



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: North Korea, HC 327

Tuesday 23 January 2018

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 23 January 2018.

[Watch the meeting](#)

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

Questions 106-183

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon. Mark Field MP, Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific, Rt Hon. Earl Howe, Minister of State for Defence, and Kate White, Director of Asia Pacific, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Mark Field, Earl Howe and Kate White.

Q106 **Chair:** Good morning everybody. Welcome to the final session of the Defence Committee's North Korea inquiry. We have strong ministerial and other representation today. Although at least two members of the panel are well known to us, I would like to ask all three to say a few words about themselves and their duties by way of introduction, starting with you, Kate.

Kate White: I am Kate White, the Asia-Pacific director at the Foreign Office.

Mark Field: Mark Field, the Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Earl Howe: Lord Howe, Minister of State at the Ministry of Defence.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Q107 **Mrs Moon:** Perhaps, Earl Howe, it would be best for you to look at this first. Does North Korea pose a nuclear threat to the UK? If it is not already in existence, when do you see them having a nuclear-armed ICBM capability that could reach the UK?

Earl Howe: When we talk about the threat, it is worth unpacking that term a little bit, because there is capability and there is intent. As regards capability, we do not currently judge that North Korea's nuclear programme, or indeed its other military capabilities, are directed at the UK.

Our written evidence sets out that the capability has been significantly developed over the last few years. We have seen a succession of nuclear tests. We have seen a gradual advancement in their ballistic missile technology demonstrated over the last few years. With regards to capability, there is a significant build-up. We judge that they are now certainly capable of reaching targets in the short range, by which I mean Japan, South Korea—obviously—and adjoining territories. Our judgment is that it will probably be six to 18 months before they have an ICBM capability that is capable of reaching the coast of the United States or indeed ourselves.

When I include the UK in that sentence, it is important to come back to what I said at the beginning: we do not judge that their programme is directed at the UK. North Korea has stated on several occasions that it does not consider the UK to be its adversary. As evidence for that, it cites our official state relationship with it, and continues to reiterate that its capability development is in response to the United States' so-called hostile policy against it.

On the one hand, as I said, we are seeing considerable modernisation of the DPRK's armed forces, with most of the focus on missile and nuclear

capabilities. There is a high likelihood that it has the capability to target nearby territories, but we judge that the threat to the UK is not significant.

Q108 Mrs Moon: Are there other potential threats to the UK, perhaps from an upper atmosphere detonation of a nuclear device that might affect our satellites or the satellites that we utilise the capability of? How real is that threat? Many feel that that is a more likely route for North Korea to take.

Earl Howe: Yes. The DPRK possesses a nuclear capability. It has been testing that capability. Should the regime carry out an atmospheric nuclear test, which they have said that they might do, they would be breaking an international consensus that has been in place for many years—it goes back to 1980. It would be a very dangerous thing to do, not least due to the risk of the device detonating at a lower altitude than was intended. Of course, that takes us into the risks that it would pose in terms of miscalculation, which are very serious. But let's imagine that the DPRK carries out a successful atmospheric nuclear test above the Pacific. Last September, the Foreign Minister of the DPRK suggested that might be a possibility. Our assessment is that the risk to the UK from the fallout would be minimal, but that is not to minimise the seriousness of such an action.

Q109 Mrs Moon: Are you including in that response the risks of an EMP attack or space weather attack on our satellites?

Earl Howe: If you will forgive me, there is a limit to what I can say about that particular aspect of the risk. Obviously, assessments are made in that area, but it is probably not appropriate for me to go into it.

Q110 Mrs Moon: Mark, I can see you twitching. Were you wanting to come in or to shut me up?

Mark Field: Madeleine, would I do such a thing? I think it is important to emphasise everything that was said earlier. The Committee will understand that there are limits to what it is possible for either of us to say in open evidence on these matters. We have tried to be as helpful to the Committee as possible in a lot of the written evidence, but it may be difficult to elaborate further in certain areas. You will also understand, in the context of the Foreign Office and diplomatic perspective, that although, of course, we have an operation out there—we are one of the relatively few NATO nations with an embassy in Pyongyang—the truth of the matter is that North Korean society is so closed and secretive that even in the context of having Alastair Morgan and his excellent team on the ground, our understanding can never be entirely perfect on what is happening in the slightly more speculative area of atmospheric or other tests.

Q111 Mrs Moon: You understand that the Committee will always probe.

Mark Field: Of course; you must. As I said, you will recognise that there are possibly limits to that probing in an open session, which makes life slightly more difficult.

Mrs Moon: Thank you.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q112 Mr Francois: Earl Howe, threat is traditionally a mixture of capability and intention, and once you have a capability, your intentions can change, so I want to be clear about the advice you are giving the Committee; I take on board your colleague's strictures about what you can and can't say. Although you think the North Koreans have no intention of directing a nuclear programme against the United Kingdom, am I right that you said you think that within six to 18 months, they will have the capability to reach us?

Earl Howe: That is our judgment, yes. Perhaps I should amplify what I said about the threat to the UK. The UK has substantial interests, quite clearly, in that region. Many UK citizens are based in the region, either permanently or temporarily, so clearly UK interests are engaged in this whole arena, and that has to be taken very seriously. I said that, currently, our judgment is that the DPRK is not explicitly threatening the UK, but we are dealing with a state where all the strategic decisions are in the hands of one man. To be fair on that one man, his actions have been consistent with his words, and vice versa. But to the extent that those strategic decisions are dependent on a single individual, it is impossible to achieve a comfortable level of assuredness on the DPRK's future actions and intentions.

Q113 Mr Francois: Thank you. We have had academics give evidence earlier in this inquiry, and some believe that the North Koreans can already reach the west coast of the United States, which means, in effect, that they can already reach us.

Earl Howe: It depends on what you mean by "reach". Maybe their ballistic missile capability is currently capable of doing that, but as you will be aware, a nuclear strike capability depends on marrying up the ballistic missile with the warhead, and that is, we judge, work in progress.

Q114 Mr Francois: Presumably, given that it is particularly difficult to read the regime's intentions, for the reasons your colleague has given the Committee, if they had a nuclear ability to reach us within two years, from an MOD perspective—and probably from a Foreign Office perspective, too—that places an additional premium on maintaining our own deterrent, doesn't it?

Earl Howe: Certainly it does. Whenever we debate the issue of the UK deterrent, the North Korean weapons programme is cited as a prime example of why we can never be complacent as regards the threat to the UK from sources which, maybe today, we cannot predict.

Mr Francois: Thank you very much.

Q115 Chair: Can I ask for the expert view on whether, given the progress North Korea have made so far, it is just a matter of time before they have nuclear warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles and the ability to put the two together and join that small group of nuclear powers with a versatile and far-reaching nuclear capability?

Mark Field: Personally, I would not be as pessimistic as to say that. The DPRK's illegal pursuit of nuclear weapons inevitably poses a serious and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

growing threat to international peace and security. There is little doubt, as Earl Howe has said, that the timeline to which he referred, of six to 18 months, has drastically reduced over the course of the past year or so. But I would want to make clear to the Committee that we are pursuing a policy of maximum pressure. We have supported the UN sanctions and pursued additional autonomous measures through the EU, as well as a huge amount pressure through the UN, through a succession of sanctions. The evidence is that those sanctions and that pressure, which are designed to bring the DPRK to the negotiating table and thereby achieve a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation, are having some effect.

Now, I accept the academic view—I obviously know your background, Mr Chairman—of, “Surely we should be dusting down the old rulebook on containment and deterrence.” I am sure that, in academic circles, some of that work is going on, and I suspect that is linking in with those in authority. But I would not wish for one moment for you to take the view that there is a somehow defeatist view that this is now an inevitability. The UN and the international community are continuing to put a huge amount of pressure on DPRK through all the means that we can.

What has been interesting—you will be well aware of this—is that nine or 12 months ago, one might have speculated that those UN sanctions would have been vetoed by the Chinese and perhaps by the Russians. That has not happened. There has been a significant turning of the screw in terms of that pressure because I think it is widely felt that it is not just in the interests of the US or NATO that we do not have a nuclear state in the DPRK. One might argue that it is even more in the interests of China and Russia not to have such a potentially unpredictable state in their backyard.

Q116 Chair: Okay. I want to bring Kate into this, because you are the full-time person focusing on this part of the world. Is there a scrap of evidence that North Korea have even the slightest hesitation about pursuing this programme, given the determination they have shown so far?

Kate White: As the Minister says, the purpose of the international pressure and the approach we are taking in concert with a very unified set of international players is to try to change the calculation of the North Korean regime. At the moment, it is very clear that it is the policy of the North Korean authorities to try to pursue both this nuclear programme, which is illegal, and the missile programme associated with that, and also to try to offer the North Korean people rapid economic growth. We are working very hard to show that it is not in North Korea’s interests to continue down this path and that, in fact, if it does seek that better, brighter future for its people, very much the best approach will be to cease and desist and come back meaningfully into discussions to end this illegal nuclear and missile programme.

Your question was, “Is there a scrap of evidence?” It is very clear from the ongoing public statements that North Korea will continue to talk about—indeed, in his new year speech, Kim Jung-un talked about—the mass

production of nuclear weapons. Our approach and our determination is to persuade and to put the pressure on, which will force a change of course.

Q117 **Chair:** This is a difficult one. Why do you think that North Korea wishes to have a nuclear arsenal?

Kate White: The repeated statement that it makes is that it needs to do that as the only defence against the so-called hostile policy of the US. Our counter-argument is that the opposite is the case and that its security and prosperity will be much better preserved and promoted by changing its course.

Q118 **Johnny Mercer:** Taking the UK's military response out of this and the direct link between the UK and North Korea, can I ask Mark, would the UK support a limited strike by the United States on North Korea?

Mark Field: You will appreciate that is very much in the realms of speculation and is a hypothetical matter. Inevitably, if there were to be any direct action in this regard, it would have to be within international law. Our support for such action would only be if it had been sanctioned in advance.

Q119 **Johnny Mercer:** But you can see a position materialise where the United Kingdom supports a limited—

Mark Field: I can see all sorts of positions materialising, but that is to say that this is in the realms of entirely hypothetical matters.

Q120 **Johnny Mercer:** Of course, we ask—

Mark Field: It is an entirely hypothetical matter. It would be improper, I think, for me to be speculating in such a hypothetical way about strikes. The process that we are putting into play is to try and deal with this through the diplomatic process. We have had five UN Security Council resolutions during the past year that have been passed unanimously to try to impose sanctions. That pressure will continue. I think it is better that we focus on what we are doing, rather than going four or five steps ahead with some speculation.

I may be pre-empting slightly what you might be asking, but it is worth looking rather less at President Trump's Twitter feed and a little bit more at what he is doing on the ground and what ambassadors are doing, both in New York and Washington. You will see that there has been a consistent campaign of ever more pressure with, as I say, five Security Council resolutions adding further pressure.

Q121 **Johnny Mercer:** Do you think the UK would be told in advance of something? If the US was to conduct some sort of strike, would you expect the UK to be told in advance?

Mark Field: Listen, I am not going to speculate. All I would say is this: obviously, we have significant interests in Pyongyang, in a way that the US does not. The US does not have an embassy. In the context of international diplomacy, and particularly as a member of the Five Eyes relationship that we have, clearly there is significant benefit to the US

from having UK eyes on the ground to be able to provide information on what is going on.

Following the very speculative path that you put into play, I would very much think that we would be made aware if there was anything that would endanger British interests on the ground in North Korea.

Q122 Johnny Mercer: Let's move away from speculation. What tangible things are the UK doing to make sure that the increasingly aggressive rhetoric towards North Korea is not going to turn into a conflict?

Mark Field: As I say, step back from analysis—I know that many in the media spend a perhaps disproportionate amount of time looking at President Trump's tweets—and look at the action on the ground; look at what we have done. Security Council resolution 2397 was passed less than a month ago. Resolutions 2375, 2371, 2356 and 2345 have all been passed during President Trump's tenure. That suggests that, amid concerns, both currently and going back some years, that there was a somewhat passive policy towards North Korea, we have an Administration and international community that are trying to stand up to potential nuclearisation of North Korea.

Q123 Johnny Mercer: I guess this is what the British taxpayer would want to know. This chap doesn't seem particularly perturbed by UN Security Council resolutions. What reassurance could you give to the British people that we have a resilient backbone and that we are prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Americans, if required?

Mark Field: The sanctions are beginning to bite. I have twice in the past month been in New York at UN Security Council meetings in relation to the whole issue of proliferation of nuclear weapons. Both Japan, which had the presidency in December, and Kazakhstan, which currently has the presidency, put it at the forefront of their thinking. There is a lot of international pressure. There is an increasing amount of independent evidence on the ground from our own embassy in North Korea that the sanctions are beginning to bite to an extent in everyday life in North Korea.

There is a difficulty, Johnny, in relation to diplomacy, and we are all guilty of this—I was as guilty as anyone until eight months ago, when I took up my office. It is very easy to be sceptical about what is happening, and then you actually recognise that a huge amount of work goes on. A lot of patience is needed, particularly on issues such as this or Burma, which is also in my patch. Often you are taking three steps forward and two back. It is easy, in the modern media world, particularly the social media world, to be very dismissive and ask why we are not having more action. There is a lot of activity that is going on quietly behind the scenes in the diplomatic world that I think is beginning to bear fruit.

This is a very grave and dangerous situation. Don't get me wrong: I don't think there is any cause for complacency in that regard, but I think you and the British public should be reassured that the international community is speaking as one on this issue and will continue to do so.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q124 Johnny Mercer: Excellent. On that theme, over the last couple of weeks we have seen a slight resumption of talks between the North and the South. They are getting together for something in the winter Olympics. They are going to share a women's dance team, which is going to be interesting. What do you make of that? Why is there this sudden shift? Is it because North Korea wants to push a divide between the United States and South Korea, which is clearly a very resilient relationship? Or do you think he genuinely intends to change his ways?

Mark Field: It is important to get this into perspective. It would be wrong to suggest there has been a massive change; President Moon of South Korea has made that fairly clear in the discussions he has had in recent weeks.

Inevitably, the eyes of the sporting world will be on Pyeongchang with the winter Olympics and Paralympics that are coming up. Certainly, from the South Koreans' perspective, there was a concern some months ago. I have visited South Korea twice in my time as a Minister, and there was a concern that some major incident could derail the entirety of this high-profile event. It is in everyone's interests that, at least as far as this time is concerned, there is an element of détente. I would not read too much into this and suggest that there has been a sea change of views between North and South Korea, but I think it is to be welcomed.

Q125 Johnny Mercer: Has it happened before? Have they ever combined a sports team before?

Mark Field: I believe it has in the past, yes.

Johnny Mercer: Has it?

Q126 Chair: Can I remind people of what was called ping-pong diplomacy? That was in the days when Mao Zedong's China was being approached for the first time via the exchange of table tennis teams.

Mark Field: Very good. Your memory, or perhaps experience, is longer-standing than mine.

Chair: My age.

Mr Francois: Football's coming home!

Q127 Leo Docherty: Just as a follow-up with regards to you mentioning our relationship with the US, what can we offer in support of our ally? What is the military capability that we can offer the US in your view, Mark?

Mark Field: I am not wishing to pass the buck, but that is more a Defence than a Foreign Office question.

Q128 Leo Docherty: That is fine. Following CGS's comments yesterday about his concerns about our deployable capability, do you have concerns that we might not be able to offer anything significant enough to support our American allies?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Earl Howe: It really would depend on the circumstances at the time and where our resources were deployed around the world, if we were to take this hypothetical situation. If we were to become militarily engaged in a conflict in the region, the extent and nature of our involvement would depend on a whole host of things, as Mark has said. In the first instance, the decision to become engaged would depend on the legality of it and the prevailing circumstances. We would have to take decisions about the relative priority and importance of committing this or that asset to the region, so it is actually quite difficult for me to answer you.

Q129 **Leo Docherty:** Sure. Setting that hypothetical to one side then, in terms of the here and the now and the deterrent effect that we and our allies are trying to have, what assets have we got in that region in support of the US?

Earl Howe: We do not have that many, but HMS Sutherland is on a course at the moment to visit the region, and we would like to believe that that is a sign of our commitment to our allies there—that we stand beside them and that we regard them as our important partners in that part of the world. HMS Argyll will be going out to the region as well later in the year. We have an important drumbeat of visits to the area by Government Ministers and our military—the vice-chief of the defence staff is in South Korea at the moment, for example. It is important that we demonstrate to our partners in the region that we are standing beside them, but it is difficult for me to sit here today and commit to certain assets being deployed.

Q130 **Leo Docherty:** Sure. Are you confident that if we needed to escalate that deterrence in the short term—I am not talking about a nuclear confrontation; I am just talking about the deterrent effect—we have the capacity to do that?

Earl Howe: We have, as you know, sent out some of our Typhoon aircraft to exercise with the South Koreans. That could be done again. We are encouraging South Korea to look to the UK to exercise with us here. We regularly take part in the annual exercises that they undertake in the peninsula. There are two annual exercises we regularly take part in. Admittedly, our participation is small, but we are there, along with representatives from other sending states. At present, as of today, it is clearly difficult for me to give you facts and figures as to what we could send, because we are committed in a number of parts of the world, but given adequate notice, yes, I am sure we could deploy forces.

Q131 **Mrs Moon:** As a quick follow-up to Leo's questions, do we actually have any MOU or treaty obligations to provide South Korea or other nations in the region with military support?

Earl Howe: There are no obligations arising from the 1953 armistice, for example. We are not obligated in law to defend ROK or to join the United States in defending South Korea. So, in that sense, we have no legal obligations, but we clearly do have interests, as I said earlier.

Q132 **Chair:** For the avoidance of doubt, with all this talk about the UK possibly



HOUSE OF COMMONS

being involved in some conflict in that region in the future, we are purely talking about the possibility of coming to the aid of an ally such as the United States or the Republic of Korea if they were attacked. We are not talking about participating in the initiation of any attack.

Earl Howe: Let us imagine that there is an attack against the United States. Any attack of that kind, whether it was directed against Hawaii, Guam or the American bases on the mainland of Japan, would be likely to be part of a major conflict. In such a case, our assessment is that article 4 or article 5 of the NATO treaty would be engaged and that any decision for the alliance to become involved would depend on the view taken in the North Atlantic Council as regards the response.

Mark Field: It is 65 years since the end of the Korean War, and there are no extant treaties that we are subject to. It is also worth remembering that it was the first and probably the only armed conflict where it was on a UN mandate that we entered—Korea in 1950—so I agree with what has been said.

It is also worth highlighting the interests that we have in the region. Approximately 100,000 UK nationals travel to South Korea each year. We estimate that there are about 8,000 UK nationals living there. Obviously it is not a country where British nationals are required to register their interests when they are there, but there are significant interests even in South Korea, although they are on a rather bigger scale in the neighbouring area of Japan.

Q133 **Chair:** But I come back to my point: we are not talking about participation in the initiation of an attack. We are talking about the possible participation in the response to an attack initiated by North Korea. I want to get that point fairly well established if that is our position. Is it?

Mark Field: I think our position is clear, Mr Chairman, that if there were to be military activity in the region, clearly it would be subject to the UN or NATO, as Lord Howe has said. It is already quite speculative, but we would see whether there had been a breach of any sanctions within NATO—

Q134 **Chair:** Yes, but Japan and South Korea are not members of NATO.

Mark Field: But the US is, and there would obviously be urgent ongoing diplomatic activity, which would recognise that within the UN, and we would be a UN player.

Q135 **Chair:** I will have one more go. I still have not heard the words, “We are not talking about joining in the initiation of an attack, only possibly participating in the response to an attack initiated by North Korea.”

Mark Field: This is highly speculative, but I can foresee no circumstances at the present time where we would be joining in the initiation of any attack.

Chair: Martin has been waiting very patiently. I must bring him in.



Q136 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Thank you, Chair. Kate and maybe Mark—Frederick, you may also want to come in from the MOD perspective—let's go back to diplomacy, before we get on to any conflict. In terms of our partnerships with key players in the region—let us take China, Japan and South Korea, of course—what type of work are we doing with those three key players to resolve the crisis in the peninsula?

Kate White: We are working very closely with all those partners—and more—bilaterally and multilaterally. There has certainly been an uptick in our diplomatic efforts. We have teams in all our embassies that engage with those host Governments. With China, as a member of the UN Security Council and a permanent member, our teams in New York will be constantly and closely talking to them, and with all the other members of the Security Council. Over the last year, Japan has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council as well.

The Minister referred to a number of high-profile meetings convened at the UN Security Council. There was a ministerial meeting in April last year that the Foreign Secretary attended, which was chaired by Secretary Tillerson when the US held the chair of the Security Council for that month. In December, the meeting that the Minister just referred to was called by the Japanese, to focus on these issues, when they similarly were leading within the UN Security Council. Those discussions cover a wide range of issues. We are talking about sanctions. We are talking—in the case at the UN—about developing when there are discussions about new UN Security Council resolutions. We are working closely, thinking through and working with partners to work out whether we have the right evidence that will meet the threshold and that will be able to go into those resolutions. We are looking closely to make sure they will have the right kind of impact. As I said, the pressure strategy is designed to target sources of revenue which the North Korean regime are using to fund these illegal programmes. There are also important humanitarian exemptions in those resolutions, making sure that the package of measures is really fit for purpose.

In follow-up diplomacy, there is a huge amount of work on co-operating to ensure that we are all implementing those sanctions. This has been a very united effort, as both Ministers have mentioned. A number of people might have been surprised a couple of years ago that we have had the degree of concerted international united effort that we have. Then, our diplomacy extends to working with individual countries. Following on from the evidence provided, there is a sanctions experts committee in New York, which is looking at implementation of sanctions. Often, our diplomats around the world will be discussing with host Governments if we have any information arising about possible loopholes or grey areas. Again, we all have that collective interest in ensuring those sanctions are implemented.

Mark Field: It is worth giving some practical examples here of the tightening of the screw in sanctions. In many overseas embassies that the North Koreans have, they are utilising this as a way of trying to get hold of hard currency. It probably has been in the public domain, so I can tell you that in Pakistan, for example, an illicit alcohol sale process—obviously, this



HOUSE OF COMMONS

is a Muslim country—was allegedly bringing in more than \$1 million¹ a year in hard currency, and it has been broken down. You can imagine that there have been North Korean operatives involved in the smuggling of high-tax luxury products across the world. That is one of the ways they have tried to bypass sanctions and bring in money. Where they are being identified—and they are—across the world, they are being clamped down on.

Q137 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Earl Howe, can you speak from an MoD perspective about how the diplomatic effort is helping the Ministry in any shape or form and how it is impacting decision making?

Earl Howe: We work very closely with the FCO in all that it is doing. There is a set of arrangements across Whitehall that determines policy for the north-east Asia region. We can provide intelligence, our assessments, and specialist subject matter and security policy expertise. We have a network of defence attachés in the region. We have embedded military officers, as well as liaison officers. All that contributes to the wider Government understanding of the situations and provides channels for communication and, indeed, influence.

Q138 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Can I just pick up on the final part of that question? The region is very complex. I have talked about the relationship of Japan and South Korea, which can be fraught. The relationship between Japan and China can be fraught for clear historical reasons. Does that hold us back in terms of resolution? Again, Japan and South Korea perceive a threat from North Korea, yet they have a complex relationship. China's economic situation would clearly be undermined by any situation in the peninsula in their relationship with the North. It is far more complex than we sometimes give credence.

Mark Field: I think that is right. It is one of the ways that I hope the UN and our role as a P5 nation can make a difference in elements of that diplomacy. You touched on the Chinese situation. I think it is fair to say that Kim Jong-un is far less close to the Chinese than either his father or grandfather were. While I believe there is more that can be done from the Chinese angle, it is also worth recognising that in a diplomatic sense they have a very fraught relationship. Clearly, there are economic equities that China has, and it also stands to be the biggest loser from economic sanctions, and there has been fairly significant progress on that front.

However, if you are asking me—not just personally but as a Foreign Office Minister—I think the notion that somehow this whole problem could be solved if only China pulled its finger out, which is something you hear from some people, is an entirely simplistic analysis of the situation.

Q139 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Why are sanctions and the perceived threat of US military action not stopping North Korea from developing nuclear weapons?

¹ Correction from witness: the illicit alcohol sale process was allegedly bringing in more than \$150,000 in hard currency”.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Field: Again, let me be open about it, and I will almost go back to a question that the Chairman put—

Q140 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Do you think that North Korea would actually give up its programme, given how advanced it is now?

Mark Field: One always has to work towards the idea, from our perspective, of not giving up, although, as you say, the programme is more advanced than it was.

Going back to something the Chairman said earlier—I think it partly answers your question, Martin—I think that one of the aspects behind the ramping up of pressure has been a sense that Kim Jong-un wants to come out of the shadow of his father and particularly his grandfather, and part of that is to assert himself as, “I’m the person who has been able to put us on to the nuclear top table,” which is obviously where he would hope to be if he is able to get fully fledged nuclear weapons.

The other thing—going back to the broader issue of deterrence theory and to be candid—is that the one lesson that we have all learned from the wars undertaken in the past 15 years is that if you have nuclear weapons, you are going to be exempt from being threatened. The message is loud and clear—this is the ultimate insurance policy for any country going forward.

I fear that mistakes were made, particularly in relation to Gaddafi and Libya, and that was a man who was seen as a pariah for 30 years. After 9/11, he was brought into the international community—“Give up your weapons of mass destruction and you will become part of the committee of nations. You will be brought on board.” Within eight years he had been hunted down and killed. That is a pretty strong message for any leader. Do you trust the international community to hold true to their promises? And, secondly, let me get my ultimate insurance policy, and that is to have nuclear weapons. I am afraid that is a lesson from mistaken Government policy—international community policy.

In all of these complex international problems—I am very aware of it in the context that is close to my own heart, which is what is happening in Burma at the moment—we always have to recognise that the way the international community acts today, or in the weeks, months and years to come, in relation to sanctions for those who have committed some terrible crimes, including in Burma, will have implications for future generations. I think the way in which the international community brought Gaddafi on board—we had a person who was going to join the battle against the axis of evil, giving up his nuclear capability, and within eight years there was regime change in Libya. There was a message there and—

Q141 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Some academics are saying that we just need to accept the reality that North Korea will have nuclear weapons—

Mark Field: No, I don’t work to that basis. As I say, I am sure there is academic thinking going on—rightly—for that particular eventuality. I guess what I am saying is that there is a sense that, whatever the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

absurdities of Kim Jong-un's regime and the absurdities of the North Korean regime, they are rational actors in that regard. There is a rationality behind the strategy that they are adopting.

Q142 Chair: This is getting very much to the heart of the issue. Professor Malcolm Chalmers told us in earlier evidence that the North Koreans explicitly draw parallels with the fate of Colonel Gaddafi, as you have just said, Minister, and even with Saddam Hussein, who gave up power—his programme of nuclear weaponry, however rudimentary it may have been.

To what extent do all three of you consider that a nuclear-armed North Korea would be deterrable just as—I know these parallels can be contested—a nuclear-armed communist China under Mao Tse Tung, who many would say was cut from similar cloth to the Kim dynasty, has proved to be a relatively rational actor where the nuclear stalemate is concerned? I would be very interested to hear all three views on that. Perhaps I will ask Kate first so that she does not feel constrained by what Ministers might have said before she answers.

Earl Howe: I think you had better ask her first so that I will be constrained in what I say.

Kate White: I think the situations are very different. The time and place are different. North Korea stands as the only country to have withdrawn from the non-proliferation treaty. When it signed the treaty, it forswore the pursuit of nuclear weapons. It has made a commitment in that regard not to develop or manufacture nuclear weapons on different occasions. But it has continued to pursue a nuclear weapons programme in violation of successive UN Security Council resolutions.

Q143 Chair: I do not want to stop you in mid-flow, but I am not trying to put forward the conjecture that North Korea is acting in a rightful or ethical or legal way. The question I am asking you is: to what extent, however they have been acting, are they deterrable and to what extent are they rational? We have already alluded to the fact that some of us are old enough to remember even the events of 1964, when there was great perturbation that a dictator with as bloody, irrational and ruthless a record as Mao Tse Tung would not be able to be contained and deterred in the way that the Soviet Union was being contained and deterred, but in fact history proved otherwise.

Kate White: Because of our approach to the rules-based international system and the international structures that it provides, we cannot and do not accept the prospect of a nuclear North Korea. The successive UN Security Council resolutions have all said that we are looking for irreversible and verifiable denuclearisation. That is why we have worked and continue to work on this pressure campaign to change that calculus, which I accept is the current way that the North Koreans present their logic. We are putting pressure in order to encourage a change of course.

Q144 Chair: But we must have a fall-back plan. I am not in any way asking you to abandon your policy; I am just saying, "Supposing your policy sadly



HOUSE OF COMMONS

fails to do the trick and North Korea gets nuclear weapons.” Indeed, there have been some quite worrying statements from our US allies about what they would do to prevent that from happening. The simple question I am asking, albeit a hypothetical one, is: if North Korea does become a nuclear power, do we believe that they are deterable and containable, as other hostile nuclear powers have been in the past?

Mark Field: Listen, we all know in life that there are many things that are unthinkable until such time as they happen and then you have to react to it. You have rightly said that a little over 50 years ago it was felt that it would be a calamity of great consequence if China were to have nuclear weapons.

Our calculation at the moment would be that it would be incredibly serious in a very difficult world to have a nuclear North Korea. As a consequence, we are redoubling our efforts and working as hard as we can to impose as much pressure so that this point does not come into play. We have a very narrow, very focused approach on working in this area, which does not leave open huge amounts of speculation or talk about how our containment or deterrence work, or trying to work through whether this person would be as big a threat and how a deterrence strategy would work.

I think it would be incredibly bad news for the world. Some 20 or 30 years ago there was a thought that by now we might have dozens of nuclear states. One of the great successes of the international community has been to have that sense of containment to avoid that outcome. That is the policy, understandably, that the international community wishes to pursue.

Q145 **Chair:** And that is absolutely the diplomatic initiative but, Freddie, from the purely military perspective—

Earl Howe: From a military perspective, as I said earlier, we judge that North Korea already has a nuclear capability of a kind. But Kim Jong-un knows that any attack on South Korea or anywhere else, or use of nuclear weapons in any context, would be met with an overwhelming response. I am sure that in that situation—

Q146 **Chair:** Do you think that would deter him?

Earl Howe: The world would be absolutely united; I am confident in that. The United States, South Korea and others have formidable military forces in the region. To come back to your original question, are they deterable? I think that any rational person would be deterred in the knowledge that use of a nuclear device would be catastrophic for them. Indeed, that is part of our argument in trying to persuade the North that its mission is fruitless ultimately.

Chair: Thank you.

Q147 **Gavin Robinson:** I think we have canvassed comprehensively the action being taken both militarily and diplomatically, but let us probe a little further how successful unanimous sanctions have been. Mark, there has



HOUSE OF COMMONS

been quite a lot of public detailing of the fuel sanctions—how they have been avoided, how there have been fuel supplies to North Korea by Chinese-registered vessels and so on. What action can you take when you see unanimity at UN level but fear that those sanctions are not being implemented fully on the ground?

Mark Field: I think they have been inflicted to a pretty great extent. You are alluding to the idea that China and Russia, particularly as DPRK's nearest neighbours, have a key role and a key interest to ensure that sanctions implementation is not just undertaken but seen to succeed. On the ground, there is now quite a lot of evidence that the sanctions are beginning to bite in everyday life in North Korea, making life a little bit more unbearable for its citizens. That is clearly something that we are aiming to do.

There are other sanctions, for example to do with obtaining hard currency, which are also biting. I am not pessimistic that the sanctions regime is not doing anything other than working. The fact that there has been unanimity suggests that it is working its way through. Inevitably, these things take a certain amount of time, but particularly when you are dealing with such a closed society as North Korea, sanctions can quickly begin to bite.

Q148 **Gavin Robinson:** Although you accept the premise—you offered it yourself—that the historical parallels of Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein, for example, will feature prominently in the mind of the Kim regime in giving up their pursuit of nuclear arms. Are we in a sort of three-stage process? First you get a proposition and you dismiss it—you believe it will never happen; they will never get nuclear weapons. Then you fear it might happen, and you resolutely stand to ensure that at all costs it will not. Then we get to the acquiescence, where you accept that North Korea will eventually obtain nuclear arms but will have them only for defence purposes, and on that basis work to make sure that it works within the international community.

Mark Field: Again, huge amounts of speculation are going into play here. One of the great successes of the UN in the past 30 years has been that there has not been a massive amount of proliferation. One of the bigger concerns even within the nuclear states that exist today—and it would be an absolutely acute concern in relation to North Korea—is that some non-state groups could try to acquire some sort of arsenal of nuclear, and indeed other, weapons of mass destruction. That is one of the biggest concerns and one of the reasons, with the unpredictable nature of the regime in North Korea—therefore I am not going to speculate about what sort of deterrence they would be—we want to stop it. That is because there are now a lot of non-state players who, understandably, in trying to get hold of atmospheric weapons or others will think, "What is the weakest link here?" You are not going to be able to buy those weapons from the UK or from France; you will go to the weakest link in the international community. If there were to be a nuclear North Korea, clearly that would be such a link.

Q149 **Gavin Robinson:** I guess time will tell on a lot of this as it unfolds. I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

think you have fairly outlined the rationale for why the North Koreans would not engage in a pre-emptive strike against South Korea. We can accept that the ramifications for them would be incredibly severe. In thinking about how we prepare ourselves for action that we may take, can you provide any analysis for the Committee as to what the Secretary of State meant when he said that we need to step up our game?

Earl Howe: I think he was thinking along a number of tracks when he said that, not least of which is the cyber-threat. Our written evidence sets out where we are in dealing with that threat, but of course while we judge that Kim's offensive cyber-capability is mainly directed towards South Korea, the consequences of irresponsible use of viruses and cyber-weaponry are unpredictable by their very nature, as we saw with the WannaCry virus. Therefore the programme that we have in the UK of considerably augmenting our cyber-capability is one that should be stepped up and is being stepped up. As you know, there is a £1.9 billion programme across Government to improve our cyber-capability. I think that is very important, given that it is clear that the threshold for Kim of using cyber is quite low.

Q150 **Gavin Robinson:** Is that what the focus should be when we consider this "step up" remark from the Secretary of State?

Earl Howe: The threat to UK interests, albeit originally unintended, is there. That is why it is important that we devote some of our resources to ensuring that we are in the top rank internationally in defensive cyber and developing our offensive capability.

Q151 **Gavin Robinson:** Both Ministers have indicated the closed nature of the regime and society. Focusing on this Korean issue, but also with reference to others, are we in a constrained place, where we do not have sufficient information, whether in the MoD or FCO, where we do not have the information that we would normally have or that we would like, and therefore are not in as good a place as we ought to be when strategising?

Mark Field: You have to deal with the information you have.

Q152 **Gavin Robinson:** So how hampered are you?

Mark Field: If I knew that—we do not know what information we do not know, do we? The truth in honesty, Gavin, is that obviously it is an incredibly closed society, but we have an operation. We have an embassy out in Pyongyang. I think we are pretty confident we know a fair bit, but it would be wrong for us to be definitive, because it is a very closed society. For example, touching on something Earl Howe just said, more often than not, we would not necessarily attribute malicious cyber-activity where we believe it would not be in the UK interest to do so. We did in relation to the WannaCry ransomware, which was assessed by the National Cyber Security Centre as being the work of North Korea—a North Korean actor called the Lazarus group, which one assumes, given the nature of North Korean society, has close links with the state. We did that because it was a very significant cyber-attack affecting the UK. Not only was it reckless



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and indiscriminate, but the idea was to try and circumvent sanctions—that is what it was designed to do.

The nature of that threat is only going to get stronger as time goes by. I was speaking about this with the Home Secretary only this morning, informally, but the issue is that the UK feels that it is something we are investing in. It is important, as Earl Howe rightly said, being candid, not just in defence, but in offensive territory. Also, given the importance of our own financial services and other industries, which have been subject to cyber-attacks, there needs to be a sense of confidence from those who are here and are investing and will invest in the UK that we have as robust a mechanism of defence to look after us as we can. North Korea is one of a number of state actors. It is well aware that it was felt, in the context of the WannaCry ransomware, that we should call it out.

Q153 Gavin Robinson: Given the unanimity at the Security Council level of the UN, we have had evidence thus far that suggested that many of the North Korean cyber-attacks emanated from China, and that there is co-location between their secret services. It was Nigel Inkster who gave us information to that effect. Is that likely to feature as part of a future sanction pursuit of our Government and others?

Mark Field: Inevitably, we are well aware—it is in the public domain—that there are certain countries not far from North Korea that have been state actors in relation to cyber. Whether there has actually been concerted co-operation between the two is more open to speculation. Rest assured, we will have those discussions—at times publicly but, more often than not, privately—to make clear our displeasure.

Q154 Gavin Robinson: I shall not push that basis any more, but Lord Howe or Kate, is there anything further on how hampered you may be at the MOD level or at an official level by not knowing as much as you ought to, given the nature of the regime? I respect that answer, but it is FCO specific.

Kate White: I can add a little bit. We have an embassy there, as the Minister mentioned. It is a small embassy, but we have an excellent ambassador and his team. He speaks Korean, Chinese and Japanese, so he can talk to North Korean contacts and deal with others. That is important. It allows us to get the best understanding that we can from having that small embassy presence on the ground. It also allows us to pass messages. Equally, the North Koreans having an embassy here is a channel of communication where we raise concerns frankly where we have them. The Minister has been involved in summoning the North Korean ambassador on a number of occasions when we have had those concerns. Those are the ways in which we can connect and get the best understanding that we can. Of course, there will be limits because of the sort of society it is.

Earl Howe: I do not think I can add anything to that; it is entirely right.

Chair: We will be coming back to cyber with Mark in a few moments, but there are two specific points that colleagues want to raise.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q155 **Mrs Moon:** Mark, I want to clarify something that you said earlier, which I may have misunderstood. Just so I have it straight in my head, we were talking about a hypothetical attack, and you appeared—to me, I may have misunderstood—to suggest that if there was an attack on Hawaii or on US bases in Japan—

Mark Field: I think it was Freddie who made those references.

Mrs Moon: Okay, even more reason why I may have misunderstood. You said that that would be seen as an article 5 attack. I can see that if it was Hawaii, but I cannot see that if it was Japan. Can you clarify?

Earl Howe: I think we should talk about Guam, rather than Japan, to make life simpler. Guam is not a US state but it is US territory. Mark will be able to correct me as to the distinction. Our assessment is that article 4 or article 5 could be engaged in those circumstances.

Chair: We are talking about US territory now.

Earl Howe: The article 4 requirement is for consultation between the allies, so that is probably the very minimum.

Q156 **Mrs Moon:** My understanding was that article 5 says “on North America”; it does not say “on North America’s territory”. I raise that in relation to clarity.

Chair: May I suggest that you write to us afterwards with a definitive explanation of what the legal obligations are in terms of the NATO treaty and other rationales for coming to the aid of someone who is attacked by North Korea?

Mrs Moon: That would be extremely helpful.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Could we take that answer further in terms of that written response? If a first strike was to come from somewhere else other than North Korea and it was the other way round, in that the United States believed that there was a perceived threat and instigated a first strike, where would that place the United Kingdom?

Chair: I think we explored that fairly fully in the earlier discussion about there being no basis for joining in the initiation of an attack. By all means, if you wish to have a few paragraphs on that subject—

Mark Field: I will take the easy way out and say I refer you to our previous answers on these matters.

Chair: Certainly, can we look at what the legal obligations are under the respective treaties and/or the United Nations? I think we had better have a definitive, written, considered response. Thank you.

Q157 **John Spellar:** You alluded earlier not to proliferation of nuclear technology to North Korea but to proliferation from North Korea. What assessment do you have of whether North Korea is selling its nuclear and ballistic missile technology elsewhere?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mark Field: To be honest, I do not have a firm assessment on that at this stage. Clearly, as it has ever more expertise—it is moving rapidly up the curve of expertise in this area—it would be a cause of great concern. There could be non-state actors who would be willing recipients of that expertise, potentially for hard cash, which is clearly what North Korea would want. It is the fundamental reason why we are potentially in a rather different place than we might have been in the past with other countries and nations becoming nuclear states. We are in a far more dangerous world because of the risk of non-state actors as well as the unknown unpredictability of the North Korean regime.

Earl Howe: We touch on this, John, in the written evidence. We judge there is a willingness in North Korea to be a proliferator of technologies because that is a revenue earner for them. As Mark said, although we do not have any hard facts to give you, we do know that there are technologies that can and do filter into areas of instability around the world, which appear to emanate from North Korea.

Q158 **John Spellar:** Does that include ballistic missile technology?

Earl Howe: I am not aware of particular technologies.

Q159 **Chair:** Kate, can you throw any light on this?

Kate White: I would refer you to the written evidence where we have a few paragraphs about that issue.

Q160 **Mr Francois:** Freddie, when we were talking earlier about North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, you explained that, while they have a nuclear capability, they are developing an intercontinental capability. You then gave a number of reasons why you think they don't necessarily regard us as hostile towards them. Therefore, you think it unlikely that we would have a mixture of both capability and intention. So why did they attack our NHS with WannaCry?

Earl Howe: One has to assess whether that was the intended target. It is in the nature of viruses like that that you cannot predict where they will hit. Indeed, it was not just our NHS institutions; I understand many organisations around the world were affected. My understanding is that the target for that was South Korea but, in the nature of those activities, these viruses can spread almost anywhere. That was the reason for my saying it was important for us to augment our capability in the cyber domain, if only to ward off threats of that kind.

Q161 **Mr Francois:** So you think that, in effect, we were attacked by accident.

Earl Howe: It is very difficult to make an assessment. I think Kim probably did not care very much where, who or what was affected by the actions of the Lazarus group, if indeed it is correct to attribute, at one remove, the actions of the Lazarus group to the regime. Let us make that assumption. The balance of probabilities is that the UK was not necessarily a target that was intended in the first instance.

Q162 **Mr Francois:** Nevertheless, we were attacked by North Korea.

Earl Howe: Yes, that is true.

Q163 **Mr Francois:** What did we do about it?

Earl Howe: The response in the NHS was very rapid, and the systems were made good in a very short space of time. It did cause disruption, as we are all aware, and inconvenience to patients, but there are systems in place in the NHS and our wider infrastructure to deal with attacks of that kind. We do have the capability of dealing with a number of threats, but it is important that we do not take our foot off the pedal in developing the systems that we need. It is impossible to defend every computer system in the UK against every virus attack, but we do have adequate resources to protect and defend against a number of cyber-threats. We are working through the NCSC, the national hub, to do that, so you should take my remarks in context: this is a cross-Government effort led by the NCSC.

Q164 **Mr Francois:** Are we working on cyber-defences in collaboration with countries such as South Korea and Japan?

Earl Howe: Yes, we share information with both of them. It is perhaps important that we preserve to ourselves some of our more sophisticated capabilities, but there is a lot of joint working.

Q165 **Mr Francois:** Right. Are we capable of conducting offensive cyber-operations against North Korea if we had to?

Earl Howe: I think it is public knowledge that we have an offensive cyber-capability. The previous Secretary of State for Defence made that clear in the context of the Middle East and Daesh. So you can take it that our offensive cyber-capability is there and is being developed.

Q166 **Mr Francois:** Did we ever consider retaliating?

Mark Field: You will appreciate that, as Freddie said, we have a huge amount of resilience. Not least, there is the amount that we are spending on cyber, and the reality is that not all of that is being spent on defence. Equally, it is an issue of intelligence and security as to whether we have, will or will continue to retaliate against any one player at this stage. If we are aware of problems or concerns in this area, our electorate will expect us to do all that we can to keep our systems as robust and resilient as possible, I am sure.

Earl Howe: The electorate should be reassured by the fact that we do now have a National Cyber Security Centre. We have committed substantial funds to that, and while it is the lead organisation taking this work forward, the MOD does have the ability to augment its response through our very highly trained staff.

Q167 **Mr Francois:** Have you been able to recruit enough skilled cyber-personnel?

Earl Howe: So far, I think—

Mark Field: I was on the Intelligence and Security Committee at the time. There were concerns in GCHQ, although actually they were not about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

recruitment, but about retention. Clearly, the skills at the cutting-edge globally—attractive skills that our brightest and best are getting in GCHQ and the security services—are in great demand. That is well known. I would also say that we have some fantastic people working in the NCSC who know they could earn multiples of what they are on if they weren't acting for the national interest, but who none the less put that national interest first. I think that is to be greatly commended.

Q168 Mr Francois: Do North Korea's biological and chemical weapons worry you as well?

Earl Howe: There is a limit to what I can say about that, in terms of factual statements as to what North Korea possesses, for reasons which you'll appreciate.

We know that a chemical agent was used to kill Mr Kim's half-brother. That indicates that they do have a capability in that area. We know that they train for chemical warfare. But as to what the threshold might be for the use of such weapons, we don't know, and in general—taking Kate White's previous remarks—given the nature of the regime we are dealing with, there is only a limited amount of intelligence that it is possible for us to garner in this area. However, we are in fairly highly classified territory here.

Q169 Mr Francois: All right, but we are dealing with a regime which you concede is difficult to read, which is close to acquiring a nuclear capability to strike the United Kingdom and which has already attacked the United Kingdom's hospitals—that may not have been its primary objective, but, nevertheless, that was the result of its action. Shouldn't we be more worried as a nation than perhaps we are?

Earl Howe: There is a balance to be struck here, I think, between positing alarmist scenarios on the one hand and being overly complacent on the other. I think the balance we are trying to strike, and I hope the whole nature of this evidence has made it clear, is that all the effort is going into the diplomatic channel, to exercise pressure on North Korea to come to the negotiating table, to change its calculus, to enter more directly the family of nations and thereby to fulfil one of their national objectives, which is economic development.

So we need to be alert, and we need to be ahead of the curve, as far as we can, on capabilities like cyber, while at the same time not alarming ourselves that there is a risk of war round the corner. We don't think, on balance, that there is a likelihood of armed conflict in the near future.

Q170 Mr Francois: I will put one more question to you. Mark, you, in particular, stressed the tremendous amount of diplomatic activity that has gone into trying to persuade the North Koreans to mend their ways; I think you cited five unanimous UN resolutions to that effect. But would it surprise you if we told you that nearly every other witness who has given evidence to us in the course of this inquiry has been pretty certain that North Korea is extremely unlikely to give up that capability, because they are so massively invested in it? Despite all the diplomatic efforts that you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

cited, it looks as if they are extremely unlikely to give up their nuclear weapons programme.

Mark Field: I have not read some of the evidence that has come through. It is a good evidence session to have, and I'm not in any way—these are all respected academics, who obviously have a tremendous number of sources in the area. As I say, I do not despair; I do not think we should give up on trying to exert as much pressure as we do. The course that we are taking is—as I say, it is a pretty innovative, pretty robust diplomatic course—beginning, we believe, to bear fruit. So I do not subscribe to the somewhat pessimistic view of what the longer-term outcome will be. We obviously have to continue working in the way that we are to try to ensure that we bring North Korea into the community of nations and ensure that its responsibilities are there.

Looking at the context of the passion that the international community has shown in recent decades for ensuring that we are bearing down and away from nuclear proliferation should give some confidence as to what has happened. This is a serious and grave time, and I would not underestimate that. I am not complacent that we will get all we wish in this regard. Obviously it is alarming to see at each and every test how the capability is improving or increasing from the North Korean perspective, but I do not think we should in any way despair about that. If anything, the evidence of your academics only makes me all the more determined to redouble those efforts.

Q171 **Mrs Moon:** I was going to ask you, Mark, whether we have a plan to evacuate UK civilians, but *The Times* got there before you and revealed that, yes, we do have a plan.

Mark Field: We do.

Q172 **Mrs Moon:** I am sure that the civilians out there are very pleased. I would have liked to have known that before I went out there last September.

Mark Field: I dare say that it is not just civilians; we have others out there who are working in the military or the diplomatic sense. As I have mentioned, I have twice visited South Korea in my eight months as a Minister. Whenever I see our excellent ambassador, Charles Hay, and his team, I say, "How are the plans going?" This is under constant review. We all know that, were the unspeakable to happen, we would try to work along with allies to ensure that there was an evacuation. Part and parcel of that is knowing who we have in place in South Korea. With 100,000 tourists a year and at least 8,000 nationals, we are not even sure who all these people are at any one time because there is not an obligation for individuals out there to register with us. It is also worth pointing out specifically in relation to South Korea that there are general templates on travel advice. Our travel advice for South Korea has not changed. It has gone up a notch in relation to North Korea, where there are a small number of British tourists and people who live there, but we take seriously our obligations to British citizens. In so far as they require evacuation, we have a set of plans in place that we would be looking to implement.

Q173 **Mrs Moon:** Since you mentioned Charles Hay, I just want to say what a fantastic ambassador he has been for us. Sadly, I think he is leaving. Is he coming back in March?

Mark Field: There is a smooth transition, not least because of the difficulty of learning the Korean language. Simon Smith, his successor, has been in Korea for some months already, and there will be a smooth transition. I am not sure it is in the public domain, so I will not say where Charles is going, but you will be glad to know that he will be representing us in another part of my region in years to come. He is, as you said, an absolutely excellent ambassador. I would also say that he has a very good team around him.

Q174 **Mrs Moon:** From all the evidence we have heard today, should something happen, it is likely to be a surprise. How quickly do you think we can actually act to evacuate? In your plan—I do not expect you to give me specifics—are you working with an assumption of a surprise attack and being able to evacuate quickly? That is all the Committee would expect you to give us.

Mark Field: In fairness, nothing would come as a massive surprise in the sense that a lot of attention is going into this. Inevitably, I want to see evidence that we are constantly updating whatever plans we have got, to take account of any change to circumstances or any other intelligence we have on the ground. Inevitably, if this is brought into action, it would be at a time of such great crisis that one has to realise that the best-laid plans would not necessarily go awry, but would not go as smoothly as they might do on a 50-page memorandum. But I am confident that we are doing all that is responsible both from the perspective of London, but more importantly in Seoul, to ensure that we give as good an opportunity as possible to ensure that the safety of UK citizens is maintained.

Q175 **Mrs Moon:** So people know what to do and would respond accordingly?

Mark Field: Yes.

Q176 **Chair:** I cannot resist saying, in the present climate, that presumably, whether in this context or in other contexts of evacuation, having a strong, world-leading amphibious capability might come in handy.

Mrs Moon: Even in this region?

Chair: Indeed.

Mark Field: Why did I think this was going to come up? You have done rather well, Mr Chairman, to get to the 91st minute of this session without bringing up anything to do with the defence review. I am sure that you will continue robustly in the Committee. As you know, you have a lot of support from many other Members of Parliament across the political divide for making a case, even in these difficult times, whether in relation to the Korean peninsula or elsewhere, that we need to prepare for the unexpected.

Chair: That is much appreciated, thank you.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q177 **Gavin Robinson:** I think this collection of questions involves so many variables and imponderables that we may not get much out of it. Earl Howe, do we have deployment plans? Do we have evacuation plans?

Earl Howe: It would be very strange if I were to tell you that there were no deployment plans. I can tell you that there has been no lack of discussion in the Ministry of Defence about various scenarios, but it is not the habit of Ministers or spokesmen for MOD to talk in detail about operational issues. I hope you will understand I cannot go into terrific detail.

Q178 **Gavin Robinson:** Of course, but can you confirm that they include consideration of the sustainability of deployment?

Earl Howe: Of course, sustainability is always a central consideration.

Q179 **Gavin Robinson:** And the impact that would have on current theatres in which we are engaged?

Earl Howe: Indeed, we are committed in a number of parts of the world, as you are aware. All that would have to be factored in to any plans.

Q180 **Gavin Robinson:** Are we engaging with other allies—NATO allies—about such deployment plans?

Earl Howe: I would need advice on the extent to which we have had formal discussions with NATO allies. Perhaps I can write to you about that.

Q181 **Gavin Robinson:** That would be a good way to conclude that. I suspect that even if we tried—and through no unwillingness to be helpful—we might not get too far.

Q182 **Chair:** I would like to conclude the session with a quote from some written evidence just received from the Sky defence correspondent, Alistair Bunkall, who has taken a particular interest in North Korea and reported from there in 2015. He concludes: "I do not believe Kim Jong Un seeks a war. From my dealings with regime officials, they do not underestimate the United States and its military capabilities. I have put forward the theory that self-preservation is a driving factor behind Kim Jong-un's nuclear policy—war, and the consequence of almost certain destruction, would contradict this. However I don't rule out conflict either through mistake or because of a first-strike option ordered by President Trump." To conclude, may I ask you each in turn, starting with Kate, what you feel about the validity of that assessment?

Kate White: The US have made it clear that for them all options are on the table. That is a very serious position in response to the gravity of the threat that North Korea poses and to some of the things that we have discussed. As we have discussed, we do understand that very clearly stated position. We are working very closely with the US and others on the diplomacy that will enable us not to be in that position. That is where we are at the moment.

Mark Field: The analysis is interesting. I know Alistair Bunkall has been on the ground there. It is always worth remembering that Kim Jong-un is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

a young man. Some young men in politics are in a hurry. Others want to keep their regime going for 40 or 50 years. I would say that if he wants to die peacefully in his bed in 40 or 50 years' time as the Supreme Leader of North Korea, the best way of doing that might be to engage more with the international community along the lines that we have presented.

Earl Howe: I would only add to that by reminding all of us of the "four noes" that Secretary of State Tillerson has articulated. The United States does not seek regime change or the collapse of the regime; it does not seek accelerated reunification of the peninsula; nor does it seek a pretext to put troops north of the 38th parallel. It is perhaps disappointing that those assurances have not gained as much traction as we would like them to have done, but it is important that we keep reminding North Korea that that is the stated position of the United States.

Q183 **Chair:** A very positive note on which to conclude. Let us hope that this session has helped flag up that message. Thank you all very much for coming today.