

Defence Sub-Committee

Oral evidence: Defence in the Arctic, HC 388

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Members present: Mrs Madeleine Moon (Chair); Mr Mark Francois; Gavin Robinson.

Questions 20-44

Witnesses

I: Professor Eric Grove, former professor of naval history and senior fellow, Centre for Applied Research in Security Innovation, Liverpool Hope University, Dr James Jinks, historian and author, and Colonel Professor John Andreas Olsen, Defence Attaché, Royal Norwegian Embassy, London.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Grove, Dr Jinks and Colonel Professor Olsen.

Q20 Chair: I would like to welcome our three witnesses. If you could start by formally identifying yourselves and your affiliations for the record, please, and telling us a little bit about yourselves, that would be helpful.

Professor Grove: I am Professor Eric Grove. I started my career at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth and have had a pretty close connection with the Royal Navy throughout my life. I lectured at the Old Royal Naval College and also taught at Hull University and Salford University. I am now retired and independent, but I still keep in touch.

I think the main reason I am here is that back in the late '80s I observed Exercise Teamwork 88, the biggest of the maritime exercises in the far north, and wrote a book about it, called "Battle for the Fjords". I have a particular interest in possible Atlantic campaigns and the interaction with what happens in the area that you are reviewing.

Colonel Professor Olsen: I am Colonel John Olsen. I am the Norwegian defence attaché to the United Kingdom and Ireland. I am also the editor of a recent publication called "NATO and the North Atlantic: Revitalising Collective Defence". Today I am ready to answer questions on the content and the recommendations of that book, but I am also available to elaborate on Norwegian positions and policy.

Dr Jinks: My name is Dr James Jinks. I am an author and recently co-authored a book with Lord Hennessy, who I am sure some of you know, on the history of the Submarine Service since 1945. A lot of that book was focused on the areas we are going to be talking about today.

Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen, and thank you for your time. Gavin will start with some questions.

Q21 Gavin Robinson: Good morning. Colonel Olsen, could I ask you to outline the current threat to security in the north Atlantic, and how relevant that is to the Arctic and the High North?

Colonel Professor Olsen: The north Atlantic, and by extension the European High North and the Arctic, is of increasingly geostrategic importance, primarily because of the Russian strategic submarines. They are located up around the Kola peninsula, which is the ice-free port throughout the year for the Russians. Those submarines are increasingly capable and they need a strategy to defend them, and that is the bastion defence concept.

On your maps, you will see that the inner bastion is the darker blue and it is in that area that they would need sea control. That includes Svalbard and northern Norway. The outer bastion includes the Greenland sea, the Norwegian sea and the North sea and goes down to the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap. They would need sea denial in that area. They might not



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need full access to it, but they need to prevent others from operating there.

This is a concept that was established in the '60s, so it is nothing new, but it has been revitalised now with the modernisation programme that started in 2008. We say that they fly more and they sail more and it is becoming increasingly important to them. And it is important for us, because if we end up in a conflict in Europe, we need reinforcement from the United States and Canada and that would have to come through the GIUK gap. So it is important for both sides to have command of the seas and control of this area. That is why I would argue that it is of great importance to Russia and to NATO, and of course to Norway and the United Kingdom specifically.

- Q22 **Gavin Robinson:** You mentioned increasing geostrategic importance. Is it increasing because of capability, or is it something that has always been an important issue but has been neglected, whether by the United Kingdom, NATO or others?

Colonel Professor Olsen: It was a very strong capability during Cold War times with the Soviet Union. NATO had a regime for handling that, with big exercises and considerable capability. We may actually talk of a battle of the Atlantic during the Cold War; we were both aware of how important that was. Luckily it did not get hot, but we took it seriously and we had a command structure that was tuned to take that area of responsibility seriously. It is important to know that NATO's area of responsibility goes all the way to the north pole, so we have a responsibility for that area.

After the Cold War, Russia had a broken back and it did not sail much or have much activity. Accordingly, we looked elsewhere to deal with out-of-area operations and we changed our command structure to be more capable of dealing with those kind of threats. It is not that we forgot about the north Atlantic, but we did not pay as much attention to it as maybe we should have. Now, with the modernisation programme and Russian policy, which seeks to make Russia great again, there is more focus on that.

We must not see Russia as 10 feet tall on this—it is not on a par with the Soviet Union—but the trend is clear: they are investing in military capabilities on quite a different scale from 10 years ago. That is despite a tough economic situation at home, so they give priority to their military. I would talk less about the quantity, but the quality has changed. We see that the Russian soldiers are more professional than they were a decade ago. Their logistics operators are much more efficient. The command structure is quite smooth. The time from a decision by the President down to action on the ground is quite quick. We have to change our response time and our readiness. They invest in high-end capabilities in sea and air. The quality is quite different from what it was a decade ago, even though the quantity is not comparable to the times of the Soviet Union.

- Q23 **Gavin Robinson:** You have presented us with a map and we have another one—they are almost co-terminus. One is a little closer to the United Kingdom than I would like, but that in turn leads me to ask you



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about sovereignty in Norway. Obviously the area of control seems to cover your northern coastline, for example. How is that considered and what importance is placed on it in Norway? Could you give us an understanding of that?

Colonel Professor Olsen: Norway is a maritime nation, as is evident in the fact that we have jurisdiction of an area that is seven time larger than our land territory. Some 80% of that maritime domain is north of the polar circle, so we are looking north. We have Svalbard up there, and not just the main island of Spitsbergen, but the whole group of islands, which is Norwegian territory and where Norwegian law applies. We take that seriously. There is a treaty from 1920, implemented in 1925, that says that we should not use Svalbard for war-like purposes, so we will not build naval bases or other military infrastructure, but it is still Norwegian territory and an attack on Svalbard would constitute an article 5. That is part of our policy and what is important to us.

We have gone through a strategic defence review, as you have, and we are looking more north than we did a decade ago. We are making quite a few investments to be more capable, not least by buying 52 F-35s. We are buying five P-8 maritime patrol aircraft. We are buying new submarines. Our frigates are quite good and we are getting NH90 helicopters on them. We will be increasingly capable to do our bit in the north together with you, but it is our first priority when it comes to foreign policy and defence. That is our hope. For some it is an exotic part far away, but for us it is home. It is quite close to us and we need to take that seriously. I would be happy to talk about the relationship with Russia if that is of interest now or later, but how to relate to Russia is also part of our policy.

Chair: Now would be a good point.

Colonel Professor Olsen: Our relationship with Russia is in many ways a tale of two cities. The first tale is a positive one. We have had more than 1,000 years of peace with Russia. We have had good neighbourly relations with Russia for hundreds of years, including the Pomor trade. It was Russian troops that liberated Norway in 1944-45. They withdrew their forces after the war—they did not do that everywhere. We co-operate on a fishery regime to sustain the cod in the Barents sea. We work together on nuclear waste. We look together at what the ice melting means through research and science in that area. We look at the potential for economic growth. We have multilateral mechanisms to strengthen our co-operation with Russia, of which the Arctic Council is the most important. It deals with areas that we have a common interest in. There is a strong element of co-operation with Russia.

We have a 196 km border with Russia, which is undisputed and guarded in a very professional way—we use conscripts, men and women; they have a different regime. You will find poles indicating our border 4 metres apart: 2 metres from the Norwegian pole, 2 metres from the Russian pole. It is out in the open, although there are defences on the Russian side further inland, but it is not challenged and it is working well. It is a very professional relationship, I have to say. We have no border disputes with



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Russia at sea. The last one was agreed in 2010 after 40 years of negotiations. We find that the Russians respect international law and the law of the sea up in the north. In conclusion, it is a peaceful and stable part of the world and we would like to continue to work together to keep that positive state of affairs.

The second tale is that of the military dimension—the increasingly aggressive rhetoric, the more assertive Russia that we have seen lately, the way they exercise and train, and all the efforts they put into the military despite a tough economic situation back home. Those are two things that we have to look at together. It has always been Norwegian policy to have a dual approach. We are firm in our criticism when we have to be, as we were with Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea and the support of separatist activities in east Ukraine, which is unacceptable and a breach of international law—we condemn it fully and support the EU's restrictive measures taken against Russia.

So 2014 was a watershed in our relationship. We stopped military co-operation and we still do not have that, because we find it unacceptable, but we cannot close down all links because of that. For example, we have kept up the border guard, the search and rescue co-operation and the fishing inspection regime. We have also kept to our incident at sea agreement. We have an open line between our military headquarters at Bodø and the northern fleet. We Skype once a week. That is to avoid escalation and the unintended consequences of some actions. It is a measure of confidence building at the same time as condemning what they have done and are doing in Ukraine. That dual policy is so important to us. To understand the Norwegian perception is to understand that it is a tale of two cities: one that is very positive about co-operation in the north, and the military dimension that gives us great concern.

- Q24 **Gavin Robinson:** If we consider the two key components of threat as intention and capability, when you see the bastion area of control encroach on southern Norwegian territory, clearly capability is there but up to now you felt that there was no willingness to assume control, if we put it in that sense. But do you fear that the increased rhetoric and increased investment in military infrastructure and so on is changing that somewhat?

Colonel Professor Olsen: In the sense that threat is a combination of capability and intent or will to do action, we do not consider Russia a threat to Norwegian sovereignty and territorial integrity. We don't believe that they intend to target us. What we do know is that they have a capability to do bad things if they want to. A Russian strategic submarine placed in the Norwegian sea or the North sea, close to the United Kingdom, could target any location in Europe at will with ballistic, high-precision nuclear weapons. We would also argue that defence of the northern flank is not something that we do only for ourselves; it is a contribution to the security of NATO and Europe. But we do not consider them a threat at the moment.



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What I would like to say on the threat perspective is that although we do not recognise or define Russia as a threat today, we do not know what the future Russia holds. Political will may change in different circumstances or with developments, so we cannot exclude the need to be prepared for something bad in the future when we know for sure that it has the capability.

- Q25 **Gavin Robinson:** Thank you very much; that was very helpful. Perhaps, Professor Grove, I could ask you to contextualise some of that. The Committee touched on why the north Atlantic was such a crucial theatre in the Cold War, and the importance of defending the Norwegian sea.

Professor Grove: I always say that NATO's name gives it away—it is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—and of course the Atlantic link, the capacity of the United States to provide direct military support to Europe, was always a key factor in the Atlantic alliance. There were great fears that, given the Soviet predilection for submarines, they might mount a threat even greater than that of the U-boats in the Second World War to sea lines of communication in the Atlantic. A lot of effort went into trying to deal with that.

In addition, there was always a fleet dimension to NATO's maritime strategy—using carriers to move north, partly to help protect Norway through amphibious operations and seaborne airstrikes, and partly to put the Soviets on the defensive. After a period in the 1970s when, because of the rise of the Soviet navy, there were considerable doubts as to how far forward western fleets could go, there was perhaps rather more emphasis on the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap, rather than on moving forward. Then, at the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, things began to change.

NATO came forward with a new concept for maritime operations, which stressed the idea of containment of Soviet assets as far forward as possible. It stressed the idea of defence in depth—that we try to protect sea lines of communication in the Atlantic as far forward as we could—to address the threats in the north and, finally, to maintain the initiative. This went together with changes in American strategy in the 1980s—the so-called Maritime Strategy, with a big M and a big S—and the idea there was forward operations.

So it was decided in the '80s in the alliance—nationally in America, and in the alliance, and we Brits latched on to the Maritime Strategy—that the best way of protecting the Atlantic was in fact to move forward to force the Soviets into a sea control campaign to protect what was important for them: their ballistic missile-firing submarines. If we threatened their ballistic missile-firing submarines with a forward submarine offensive and moved carriers forward to threaten Soviet base areas and to provide something for Soviet forces to attack to protect themselves, there would not be the Soviet assets to surge out into the Atlantic.

Basically, one was taking the initiative—the Americans like to say the “offensive,” but I was always a bit worried about that. Certainly it was taking the initiative, moving forward with carrier and anti-submarine



forces. In those days, the idea in wartime would have been to have three carriers—the biggest they got on an exercise was two American carriers plus a British anti-submarine carrier. From the Greenland-Iceland-UK gap forward, in this area that is shaded on the map, to provide something that the Soviets would have to address with their submarines and naval aircraft, so instead of doing something that would be very troublesome to us—interdicting shipping crossing the Atlantic bringing supplies and reinforcements—they would have to look after their own maritime interests and forces.

We took the initiative, forced them on to the defensive, threatened them in their inner bastions, moved forward, drew Soviet submarines into a battle with the anti-submarine warfare striking force and, from the mid-1980s onwards, the idea was that the carriers would go into their own bastions in the fjords—in Vestfjord and Andfjorden, and in fact the British in '88 took HMS *Illustrious* into Hadsselfjord. The idea was that there, they would pose such a threat to the Soviets that the Soviets would have to attack them but under favourable conditions, because they would be protected by the mountains. You could also concentrate your anti-air and anti-submarine assets at the entrance to the fjords, cover the entrance and force the Soviets to attack in unfavourable conditions.

One would hope that that would be done in a crisis-management context rather than a war-fighting context, but the idea was that you would move your forces forward, get the attention of the Soviets and force them into actions to counter your actions, so that you had the initiative and the Soviets would not be able to surge massive submarine and air forces out into the Atlantic.

If they still tried to do that, they would of course open themselves up to serious attack in their northern bases. The defence of the Norwegian sea, actions in the Norwegian sea and the defence of northern Norway, was an integral part—the frontline—of the defence of the Atlantic lifelines. There were two campaigns: Norwegian sea and Atlantic lifelines. Norwegian sea supported and enabled Atlantic lifelines to be put into effect.

Q26 **Chair:** Before I come back to you, Professor Grove, with more questions, I will go back to Colonel Olsen. You have your bastion line going over large areas of landmass in Scandinavia. Is that because it is a perceived threat? Why have you done that?

Colonel Professor Olsen: It is for illustration purposes, so the exact borders can be discussed. We find that the inner bastion also covers Svalbard and northern Norway and also parts of Sweden and Finland. It is not necessarily that they need access to Norwegian territory but they have to prevent somebody else from using that as a launching platform.

It is basically because it is so close to their submarine bases outside the Kola peninsula and the northern fleet headquarters outside Murmansk. This is not a map of political intent. It is a military strategy and the defensive bastion concept.



Q27 **Chair:** Professor Grove, is the bastion concept still the basis of Russian naval strategy in the region?

Professor Grove: As far as one can make out, yes. They have about eight SSBNs based in the northern fleet—ballistic-missile-firing submarines. They are still seen, I think, as a vital part of the strategic reserve force and they wish to keep them there to maintain their combat stability—which I suspect sounds better in Russian—as much as possible. The major role in a crisis or war of the Russian navy, I am pretty sure would still be the protection of those ballistic-missile-firing submarines, creating in their own eyes a defence in depth for them. Hence the idea, which could be resuscitated, of in effect creating a possible danger for these submarines, forcing them to keep their forces back so that they do not cruise around the coasts of Britain or through the gaps into the Atlantic. Therefore, we maintain their attention in protecting themselves and that is the major factor in the protection of the Atlantic lifelines.

Q28 **Chair:** Given how often we recently seem to have heard of Russian submarine incursions into British waters, Dr Jinks, do you feel that Ministers are engaged in tackling the challenge from Russian submarines as much as they were in the Cold War? Have we taken our eye off the ball?

Dr Jinks: The threat really went away in the early '90s—well, by the mid-'90s. Certainly, if you look at the bastion concept of submarines going to the north Atlantic and up to the Arctic, that really peaks in the late '80s and early '90s.

Once the threat declined, the submarine service had to start looking away from its traditional role of anti-submarine and try to stay relevant in the world. You can probably recall, if you go back to the '90s, there were significant cuts in the size of the SSN fleet, coming down to where we are today.

The submarine service, in order to find a role in the post-Cold War world, started to look for other things to do. You had power projection from the sea, in terms of the Tomahawk capability, and you had new roles east of Suez with Tomahawk. Once the conventional submarines disappeared because they were scrapped and sold to the Canadians, nuclear-powered submarines took on the special forces role, but even when that happened, they were still looking to the north. We were still going up there, participating in the American ICEX programmes. There was one in 2004 and the last one that we did was in 2007. Even since that point, we still have Royal Navy liaison officers up there on those ICEX programmes, even if we do not send submarines up there.

The way submarine training works, they have always sought to keep the ASW element and those traditional skills rolling on, but obviously there was a huge dip in the perceived threat from the mid-1990s until mid-2005 to 2006, I think. In 2002, the Russians could not put a single ballistic-missile-carrying submarine to sea. There was a real decline in the number of patrols that they were doing. We have heard, and we all know about,



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the huge increase in not only the submarines that they are building and putting into service, but their operational tempo: the number of submarines that they are putting to sea.

Q29 **Chair:** Are we focused enough in countering that, or have we lost the capability?

Dr Jinks: I do not know what is going on today because, as you know, the Government do not comment on submarine operations, so I cannot really comment. Certainly, if you go back to the Cold War, we were world leaders in this. We had a very close relationship with the United States and were highly regarded in the area of anti-submarine warfare. I imagine that there is a focus on getting back to where we were, but of course we will not have the numbers that we had in the Cold War and, as we have heard, nor do the Russians.

The key point, as John said, is that for most of the Cold War it was really a game of quality on the western side versus quantity on the Soviet side. That started to change in the 1980s, and just as the Soviets started to catch up with the west, the US and the UK in terms of quality, the Cold War ended. Today, it seems, the Russians have picked up where they left off, so any future confrontation with the Russians, certainly beneath the waves, and as we have heard in other domains as well, will really be one of quality versus quality. That seems to be the key difference, from my perspective, between most of the Cold War and what is going on today.

Professor Grove: There has been a considerable drawdown in our anti-submarine capabilities, in terms of surface ships and maritime patrol aircraft. The loss of the maritime patrol aircraft cannot be overestimated as a blow to our anti-submarine warfare capabilities. Thank heavens that something was done to mitigate that to some extent, and we are getting the aircraft. It is well known that we have had to use allies to provide the MPA. The best thing we can do, as I found out at Culdrose recently, was that we send out Merlins to prosecute submarine contacts, and there is quite a lot of activity there as well.

What worries me is that the Royal Navy has become extremely good at boarding—perhaps even as good as they were in the 18th century—for constabulary operations and that kind of thing, and something has had to give. I think that the higher-level warfare capabilities in terms of training are only now being addressed properly. There are signs that things are improving. NATO's maritime commander organised a very important anti-submarine exercise recently, so we are trying to re-learn it, but anti-submarine warfare is very much a matter of technique, expertise and experience, because you are operating in a very difficult environment. We need to try very hard indeed, and recognise the potential problem of getting back to where we were in the Cold War, when we were pretty good.

Colonel Professor Olsen: On your question on whether NATO is adapting to the new normal, I think it is fair to say that it is the new normal. It is not something that will pass shortly; it is something that we will have to



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deal with in the near-future and the intermediate period. Whether NATO is doing enough will always be a question, but since 2014 there have been quite a few steps in the right direction. The first was that NATO members stood together at the Wales summit and at the Warsaw summit. NATO is first and foremost a political organisation, so it starts by us standing together in a united front. We have seen over the past three or four years that the north Atlantic is increasingly getting back on the NATO agenda. We have seen it through the fact that we are sending troops to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. We have taken responsibility on the ground aspect of that.

We would like to see more focus on the maritime domain, and I think that is happening. One example is that the command structure is being improved. That takes time, but it is a step in the right direction. More of the authority is being moved from ACT in Norfolk to SACEUR in Europe. We are also discussing establishing a third command in addition to Naples and Brunssum that will have a dedicated responsibility for the maritime domain in the north Atlantic.

There are movements in the right direction, but we cannot think of command as only a location or a headquarters—it is what it does. Will we do more exercises that are relevant for an article 5 setting—the real stuff? We know that operating in the north Atlantic is difficult. It is an unforgiving environment, so you cannot do it on the hop if a crisis occurs. You need to know the area, to have exercised in the area and to have experienced it at first hand over time. We need more situational awareness of this environment and what is going on, so we need better intelligence. These things are being improved, but it will take quite a bit of time.

We have a big NATO exercise that we will host in Norway in the fall—October and November—called Trident Juncture. It will have 35,000 troops, six brigades, 150 aircraft—fixed and rotor—and about 70 big ships. It is a considerable exercise, and the scenario is article 5. It is taking place in Norway. The essence of article 5 is not only how you defend, but how you deal with logistics to get reinforcements in. I am not saying that is a lost art, but we tend to underestimate the logistical aspect of an operation and, as most know, operations and logistics are two sides of the same coin. We have not exercised that lately, so we need to do that and realise that it is an art form, not only a matter of science. We need to find a good way of reinforcing the theatre, because that is what it is all about if there is a conflict in this region.

So NATO is doing quite a few things, and we are taking it in the right direction. Some will argue that it is not fast enough or it is not enough, but NATO is an alliance of 29 members and we all have different concerns. The Norwegian policy is that we have to think 360 degrees. We have to help each other where the pressure is the highest; but each NATO member has to take extra responsibility for its own part of the sector, and for Norway that is the north and the northern flank. I would argue that for global Britain that is also a critical aspect, because the GIUK gap is a

strategic gap and it is crucial for the defence of the United Kingdom, as it is for Norway.

- Q30 Mr Francois:** If the Russian strategy now, based on the bastion concept, is essentially defensive, why are we seeing much more aggressive incursions by Russian submarines into UK waters?

Colonel Professor Olsen: The bastion concept requires a certain patrolling of areas to ensure good intelligence and that kind of thing, so that is one aspect of it. Another aspect is that they may not be provoking you and us, but they are stress testing us all the time. Are we aware of this? How do we respond to this? What is our response in the media? What is our response diplomatically? What is our military response?

They are stress testing us all the time. It is not illegal, but we have to decide what we should do about that development, because the trend is very clear: there is more of it. It is not confidence building. It is not trust building. There is a challenge here that we have to take seriously, because in many ways our values and our way of life are being tested. Free access to the sea is crucial for our prosperity and our peace. Many goods go by sea, so we need to have free manoeuvre at sea in order to keep to our way of life and what we have become used to.

Dr Jinks: During the Cold War, the Soviets were pushed into adopting the bastion concept from a position of weakness, because throughout the early period—at least up until the mid to late '70s, before the development of long-range ballistic missiles that could be fired from ballistic-missile-carrying submarines—to actually hit their targets or hold targets at risk in the United States, the Soviets had to deploy their ballistic missile submarines relatively close to the US mainland, and that of course meant transiting through the choke points, the GIUK gap, and out into the Atlantic. They were vulnerable there once transiting through and could be detected, shadowed and trailed, and the US and UK got very good at doing that.

- Q31 Mr Francois:** SOSUS and all of that.

Dr Jinks: Yes, and the Russians did not really appreciate just how good the US and the UK were at doing that until the mid-1980s and the Walker-Whitworth spy ring, which was the biggest espionage case that the United States Navy had ever had. It revealed that since the late 1960s, a group of spies operating in the US navy had been passing huge amounts of information on submarine operations—intelligence digests, manuals and war games—to the Soviet Union. They essentially concluded that they were not as good as they thought they were and started putting a huge effort into making their submarines better and quieter, and learning about the way the oceans worked in terms of different thermal fronts and being able to hide in them. But they also started to alter their strategy.

As we heard from Eric, the general consensus had been that you would essentially have a second battle of the Atlantic and that the Russian fleet would come down and try and disrupt the sea lines of communication that way. But once they started to realise how vulnerable they were and once



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longer-range ballistic missiles entered service, they did not have to go through those choke points any more. They could pull back. So part of the maritime strategy—the aggressive maritime strategy that we heard about in the '80s—was that if you started pushing forward to go after these Russian submarines that were staying in waters that were familiar to them, you would then force the Russians to use a lot of their assets—their other submarines, their surface ships and aircraft—to protect those submarines.

That gain really started to pick up from about the mid-1980s onwards and was going right the way through until the end of the Cold War. So the Cold War ended and now the Russians are back. If my quality versus quality thesis is correct, the Russians have evened the playing field in many ways in terms of the quality of the kit and the submarines that they have got. Maybe that is one of the reasons why they are pushing out and coming back down again into our waters and out into the ocean.

Professor Grove: The basic point is that if the west does nothing when the Russians send their forces and their submarines forward, and it is kind of accepted and we do not shadow ships sailing through the channel and we do not prosecute submarine contacts and this kind of thing, they might think this is a weakness that they can exploit, and we might be back to the potential threats that we saw in the earlier days of the Cold War. The Atlantic lifelines are crucial, so we have to do something to stop the Russians coming forward. The best way of stopping the Russians coming forward is to be pro-active ourselves and to tweak them where they feel weak, so that they adopt in a crisis or—perish the thought—war a defensive strategy that is the least possible threat to what is important to us at sea.

Dr Jinks: Even at the very end of the Cold War, the Russians still did come through the GIUK gap and flood out into the Atlantic. There is an incident in our book, which I think was in 1987, when they sent six Victor IIIs, which at that stage were one of the most advanced boats they had, into the Atlantic. They tried to get our SSBN as they were going through the GIUK gap—the waters they thought it would have been in—and then went out into the Atlantic. That put a huge strain on us and the United States to try to keep track of those submarines. Even after they had adopted the bastion concept, they still liked to remind us that they had this capability to flood out if they needed to.

Q32 **Chair:** Can I take you back to the issue of institutional expertise? It declined and found other outlets to keep itself going. One of the areas where it weakened itself was in relation to near ice and under ice. Has that expertise been sustained? Is it still there? Do we have that capability? Is it something that we are going to be able to recover?

Dr Jinks: My own view—I don't know what is going today—is that it has been sustained at a very low level. As I said earlier, the last ice exercise, I think, was two years ago. I was looking yesterday on the Royal Navy's website. There were two Royal Navy exchange officers out there who



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participated in the entire thing, who would come back with their knowledge and disseminate it to other submariners.

Obviously, we have not been up there in submarines since 2007, when HMS Tireless went up and had that unfortunate incident. In the late 1940s, we were sending conventional submarines up to the Arctic, to the marginal ice zone, just to test equipment; to see how crews and equipment performed; and to try out tactics on how you would fight up there.

If the Russians ended up going there, if the Cold War heated up, with conventional submarines you have a very limited capability to go under the ice. You would not really want to do that in a conventional submarine because you are limited on air, you are dependent on your battery and you cannot go very far because the ice moves and you have to be able to come back out before your battery and air run out.

Once we had nuclear-powered submarines that changed the game completely. The Americans first did it in 1958 with USS Nautilus. We first went up there in 1971 and then we went back up in 1976 with the first British nuclear-powered submarine which was specifically designed with under-ice operations in mind, which was the Sovereign class. Even at that stage, the agreement we had with the Americans was that we would go up there every five years to keep the skills going. We were not routinely going up there all through the Cold War. It only starts to pick up in the late 1980s and early 1990s once the bastion concept picked up and the Russians started putting in the Typhoon and the Delta IV, which were specifically designed to hide under the ice and then surface and fire off their missiles in the event of war.

Then, obviously, we see a decline, but they have still kept that tempo going. I do not think we have lost the capability to go up there completely. As I say, I do not know what future plans would be.

Q33 **Chair:** I am going to go along the panel, if I may, to ask for your top two main challenges facing the Royal Navy submarine service in the north Atlantic today. I will start with Dr Jinks. What would you say are your two top threats?

Dr Jinks: The top two threats would be lack of resources. I am talking about possibly numbers. Do we have the necessary resources to match the tasks? I was talking about how the submarine service has had to find other things to do after the disappearance of the Russian threat. Those tasks are going to increase yet again, once the carriers enter service. If we deploy a carrier group, either independently or as part of the task group, we are probably going to have to have a submarine out there as part of that task group, so those roles could potentially increase.

I would also say, going back to what I was saying earlier, the challenge of getting back to where we were in the Cold War, in terms of being a competent ASW force again. Those would be my two.

Colonel Professor Olsen: I am not a submarine expert and I do not want to comment too much on the Royal Navy, but of course ASW



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capability is sought after, and there is the ability to work together. We will do our bit by investing in new submarines in the next few years. We speak the same language when it comes to submarine warfare and surface warfare, so we find that you are an extremely important ally in this. You are our most important ally in Europe, and that is reflected in all the services. We come here to get inspiration, certification and training, so it is very important for us that the Royal Navy remains very robust and strong in the future.

Professor Grove: Maintaining the operational availability of a very limited number of submarines. There are not enough SSNs. There should be at least eight. Currently, if we are lucky, there are six. At times in the last couple of years, there has been nothing because of mechanical problems and accidents and that kind of thing. So the first challenge is maintaining the operational ability of what we have, and the second is maintaining enough personnel to man them, which of course feeds in to operational availability. There is a cultural problem now with young people, who do not like operating in submarines, where they are cut off from their social media. It may sound trivial, but it is not in terms of recruitment. We need to maintain personnel in sufficient quantities and maintain the submarines with sufficient mechanical reliability.

When they work, the Astute-class submarines are magnificent. They have probably the best anti-submarine potential of any submarine in the world. The Americans were flabbergasted at the way one of our Astutes was able to hold a contact at long distance. They have enormous potential, and when they are there, when they have enough people and when they are out at sea, they are marvellous, but particularly given the limited number we have, we really need to stress operational availability and manning.

Q34 **Chair:** That is really helpful. Thank you, all three of you. Professor Grove, I want to take you back to the NATO training and exercises that we used to do to practise reinforcement of Europe through the Atlantic and the forward maritime strategy. What did we do, what are we doing now, and where is the gap?

Professor Grove: Every year—certainly in the '80s—there was a big NATO exercise. There was Teamwork, there was Northern Wedding and there was Ocean Safari. Ocean Safari was the major reinforcement exercise across the Atlantic, but interestingly, one of the last Ocean Safaris saw forward carrier operations in Norwegian fjords to support the operations in the Atlantic. The Teamwork exercise that I observed contained both carrier operations to engage the Soviet fleet and amphibious operations to help protect northern Norway. It was a big exercise, with a very large number of ships and very realistic training. I remember the Norwegian submarines were very hard to find when they played Russian submarines in the fjords; they used to hide behind pinnacles and that kind of thing as we hunted for them on active sonar.

Q35 **Chair:** What year was that?



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Professor Grove: That was 1988. That was the biggest of the exercises. It wound down a bit in '89 because of the changing international situation, but there was something of a peak in '88. There were two American carriers, and so on. It was a very large exercise. In fact, in the '80s, the number of people being landed was greater than before, and that kind of thing. It was a multi-dimensional amphibious sea-control exercise that showed the interaction—Teamwork, anyway—between the amphibious defence of the northern flank and the utility of forward naval operations in gaining the attention of the Soviet navy.

Those exercises were very large-scale. All warfare aspects were exercised. Lessons were learned about the difficulty of finding submarines in certain conditions and the problems of jamming if you are trying to operate an anti-submarine force over a broad area, but also about the utility of things like towed array sonar, which greatly enhanced the capacity of surface ships against submarines. A lot of lessons were learned that could be read across into training programmes and that kind of thing. All aspects of high-level maritime operations were exercised in those big exercises, and there were other exercises complementing them. There was a huge programme.

In fact, to show the effectiveness of Norway, just before the Falklands War, one of our LPDs was put into a fjord to help protect it, and that was a very important factor in them choosing San Carlos to invade, because they thought it would be a good place to put their assets and to protect them from air attack and anti-ship missile attack. So a lot of lessons were learned.

Because of the end of the Cold War—in the inter-war period, as my former colleague Colin Gray put it—the Navy began to concentrate on other things: survey ships and so on, power projection, constabulary duties, international engagement and all these things. But as you have heard, we are beginning to start bigger exercises again to train ourselves in these crucial warfare specialisms and, as I said, anti-submarine warfare is a particularly difficult one because there is no alternative to experience, particularly in waters like Norwegian waters which are very difficult to operate in.

So there has been a gap, and attempts are now being made to fill it, but of course the attempts being made to fill it start at a much lower level in terms of available assets. The Russians have drawn down, but so have we. One would hope that an area of deployment for the future carrier—or carriers—could well be in this area. In the good old days of the late '60s, the idea was that you would send four American aircraft carriers and two British ones in two carrier groups. By the '80s, that had come down to three American and one or two British anti-submarine warfare cruisers.

Particularly as the Americans are finding difficulty with the operational availability of their force, I think that we Europeans—in a non-political sense—need to start thinking about using our carrier assets, as well as our submarines, to as it were reconstruct the old forward strategy, albeit in a new form and perhaps at a lower level in terms of numbers.



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There is no alternative to maintaining and re-emphasising training so we can use what is in fact our excellent equipment—when the Type 45s don't have engine problems and so on. The equipment is there, but what needs to be done is very much to train people in it and the optimal use of it, and there is no alternative to rigorous exercising for that—and having these big set-piece exercises too, which are good in that they demonstrate the problems of communications and so on.

Colonel Professor Olsen: I think it is important that we take those lessons from the Cold War and apply them to today's situation. Of course we cannot replay the Cold War—they are very different circumstances. Yes, with the bastion defence concept there are similarities, but we cannot replay the Cold War. But we can learn from it.

There are at least four aspects that we have to consider when we look at exercises in the future. The first is, again, the command element. SACLANT had a dedicated responsibility for the north Atlantic. We have to find a way to get a command that is dedicated and has responsibility for this crucial transatlantic link.

Secondly, we tend to have a lot of national exercises, rather than connecting them to bigger NATO exercising. There is an opportunity lost in that, because we don't get to share the lessons, we don't get the interoperability that we would otherwise get—not only the physical plug-and-play aspect, but also mindset and doctrine interoperability.

Thirdly, as Professor Grove says, we have to be more realistic in our training and to think high-end. Yes, there are hybrid threats and those have to be taken seriously, but we have to be prepared for the high end and, ultimately, the article 5 scenario.

The fourth bit is contingency plans. In the Cold War we had a very close link between our exercises and national contingency plans. We have to get back to that and to connect those national defence concepts with the higher level within NATO. For Norway, this is crucial, because our defence depends on early reinforcement from allies, so that we can integrate early on and have a seamless escalation if that is necessary. We depend on allied reinforcement from the very beginning. It is important that we exercise those contingency plans together, and that we exercise the realistic scenarios, rather than other versions.

Professor Grove: One of the features of the CONMAROPS process, if you like, was that Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic developed a whole series of contingency plans based around a range of assets that might become available, beginning with national deployment if there had not been a general NATO alert, but moving towards a more NATO-orientated and controlled force. There was a whole series of these contingency plans that were exercised in the big exercises and so on. That is something that needs, as we have just heard, to recur. As a tension arises, you can use maritime forces very effectively—they operate in an international medium and so on—without them appearing too threatening, while being sufficient to maintain or establish deterrence. There is a huge flexibility in maritime



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forces, and you need to exploit that via these NATO contingency plans. They were exploited as such in the past; I am not sure what the current situation is.

- Q36 **Mr Francois:** Colonel, you touched on the formation of a new NATO command structure. How far advanced are we with that, and how does that compare to the old SACLANT command?

Colonel Professor Olsen: That discussion has to be done in a restricted room. The information about the new command structure is not available yet. What we know is that it does not compare to the SACLANT arrangement. It is very different from those days, and we are not necessarily arguing that that is the way to go in terms of scale and scope. What is important for us is that there is the transatlantic link. We have to be strong in Europe and we have to do more and we have to do it together, but we have to have the transatlantic link. NATO cannot do it without the United States and the United States cannot do it without NATO. It is a relationship that we have to strengthen, and that goes for the command structure as well.

One of the options that is being reviewed is to have a third joint force command that has more responsibility for the north Atlantic and the maritime domain. That is to be decided and to be developed. There is a military decision, and that goes to Defence Ministers. Hopefully it will be decided at the NATO summit with the state Ministers. Those are things that are ongoing. We find that we are moving in the right direction.

- Q37 **Mr Francois:** Would that be something comparable to the old AFNORTH?

Colonel Professor Olsen: I'm not sure. What we know right now is that the maritime command in Northwood is being strengthened considerably. What we know is that Ramstein—that is the air command—is also being strengthened considerably. There are things that indicate that the north Atlantic is back on the agenda and we are taking it more seriously and giving more attention to it, with the capability needed to do something in the north. How that compares to the Cold War arrangements, I do not know. It will be classified at this time.

- Q38 **Mr Francois:** Was it a mistake to abolish SACLANT, do you think? *[Interruption.]* Professor Grove, contain yourself; we will come to you in a second.

Professor Grove: I didn't say anything.

Colonel Professor Olsen: I do not think there is a yes or no answer to that. It made sense at the time. We have to be careful not to judge too much, because you always have to make decisions according to the political climate at the time. At the time, there was not a need to continue SACLANT. There was a need to get united and adapt a command structure so that we could do out-of-area operations with a focus on Afghanistan and those things. Brunssum and Naples were designed for that. Did we abolish too much? I do not know. It is now time to regroup and to find a way to adapt to the new situation.



Mr Francois: Professor?

Professor Grove: Yes, I think it was. I was surprised when it happened, but I can understand the reasons why. The Atlantic command was an innovation to provide a command that could connect the other members of NATO with the technological developments of the United States and so on, although they did keep the structure with the British deputy and so on. For a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation not to have an Atlantic command strikes me as very odd.

I think that measures are now being taken, as far as they can be, although there is a huge range of variable factors here. It had been suggested that MARCOM be expanded, but MARCOM was a bit anxious about that because it did not want to appear to be trying to take over and increase its authority. This will probably be an American based organisation. It may not be a fully-fledged command; it may just be a contingency. A whole range of options is still being thought about, and one should not say that anything is certain. The more that we have a NATO command concentrating on the Atlantic, the better, because the Atlantic is the keystone in the arch of the alliance. There is also the factor that if you have another headquarters, a lot more personnel and that kind of thing, is that the best use of the personnel? But certainly, for a whole range of political and strategic reasons, NATO needs an Atlantic command, particularly in the current circumstances when we are back to dealing with the Russians.

Q39 **Mr Francois:** If you go back to the '80s, which you were talking about earlier, you had the Maritime Strategy—capital M, capital S—John Lehman as the Navy Secretary and the 600-ship navy under Reagan. All of that was a very forward-leaning posture with the strike fleet planning to sail up into the Norwegian sea and sock it to the Russians right in the Kola.

Professor Grove: Not so much Kola bashing—there was a debate about the best way to use the assets. Actually, going to attack the Russians where they were strongest did not seem to be a desperately good idea. I remember the late Admiral Oswald telling me that Kola bashing was a very bad idea.

The whole idea of the maritime strategy was to create a threat to the Kola and the Russians would come after you. You could then do a good Clausewitzian defensive form of war. You took the initiative, which is why I was always very careful in my books at the time to separate the initiative from the offensive, and force—Corbett again—the enemy to come to you and fight him on favourable terms. That was the idea. There was a sort of latent offensive threat, but you did not actually carry out major attacks. It was not a mad carrier rush to the Kola peninsula, as some of the critics said. You put yourself in your own bastions in northern Norway and forced the enemy to come to you, and hopefully defeated them. I became a kind of born-again maritime strategist; I had doubts about it to start with and I thought it was too offensive, but then it was explained to me properly, I observed it in action and it seemed to make a great deal of sense.



Q40 **Mr Francois:** What is the American strategy now?

Professor Grove: Good question—to keep as many ships at sea as possible. The problem with the Americans is that the availability of their vessels is very low—there is only one carrier operational at the moment, and that is in the Gulf. How far the Americans could raise carrier striking groups to come over is a moot point. They have been thinking about lots of other things: the 600-ship navy, co-operation with other fleets, and so on. From having spoken to American admirals recently, I get the impression that they are also coming back to the idea of, “This is how we did it in the past, and this is how we might have to do it in the future,” but they have to get the assets to do it first. That is where the British carrier force will be particularly important.

Q41 **Mr Francois:** John Olsen, perhaps I could start with you on this. How important is the relationship between the United Kingdom and Norway in meeting the challenges of this new environment? You have described us as your strongest ally in Europe.

Colonel Professor Olsen: Very much so. Our defence concept relies on the United States as our most important ally, and you are our most important ally in Europe. Our whole defence concept relies on that co-operation and reinforcement in a time of conflict, and that has to be exercised and trained in times of peace. We have a strong relationship that goes back to the Second World War; it was cemented back then and before that. You were quite dedicated to the north during the Cold War.

We have had the Royal Marines since the 1960s, which is a tremendous capability to have. We work closely with your Marines; they know arctic warfare and cold weather warfare better than anybody else. We would like to see our co-operation with them strengthened on three counts. One is that we would like to exercise more at our current infrastructure, rather than at Asegarden, where they used to be in the past on their own. We would like to train and exercise together, to be integrated to a larger extent than before, and we would like that training to be related to the contingency plans, so that we are prepared for the real thing. Practice makes perfect—we just have to do it together. That kind of training is very important for you, too, and not only in defence in the Arctic: you benefitted from that skill set when you were on the Falklands and in the Hindu Kush area. When you train and exercise in such extreme conditions, you can use that skill set elsewhere.

We have found that in the last decade or two, more and more countries have lost that Arctic skill set because they gave priority to other areas. It is an art in itself to operate up there. One thing is to do the basics: to keep yourself warm with the right clothing, to get a good night's sleep under tough conditions, to eat properly, and to handle the snow, the wet and the waters up there. There is a team building factor: how can you conduct operations in those conditions rather than just survive? We find that the Royal Marines are so good at it; their motivation and their willingness to take on new challenges is really important for us.



- Q42 **Mr Francois:** We are slightly tight for time, so can I ask you a direct question? You will be aware that we are going through a review at the moment. One of the options that has been mooted in public forums is a reduction in our amphibious shipping capability and possible reductions in the size of the Royal Marines. From Norway's perspective, does that worry you?

Colonel Professor Olsen: We have a very good dialogue with the MoD and through the services. There is a long-term plan. We have been informed that there will be fewer exercises this year than in the past, but that that will get back on track shortly. We understand that there are other considerations to take into account. We would like to see more Marines and more exercises together, especially now that we have more of the US Marine Corps up there too, and the Royal Marines from the Netherlands. The combination of that is quite useful.

Being able to work together with such skilled personnel is crucial for us. We believe it is important for you, too. We hope that that will get back on track, with the numbers that we have had in the past. We know that that has been part of the discussion and we have been informed that there will be a dip in the numbers this year.

- Q43 **Mr Francois:** I am not just talking about exercises, though. What would be your reaction if we were to lose—to delete from the inventory—some of our specialist amphibious shipping?

Colonel Professor Olsen: We would encourage you to operate, exercise and train more with us up in the north, because we find that the new normal up there is so challenging that we need to keep up that skill set. We would encourage you to continue to co-operate with us to the extent that it is possible. We understand that there are other considerations, but we would really appreciate the continued co-operation that we have had since the '50s and '60s, not only with the Royal Marines but across the canvas.

Chair: If you ever leave the military you will have a real future in the diplomatic corps.

Professor Grove: Very quickly, even considering what we have at the moment and what we plan to have in the early 2020s, I can see there being a pretty good force to operate in a forward strategy. I can see two aircraft carriers if we can man them both—perhaps carrier strike carrying American aircraft, partly at least, and one with one British squadron and some helicopters for anti-submarine warfare and/or supporting an amphibious landing.

Maintain the amphibious force; do not scrap the LPDs; try to maintain the Royal Marines, who we have heard are the specialist forces, as much as possible and do not mix them up with the paratroopers because they do not get on with each other. The surface fleet—if it is maintained—should maintain its anti-submarine skills. Get the Type 45s operating well. Viper is an excellent system if the ships can move, and so on. Investment must be made in the capabilities that we plan to have so they are properly



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operational. It might mean we cannot do much elsewhere around the world, and there are some choices that might have to be made between how far we can do things in Asiatic waters and how far we can do other things, but I would have thought that the Royal Navy, as it is planned today, if it is serviced properly and invested in properly, could make a pretty good fist of a new forward maritime strategy—but don't cut any more, for heaven's sake.

Q44 **Chair:** Briefly, from each of you, is NATO sufficiently active in the defence of its northern flank?

Dr Jinks: I cannot really comment on what is going on today.

Colonel Professor Olsen: We would like to see more activity, but it has to be planned and it has to be part of a coherent effort. We cannot have everybody coming up north as they please. If we can do that planning together—one term we have not discussed is “level of ambition”. Can we agree on the level of ambition that we should have in the north Atlantic and how best to meet that together? We would like to see more exercises and training in the north, but it has to be planned and there has to be a good agreement on the ends, ways and means to do that.

Professor Grove: The problem is beginning to be recognised. We need to do the kinds of things that we did in the past, although perhaps not in exactly the same way or with exactly the same balance. I am heartened by the fact that problems are beginning to be recognised, but whether people will supply the assets, money and logistics to do it properly is quite another matter, and that is really more up to you than to us.

Chair: I would like to thank our witnesses for appearing today and for your very full answers. It has been extremely helpful in giving us the evidence that we need for our report. We are very grateful to all three of you. The session is now concluded.