



HOUSE OF LORDS

Select Committee on the European Union

External Affairs Sub-Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Brexit: Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions

Thursday 8 February 2018

10 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lord Stirrup (The Chairman); Baroness Brown of Cambridge; Lord Dubs; Lord Horam; Baroness Manzoor; The Earl of Oxford and Asquith; Lord Risby; Baroness Suttie; Lord Triesman.

Evidence Session No. 4

Heard in Public

Questions 40 - 58

Witness

I: Major General Charlie Stickland OBE, Operation Commander, EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta.



Examination of Witness

Major General Charlie Stickland OBE.

Q40 **The Chairman:** Good morning, Major General Stickland, and thank you very much indeed for agreeing to come and talk to this Committee. We are enormously grateful to have someone of your experience and expertise to talk to us on this important subject. You will have had a list of questions already, but, as ever, members of the Committee may deviate from those as they feel the urge to do so during the proceedings. It is a public session, so it will be aired. A draft transcript will be produced afterwards. We will send you a copy of it, and if there are any errors of fact, please let us know. Indeed, if afterwards there is anything you wish to expand upon in writing, please feel free to do that as well. Are you happy with that?

Major General Charlie Stickland: I am indeed. Thank you.

The Chairman: Good. In that case, if we may, we will get straight on. I will get us going by asking you if you could just give us an overview of your role as the Operation Commander, the structure of Operation Atalanta, and how all that command and control works at the moment.

Major General Charlie Stickland: The answer to those questions has three bits to it. I will start with the Op Atalanta mission, as it was reconfirmed with the new mandate in 2016 and continues today. Essentially, there are four strands to it: to protect World Food Programme shipping and other vulnerable shipping; to deter, prevent and disrupt piracy and armed robbery at sea; to monitor the fishing activities off the coast of Somalia; and to support other EU missions and international organisations working up the strength of maritime security and capacity in the region. Those four strands drive the activity of Op Atalanta—EU NAVFOR Somalia.

My role as the Op Commander is fascinating and highly stimulating. First, I am responsible for the operational design. Essentially that means that, with the resources I am given by the EU, I determine where we place our effort along the Somali coast and how we integrate our information activity, our outreach, our engagement with coastal communities, the use of our aircraft, and the use of our maritime assets. I plan that out over a period of three to four months. It is my role to make sure that I am meeting those mandates with the resources I have.

The next piece of that jigsaw is that I offer military advice to both the Political and Security Committee of the EU and the EU military staff. There is a regular interchange between me as the Operation Commander and Brussels. It is worth highlighting that I work directly to the PSC; there is no intermediary. As the Op Commander, I work to the committee of the 28 nations and the EU ambassadors, which is hugely empowering. One of the key things I talk to them about is the balance of the four Rs: requirement, resources, reality and risk. It is making sure that they



understand, with the resources and the mandate that I have, how I am delivering it.

Another part of my role is the up-and-out dynamics of managing a multinational organisation. The headquarters in Northwood has 20 nations in it: 18 from the EU and two third-party states. I am also involved in working with the Member States, talking about their contributions and things of that nature. I am talking to capitals and encouraging them to offer capability into Atalanta as we move along.

Another part of the jigsaw is dealing with the shipping industry. I have a strategic forum with the shipping industry. We are now on our fourth forum, and it is seeking to talk to the shipping industry about its behaviours and seeking to make sure that it is part of the preventive measures of our counterpiracy efforts.

The final part of my role is to link with partners. I spend a lot of time linking with the Combined Maritime Forces¹ in Bahrain, led by the Americans, linking in with agencies such as the World Food Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to play Atalanta's part in the broader maritime security architecture of the Horn of Africa and the Somali Basin.

That is my business. Forgive me. That is a very long answer to your question.

On the question of the structure of Atalanta, the Operational Headquarters are at Northwood, as I said. My Royal Marines headquarters, COMUKAMPHIBFOR, forms the spine, and other UK staff augment it. There are 104 people at the headquarters, and 56 Brits in the spine. It is responsible for the operational design and the oversight of the activity.

Another key component of Northwood is MSCHOA, the Maritime Security Centre-Horn of Africa. It was set up in the early days of Atalanta and is our link into ships at sea. Ships at sea register with MSCHOA, so we know where people are moving and where they are within the area of operations. MSCHOA is responsible for managing the convoys that go into the internationally recommended transit corridor through the Gulf of Aden. It is our activity that racks ships up and then hands them to protective vessels for their transit through dangerous areas of the Gulf of Aden. MSCHOA is interactive through a system that we designed, called Mercury. Ships can be given threat warnings and warnings about other things that are going on at sea to try to keep up the situational awareness of ships at sea. Every month, about 14,000 ships and organisations register with MSCHOA, which is in Northwood with the OHQ.

¹ The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) is a multinational naval partnership, which exists to promote security, stability and prosperity across approximately 3.2 million square miles of international waters, which encompass some of the world's most important shipping lanes. It has 32 member nations.



The second piece of the HQ composition is the Force Headquarters. I do not have one all the time. When the weather is bad, i.e. when the monsoon is up, piracy is less likely. Over the last two years, we have not had a Force Headquarters during the monsoon period, and tactical activity has been controlled from Northwood. When the weather is better and there is a higher chance of piracy, a Force Headquarters is deployed on a flagship forward, bouncing from Djibouti into the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin. In past years, that has been delivered mainly by the Italian navy or the Spanish navy. The last chap to do it was a fabulous man called Fabio Gregori, who was a very proactive Italian rear admiral.

Those are the two bits of operational command and tactical command. In Djibouti, there is a support element, which enables our activity, ships to come in and stores to flow in. There are also two maritime patrol aircraft detachments, one German and one Spanish.

The final bit of the structure is the Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachments, which are teams of marines, soldiers or sailors from a nation, which we put on board World Food Programme ships that we think are at particular risk. At the moment, the detachment is Lithuanian. We work with the World Food Programme, escorting the ships either with our assets or with an Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachment on board to provide that security. That is the mission, with me at the operational level doing an awful lot of networking, and a structure. I hope I have painted a picture of how it all works together.

There is a final bit to the jigsaw. I run another organisation at the moment called the EU Battlegroup. As well as running Atalanta, the Operational Headquarters in Northwood is the preferred headquarters this year for the EU Battlegroup at the operational level; it sits across the Benelux battlegroup as part of the EU Battlegroup construct. I am the Operation Commander for that. If it was activated and we were chosen as the preferred headquarters, of which there are two, I would amass more augmentees and build on a mission monitoring team that I have in Northwood to form another headquarters that would run that EU Battlegroup operation. So there is another strand to the activity.

The Chairman: Those earmarked headquarters move every 12 months. They rotate between the nations.

Major General Charlie Stickland: That is correct.

The Chairman: At the end of the year, you will cease that.

Major General Charlie Stickland: Yes, in January 2019 we will cease to own that commitment for the EUBG.

Q41 **The Chairman:** Could I ask you to look up, once again, for a moment? You talked about your relationship with the PSC. Could you explain to the Committee how you get your formal orders, your directive? Who signs the directive that gives you the authority to do all these things?



Major General Charlie Stickland: I am asked to put together an OPLAN,² based on strategic guidance which the EU Military Staff draft on behalf of the PSC. I then brief that OPLAN back to Brussels, and as long as Member States are content, this gives me my authority to operate from the PSC, within the mandate that they have given me.

The Chairman: You do not have a written directive in that context, as you would have from CDS.³

Major General Charlie Stickland: No, not in the same way.

Q42 **Lord Risby:** Thank you very much, Major General. The way the world works is that, when the world is exercised by a problem, there are headlines. Indeed, we have had some very dramatic coverage of the problems off the Somali coast, not least a film that caught the public's imagination, as you will remember.

You have partially answered my question, because you have expressed very comprehensively the planning and the thought that has gone into this. The very fact that we do not hear about it any more in the way we did is a great tribute to all of you who are involved in this process. What are the essential reasons for reversing what became a huge problem to maritime shipping?

Major General Charlie Stickland: First, counterpiracy is a non-contentious battlefield in that it has a demonstrable effect on trade and on people's lives, so people can coalesce and co-operate very easily around it. In the early days, three missions operated: the Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain; Ocean Shield, the NATO counterpiracy operation; and Atalanta. So the first point is the co-operation that counterpiracy drew, because piracy was a clear and present danger to shipping and to the lives of seafarers.

What has been key from an Atalanta perspective is what we would refer to as our *acquis*: the key things that we managed to put in place that really went after this problem. They are, very simply, a mandate from the United Nations to operate, to do something, and a coherent force package that could be employed to actively disrupt piracy in the early days, and is now deployed, sensibly, to deter it, because without presence you cannot have credible deterrence, in my view.

The legal finish is important and is something that Atalanta has that others do not. We worked it up initially with the Kenyans, the Mauritians and the Seychellois. Now it rests with the Seychellois government. That was really powerful, because it meant that, rather than capturing people at sea and then releasing them, as was happening, we can now see people going through a legal process under the Seychelles government and being transferred into Somali jails. That was a really powerful deterrent, and—as with the legal finish—was key.

² An Operational Plan

³ The Chief of Defence Staff



There are two more reasons why it was successful. First, it was a partnership with industry. I have already explained what the Maritime Security Centre-Horn of Africa does in relation to the information flow, how it links with industry and how, if an incident occurs, it can act as a co-ordinating body to send more warnings out to shipping and things of that nature.

Secondly, it was industry getting involved in best management practice. We work with industry to update best management practice, which involves very simple things such as people having private security detachments on board ships, people not going through dangerous routes, people not going slowly to save fuel but going at a faster speed, and having barbed wire on the sides of their ships. All those things, coupled with our deterrent posture, the legal finish and the communications wrap, drew together to address this problem.

Q43 Lord Risby: On the legal finish, I am just curious to know, even if it is a ballpark figure, how many have gone through this process in the Seychelles and then landed up in Somali jails where they are safe, in the sense that there is no citizenry around. So they are in jail and stay in jail. Is it a significant number? I am just curious.

Major General Charlie Stickland: The ballpark figure from about 2011 onwards is 850⁴ people, which is significant.

The oversight of jails is another interesting issue. We broke up a pirate action group in November last year. It was the first time for four years that a pirate action group had been at sea and was apprehended at sea. We had had some incidents earlier on in the year. Therefore, we retested the legal finish with the Seychelles government.

The other thing about people being transferred back to Somalia, to answer your question, is that UNODC⁵ has an oversight of a couple of Somali jails, such that it is satisfied that the conditions are acceptable for them to be transferred from one state to another.

Q44 The Earl of Oxford and Asquith: When we leave the EU, Atalanta is due, under CSDP rules, to lose Northwood as its operational headquarters, I understand. How significant to the mission of Atalanta is the British provision of headquarters in comparison to the contribution of other EU members such as Spain and Italy, which you mentioned?

Major General Charlie Stickland: It is quite a difficult question to answer with comparators, because I do not have a comparison, and I think it would probably be wrong to compare with another nation, because nobody else is doing this in the same way. So, if I may, I will answer the question in two parts.

⁴ This figure is incorrect. 166 suspected pirates have been arrested under Operation Atalanta, of whom 60 were transferred to the Seychelles for prosecution. Of these 60, 39 have been convicted to date and 38 have been repatriated into Somalian custody.

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



The contribution that we as the framework nation have made to Atalanta is key, such as through the innovation of the Mercury system and working with the shipping industry on best management practice. The constant location of the shipping industry in the early times—70% of world shipping is insured by Lloyd's in London—means that there is definitely a connection.

The UK framework also offers both military and diplomatic relationships. Some of that legal finish was negotiated with Kenya and Seychelles through our UK political auspices to then enable an EU activity. In other relationships, such as in Bahrain, the deputy commander of the Combined Maritime Forces is a British officer. We put quite a lot of emphasis on the CMF. The very nature of that UK to UK relationship means that you can build it out to a relationship between the EU and another organisation. We have offered a number of strands through innovation, and military and diplomatic relationships, which have been key throughout.

I would also highlight the contributions of other particular nations. I will probably get this wrong and offend somebody on open record, but when it comes to force generation and force flow, the Italians are significant contributors, as are the Spanish and the Dutch. The Swedes put people on Dutch ships. The Germans contribute in MPA.⁶ There is a significant group of people in the EU who are significant contributors to the Atalanta game. My deputy, for example, is an excellent Spanish admiral who looks to the tactics while I look up and out.

To try to compare it would be wrong, because a lot of nations are brought into this process and ensure that the sum of parts are absolutely where they should be.

Q45 Lord Dubs: Good morning, General. Could you say something about the UK's security objectives in the Horn of Africa? How does Operation Atalanta contribute to achieving our security objectives, and how does it complement the UK's bilateral initiatives?

Major General Charlie Stickland: The first point is to see Atalanta as part of a broader maritime security architecture, which is something that Vice-Admiral Aquilino—the American who commands the CMF—and I are very definitely trying to take forward. It is not independent actors doing their own thing. There is a synergy between all activity, ideally, in the Gulf of Aden and in the Somali Basin. The linkage to our national security objectives of the activity that we deliver is quite profound. We have done some thinking, and I believe we contribute to four of the five priorities in the National Maritime Strategy published in 2014.⁷

The first is promoting a secure international maritime domain and upholding international maritime laws and norms. With our operations

⁶ Maritime Patrol Aircraft

⁷ HM Government, 'National strategy for maritime security': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-strategy-for-maritime-security>



and activity we are absolutely in that space. The second is developing maritime governance and capacity among the states in that area. Local maritime capacity building is a secondary task for me, but it is one of the things that we do with our ships at sea. Although it is not one of my key objectives in relation to vulnerable shipping and piracy, we have to help elements of the Somalian capability to carry out their own business at sea, so we are contributing to that UK national security objective as we go along.

The third is protecting UK citizens and our economy and supporting the safety and security of ports, offshore installations, Red Ensign Group vessels⁸ and cargo ships, which goes to the very heart of my mission. Port security is also interesting, because EUCAP Somalia, which is the capacity-building activity, and other sister EU activity, are focusing on the four main ports of Somalia—Mogadishu, Bosaso, Berbera and Kismayo—in their capacity-building efforts.

Finally, we contribute to assuring the security of vital maritime trade and energy transportation routes in the UK marine area, both regionally and internationally. Without a doubt, part of our *raison d'être* is the free flow of trade. I genuinely believe that Atalanta contributes significantly to those four national maritime security objectives.

Q46 Baroness Manzoor: Good morning. You have comprehensively outlined the four strands of Operation Atalanta and your role in it. Could those objectives be achieved outside the EU? What are the advantages and disadvantages—of course, I am thinking here of Brexit—as opposed to the objectives and advantages that you have already outlined?

Major General Charlie Stickland: It is a far-reaching question, so I will do my best to dance through it. First, on the question of how to meet counterpiracy objectives, one of the task groups of the Combined Maritime Forces, Combined Task Force 151, has a specific counterpiracy mandate. We work alongside it, so there is no doubt that if the UK wished to contribute to CTF 151, whether in staff, planning or assets, it could contribute to the ongoing counterpiracy efforts in the Somali Basin area of the Indian Ocean.

You could also, from a UK perspective, deploy your assets and put them into associated support for other missions, which is what some people do to Atalanta. Associated support means national tasking—it is a national asset—but while it is in that area it is happy to exchange information and, if necessary, react with that organisation if an incident was to occur. Associated support is quite a vexed issue, because in reality, from my perspective as Operation Commander, it is not a replacement for core coherent activity. It adds a little value, but fundamentally those ships go where the individual nation wishes them to go, rather than as a core

⁸ The Red Ensign Group (REG) is a group of British shipping registers. Any vessel on these registers is a 'British ship', and is entitled to fly the British Merchant Shipping flag, the 'Red Ensign'.



asset to an operation. That is the answer to where we could contribute elsewhere to the objectives that we achieve.

There are probably three areas where Atalanta has a distinct advantage over CMF. The first is the legal finish, which I have already talked about. It is not the same with the Combined Maritime Forces, so it is more difficult from a legal perspective if you support CTF 151.

The second area is the scale and geography. Clearly, people contribute to 151 based on their own national interest, and most people's national interest is in the Gulf of Aden, that international shipping corridor through the Bab-el-Mandeb and up, and less so in the Somali Basin. Atalanta has slightly more of a geographical focus on the Somali Basin, which is a huge piece of sea. There is a synergy between the CMF's 151 and 150 and our activity in that we seek to co-ordinate the location of our assets in order to give optimum spread. Atalanta's spread is in a different place from the CMF's.

Finally, Atalanta has another advantage in that we are the only operation that is allowed to operate in Somali internal waters. We have an agreement with the Somali government that we can work inside the 12-mile limit—in 'brown water', as I would phrase it, rather than in open sea. That allows me to do capacity building and engagements on the land with coastal communities and is something that other missions do not have. You can absolutely do counterpiracy in other ways—there are other mechanisms to do so—but Atalanta has those three advantages, which are slightly different.

The Chairman: Is that agreement to operate within territorial waters a political agreement between Somalia and the EU?

Major General Charlie Stickland: Yes.

The Chairman: I suppose the question one would have to reflect on—I am not asking you for an answer—is whether it was the political size and clout of the EU that enabled that agreement to be reached more easily than it might have been through bilateral agreement between nations.

Major General Charlie Stickland: I will offer a view, if that is all right. That is one of the EU's mechanisms in that with its delegation in Somalia it can speak with one voice for the 28 nations to the Government. Its ability to a certain degree to talk from a military and civilian political perspective is a benefit, whereas the Combined Maritime Forces is very definitely a military alliance as opposed to a political alliance. That is probably one reason why the mechanism has unfolded in such a way.

Q47 **Lord Horam:** Good morning, General. As you were saying just now, you are allowed to operate inside Somalian coastal waters and on Somalian land by agreement between the European Union and the Somali Government. Somalia clearly has huge problems, and it has two European Union missions there operating on those. How, in practice, do you co-ordinate all that? Do you do that? How does it work on the



ground?

Major General Charlie Stickland: There is a very practical answer to your question, but there are some other things that might be worth exploring, if I may, within the spirit of that question.

In practical terms, there are three EU activities going on that are focused on Somalia. There is the training mission,⁹ which is essentially a 'train the trainer' mission, with a significant Italian presence and some support from Spain and other nations. There is EUCAP,¹⁰ which is essentially a capacity-building enterprise that looks at institutional reform, but also some lower-level capacity building.

Lord Horam: What do you mean by institutional reform?

Major General Charlie Stickland: It is essentially looking at the structure of federal government in Somalia. Its focus is on the civilian oversight of the security organs—the Ministry of Interior and National Security, a maritime security strategy, and things of that nature—but at the government level, and there are institutional structures that flow down. That is where EUCAP focuses, with some targeted activity, as I have mentioned, in the four ports, from a maritime perspective. My operation is looking at the counterpiracy activity, as I have explained.

There is no doubt that, by going through the ambassador of the EU delegation—we all talk with Ambassador Lorenzo quite a lot—if we have one particular point to put, it is not an Atalanta point or a EUCAP point; it is an EU point. A good example of this is trying to encourage the Somalians to think seriously about a maritime security strategy. Do they want a coastguard? Do they want port police? Do they want a navy? Those large questions are something that we can have a conversation about as a collective. That is the first stage: using the EU ambassador as a mouthpiece for all of us as we go through.

I will be very honest and say that there is very little practical liaison between me and the EUTM, the training mission, because we are doing very different activities. We share information, so threat information or something of that nature will be passed between the two organisations.

There is slightly greater linkage between EUCAP, the capacity building enterprise, and Atalanta. We are trying to grow that. My maritime capacity building needs to be in a place where, if EUCAP is not carrying out activity, we are complementing and growing it, or, if it is, we are reinforcing that activity. That is one of the bits of work that we are doing with Ambassador Lorenzo to achieve a better synergy between the two activities. There is connectivity. My liaison officer in Mogadishu works in EUCAP, so we understand what each other is doing and there is an interface.

⁹ EUTM Somalia

¹⁰ EUCAP Somalia



Q48 **Lord Horam:** How satisfactory is the response from the Somalian Government to what you are trying to achieve?

Major General Charlie Stickland: In all honesty, it is very difficult. At the moment, the EU's focus is the benchmark activity of the withdrawal of AMISOM¹¹ and the growth of the Somali National Army. From a maritime security perspective, the bandwidth is very limited and we have made very little progress with getting that institutional change, to be honest with you. We are definitely a long way away from a core structure and key capabilities on the ground.

Q49 **Baroness Manzoor:** Can I just unpick that? You said that you had been there in one form or capacity, or the EU has, since 2011. What has been achieved in building capacity? You have just told Lord Horam that it is very difficult, but what have the gains in capacity building been, rather than on the policing side of it?

Major General Charlie Stickland: From my limited knowledge of EUTM, it has trained a number of company-level groupings that have then been put back into the Somali National Army. One of its issues is tracking them and seeing where they subsequently go. The UK and the Americans have a similar problem with our activity in Somalia.

From a capacity-building and maritime security perspective, the gains have been incredibly small. The first success was the Somaliland Coast Guard, which people have been involved in. It has a structure and some vessels that go to sea. Elsewhere down the coast of Somalia the gains have been incredibly low. That is because the focus has to a certain degree been on the land and the Somali National Army—those sorts of things. The maritime security dimension has always come a relatively low second. An honest answer is that we have a long, long way to go on maritime security capacity before the Somali government take over the security of their own territorial waters.

Q50 **Lord Triesman:** You mentioned Somaliland, and earlier you talked about the relationship with the federal Government. Is there any kind of formal relationship or operational relationship with Somaliland or Puntland? Do they operate on a sub-federal basis with you?

Major General Charlie Stickland: Yes. We absolutely focus on working with the federal government of Somalia, and that is quite rightly the focus of the activity, but there is a practical reality in relation to where we focus our attention and where we perceive pirate activity and pirate networks may be operating and where we seek to engage and develop relationships.

For example, in a focused operation to collect intelligence, to engage with the coastal community and to try to build capacity—we had one in November off Galmudug, where historically there has been piracy—we will end up engaging with the Federal Governor or his representatives as we go ashore. It is a very practical relationship, rather than finding

¹¹ The African Union Mission in Somalia



ourselves in the slightly difficult position between the federal member states and the federal government, which as you know that is a tension that is currently playing out in Somalia. We seek to do it on a very practical, operational level with the federal member states, focusing on our mission set rather than involving ourselves in the politics.

Q51 Baroness Brown of Cambridge: Can I start with a very quick question that will give me a bit more of a feel for what you do? Very roughly, how do you split your time between Northwood and being out in the huge operational area around the Horn of Africa?

Major General Charlie Stickland: Crumbs. I try to get to theatre every three months. By 'theatre' I mean into Kenya, Mogadishu and then bouncing through Djibouti. One aspect of that is the welfare of one's people—being able to see your people, talk to them and ensure that all is well. The other is networking and relationships.

The other component of my role is in Brussels and other capitals. Next week, I will spend three days in Brussels briefing on my six-monthly report, and offering some views on the strategic review. Over the next three weeks, I will be in Madrid, Rome and Holland—I have been to Paris—to talk to Member States about the future and to encourage their commitment. Then there is Northwood-centric activity.

My role is complicated further in that I am also the Commandant General of the Royal Marines and run COMUKAMPHIBFOR,¹² so that is another balance that I have to play through. Knowing where to focus my time is a constant juggling act. The ongoing strategic review has made me more Brussels-centric, because that is where I have my space, and my delegation to the force commander allows him to work the force and work the tactics in the area. I am looking forward to getting a new Force Commander again in April. I will not be doing both. I hope that gives you a flavour.

Q52 Baroness Brown of Cambridge: Yes. It is a very, very complex role, so thank you very much. The question I was supposed to be asking you was this. Just over a year ago, Sir Alan Duncan told us that the future of Operation Atalanta post-2018 remains uncertain, with force generation a particular problem over the period of the next mandate. Is that still the case? What developments have there been? What might happen in the future?

Major General Charlie Stickland: I have just touched on the strategic review, and I will unpack that a little, if I may. There are two parts to the answer. The first is the mandate. We are going through a strategic review process at the moment, and the EU military advice has just finished its silence procedure and has been published. It has tasked me as the Operation Commander to offer a number of thoughts back to the PSC by the end of April. I will come to those in a minute, but all indications from that strategic review process are that the Member States see a

¹² Commander United Kingdom Amphibious Forces



continuation of the mandate to 2020. The expectation, as opposed to it being absolutely signed off by PSC, is that the mandate will continue for another two years. That is an interesting proposition for transition of C2¹³ and that sort of thing.

The next part of the advice that I am going to deliver for the strategic review gets to the heart of your question, which is about force flow and structure. The review asks, "Could we deliver this differently? Could we look at the resources we have and employ them differently?" As with most maritime operations, there are not enough assets. It is about trying to see whether you can command it differently. Can you put your emphasis on information operations and influence differently in order to deliver the same mission set?

I have been tasked to give a view on what the force flow and force structure should look like and to offer views on the command and control of the operation: the OHQ,¹⁴ the FHQ,¹⁵ and those sorts of things. I have also been asked to talk about how you might use influence operations, as we already do, to create a deterrence posture as we go through.

I firmly believe that to have credible deterrence you need presence, but a key thing for me is the recognition that we can use the weather to our advantage. The Member States have already been giving me a seasonal force flow with no Force Headquarters and fewer assets during the bad weather, and then surging them back up again during the good weather. We have done this now for two terms, and I have a sense of where that works and where it does not work. Can you maintain the momentum? Can you maintain deterrence during those quiet periods, or do you need more force flow? I will offer those views to the EU at the end of April. Again, I hope that gives you a flavour.

Baroness Brown of Cambridge: Thank you, yes. That is very helpful.

Q53 The Chairman: Just to follow up on Baroness Brown's first question, you said that you went to all the national capitals to talk bilaterally. To whom do you speak when you go to those places?

Major General Charlie Stickland: There are two areas. I normally end up at CHOD¹⁶ level or in the operational part of the nation, and quite often in the military engagement side of a nation. Operational, military/strategic and defence engagement would probably be the three areas of a defence ministry that I would be likely to talk to. I also go to the ministry of foreign affairs in each country. It is a mil/pol activity.

I have four POLADs.¹⁷ I have an English POLAD, a French POLAD, a German POLAD, and a Dutch POLAD who lives in Nairobi, to make sure

¹³ Command and control

¹⁴ Operation Headquarters

¹⁵ Force Headquarters

¹⁶ Chief of Defence

¹⁷ Political Advisers



that political advice plays through. My senior national representatives in the headquarters are aware, and the thinking that we are doing is key to maintaining Member State relationships and to understanding what we are trying to achieve.

Q54 The Chairman: I realise that I am just asking you for impressions here, but they can be quite important. What impression have you formed from the foreign ministry visits you have made to EU capitals of their attitude to Operation Atalanta, its importance and where it sits in the overall scheme of things? I am just trying to see the world a little as others see it.

Major General Charlie Stickland: I am at the beginning of my journey. My first engagement was in Paris. I will go to Madrid, Rome, The Hague and Berlin over the next three weeks as we go through. I think they all see the value of Atalanta, but some are more enthusiastic about committing resource to it.

The French and the Germans have come a long way in saying that they would like the mandate to extend. If you had asked them the question a year ago, I think they would have said, "We should be looking to terminate", but a lot of the nations have seen the value of Atalanta, not just from a counterpiracy perspective but with the broader maritime security architecture dynamic that plays through.

This year has been slightly different, because there were a number of piracy attacks in mid-2017, one ending with a ship's crew barricading themselves in the citadel. It was a Chinese boarding team that boarded, but it was a combined effort. Then there was our activity in the Somali Basin in November when a pirate action group tried to attack two vessels. People say, "What was it?" Genuinely, they tried to put ladders up the side and fire RPGs¹⁸ at the stern and the bridge of the ship to try to disable it. Admiral Gregori and his team apprehended them and took them to the Seychelles. This year has been slightly galvanising and has showed that the intent is still there, the capability is still there, and the deterrence appears to be working.

Lord Horam: You said that a Chinese ship was recently involved in an incident. How many of the vessels going through the area are European Union vessels as opposed to non-European?

Major General Charlie Stickland: I cannot give you great facts and figures, so it is probably best if I answer the question from a relationship perspective. There are three structures through which, as the commander of Atalanta, I can employ people. There might be an EU nation—Spain, Italy or Germany—contributing physical resources to the operation, and I task them appropriately within the operational design. There are also third-party states that have asked to play a part.

Lord Horam: I meant the nature of the merchant vessels going through.

¹⁸ Rocket-propelled grenades



Major General Charlie Stickland: Forgive me. It is such a broad question that I cannot really answer it. Fundamentally, the quantity of trade that runs through is enormous.

Lord Horam: It is huge. I am trying to get at the fact that the European Union is operating on behalf of the whole world in this area, and there is massive commercial traffic going through this area, most of which is not European Union-connected.

Major General Charlie Stickland: Yes. We talked about your first question in relation to the connection of EU activity within Somalia. Atalanta plays a part in the broader EU regional view in terms of what is going on in the Middle East, what is happening in Africa and what is happening in the Indian Ocean. We are part of an EU footprint looking at the safety of free trade and the flow of commerce into Europe. We have a broader role that is not just about Somalia, and I think the EU would see it as such.

The Chairman: Our team will look at various resources to see if they can tap into that data and get it for the report.

Q55 **Baroness Suttie:** This has been a hugely interesting and informative session. Just to understand how this operation works in practice, I would like to take you back to the answer I think you were just about to give to Lord Horam about non-EU countries' contribution to Operation Atalanta. My question is in three parts. Which countries do contribute and have contributed? Which contribution is the most significant? What are the practical difficulties for co-operation between Operation Atalanta and non-EU countries?

Major General Charlie Stickland: Again, this is a fascinating part of the jigsaw. I would just go back to where we started.

Baroness Suttie: You mentioned China.

Major General Charlie Stickland: There are four bits to this. There are the core EU players that contribute resource very easily, because they fall under the mandate, the mission set, and they play their game according to the operational design. That is great and very flexible.

The second is the third-party states. At the moment, we have Serbia and Montenegro with staff officers in the headquarters. We have had a Serbian autonomous vessel protection detachment. That is business as normal now, as we have an information-sharing agreement with them. I will come to the caveats on the third-party state bits in a second.

The most significant, third party state grouping is South Korea. We have a signed Framework Participation Agreement between the South Korean government and the EU in Brussels—not Atalanta—for South Korea to offer four or six days per month to Atalanta, whereby essentially it becomes part of the Operation. South Korea is not in associated support; it is genuinely part of the operation. At the moment we are saying, "It



would be better if you would give us potentially three weeks every three months rather than four every six", just from a pure practicality perspective, because of the size of the sea space and how we could use its capability. It has become part of the Operation and is also exploring whether it wants to put staff officers into the Force Headquarters or the Operational Headquarters. Third-party state status is a well-trodden path, right back to Colombians operating in 2015.

I mentioned associated support, but it is probably worth highlighting that that is the third mechanism of support, and it is one that the French favour. Associated support states do not want to commit resource to the Operation and say, "We are going to have a vessel Atalanta-flagged". They prefer to say, "We are in associated support. We are in the region, and we will respond and play appropriately", hence my comment about value add, rather than it being a core part of the operation.

"Co-ordinated" would be the best way to describe the fourth area. The Chinese fall into that area. Atalanta is the co-ordinating authority for allocating ships to escort the World Food Programme, and it likes us to be the clearing house for that. We are putting our autonomous vessel protection detachment on board. I am allocating my resource to protecting a ship, but we sometimes use other people. We have used the Indians, and we have just used another Chinese ship. We act as a co-ordinating authority to have that ship operate in support of the World Food Programme under the auspices of the Atalanta footprint, but there are no agreements. There is some data exchange, but it is very much about the World Food Programme as we go through.

Those are the four strands, and I hope that answers your question.

There are two other bits which I think are important. The first is an organisation called the SHADE, the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction forum. This is an extraordinary forum, which I co-chair with the Combined Maritime Forces and Vice-Admiral Aquilino. It is run by our two chiefs of staff to keep it as a 'worker bee' session. It is held in Bahrain and it invites anybody who is involved in counterpiracy to come and talk about co-operation and trying to achieve synergies. It involves the shipping industry. It involves the Chinese. It has involved the Russians. It involves the South Koreans.

Pretty much anybody who has an interest in this issue of counterpiracy—because it is non-contentious; it is about free flow of trade—comes to SHADE. We seek to use it as an opportunity to explore how we might release threat information, discuss deconfliction and talk about best practice. We try to share best practice as we can across both the military and the shipping community. SHADE is a very powerful forum, and again it does not use confidential information. Everything is open source, such that we can have coherent conversations across the community that about trying to protect shipping. That happens every six months.



Another limitation for third-party states that play, which is worth highlighting, is that they have to come under the operational design. If they have a staff officer in the Headquarters, of course they will be part of the planning team. But fundamentally the regulation for third party states is that you drop into the organisation and get on with the plan. You cannot decide the levers and the nature of the Operation. You are just joining it. You also have second choice of vacancies and things of that nature, rather than being a core Member State.

I would also highlight that essentially you agree the rules of engagement that you operate with at sea, and there is a cap on the level of people we will take as staff officers, which is the commander and lieutenant colonel level. Some constraints operate for third-party states as we go through, but fundamentally they want to operate within the mandate and contribute to the Operation, so it creates a synergy. I hope that answers the question.

Q56 Baroness Suttie: It does, comprehensively. Who decides the level of co-operation? How it is decided? Is it purely bilateral between the third country and the EU?

Major General Charlie Stickland: I do not know. I will check and come back to the Committee, if that is all right. My instinct is that states tell the EU in Brussels that they would like to participate, because the Framework Participation Agreements and all those things do not come from EU NAVFOR Somalia. They come from Brussels. That structure is put in place and then they operate with me. I will confirm that to the Committee.

Q57 The Earl of Oxford and Asquith: You have answered a lot of what I was going to ask in your description of the differences between the Framework Participation Agreement and more *ad hoc* arrangements, which I think you call the co-ordinated approach. Do you have anything more to say about the advantages or disadvantages of the different approaches? Also, there is a significant US presence out there, is there not? We have not really touched on how that performs with Atalanta.

Major General Charlie Stickland: There are probably three bits to that. I will take the American question first.

The Earl of Oxford and Asquith: Also, where are the Russian military assets? Where are they deployed out of? You can answer that at the end.

Major General Charlie Stickland: We will go through what the American dimension feels like and then look at what is good about third-party states and that sort of thing. Then we will go to the Russians.

The American dimension is significant, but our engagement is all through the Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain. There are two bits to Bahrain: there is the American sovereign fleet activity, and co-located in their headquarters is the Combined Maritime Force. Vice-Admiral Aquilino commands both and therefore wears dual hats.



Underneath him in the Combined Maritime Forces are a number of multinational taskforces that have different mandates. One is CTF 150, which is counternarcotics and counterterrorism. CTF 151 is counterpiracy. There is a grouping that does work up in the Gulf, which has more Gulf partners involved, and there is a grouping that deals with supply and resources. Nation states volunteer the command and resources in each of those through a force generation process.

Sitting above those taskforces is the Combined Maritime Forces Headquarters, the deputy of which is a UK commodore. In it are American staff and multinational staff, who oversee all the various taskforces as they go through. The link to the US activity is through the co-location of the two headquarters. If there are events at sea that potentially require an American asset to chop into one of those missions for any requirement, that is done through the mechanism of the American fleet linking with the CMF. I hope that paints a picture of how that works.

The other thing I would highlight is that we are continually striving to make sure that we optimise, particularly for CTF 151 but really for all the maritime resource in the area, what the CMF and Atalanta are doing. A good statistic is that 30% of the ISR¹⁹ from maritime patrol aircraft that the CMF is using is provided by Atalanta from an information-sharing perspective, because in my mandate I am allowed to share information on counterpiracy with the CMF.

Our perspective is that we all know we have not got enough resources, so we are trying to co-ordinate where our resources are, such that we get maximum spread and maximum capability. We are constantly trying to share intelligence information that is relevant to our mandates, and potentially relevant to somebody else's mandate. SHADE is part of that, but there is also, for example, a weekly intelligence forum with the CMF from Atalanta. The relationship is very strong when it comes to trying to co-ordinate and optimise our resource. The brilliant thing about it is that counterpiracy is a non-contentious playing field, so sharing information about those sorts of threats is easier than in some other circumstances. That is the American dimension.

The next bit of your question about third-party status, what is the best and how it works is really difficult to answer, because quite frankly I will take any help I can get. To a degree, third-party status from an operation command perspective is much, much better than associated support, because the nation has very kindly subordinated itself to the mission and I can use it where appropriate. Generally, as long as there is a framework participation agreement, third-party states add very few caveats to it, so I can genuinely use those resources.

For me, it is all about core and third party, associated support and co-ordination. I will do my very best to optimise where they wish to be

¹⁹ Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance



and what they wish to be and to fold them into the architecture of the Operation as we go through.

As to the Russian dynamic, it is a huge piece of sea space and a very busy piece of sea from an Indian, Chinese, Russian or Iranian perspective. Fundamentally, Russian vessels are escorting their vessels through the international recommended trade corridor and using the ports around the region.

The Earl of Oxford and Asquith: They are escorting their own vessels.

Major General Charlie Stickland: In general, some of the individual nation states that have independent deployers—the Russians, the Chinese or whoever—are more focused on their own assets, but through MSCHOA we seek to add other nations in order to maximise protection for any convoy that is going through. That is where SHADE comes in, because it is about deconfliction and co-operation as we go through.

Q58 **The Chairman:** Can we turn, finally, to what might or might not happen post Brexit in all this? In terms of expertise, resource and the rest of it, there is absolutely no reason why you or your successor could not continue to command the forces in Operation Atalanta. As you have described to us, you have a very important relationship upwards with the PSC, and *prima facie* it is a little difficult to see how that could be maintained by a British officer if the UK was no longer a member of the EU. My first question is: do you agree with that proposition?

Secondly, you said earlier that you thought that participating in Atalanta was profoundly important to the UK's national interest. If that is true, presumably it would also be true post Brexit. Are you therefore in favour of the UK continuing to operate in some form in Atalanta post Brexit, and what form do you think that would best take?

Major General Charlie Stickland: We dance slightly into politics.

The Chairman: Let me ask you to answer the question purely from a military perspective.

Major General Charlie Stickland: From a military perspective, there are some very sensible reasons why you would maintain Atalanta as it is—because of the *acquis*, because of the relationships, because it is an ongoing concern. The direction I have received, which I am very definitely following to the letter, is this: "Continue to deliver this Operation in good order, Stickland, making sure that you are integrating and drawing in all the Member States, such that there is no loss of output and no loss of reputation as this goes through".

That is where I am from a military deliverables perspective. I am thinking about the strategic review. I am offering my thoughts from the expertise that we have in Northwood and building the next OPLAN, which will come out after the strategic review.



There is some thinking going on about where the UK should play in this. That sits with the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the combined European security unit. I understand that that will offer Ministers some thoughts about how we might explain our potential relationship with Atalanta as we go through. There is also interest from other Member States in taking over the C2 transition of Atalanta.

Again, writing from a purely military perspective, I have been asked by the EU to offer my thoughts on the things that need to be considered if it comes to a transition of command of Atalanta. I characterise them in physics and chemistry terms. The physics perspective is things like contracts and moving desks. Mercury, which I mentioned, is a communication system that we have designed over 10 years. There is 10 years' worth of data in Northwood, so there are some very practical things that you need to think about from a C2 perspective.

The chemistry is in the relationships. There is the issue of where MSCHOA fits because of its linkages to the shipping industry. If you move the Headquarters, do you take it with you? There is real synergy with it being in the OHQ, but there is also synergy about its location, so there is a conversation to be had with the shipping industry there. The other bits of chemistry are about relationships with the CMF and the Seychellois in relation to the legal finish. Some of the UK relationships have helped those on their way. If Atalanta goes to another Member State, part of my role is making sure that the EU understands both the chemistry and the physics of a C2 transition. It has also been made very clear to me that, if a decision is taken to transfer, my job is to make sure that I set my successors up for success in every way I can and demonstrate that we are still a very strong supporter of European security and mechanisms as such.

The Chairman: That was very well negotiated, if I may say so. Major General, thank you very much indeed for coming today. You have helped to shed a lot of light on a very complex area and helped the Committee to understand it. We are enormously grateful to you. I remind you that it was a public session and you will receive a draft of the transcript. Please amend or add to it if you wish. Some of the members of the Committee will be coming down to Northwood to visit the Headquarters at the end of the month, and you have certainly whetted our appetite for that, for which we are also very grateful. Thank you very much indeed for an excellent session.