the Vienna document, which provides for transparency of military activities. We lost the adapted CFE treaty around 2007, so there are no operative limits or negotiations on conventional nuclear weapons. We have no dialogue to speak of between Russia and NATO, or indeed Russia and any NATO ally, on arms control in the European theatre, in circumstances where technology is developing at breath-taking pace, completely unregulated.

Maybe we should just relax and enjoy it, because most parts of the world have no arms controls provisions; Europe has been the exception because of the 20th century cold war history. I would not be complacent about that. As NATO finds itself physically on Russia's borders, each one with a rising level of anxiety about the other, I think we should be in dialogue with Russia—not necessarily because we expect any early results, but because dialogue can be stabilising and can build better mutual understanding of the other's preoccupations. This obsession in the NATO-Russia Council with avoiding a return to business as usual is NATO cutting off its nose to spite its face. It prevents real dialogue with Russia about business that needs to be done.

Chair: On that sombre warning note, we will bring our proceedings to a close. It remains for me to thank you, Elisabeth, and to thank you, Sir Adam, for sharing your expertise with us today. We have benefited greatly from it and we are much obliged.