

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Modernising Defence Programme, HC 818

Tuesday 17 Apr 2018

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Members present: Dr Julian Lewis (Chair); Leo Docherty; Martin Docherty-Hughes; Mr Mark Francois; Graham P. Jones; Gavin Robinson; Ruth Smeeth.

Questions 79-146

Witnesses

[I](#): Her Excellency Ms Tiina Intelmann, Ambassador of Estonia, Her Excellency Mrs Baiba Braze, Ambassador of Latvia, and His Excellency Mr Renatus Norkus, Ambassador of Lithuania.

[II](#): Justin Bronk, Research Fellow, RUSI, Dr Andrew Monaghan, Director of Research on Russia and Northern Europe Defence and Security, Changing Character of War Centre, Pembroke College, University of Oxford, and Sir Adam Thomson KCMG, Director, European Leadership Network and former UK Permanent Representative to NATO.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Her Excellency Ms Tiina Intelmann, Her Excellency Mrs Baiba Braze and His Excellency Mr Renatus Norkus.

Chair: Welcome, everybody, to this oral evidence session for the Defence Committee's inquiry entitled "Modernising Defence Programme". This time, we are taking a NATO/allied perspective on the inquiry. Our first panel consists of three ambassadors, who I will invite to introduce themselves in a moment. Please ignore the bells that will go off in three or four minutes; they will not affect our proceedings.

I would like to say—I am sure you are used to working together—it is not necessary for every panel member to answer every question every time, so if one of you feels able to speak for all three we will be able to get through more questions and more supplementary questions. We are looking to speak for up to an hour, so hopefully you will make considerable progress in that time. Would you like, just briefly, to introduce yourselves?

Ambassador Braze: Good morning. Thanks for having us. My name is Baiba Braze. I have been the ambassador of Latvia to the United Kingdom since August 2016.

Ambassador Norkus: My name is Renatas Norkus. I am Lithuania's ambassador to the UK. I arrived to assume my duties in August last year.

Ambassador Intelmann: Good morning. My name is Tiina Intelmann. I am the Estonian ambassador. I also arrived last year—late last year.

Chair: Thank you very much. Gavin Robinson will start us off.

Q79 **Gavin Robinson:** Thank you, Chair, and good morning to the three of you. Ambassador Intelmann, may I ask you, and then your colleagues, for the mood of your general population in reaction to the Salisbury attacks? Could you give us a sense of who they view was responsible for the attacks? From an ambassador perspective, were you surprised by the international diplomatic reaction?

Ambassador Intelmann: First of all, everybody shares the surprise and disgust at the fact that chemical weapons were used here in the United Kingdom; I think I can speak for the whole population of Estonia. That is really something that is quite shocking. Of course, we trust the information and conclusions that the British Government came to and were convinced that this is exactly the case. Most probably, Russia is behind all of this. We then took steps in solidarity with other Western countries. We expelled one diplomat, and our Prime Minister cancelled his visit to Russia. We also took other steps and implemented the Magnitsky list. In general, I think that is the feeling of the whole population. We are shocked and disgusted at the fact that this kind of thing can happen.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ambassador Norkus: Thank you for the question. This was a terrible event. It happened to be the case that my Minister of Foreign Affairs was in London in the immediate aftermath of the attack. He was at the House of Commons when your Prime Minister made the second intervention. Let me emphasise one important element here. We were very happy about how the UK Government informed us, through direct communication between the Foreign Secretary and my Minister, but also at different levels at various stages. Your National Security Adviser came to Brussels. He informed NATO. We had bilateral channels. All that information made us very confident that the findings of the UK Government and the intelligence communities is exactly what happened. That is why there was no hesitation whatsoever on the part of our Government, with the support of our people, to express full solidarity and take all the actions that consequently have been taken. We believe that that has demonstrated the unity of our Euro-Atlantic community, led by the UK. The UK acted with precision, quite quickly and in a robust way. That is exactly what, in our view, should be happening in similar incidents. The inhuman use of chemical weapons, be it on European soil or be it by the regime in Syria, cannot be tolerated or left unanswered.

Q80 **Gavin Robinson:** Just to be clear, obviously your Government speak on behalf of your people, but in the aftermath, without access to the information that your Government would have had, was there any reticence among the general populace or were they quite content with the conclusions that had been drawn?

Ambassador Norkus: You know, in a democracy, there is always a discussion and of course there are various voices, but in this particular case, since it was such a despicable act, I think there was a more or less united view.

Ambassador Braze: In our case, the Government's reaction was immediate. It was a condemnation of the action. After the Prime Minister's statement to the Commons, which I had the honour to attend, our Minister came out with a strong statement and so did the Ministry and the whole of Government. We commend the UK's work with partners, by informing and by organising themselves very quickly within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the UN, NATO and other institutions, and also bilaterally. There was very clear, fast, proper action.

In our case, we took national measures. One of the so-called diplomats was asked to leave and a civilian head of a business organisation was also put on the list. Plus we supported a very strong reaction from the EU and NATO, both at Foreign Minister and Heads of State and Government levels, to issue a condemnation and very clearly support the UK in expressing solidarity—obviously mentioning that it was highly likely that it was Russia who committed it.

Q81 **Chair:** All three of your countries expelled Russian diplomats and I believe all three of you have taken a special interest in Russian disinformation activities against your countries. Did it surprise any of you, the way Russia has reacted to this matter and the way in which they have sought



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to obfuscate what happened, even suggesting that there was some link between the fact that this happened in Salisbury and that our defence laboratories that specialise in research into this sort of warfare were a few miles away from the place where it happened? I suppose that would be sort of second nature as far as you are concerned, in the way that Russia behaves.

Ambassador Braze: On our side, we were not surprised. We expected a Russian reaction like that. Your Government was also very well aware that that was what would follow after the Prime Minister's statement to the Commons. The same happened after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, after the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, and on a number of other occasions—a massive disinformation campaign. In our case, it is rather more complicated. We have part of the population who are Latvians, but whose first language is Russian, even though they are bilingual or trilingual. They sometimes watch Russian TV channels that are broadcast into our countries. Some of those channels are registered here in the UK, so Ofcom has a responsibility to monitor and to regulate them. We took up the issue on that occasion also.

Ambassador Intelmann: No, we were not surprised by the Russian reaction, but also do not forget that we are products of the Soviet Union, so all this obfuscation of facts is something that we know and that our population also knows, and our population is probably a bit more critical than people in some other countries.

Ambassador Norkus: Though we deplore the Russian tactics of denial of their involvement in the Salisbury case, as we condemn their groundless decision to reciprocate by PNG-ing our diplomats, at the same time we had honestly not expected that country to change its attitude this time around. The incredible pattern of previous cases tells us that it has become the policy and action of the Russian state. I would like to refer precisely to the Russian state, not to Russia per se, on this particular and overall. It has been doing invasions, occupations and destabilisations of independent countries around its perimeter, and further it has been attempting coups d'état in Montenegro, shooting down MH17, interfering in elections and doing hacks, cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns. All that showed, and continues to show, the Euro-Atlantic community that we need to act when the time comes.

Q82 **Chair:** Have you developed a common strategy of trying to counter such disinformation and obfuscation? Would one of you like to explain what that is?

Ambassador Norkus: I could take the liberty; of course my colleagues might join me. We in Lithuania have already put in place a complex set of counter-intelligence measures aimed at preventing and disrupting hostile intelligence activities against our country. We have taken measures by expulsions and public disclosures, to reduce the size of Russian state intelligence residences in Lithuania. A tight counter-intelligence environment is of paramount importance, but it is not enough. Russia is steadily developing its whole-of-Government approach, which weaponises



HOUSE OF COMMONS

information, energy, economy and other domains. We must make sure that we are on the same page in recognising the risks it entails and the means it employs.

We must make sure that Russian state-sponsored media outlets are taken for what they are—propaganda tools. In this regard, in Lithuania we have developed a screening mechanism for granting accreditation for Russian journalists. It is harder for Russian state propaganda operatives to obtain Lithuanian visas, although they apply for Schengen visas elsewhere, indicating that there is still a long way to go in dealing with this propaganda menace. We must help our societies to become more resilient by exposing the networks of Russian media fixers and their conduits.

Finally, we should not stand idle, watching Russian money buying influence and corrupting our institutions. On the national level, we have already developed a mechanism that allows proper checks on investments into sectors and enterprises of strategic importance, and any potential investor, foreign or domestic, in the energy, transport, information technologies, telecommunications, finance or credit sectors must comply with certain criteria listed in the law. Those are the measures we have been looking at for the last couple of years in our intelligence and governmental institutions, with precision.

Q83 Chair: So, I will ask your colleagues. A lot of this depends on exposure of what is going on. Is that right?

Ambassador Intelmann: Some of the measures that we have taken are similar to those taken in Lithuania. But maybe in a broader perspective, it is not possible to shield the population from all misinformation or Russian propaganda. So you just have to offer the facts—the truth.

For instance, one of our activities is that every year our security police publish a yearbook—the references are in the paper that we just distributed—telling what is really happening. Of course, we are not able to tell everything to the population in general but just telling a few facts of what is happening and what people should be aware of.

Ambassador Braze: In our case, we acted both nationally and internationally. We took the initiative to establish in Riga the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, which on a systematic base studies not only the Russian disinformation and propaganda but the tactics and technologies used in other places. You are most welcome to visit the Baltic states. Once you come, we would like to bring you to the NATO centre in Riga.

Then, of course, on a national level, we realised what the Lithuanian Ambassador said. All those measures have to be taken but people also have to be empowered to understand that they are under an attack. There is a comprehensive effort in creating this kind of critical thinking attitude in people. That was done through various channels.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

First, it was very clear that having quality media is of strategic importance for any country, including Latvia. Training journalists and empowering them to understand how the propaganda works is important. Together with our Baltic friends we created the Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism, where they are working journalist-to-journalist together and training each other, giving best practices to each other in this environment of an information war.

We also created a media fund, where the Government allocated a certain amount of money, and firewalled it so that the Government have no say in how the money is used, for media and journalists to tap into, if they want to do some in-depth research projects or investigative journalism. The result has been quite remarkable. There have been some studies that have come out with an impact on society, especially the security situation.

Q84 Graham P. Jones: As an aside, what value do you put on the BBC Russian language service?

Ambassador Braze: Do you want Latvia's opinion as such? We don't have an official position, so I can answer in my private capacity. Personally, I think it is good to have the BBC Russian service. I do not have the data on how far it is available in Russia itself and how far it is watched, so I cannot judge the impact on audiences and penetration of news. However, having a quality, independent media outlet within Russia is good and important. Our task, we believe, as the West and European countries, is not to punish the Russian population. It is not to punish civil organisations or activists. We still have to maintain contacts and engage. We have to work with them.

Q85 Graham P. Jones: Because there are Russian communities inside the Baltic states.

Ambassador Braze: There are.

Q86 Chair: Yes, we are coming on to that with Martin in a second.

Ambassador Braze: They are Latvians.

Q87 Chair: Yes; Martin will be champing at the bit for that. But just before that, can I just ask you a brief historical point? Obviously, the Soviet Union broke up and we have had different phases in the evolution of Russia since then. How would you summarise the development of relations between Russia and the Baltic states since the Soviet break-up? What was the impact of the emergence of Putin in particular? Finally, what was the effect on relations with Russia of the Baltic states joining both NATO in 2004 and the EU as well? Who would like to start—perhaps Renatus?

Ambassador Norkus: With pleasure. I think the whole history of our bilateral, or Baltic-Russia relationship, has had bumps on the road and ups and downs, and of course it very much depended on the situation then. Of course, after the regaining of our independence after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there has been an evolution with the Government in Russia that was headed by President Yeltsin. The Russian Federation at that point looked



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to the West to warm up the relationships and to find proper co-operation. The West responded in a very decent and open-minded way.

The Baltic states—I speak of course for Lithuania, but I believe that this is true for all three of us—have joined this campaign. You will remember the Partnership for Peace programme at NATO, and all kinds of co-operative efforts, with the NATO-Russia Council being created. So the West has demonstrated incredible openness, extending the hand of co-operation. The Baltic states, in that course of events, were able to join the alliance. Sometimes it is called the “expansion” of NATO. From our point of view, this has been the enlargement of Europol and the free zone eastwards, which the Baltic states as well as, of course, some other eastern European and central European countries joined as a guarantee for their security, and a guarantee for the values that we cherish.

Q88 **Chair:** So this changed with the emergence of Mr Putin, did it?

Ambassador Norkus: Well, that was the period after the cold war that you could categorise as a period of warmth, with the expectations that things would change, but in the Russian Federation, not every segment of the political establishment actually followed that line. We all know the incredible apparatus of the former KGB, then the FSB, and all the agencies. They were doing their own analysis, and then we saw things happening with Mr Zhirinovsky playing a role, and then later Mr Putin taking over. All of that, of course, pointed to the direction that Russia is not likely to change any time soon. Already then we felt that our NATO membership and our joining the Euro-Atlantic community was a shield and a guarantee that we should hold very tightly and strongly to.

Obviously, sometimes people in the West would say, “Look at the Baltic states—they never believed that Russia would change, and they were right.” In some sense, that is true, but in another sense, if we are a little more self-critical, look at our defence establishments. They were not from the very beginning a heavyweight in terms of financing. We were behind the 2% mark for a long time. Estonia jumped sooner than the other two Baltic states, but we were also expecting there to be changes. At the end of the day, that did not happen.

Q89 **Chair:** Any quick observations from the other two, or is there general agreement?

Ambassador Braze: Of course, general agreement. Renatus was ambassador to Russia, so he knows what he is talking about. I think the context is important. We are celebrating 100 years of our establishment this year—all three Baltic states. It is also 100 years of the relationship with the UK. The UK actually recognised us even before Latvia was established—there was a temporary Government at the time. Throughout these years, people have maintained the same values, whether that was during the Soviet occupation, or before or after.

Obviously, in 1937 when we look back at the numbers, we were more highly developed in terms of GDP per capita than Austria, Italy and a number of other European countries. We were on a par with Norway,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

France and others. During the 50 years of Soviet occupation, that disappeared, so we are catching up currently with the rest of Europe.

We are looking at us within the context of Western Europe. Russia has decided not to be part of that continent. That is Russia's decision. It has a right to develop its own internal systems and economic road the way it wants. What it cannot do is threaten and invade other countries. That is basically the difference of perceptions.

Ambassador Intelmann: Very briefly, it has always been somewhat difficult for Russia to accept Baltic independence. Don't forget that we became independent before the Soviet Union collapsed. Also do not forget that the Soviet Union was run in the name of the Russian people. Russians were very surprised that we took a very independent approach—we did not join the Commonwealth of Independent States—and we said that we wanted to become part of the West, where we actually belonged.

If we think back to the '90s, and looking at what is happening right now, it is so obvious what Russia was doing: trying consistently to draw a rift between us and the West, so that the West would start doubting our goals and the reason for our legislation and everything. It was very clear that this was a concerted action to put the West against the Baltic states.

Q90 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Good morning, your Excellencies. Ambassador Braze, I want to come to you first and talk about the impact of the Russian Government seeking to influence Russian-speaking Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians in your countries. I know that the focus can primarily be on the Russian Federation destabilising these minorities, but I think we also recognise that they are potentially a great asset in seeking to explain Russia to the rest of the world and their part in Baltic societies. Do you think these minorities, along with those of you who speak and understand the Russian language and culture, have a major role to play in that explanation to the rest of the world?

Ambassador Braze: Thank you for this question. Indeed, according to our constitution and practice, Latvian people are not divided by language or ethnic origin; we are all Latvians. That has been since the first day of the establishment of Latvia in 1918. The success of the Republic of Latvia is the success of all its people. That is the approach taken.

During the '70s and '80s, there was a massive immigration from certain parts of the former Soviet Union. They were settled in the bigger cities, building special housing and putting them in the factories that were specially built. When we regained independence in 1990, that was a challenge—how to integrate people who were brought into the Republic of Latvia without any connection or roots. We have a traditional minority, whether that is a Jewish, Russian or Ukrainian minority, that was there before the 1940 occupation. For them, it is a totally different story.

With the ones who were brought in by the Soviet powers, the approach was taken that people have the right to stay if they choose to. Those who did not have the right to stay were the Russian military; they had to be



HOUSE OF COMMONS

withdrawn so they were withdrawn in '94. For the rest, the main accent was put on schools—on getting the next generation equipped to function in a democratic society. The school system was reformed to provide children with a full command of the Latvian language and of another foreign language—English is the obligatory second language—plus the choice of another one or two languages.

School reform has been the key to success in creating an integrated society in Latvia. Having said that, the reality is that in a free society, there are various media that broadcast into the country: they are English, Latvian obviously, but also Russian. The issue with the Russian media—in this case it is the Russian media because the three biggest Russian TV channels are broadcast in the Baltic states—is that none of them is registered in the Baltic states. Russian TV uses European audiovisual regulation—one is registered in Sweden and two are registered in London. They do not have the soft sort of approach of Russia Today, which still manages to provide certain amounts of disinformation; the information and the broadcast are meant for Russia proper, which is brainwashing. That is what we would like to bring to the attention of our friends here, but also elsewhere. This is the reality we are faced with.

- Q91 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Would you say that it shows the strength of the Baltic societies that you are able to stand up to that at this moment in time, given the work you have done since the end of the cold war and the re-emergence of your states as independent sovereign nations?

Ambassador Braze: Absolutely, but there is still a conscious effort to undermine the very bases of our states, by doubting democracies and doubting the strength of the values, positioning Russia as an alternative model of civilisation and so on. Of course, in the case of the Skripals in Salisbury or of Syria, the information provided and broadcast is not what you see here. It is pure disinformation.

- Q92 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Would anyone else like to add to that?

Ambassador Intelmann: Just to say that Estonia has different recognised minorities, not only the Russian minority. People are our asset. Our territory is bigger than Switzerland or the Netherlands but we do not have that many people, so everyone who lives there is welcome, so long as they are loyal to the Estonian state, of course. In general, I think openness and understanding of different cultures has been the basis of Estonia's fast development.

- Q93 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I get the idea that those people are quite happy being in the Baltic states, rather than living in the Russian Federation. I will move on quickly, Chair, because I know you want me to ask the next question. Ambassador Intelmann, how have you dealt with increasing threat from cyber and other instruments of hybrid warfare?

I remember that there was a self-documented episode of an Estonian military intelligence officer being abducted within your border and taken into the Russian Federation. If possible, could you provide us with other examples of similar aggressions that have stayed close—deliberately, I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

would say—to article 5 thresholds without breaking them? Perhaps the other ambassadors will also have examples.

Ambassador Intelmann: You asked about the cyber threat. Let me just address that first. In 2007, we were, I think, the first country in the world that suffered a concerted cyber-attack by Russia, or by Russian actors. That kind of woke everybody up. Very quickly afterwards, a NATO cyber-security centre was established, which is located in Estonia. A lot of work is going on, in terms of how to protect ourselves against cyber-attacks. Everybody nowadays is subjected to cyber-attacks, but we see that our structures are functioning. The lesson that we learned in Estonia in 2007 was very valuable in that respect.

Concerning the abduction of an Estonian citizen, yes, it was a very regrettable event. Fortunately, the person was released. We hope that those kinds of activities will not be continued by Russia.

Q94 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Ambassadors, do you have any other examples that you might want to add?

Ambassador Norkus: Yes. Very briefly going back to your previous question about minorities, Lithuania has not had any acute problem with the national minorities, especially the Russian minority, but that does not mean that we should be complacent. We are investing a great deal of attention to dealing with the national minorities in a proper way, making them feel involved and part of society across the board.

As to your question about the cyber-capabilities, to cope with unconventional challenges, my country, as well as other Baltic states, has been upgrading our crisis response system to make sure that it can integrate the whole variety of methods used by potential adversaries. That could include cyber or other elements, including the penetration of energy infrastructure or basic public and political life instability. Our crisis response system has moved over to encompass a holistic approach.

When it comes to cyber, we are especially proud of a number of practical steps taken lately in implementing the cyber defence pledge, which is the common NATO pledge of our allies. Starting from this year, all national level cyber-security capabilities were consolidated in the Ministry of Defence, in our case. It is not the model that every country has chosen. We have gone this way. It allows responding to cyber incidents swiftly, in a more efficient way. Cyber elements are also integrated into exercises and operational planning.

Of course, we already have lessons learned over the last few years. We are very happy to share those lessons with our allies, including the UK, which has held very productive bilateral consultations on cyber issues. We are not the weak link any longer. We might have been viewed from the West as a weak link because we are next to the border of the Russian Federation. All these important developments gave us more resilience than one could even imagine.



Of course, we are still vulnerable, as we all are. Now the cyber threat—the cyber menace—does not see the borders. Here international co-operation and closer interaction are an absolute must if we want to progress on this particular issue.

Ambassador Braze: In our case, we learned from the Estonian attack. That was a turning point in national capability, international co-operation and practical awareness across the board—both in terms of critical infrastructure and the private sector. All the capabilities have been built up. Never say never, but up until now, I think we have been doing all right—no major attacks.

Q95 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** My final question is to Ambassador Norkus. Would you say that the Baltic states are too dependent on Russian-supplied energy? Let me turn that on its head, given that the Russian Federation is seeking to build a pipeline directly to the Federal Republic of Germany. Do you think that the pipeline going through the Baltic states allows some type of leverage, because that then needs to get to the market in Germany? Do you think the European Union could do more to put pressure on the Federal Republic over the Nord Stream pipeline?

There are two sides to it. You might be dependent on that oil, but also the Federal Republic of Germany needs to up its game in playing its part in defending the rest of the European solidarity through energy production.

Ambassador Norkus: Thank you for the question; it is a very relevant one. We view energy security as our second independence. In other words, until we feel energy-secure, we cannot proclaim full, 100% independence. With the LNG terminal that we built a few years ago in Klaipėda, this situation has changed dramatically. It helped us diversify supplies of energy. The Russian Federation is still part of the market: they play a role but they are no longer a monopoly that we have to rely on 100%.

The same is true for the whole European Union. We have been very pronounced and vocal in promoting the third energy package within the EU, which, once implemented, should also help in the security policy realm.

The Nord Stream, of course, is a political project. From our point of view, it doesn't bring any good to Europe in the longer term. We are obviously not happy and are opposed to this project. We know that several European countries take the same position—such as Poland and Denmark, with some later changes perhaps—but the German Federation is still very much on that project. Of course it has to continue: discussions have to continue and we will see how it evolves.

Ukraine plays an important role here. We don't want to see Ukraine being absolutely cut off from the supplies between Europe and the Russian Federation. That is a big challenge. So we will see how it evolves, but at the moment we are very much opposed to the Nord Stream 2 project.



Q96 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Your Excellencies, do you have any else to add, especially on the Federal Republic of Germany's position?

Ambassador Braze: Just that on our side, the issue is gas. About a third of electricity production in Latvia comes from gas, mostly from Russia. With the appearance of alternative sources, obviously that pressure has been put off. Latvia has huge gas storage, which is shared so neighbours can also keep their gas reserves there. That also resupplies Russia, actually, during the winter. So there is an interconnection in that respect: it is not just dependence from Russia; the St Petersburg region depends on this gas storage. For the rest, more than 14% of electricity production is from renewables, and especially hydro. So we are managing.

Q97 **Mr Francois:** Ambassadors, on the Russian military threat, is the Russian military more active close to your borders now than it was several years ago? If so, what are you doing to combat the Russian military threat as best you can?

Ambassador Braze: The facts are facts. We should not hide what Russia has been doing. That is not only on the Baltic border; it comes from the North down to the South. Unfortunately, we have not seen the change in Russian systemic behaviour where it increases its military presence at the borders with its neighbours, even though no Western country, be it Norway, Finland or the Baltic states, has ever expressed any threats towards Russia.

In the North, Russia has increased its presence in the Arctic region. Two brigades have been created, set up and fully equipped, and that is just 40 km from the Finnish border and close to the Norwegian border in the High North. They have been equipped with the most modern equipment: carriers, helicopters and others. Soldiers are trained, so there is a conscious effort. The S-300 and S-400 air defence systems have been placed on Novaya Zemlya island. So it is a comprehensive approach to the North.

The same has been happening on the borders of the Baltic states. In the Latvian case, just 32 km from our border there is a big increase in Russia's newest helicopters, and a special helicopter base was redeveloped and fully equipped. Those are assault capabilities; they are not defensive capabilities—none of those I mentioned.

In Pskov, about 17 km from the Estonian border, the air assault division, the Spetsnaz brigade, have been upgraded and trained. They have experience from operations in Georgia and Ukraine. Equipment has been supplied, so it is all there.

In Kaliningrad, upgrades to air defence systems, coastal defence systems and cruise missiles have now been established, and not only mobile ones but also apparently stationed ones. So-called A2/AD capability is well established there but also further south on the Black Sea, where in Crimea Russia has placed its most modern equipment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

In short, in its Western military district there are more than 100,000 Russian soldiers, which is far beyond what is necessary for the defence effort of the Russian Federation. Taking into account that no NATO member state and no Baltic state, nor the Norwegians or any others have ever expressed any threats towards Russia, our defence concepts do not provide for aggressive military actions. We regard this as completely unproportional. That is why the presence of our NATO allies is so important.

Ambassador Intelmann: Russian actions should be a concern not only for Estonia and the Baltic states but for the whole NATO alliance. We have had more than 40 violations of Estonian airspace during the time that NATO has been policing our airspace. These are facts, and as the ambassador of Latvia was saying, Russian actions are also happening in the Baltic sea, up in the North and in many other places.

Again, in this context I should say that in Estonia we are fortunate to have a British contingent within the deterrent that NATO is providing, and co-operation is going on very well. The 800 people you have in Estonia are fully integrated into our brigade, and we hope that this presence will continue as long as necessary.

Ambassador Norkus: My colleagues have described the situation quite fantastically and given facts, but let me put one bit of emphasis on the historical retrospective. Some people in the Western communities say that Russia is responding to what NATO has been doing lately, which is not true.

If you look historically, Russia is now well into the implementation of its military reform plan. That reform plan was launched after the war in Georgia in 2008, when the Russian Federation felt that they were not really up to speed. They put in place this 2020 defence modernisation programme, which they are pretty much implementing. Our services assess that their plan is to implement up to 70% of what they have aimed at by 2020.

The Zapad 2017 exercise clearly reflected the continuous process of Russia's armed forces modernisation: preparing for large scale conflict, including military build-up; upgraded military equipment; increased combat-readiness; improved capabilities for the speedy redeployment of troops; and, at the same time, selective implementation of international obligations. Lessons learned from the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria were integrated into those exercise plans.

Kaliningrad has been mentioned. Of course, Kaliningrad has become the most militarised part of Europe, with all the missile systems in place. Clearly, this presents a challenge to the alliance by limiting NATO's possibilities to reinforce and resupply the Baltic states and broader Northern Europe. The deployment of these missile systems not only has a clear military purpose but sends a political message to the entire region and reflects the continuity of Russia's aggressive posture.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Of course, we now have to move to see what the response could be and how we deal with the whole situation. Clearly, whereas the Baltic states can do a lot in terms of building resilience against soft threats and challenges, we are not able to do that alone when it comes to hard military challenges. We may invest endless money to create defence systems, which we are doing—this is no excuse not to do that—but without allied support and the presence on the ground of allied troops, it would be very hard to do anything in terms of defence.

Although the Baltic states have the political will to defend themselves and we will defend ourselves, there will be a huge mess if something happens. We will defend ourselves, but if we had pre-positioned forces, if we had ammunition in place, if we had the very smooth transition of military enforcements in place and, ultimately, if we had permanent presence on our ground, that would contribute greatly to the security of the Baltic region in general. By “permanent forces”, I do not necessarily mean that they should be statically in place all the time, but rather that they should be rotating.

Q98 **Mr Francois:** Clearly, NATO is vital to the defence of the Baltic states. I think we all accept that.

Ambassador Norkus: Without any question.

Q99 **Mr Francois:** Ambassador, you mentioned briefly the value of enhanced forward presence. I wonder whether your fellow ambassadors have any comments about how important that is.

Ambassador Braze: It is crucially important. It is the single most important thing currently. For the NATO summit in Brussels this summer, we are working towards a reinforcement strategy for enhanced forward presence. Because of the difficulties of resupply, we need to work out how to have that theatre entry capability. That is also important with regard to the British defence modernisation programme, because Brits do have such capability, and it is important to keep it and develop it.

It is important to clearly understand what is happening in maritime affairs. We need the NATO presence—I say “we”, as NATO altogether—and also in the air. Currently, the air policing operation in the Baltic states only identifies those planes that are not reporting who they are, so they do not fulfil a defence function, as such. Above the Baltic sea, they only identify those airplanes that are not identifying themselves or giving misleading information.

We need to address all those issues—plus, of course, the modernisation of the command and control structure. There are a number of very concrete issues on the table. We are very thankful to Britain for being in the Baltics. We are thankful to Germans, we are thankful in our case to the Canadians and all the other allies. The work they are doing together with us is fantastic. It has been an eye-opener for all the allies present. The work among themselves in various exercises has shown on the ground, in theatre, what is there—what is not working and what is working. They are exchanging troops; a British platoon was moving to Latvia, and so on. It is

quite exciting work for soldiers themselves and for command structures, so it is good.

Ambassador Norkus: I agree with my colleagues that the enhanced Forward Presence has been a historic decision and a very important, crucial decision for the whole security of the Euro-Atlantic area. At the same time, of course, it is just the beginning of a big process. We view it that the eFP—enhanced Forward Presence—has to truly become a joint enabled force, supported from air and from sea. Currently, eFP is too land-centric, from our point of view. I think this is what all the NATO allies are looking at with the upcoming NATO summit, to make sure that we can still do some improvements in this.

When it comes to the NATO summit itself, I do not know if there will be a question—

Chair: There will. Hold that one.

Q100 **Mr Francois:** On that point, how important are theatre entry forces like amphibious forces to your defence?

Ambassador Norkus: They are important. Obviously, they are very important. It is also very important politically that the tripwire is in the area. Having the United States, the UK and France as three nuclear powers being present in the Baltic region is of utmost strategic importance. This sends a clear message to whoever might want to challenge us that they will be faced with bigger consequences. Also, in our case, with Lithuania, Germany has assumed the role of the leader of the enhanced Forward Presence, which we very much appreciate. It is a big thing in changing the whole perspective of German politics and German security policy, because Germany has always been very hesitant in terms of direct involvement with their military. This time they are fully and this shows that article 5 is clearly of huge value for all the alliance.

Ambassador Intelmann: May I just say very briefly, I went to Tapa to where Europe forces are stationed very recently. The message I got is that it is extremely important to exercise together and to act together. It is not only about the terrain in Estonia, but also the fact how our conscription army in the case of mobilisation will interact with the British and how all that will come together. It is clear that we in NATO still have to think about these things.

Q101 **Graham P. Jones:** Primarily to Ambassador Norkus, do you believe that NATO allies would be able to move and deploy sufficient force in the time necessary to defend your country should a crisis occur?

Ambassador Norkus: My sincere belief is affirmative, provided we do our homework, implement what was agreed at previous summits of the alliance and really look at the crux of the matter, which is giving SACEUR—the Supreme Allied Commander Europe—the authority to do more exercising, movement and practising, and enabling them to take the necessary decisions before the political clout is sorted out. In this situation, it would be difficult to defend the Baltic states if we rely only on

the political wisdom of our leaders. Rather, we should rely on the professional military, who will be planning in advance.

On the next steps that we believe should be carried out, we think that something needs to be done with the NATO command structure. It should be adapted. We all share the same interest in ensuring the new structure is fit for purpose. It is vital to guarantee the rapid NATO command structure transition to crisis and wartime, including the necessary authority to SACEUR. We also believe that the land command component should occur in the region, which is not the case at the moment. We are very supportive of the Polish proposal to place the command in Poland. We hope the UK will support that decision when it comes to the NATO summit, because it will provide a very necessary ingredient, in terms of the command and control structure.

All in all, I believe it could be done with the necessary warning and intelligence co-operation. I believe it is doable.

Q102 Graham P. Jones: Ambassador Braze, which UK capabilities are central to our NATO commitment, and which support you?

Ambassador Braze: As I already mentioned, Britain has a number of capabilities that are very important for the whole of NATO: the T-38 capability, the amphibious forces and part of the Air Force. Of course, during this discussion, we expect them to be strengthened and, as part of the defence modernisation programme, maintained and developed—not because it is of benefit to the Baltic states, but for Euro-Atlantic security. There is just one security. There is no such thing as Baltic regional security, Salisbury security or regional security. The frontline is everywhere nowadays. Keeping the Baltics safe and secure is our task nationally, but it is also the task of all of us together. We must find the capability gaps and address them. Of course, the UK, as a traditional military power throughout history, plays a very important role. Your military and your services are fantastic. The ones we have worked with are of the highest quality.

Q103 Graham P. Jones: Have you been consulted on the current British Government's defence review?

Ambassador Braze: We have had consultations recently in Riga about the wider eFP subjects, and also about the understanding of what is happening. There is a lot of exchange and discussion.

Q104 Graham P. Jones: But are your three countries being invited to express an opinion about where Britain can best contribute to the common security, which you have described?

Ambassador Braze: Our militaries are in the closest possible contact, and so are our defence ministries. Through that process, and if necessary through the highest governmental process, we are working together. The British side and others are very well aware of the capability gaps for the enhanced Forward Presence, and its strengthening. The Lithuanian ambassador mentioned the relationship with the US and the US



HOUSE OF COMMONS

engagement in Europe. Maintaining that very strategic link is so important for all of us—for Britain, for us, for everyone.

Ambassador Norkus: If I may, I will briefly chip in, supporting what my colleague has said. There are a number of very practical multilateral initiatives that the UK is leading. One of them is the JEF—the so-called joint expeditionary forces that the UK has been leading. The Baltic states are part of that; some of the Nordic countries are part of it. This is exactly what we should be aiming at—participating in those. They are not necessarily NATO—they are kind of freelance operational capabilities that could be used in the case of emergency without really going for article 5 confirmation at NATO. JEF is something that we are very proud of, and we would like to continue that co-operation very extensively.

Mr Chairman, referring to your point, I think we would appreciate even more interaction in terms of the UK defence modernisation discussions that are ongoing. I think it would make perfect sense. It is being done on a bilateral and quadrilateral basis, but I think there would be no harm done if we could extend it to a new level, to more regular exchanges, because we are all dependent on each of us.

Ambassador Intelmann: I would like to say that of course co-operation is very, very deep. Very often, of course, embassies are not even informed about it, because it happens on a daily basis. It is at the level of agencies, at the level of the military. The Secretary of State for Defence was in Estonia just recently, and I accompanied the delegation. Basically, the discussions that are going on are not diplomatic discussions; these are discussions of very deep substance.

Chair: Our final questions to this panel are from Martin.

Q105 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Ambassador, what are your priorities for the NATO summit in July?

Ambassador Intelmann: If we look at NATO, we have a number of very good decisions that have come out of Wales and Warsaw, so the question is very much about implementing these decisions, taking stock of progress and also looking at reinforcement and readiness. One of the issues that should be on the table, as one of my colleagues already mentioned, is strengthening the transatlantic bond and also talking about burden sharing. Although we are in the North of NATO, we also think that threats from the South should be addressed, to make it so that all NATO allies share the common understanding of where we are. In our region, we would definitely be interested in a stronger presence on the sea and in the air, as my colleagues have also said. One of the issues that probably is not of so much interest to this Committee but is of interest to us is NATO and relations with the European Union, to make sure that we make use of the strength of both organisations.

Q106 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** If I may, I will expand that question slightly for all three of you. For instance, Ambassador, you have mentioned reinforcement. Ambassador Braze, I think that earlier you mentioned



HOUSE OF COMMONS

capability gaps. You talked about traditional armed forces, and the UK is also traditionally a naval power. Ambassador Norkus, you mentioned doing our homework.

As a Member of Parliament for a constituency in Scotland, it's in the name for me—the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. One of the key things—my colleagues continually hear me going on about it—is that if you are looking for reinforcement, if you are looking to engage in the North Atlantic, especially with the United States and Canada, what you require is a coherent policy in the North Atlantic and in the High North. Do you think that should be a solid part of the next summit? I ask that because there are many of us who are gravely concerned that if there is a need for reinforcement from the United States and also from Canada, those sea lines of communication are utterly undefended and that not only leaves us in the UK open, undefended, but leaves you, strategically on the frontline, undefended.

Ambassador Braze: Yes—the short answer is yes, we agree with that. On the practical side, currently there is no alternative, on the deterrence side, to the actual presence in the Baltic states, because having allies physically there, together with us, exercising and providing the deterrent effect is the most important aspect of all that. Further, for the resupply and reinforcement, obviously what we are talking about is important, both in terms of maritime and of air dominance—the ability to overcome the A2/AD bubbles that are built there; the ability to work with partners, including neutral partners; having other plans in place; having a command structure that is able and willing to act where necessary; and having our political will in place, with a clear understanding that acting in the moment when it is necessary will prevent further deterioration of the situation. So, yes, yes, yes, yes. And the defence pledge—obviously, without the proper financing for defence for all allies, there will be no capabilities to overcome the gaps. That is what is crucially important.

Ambassador Intelmann: I just want to say that all the concerns of the allies should be taken into account, as otherwise NATO cannot be effective.

Q107 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** The final question, for Ambassador Norkus and others who wish to come in, is: what would you say needs to happen to reduce tension in the long term—and I think also about the relationship between your experience as Baltic states, with the Russian Federation? For instance, it has been put to me that the next presidents of your states are most likely to come from what they call the post-communist regimes—from a post-communist era. If I can ask perhaps a delicate question of all of you—coming of age, I assume, under the Soviet Union—do you think it will be an advantage or a disadvantage that the next presidents of your countries will not have the experience of the present generation?

Q108 **Ambassador Norkus:** Thank you very much. I think we should continue this discussion. I am really interested in what you are saying about our next presidents. We are having our presidential elections next year. I had



HOUSE OF COMMONS

not heard of any interesting thoughts that you might be alluding to. What will count, at the end of the day, if we are talking about the Russian Federation as a security challenge nowadays, is to finally put up a coherent long-term Russia strategy. That has to be done within the European Union; it has to be done within the Euro-Atlantic community. The G7 should play a role. There are so many interlocking institutions; but behind those institutions there are powers and real leaderships, which need to play a role. We have been having a dialogue with Russia, but it is not a single dialogue. We have been having multiple dialogues on every level under various auspices without really having a proper, well thought-through, long-term strategy with Russia, towards Russia. Without that it is going to be very hard. We will manage. I think that as a Euro-Atlantic community we are strong; we have values behind us and we will manage to survive and keep as strong, one way or another. But if we had that strategy developed, that would be a huge help for all of us. Then we would sit at the dialogue with our Russian counterparts, saying that we are strong, we have a strategy, a tactical approach and capabilities, and we can do the strategic messaging that would not only involve Twitter diplomacy but also actual actions on the ground. That would count as the best medicine for our leaders and the leaders of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Ambassador Intelmann: I just want to speak about the institutional set-up. Estonia is run by coalition Governments, and of course it is a headache to put these coalitions together. At the same time, this ensures that the power is not in the hands of a few. The President in the Estonian system has quite limited powers. In this respect, the decision making is not that much in the hands of the Prime Minister or the President; the responsibility is shared by coalition Government members. Of course, we need to educate our people; but, in general, since 1991 we have always been looking to the future, not towards the past.

Q109 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I think what I mean is that there is a strength in your institutional memory which the rest of the NATO alliance really should be utilising far better, and supporting you. I think it is an opportunity that we might be losing very quickly.

Ambassador Intelmann: We will be writing our memoirs.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I will be buying them.

Ambassador Braze: Just to finish off, I do think that we as a community—the Euro-Atlantic community—we are based on values and we mean those values. They are what guides us, how our structures are created. It really does not matter in the Latvian case who is the parliamentary—that is, the parliamentary republic—who is the president so much. You can have different types of people, but as long as there is a democracy, as long as there is the republic, as long as there are independent legal institutions and everything that is there, it matters less who is there.

Having said that, I would like to once again thank Great Britain for the role it has played throughout Baltic history. I would like to thank the

Canadians, Americans and all the others who are together with us in this particular moment in history. We have to learn from the past, we have to learn from how the First World War started, how the Second World War started. This clearly shows that there is no such thing as regional security or distant security somewhere else. We are in it all together and that is the way we would like to maintain it. We are fully with you and thank you for being with us.

Chair: Thank you all very much for coming today. We greatly appreciate your contributions. We will now move to the next panel. Please feel free to stay if you have the time.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Justin Bronk, Dr Andrew Monaghan and Sir Adam Thomson.

Chair: I would just like to say that there are some special circumstances obtaining today, which is that in about 10 minutes' time, there is going to be an emergency debate arising out of the Syrian events and that is why we will be down to our bare quorum of three. It is no disrespect to our three very welcome and specialised witnesses. We will still be covering all the ground that we were going to cover, but I just wanted you to know that it is not personal that we have got a rather depleted Committee, because they will need to be in the Chamber for the debate.

As is usually my custom, I ask you to say a few words introducing yourself and then I will hand over to Mark before he has to leave us.

Dr Monaghan: I am the director of research on Russia and Northern European defence and security at the Changing Character of War Centre at Pembroke College, Oxford.

Sir Adam Thomson: I am the director of the European Leadership Network, formerly a career British diplomat. My last posting was as permanent representative to NATO.

Justin Bronk: I am a research fellow for air power and military technology at the Royal United Services Institute.

Q110 **Mr Francois:** I have one question for each of you. Sir Adam, do we still have cold war mechanisms for communication to reduce the danger of conflict escalation? If we do, how well do we think those systems work?

Sir Adam Thomson: NATO has a formal arrangement with Russia for a hotline. It barely works. There is very limited contact between NATO militaries and Russia, but I am pleased to see that General Scaparrotti, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, is expected to meet his Russian counterpart, General Gerasimov, by the end of this month. Individual nations have a certain number of arrangements but these are by and large rusty, and not well-exercised by either end of the communication. NATO has often found it quite difficult, for example, simply to get anyone to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

answer at the Russian end of the telephone line. So in my view, in short, it is quite inadequate.

Mr Francois: Doctor Monaghan. I was turned down for a place at Pembroke to read History, actually.

Dr Monaghan: I am sorry to hear that.

Q111 **Mr Francois:** Clearly I have forgotten about it. What is Russia's long-term strategy in Syria, and how does it interact with Russia actions in Europe, if at all?

Dr Monaghan: Russian long-term strategy in Syria should be seen in the context of Russian grand strategy more broadly, which is to try to re-establish Russia as a player or as a state that is ubiquitous—because of its geography making it unique in its ability to reach across the world—and that is indispensable. The phrase would be that they want a seat at the table, because if you are not at the table then you are on the menu. The drive there is for involvement. The second part to that would be to say that the Russian leadership looks at the world with a great deal of concern about the way the world is going. There was much discussion about how it should not be allowed for Syria to turn into the same situation as Libya. So there is another reason for Russian involvement there. You have a reach-out of Russian roles and capabilities that have evolved substantially since 2008. So in many ways you are also seeing a roll-through of an evolution of Russian strategy also, which is the ability to reach forward to assert and defend its own interest further afield. I will not go into great depth now, but what we have seen in Syria is obviously a much more coherent Russian ability to deploy force and to create a coalition, and it is having effects within Russian capabilities. Much of the Russian deployment there has been cycled through very quickly, and all of the senior military leadership have been involved in planning and deployment. Equipment is being used and reforms are being tested. This is a crucible in many ways for understanding Russian activity further afield, including in Europe. We should be very much aware that the Russian leadership, the Russian military and the Russian political and security establishment are learning lessons from Syria.

Q112 **Mr Francois:** From a Russian point of view, in Syria, what does good look like?

Dr Monaghan: "Good" looks like the trajectory that it has taken so far. Assad is still in power as President; they have leant towards trying to create a set of diplomatic negotiations—peace talks and so on. Russia has not become over-involved with a wide range of forces drawing it into the substantial quagmire, if you will, that people initially rather thought that it would become. It has achieved a certain set of internal goals as well, for testing military capability, testing the role of the military tool of power as a tool of power.

Q113 **Mr Francois:** Thank you very much. Mr Bronk, can we learn anything from the strikes that took place over the weekend about Russian air defence capabilities or—related to that—about UK-NATO capabilities in



HOUSE OF COMMONS

challenging peer or near-peer adversaries?

Justin Bronk: For a start, I think we can have another confirmation that so-called defensive systems or air defence systems have far more than defensive applicability if they have strategic range, as of course the S-400, and the S-300 to a lesser extent, series do. I think it interesting that both in this case and in 2017 the Russian S-400 system in particular was not employed to try and shoot down incoming cruise missiles. I think that is indicative both potentially of a fear of escalation from the Russian side but also of the fact that they are aware that with a doctrinal requirement to fire two interceptors at each incoming missile threat, their probability of kill for cruise missile targets is estimated at about 0.7, so you would usually fire two interceptors; that with an incoming strike of 59 cruise missiles last year and just over 100 this year, that would very quickly deplete the available—at least loaded—complement of interceptor missiles in the Russian defence systems, which would leave them exposed, at least until they could be reloaded, which takes about 15 minutes at the lowest. So it is possible to swamp these things, but of course, even when they are not used, they still remain a key factor in Western planning and decision making. So they are of quite high value for something that does not cost an awful lot to procure compared to a fast jet.

Q114 **Graham P. Jones:** Following up on that, do we know how many interceptors were fired, who fired them and from what source? I am presuming that Assad does not have the capability, but he could have bought off the shelf from the Russians—or was it Russian assets that were used, if any interceptors were fired? I wondered what your thoughts were on that.

Justin Bronk: Not being privy, clearly, to military intelligence, nothing of what I have seen of the raw footage coming out of Damascus in particular suggests the firing of Russian interceptors particularly. It looks to me like they were firing off SA-2s and SA-6s, and possibly other, older series missiles, mostly after the strikes had gone in, as has been reported. Assuming that the denials on both sides of the exchange that the Russian defences were employed are correct, it is worth noting that the Syrian air defences as they currently stand have a very, very limited capacity to intercept cruise missiles. There are point defence systems; they have reportedly taken delivery of Pantsir, the latest Russian point defence system, which is capable of intercepting cruise missiles if deployed near their target or directly overflown; but in terms of the majority of their Soviet-era air defences, they may still be very lethal against aircraft when cued in by modern radars, but against cruise missiles they are unlikely to have been effective. So it was most likely a symbolic launch of salvos of air defence missiles in order to claim internally that the Assad regime had taken effective defensive measures, even though in practice it appears quite likely that the claims of Syrian missiles intercepted are correct.

It is also worth remembering that the Storm Shadow, JASSM, the American stealth cruise missile, and the SCALP, which the French use and which is obviously the same missile as the Storm Shadow, are all low



HOUSE OF COMMONS

radar cross-section missiles, so compared to standard Tomahawk they are harder to intercept.

Q115 **Chair:** This question is for all three, but I will start with you, Adam, if I may. What do you think about the attacks in Salisbury in relation to Russia's approach to the West? Is this a new, more aggressive approach, or is it something that may be part of the Russian state apparatus, sanctioned without realising the extent to which it would have such huge ramifications?

Sir Adam Thomson: If you believe the British intelligence case, then the capability is not new. Indeed, Mark Sedwill's letter of 13 April to Jens Stoltenberg says that a Novichok programme was always in place, simply never declared and never abandoned. What is new about Salisbury is the overt use on, at present, a very limited scale. I defer to Andrew a good deal on this, but I would think that does not allow us to conclude much about the broad defence implications of this. The West has believed Russia is cheating on a number of arms control treaties, not just the chemical weapons convention, and it does not tell us much about the scale of a Russian nerve agent programme. What we have seen is—again, if you judge HMG to have got it right—a GRU operation, not a statement about Russian war-fighting capability. That said, we must be struck by the apparent willingness of the Russian state to be seen to be in violation of yet another arms control treaty—the chemical weapons convention.

Q116 **Chair:** I am thinking more in terms of the fact that the attack was carried out in this blatant and brazen way.

Sir Adam Thomson: Exactly.

Chair: What does that say about Russia's attitude? I am looking at the moment at a BBC News report from November 2006, headed, "Russia law on killing 'extremists' abroad". It says that in July of that year, "the upper chamber of the Russian parliament—the Federation Council—approved a law which permits the Russian president to use the country's armed forces and special services outside Russia's borders to combat terrorism and extremism." It goes on to explain that extremism is redefined to include such things as slandering the occupant of the position of President of the Russian Federation, and that the person who gets to decide on the use of this power is in fact the President of the Russian Federation.

That has obviously been on their statute books since 2006. Why should they do it now?

Sir Adam Thomson: There is a difficult question for Western policy makers as to whether Russia has simply grown indifferent to a number of international standards to which it previously adhered, or claimed to adhere, or whether it is consciously signalling its indifference—in other words, it has an ulterior motive. I do not feel able to answer that.

It is certainly the case that the Russian state would regard somebody like Mr Skripal as a legitimate target, but it has stepped across not just the boundary of the chemical weapons convention—if Russia is responsible for



HOUSE OF COMMONS

this attack—but also understandings between intelligence agencies about how you behave towards exchanged agents and so on.

Being a bureaucrat, I believe more in cock-up than conspiracy. It is possible that this was authorised, possibly even at high levels in the Russian Government, without much consideration for the wider ramifications, so I do not yet feel able to judge that this is deliberate signalling. To illustrate my point, we have a situation with the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty where Britain and the United States, and an increasing number of NATO allies, believe that Russia is in violation, and yet the Russians are attempting to appear to remain within compliance. In that sense, one could interpret the stepping across the line as deliberate.

Q117 Chair: Andrew, do you think that the Russians were in any way taken by surprise by the strength of the reaction? The sudden flare-up of the crisis over Syria has rather pushed this down the news agenda, but up until then it was dominating the news agenda to a remarkable extent.

Dr Monaghan: A lot of people were astonished by almost all of the incident. That is not just a question of whether the Russian leadership was surprised by the nature of the response. I know people in the UK and the US—public civil servants—who were not expecting at all the level of response that was given, including from the general public.

I also know many in the Russia-watching community here who were mystified and surprised by the nature of the operation. I would cautiously say that, first, I clearly agree with you that, yes, the President signed into that legislation. There have been killings abroad. Possibly the most obvious one is the killing of Mr Yandarbiyev over a decade ago. But there have also been other extrajudicial killings beyond that—across Europe in fact, in other states in the European Union. It is also worth pointing out, though, that the attempted killing appears to have failed. There are three things: the killing has failed, if I am to understand correctly that Yulia Skripal has—

Chair: Maybe they should have relied on polonium.

Dr Monaghan: The point being that it has failed. There is a big mess. A British police officer was hospitalised. What kind of operation does that suggest? I point out these three questions because it would be interesting from my point of view as a Russia-watcher to know what the situation is ongoing within Russia.

Are the individuals who carried this out being in some form decorated or are they being given “a debrief without coffee”, so to speak? Is it clear that all of the Russian leadership would have known about this? I am not sure that is the case. Who is trying to find out what? Those are the questions that I would be interested in trying to find out.

The scale of the response has been very surprising to many in this country and abroad, including in Russia. Having been in touch with Russians, I am

aware that it also creates a sense of mystification. They don't understand and have a strong sense of surprise.

Q118 **Chair:** Mystification at what? That the reaction was as strong as it was?

Dr Monaghan: No. About the nature of the whole incident.

Q119 **Chair:** Of the attack in the first place?

Dr Monaghan: Of the attack in the first place.

Q120 **Chair:** Because there have been a number of suspicious deaths of Russian citizens but those are usually ambiguous as to whether they were killed or it was suicide. It does appear that by using these bizarre and exotic methods, a two-fingered salute is being given by whoever is doing that to the country where the act is being carried out, surely.

Dr Monaghan: That is what I have been given to understand from people in this country. I think there are some complexities. As far as I am aware, the police investigation is ongoing; obviously, I am not privy to any of the information within that. In due course, I am sure they will have more specific clarity as to who carried this out. I am not in a position to know, obviously, whether it was GRU or somebody else. We need to be a bit careful before going from the use of a particular material to assignation of who and how.

Sir Adam Thomson: I want to add that, even if we cannot yet make the judgment as to whether this was just indifference to the rules or a wish to signal defiance of them, there is a further element to the Russian response, whether or not you think Russia is guilty of the Salisbury attack. That is a level of denial, defiance and contempt that plays very badly in the West and which is characteristic of quite a wide swathe of Russian national security behaviour. This is an important driver for the deepening confrontation we now see between Russia and the West. There are other conceivable approaches Russia could have taken in response to this incident.

Q121 **Chair:** Indeed, and their ambassador has been to have conversations with this Committee in the past, bemoaning the poor state of the relationship between Russia and the United Kingdom. Then something like this happens, which does rather send a mixed message, to put it mildly.

Q122 **Graham P. Jones:** My own personal view is that I have no doubt the Russians are behind this, though we are not quite sure which Russians, because I take on board your point, Andrew. I would ask you this question, in relation to some of the points that you have generally made.

This was around a week before the Russian presidential election. You said that they thought they could get away with it. Obviously, we cannot identify "they"; I wonder if you could try to. They thought they could get away with it.

Why that particular timing? There is some confusion around this. The Chair has already alluded to people drowning in swimming pools. Why use such an exotic or convoluted way to kill somebody when you could



HOUSE OF COMMONS

push them off a balcony, as we have seen in the last few days? There are so many little imponderables that don't add up. Can you shed some light on those?

Dr Monaghan: The honest answer is not really, no, because we don't have any indication of who "they" is—at least I don't, from open sources. I am struck by the fact that you mention, of course, yes, it was a little bit before the presidential election. There are numerous examples of people who have said, "Well, this was done to bolster Russian state—Mr Putin's popularity before the election." Personally, I don't think that is connected. Again, when you say, "They thought they could get away with it," I suppose—

Q123 **Graham P. Jones:** Sorry, Andrew, you said that. I was just throwing all these imponderables in. I haven't got a particular view; I was wondering what your view was.

Dr Monaghan: It is a very good question.

Graham P. Jones: I mean, who is "they"?

Q124 **Chair:** Is it likely that a step of this sort would be taken without approval at a very high level indeed, especially as the legislation itself seems to suggest that the President is the arbiter of who gets hit by an attack of this sort? Is it not strange that a country should pass legislation openly in this way, giving itself the power to fatally attack people judged to be traitors abroad and then when someone who by any stretch of the imagination qualifies as a traitor in Russia's perspective, is killed, they then protest in the loudest terms their outrage that anyone should accuse them of doing it. It does suggest a mixture of motives here, does it not?

Dr Monaghan: "A mixture of motives" is probably a reasonable conclusion.

Q125 **Chair:** Let us move on. I will try to direct these to individuals. Adam, from good relations in the 1990s, how is it that NATO has developed into what Russia says that it sees as the primary threat?

Sir Adam Thomson: This can be answered at a number of different levels. There is at a very broad level the very important factor of Russia's sense of humiliation about the 1990s and what one could argue was substantial but nonetheless insufficient NATO engagement and engagement by NATO allies with a Russia going through great post-Soviet difficulties. That has bred resentment.

There is, of course, the question of NATO enlargement. Russia's narrative today, which I am sure is sincerely believed, even if it may not be wholly well-founded in the historical record, is that they were promised that NATO would not enlarge. For a country that had grown accustomed over 40 years to seeing NATO as the adversary, to see that adversary coming closer to your borders is, I think, genuinely alarming, at least for segments of the Russian establishment.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I think there is also an important difference borne of the sense of insecurity that both NATO and Russia feel about their own defensive positions. As relations worsen and you come to see the other side as less a partner, more an adversary, then you get concerned about your ability to look after your own security. That fosters bad behaviours on both sides, which we now see flourishing.

Take the Salisbury attack or take recent events in Syria. The name-calling, the stereotyping by both sides, the assumption of the worst about the other—indeed, the necessity in defence and security planning to assume the worst about a potential adversary—all create a dynamic that has since 2008, but most markedly since 2014, greatly accelerated a worsening of relations. Whether Russia understands it or not, it has stepped across fundamental red lines for the West and for NATO as an organisation, such as the annexation of territory by force or intervention in another country, which is very alarming. You heard from our Baltic colleagues just now about how alarming that can be if you live next door to it.

By the same token, it is not difficult to identify a series of NATO and Western behaviours that are deeply alarming for the Russian military and security establishment. Not just NATO enlargement, but the apparent willingness of the West to ignore international law when it suits them, to walk around Russia's veto in the Security Council, which I am sure Sergey Lavrov would tell us had just happened again this week over the strikes in Syria, and the failure more generally to treat Russia with the respect it thinks it deserves.

I know I have gone on at some length, but I think this really is an important point. Whether we call it a cold war or not, we are witnessing a series of dynamics that are highly reminiscent of the process from 1949 through to 1989. While we look to our defences, we also need to think of whether we wish to go through a phase as long and as expensive and as dangerous as the last one.

Chair: But then the other side has a vote in that matter. Martin, you want to come in briefly. I just want to reassure you, Justin, that we have quite a few technical questions coming up so you won't be left in limbo for too much longer.

Q126 Martin Docherty-Hughes: In terms of the perception of the post-Soviet era that this is a reaction to a humiliation, there are those who would say that this is actually just opportunism by the criminals who are creating a criminalised state within the Russian Federation.

In an answer a few moments ago, Andrew was talking about the failure of the Salisbury attack. That reminds me—I find it quite extraordinary, Chair—of a kind of Mafioso approach to taking out those who have left the family. I am old enough to remember Roberto Calvi hanging from a bridge in London when he decided to squeal on the Banco Ambrosiano and the links to the Mafiosi. It's just reminiscent of these types of failures. Is it really about the humiliation of the Soviet Union, or is it opportunism for this criminalised caste who are running the Russian



state?

Sir Adam Thomson: I guess the answer is the one that Andrew Monaghan gave to a different question, which is that it is a mixture of things. There are certainly those behaviours on the part of the present Russian Government, or at least we believe so. At the same time, you would not see Putin's very genuine levels of popularity among the Russian public were he not appealing to some pretty fundamental feelings about recent history and the sense of the Russian need for self-respect. Both things may be going on.

Q127 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** In terms of self-respect, if you went to Sicily in the 1940s, the Mafiosi were very well respected because of the familial connection. I don't want to labour the point, but in terms of the veto also, that has serious consequences for the international rule of law. I am not talking about liberal democracy. Some would say that is not what the United Nations is for—it is about allowing us to live together. The Russian position now leaves us in a state where we might be abdicating the role of the veto of the United Nations Security Council.

Sir Adam Thomson: I am offering you a rather pessimistic view, I think: that it is not just the present individuals in power, however much the West might dislike their specific methods. Nor is it, on the other hand, the whole of the Russian public; we saw a very well supported liberal phase in the 1990s. Nonetheless, the present Russian Government does appeal to some deep and genuine feelings that will sustain a large defence budget and applaud aggressive behaviour, if that secures for Russia the respect that it craves.

Dr Monaghan: May I add something to what Sir Adam was saying about the deterioration since the 1990s?

What you are really looking at is a set of disagreements that have been wound into the core of the relationship since about 1993, if not a little bit before. People talk about the promise to enlarge or not, which perhaps we don't need to rehearse here. That was the original one in 1990—about which much has been written—but a subsequent discussion about that also took place in 1993. So you have, at the very foundation, a disagreement over the nature of European security.

Many in the Russian political and analytical elite do not think that NATO should exist. It will be quite difficult to create a relationship between NATO and a state led by people who think that organisation shouldn't exist. There was a rolling sense, first, of frustration as co-operation didn't work—you will remember the strategic partnership hopes, and so on—into an obvious lack of common interests, which became increasingly clear. Then you have a series of much more explicit policy clashes.

To remind you, this is really since 2004. Sir Adam is right, but really since 2004, with that role of enlargement, that was the moment when optimism was lost and policy clashes really came to fruition. You then had 2006, the NATO energy debate; 2008, the Russo-Georgian war, and so on. Please also remember that the various re-sets between the US and Russia, but

also the reload between NATO and Russia, had failed before the annexation of Crimea. This is not a post-Crimea situation.

Secondly, I don't think this is necessarily a reaction to humiliation. Although one can decorate it in those terms, the real point is policy disagreements at every single level—every single level. This isn't about Russian pride so much as the fact that when you talk about NATO enlargement, ballistic missile defence, nuclear policy—take your pick of NATO's agenda—the Russian leadership disagrees. I think that is an important point to make because this isn't something that can easily be rectified.

The third point: you mentioned how opportunistic they might be. We ought to bear in mind that the Russian leadership always has great difficulty in implementing its policies. We have lots and lots of evidence of this. We shouldn't just treat the Russians as a power that can wish something and then do it. We have many examples of the Russian leadership struggling to have its own direct orders implemented—that is Mr Putin or any of his group of allies. The vertical of power, so called, is often very dysfunctional. They are putting a lot of effort into creating some functionality there, but it remains very dysfunctional in many ways.

If you were to ask a British, American or NATO leader—maybe Sir Adam will disagree—I think they would say that is very difficult to seize opportunities on the international stage. The UK finds it difficult; the US finds it difficult often. We shouldn't just expect that the Russians can seize this. This is one of the aspects that we ought to bear in mind about the shift in Russian power and capabilities. They have come from a position where they were not able to seize opportunities, and we are going through probably to a situation in the early next decade where the situation might be rather different.

Your point about opportunity seizing is an important one, but let us not over-invent Russian capability, at least not yet. Let us see a trajectory.

Q128 Graham P. Jones: More broadly, and having visited Russia, Putin is struggling with his domestic economic policy. Often the case is put that he uses foreign adventurism or foreign policy to mitigate his domestic problems. In your mind, how true is that, bearing in mind that we know that EU sanctions have bitten quite considerably into the Russian economy? Does the Russian response reflect the economic conditions that have been placed on it by the EU and by its own domestic economic failure?

Dr Monaghan: I will give this two answers, if I may. First, I don't think it is right to make the easy line between Russian foreign policy "adventurism" as a means to resolve domestic politics. I think it works the other way around in many ways. Their concern about the international environment sometimes drives domestic policy. It is much more the other way around.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I know that it probably goes against much of the current view to say that, but there is a very quick step of saying that there are domestic problems, and therefore foreign adventurism and—I know you didn't say this, but I have heard the same line—a short, victorious war will boost popularity. There is no real tradition or history in Russia of a short, victorious war. It is really very dangerous to use war as a tool of policy in Russia.

Q129 **Graham P. Jones:** But nationalism is a key part of Russian elections and Russian parties.

Dr Monaghan: Nationalism is an important question in Russia.

Q130 **Graham P. Jones:** I am not trying to make the link myself; I am just pressing you on your views.

Dr Monaghan: A lot of the Russian extreme nationalist politicians and figures are currently in prison. Much of the Russian population is actually social or left-leaning. The Levada-Center, a respected polling organisation, had it recently that about 60% of the population is social leaning. A large part of that is communist, but another part—up to about 60%—is social democratic.

I am always slightly cautious when I hear people talk about Russian nationalism. The most difficult position to be in in Russian politics at the moment would be to be an extreme nationalist. There is not a link, in my view, between domestic problems and foreign activity, so much as there is the other way around, where you see concern about a colour revolution or regime change leading to the creation of things like the Russian national guard and various other questions.

I do not think that anybody would say that the Russian economy is a glowing model for the future or that it is in any way innovative or built on the grounds that we in the UK might see an economy being built. I remind you that it is the largest hydrocarbon state on the planet, it is the world's second largest defence exporter, grain exports have just overtaken defence exports and the Russian foreign exchange reserves are well over \$400 billion.

There is a deep ambiguity about the Russian economy. There are great limits, such as infrastructure and equipment still in purpose from the middle of last century and huge limitations on a decrepit infrastructure that require billions of dollars of investment. At the same time, it is an economy that is learning how to cope after 2008 and then after 2014. It now has about 1.7% growth, heading towards 2%.

No one would disagree with you—I hope, at least—that the Russian economy is far from ideal. However, they have certain strategic heights that they are now trying to protect. There is a sense of mobilisation that is under way, and that means using the strategic heights of the Russian economy to build a resilient economy that is not based on innovation, but on security.

Q131 **Chair:** We have to move on to the defence and technical side. What can



HOUSE OF COMMONS

we learn from recent Russian operations and exercises about the strengths and weaknesses of their armed forces? Would you like to try that one, Justin?

Justin Bronk: In very broad-brush terms, their strengths can be characterised primarily as non-air-dependent firepower. NATO's firepower is approximately 80% air-delivered, which makes it very vulnerable to infrastructure and airspace denial, and also quite dependent on communications links not being disrupted. We don't tend to try to drop bombs if we can't talk to the person who is going to be nearby on the ground.

The Russians put an enormous amount of emphasis on artillery. They have put a lot of effort into modernising and making sure that all their artillery, whether 152 mm or 203 mm, is self-propelled, and in increasing the range and rapid deployability and survivability of those systems in order to out-shoot NATO. They have taken the lesson from the Ukrainian conflict where, by their analysis, 80% of the casualties on both sides were caused by artillery. They call it "the queen of the battlefield", and that is where they have put a lot of emphasis.

They can concentrate firepower in a way that NATO forces are simply not prepared to meet. Given that in any scenario we examine, the Russians would have the advantage of choosing when and where to concentrate forces, that poses a problem.

They have very strong jamming capabilities—broad-brush jamming—across the whole electromagnetic spectrum: from equipment designed to detonate radio proximity fuses on artillery shells in the air before they hit their targets, so for self-protection in physical terms, up to jamming the frequencies used for synthetic aperture radar surveillance. That feeds into one of their weaknesses, which is that they are not sophisticated enough to jam in the way that they think they would need to in any confrontation with NATO without destroying their own ability to communicate reliably as well.

But within that constraint they have designed these battalion tactical group operational structures, which give, at the battalion level, local commanders all the organic resources that they feel they should need—everything from command and control, electronic warfare, artillery, air defence, engineers and everything you need—so that the battalion commander can, if necessary, issue orders on papers or by runners to everything they might need, without having to reach back electronically, at least in the short-term tactical picture.

The price for that is that you are much more likely to kill your own troops, if you operate like that, because timings and movements have to be quite rigid, and they cannot easily be changed on the fly. Obviously, on the battlefield no plan survives contact with the enemy perfectly. We saw a lot of indirect fire and friendly fire casualties suffered by Russian and Russian-supported forces in Ukraine, particularly between the Minsk I and Minsk II phases. So there is a weakness there.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Russian forces can't compete with Western command-and-control-heavy, network-centric warfare, if Western systems are working as intended. Therefore, they do not intend to fight us with our systems operational. They also put a lot of emphasis clearly on air defence, having decided that they can't really fight us in the air. In a way, Western fighter designers have done their job too well. You can see it from the very lacklustre funding now going into the T-50 or Sukhoi 57, their stealth fighter programme. Procurement is now running between six and 12, depending on which source you read. That is clearly not something that the Russian state is prepared to put much finance behind at this point. They have concluded that they are better served by destroying formations on the ground and denying the airspace through mobile and very capable air defences.

Q132 Chair: How seriously should we be taking this talk about the use of tactical or theatre nuclear weapons to escalate in order to de-escalate a conflict? Is this just part of an intimidation and propaganda approach, or do you think they are seriously considering initiating the use of a relatively small nuclear weapon after they had initially seized territory?

Justin Bronk: The main thing it gives Russian commanders at the strategic level is many more options for managing escalation as they see fit, in the context of an unintended large-scale conflict starting to break out with NATO. I have absolutely no doubt, in my mind certainly, that Russia will never instigate a military confrontation with NATO that it believes will last more than a couple of weeks, because if it did so, it would lose once NATO's far superior industrial manpower and eventually reinforcement potential can be brought to bear. Therefore it needs the ability within those planning assumptions to quickly stop a conflict. That may be by achieving their conventional aims quickly and then simply digging in and saying that any moves to retake this will be met with nuclear responses and seeing if the West backs down. Or it might involve—if they meet an unexpectedly unpleasant response immediately—using even sub-kiloton nuclear weapons, which are almost indistinguishable from some of the larger conventional munitions that the US air force in particular can deploy. It would take a significant amount of time to determine whether a nuclear weapon had in fact been used beyond all reasonable doubt, particularly if airborne sampling couldn't be done in an airspace-denied environment. It gives Russia the ability to credibly threaten to take a conflict nuclear, in such a way that it would look unreasonable for the West to use strategic city-flattening nuclear weapons, or even risk firing one at a more isolated military target, because the vast majority of the West's nuclear arsenal is, like the UK's, based on intercontinental ballistic missile technology, which creates a very large launch plume and will set off every strategic warning radar that the Russians have.

Of course, there are tactical options for NATO. The B61 Model 12 modernisation programme is being pushed quite strongly by the US air force. It will equip one arm of their strategic deterrent, the B-2 and later



HOUSE OF COMMONS

B-21 Stealth Bombers, but will also be integrated on to the F-35 Model A from Block 4, so from the early 2020s onwards.

Russia is very nervous about that capability. For all their talk about the S-400 radar being able to see an F-35, they are seriously worried about large numbers of stealth fighters being based in eastern Europe particularly. If you add in that those fighters are capable, from the early 2020s, of mounting a GPS-guided or inertial navigation system-guided nuclear weapon, that is something that Moscow is deeply uncomfortable with. Their tactical or theatre nuclear weapons capability, which goes from these very small, artillery-delivered, sub-kiloton nuclear devices, up to Iskander and other ballistic missile delivery systems is a response not only to their own strategic limitations, but to what they see as very threatening Western developments.

Q133 Chair: That was a very full answer and very interesting. Adam, do you think that this, again, is one of those situations—I'm talking about the Iskander end of the spectrum—where they simply don't care if they are seen to breach the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty?

Sir Adam Thomson: I think INF has some rather specific characteristics. Whereas the chemical weapons convention is credibly global and bans a category of weapons, INF is a bilateral, US-Russian deal that I think the Russians see as anachronistic. It prevents them from investing in a particular set of land-based missiles, but it does not prevent North Korea, India, Pakistan, Iran or China from doing that, so Russia is disadvantaged in a way that it feels the United States is not, by the advance of technology in other countries.

That said, the decision to deploy Iskander in Kaliningrad, if it is indeed INF non-compliant, could be read as having some political signalling motives. Whether or not Russia has a policy of escalate to de-escalate—that has disappeared from unclassified Russian doctrine, although it's clear from the US nuclear policy review that the United States thinks it still exists in the classified version—the important thing for Russia, which is the point that Justin has just made, is that they have a range of nuclear options and that they use those politically as well as in a pure defence sense, to remind the rest of us that they are a nuclear power and if you tangle with them, there will be nuclear consequences. Perhaps that is ultimately what Iskander is about.

Dr Monaghan: The point about the architecture is an important one. It is worth reiterating that the Russians have made several attempts—you could even say, from the end of the Soviet era. The Soviets first and then the Russians themselves have made several efforts to have some form of new European security treaty. First a debate and then a treaty—and about a decade ago, Moscow offered a potential treaty, which was rejected or rather was guided into the OSCE Corfu Process. So there are repeated efforts by Moscow to offer a new architecture that don't really coincide with either many of the member states' preferences or NATO's. In my view, what you end up seeing is attempts to reorganise and press at some of the architectural structures such as the treaties. If we talk about arms



HOUSE OF COMMONS

control, please remember that the Russians withdrew from that or suspended it unilaterally in 2007, first of all. So again, this is part of a long-term series of moves whereby Moscow is unsatisfied with the current European security architecture, either institutionally or in treaty form. That does not necessarily mean that it should be changed; it just means that there will be efforts put to the pillars of that treaty to either render them out of date or render them no longer applicable.

Chair: We still have about four or five questions, so we will have to try to bring them a little closer together. Hopefully the finishing post is in sight.

Q134 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Justin, on the superweapons recently unveiled by President Putin—hypersonic cruise missiles, autonomous nuclear torpedoes and I think his wishlist goes on—realistically, could they be deployed in the near future? If so, do we have a defence of any sort against the type of technology that he thinks he has?

Justin Bronk: I was personally struck, looking at the categories of superweapons that were boasted about in that mammoth speech, by the fact that almost all of the capabilities described in these fantastic new weapons programmes already exist in one form or another, and have existed for a long time in strategic nuclear-weapon state arsenals. A hypersonic missile capable of defeating any known ballistic missile defence could be applied as a term to almost any Trident class, and certainly some of the later Russian heavy-lift ICBMs that have been in service since the '80s. There is no system on earth or projected system that could threaten the Russian state's ability to annihilate America or just about any other state on the planet.

The closest that the US has come is something called the GBI—ground-based interceptor—network, which is being beefed up in response to North Korean ICBM testing. That system has had a very chequered testing and development history, and enormous amounts of money have been put into it. Even if the exoatmospheric kill vehicle is capable of performing better in tests against representative ICBM targets than previous failed generations of this defence system, it would only ever give the potential capability to the US to intercept one or two rogue shots of an ICBM class weapon. THAAD and Patriot batteries and SM-3—all the usual ballistic missile defence capabilities that we hear about in relation to North Korea and others, such as Iran, are not capable and not relevant against the ICBM class of weapons system. Nuclear torpedoes was an idea toyed about with in the early cold war as well, through to the middle of the cold war, but it was realised that there was very little point, given the destruction and second-strike capabilities offered by SLBMs and ICBMs.

I think that speech was more or less entirely for domestic consumption because Mr Putin knows, as has been alluded to, that one of the only areas where Russia absolutely can compete with anyone in the world is its nuclear arsenal. Arguably it is more capable than that of the US in some ways already. They do not need new weapons.

Q135 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Justin, and maybe also Andrew, do the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Government of the Russian Federation see the use of chemical weapons as a normal, integrated part of a full-spectrum warfare approach in the same way as they see nuclear weapons?

Justin Bronk: I don't think they see the use of nerve agents, or what we would think of as traditional chemical weapons like chlorine, as normal. They are clearly more comfortable with their use than perhaps we would like to think we are, politically—although it is worth remembering that we also maintained an active chemical weapons programme throughout the cold war. What we would call NBC—nuclear, biological and chemical—troops are their CBRN forces, or chemical troops as they are known in Russian ground forces, and they are much more prevalent than our own. They have a company in every brigade and they have much more widespread responsibilities than just the decontamination and hardening against NBC threats. For example, they are also charged with concealing their parent formations using aerosols and smokes of various kinds, some of which have tear gas-like effects for reducing enemy combat effectiveness as well. They also handle things like flame throwers and thermobaric weaponry. In flame thrower terms, they are more akin to projectors or rocket-launcher type weapons, but they actually work on an incendiary rather than a blast-wave principle—so arguably in violation of the prohibition on certain conventional weapons. Certainly, they are viewed as an integral part of the Russian armed forces. In that sense, chemical troops make up more of their conventional capabilities than ours, but not in terms of active use of nerve agents, I would say.

Q136 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Andrew, do you have anything to add to that?

Dr Monaghan: No, I have nothing to add to that.

Q137 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Okay, I will go back to both of you yet again. What capabilities should the UK be focusing on in the modernising defence programme to meet state-based threats? I want to add to that, because I think we get caught up sometimes on hardware. There is an element, to me, that is missing in that.

I had a broader question about understanding Russia, which is of the utmost importance as we consider the way forward. For instance, Andrew I noticed on your CV, which you submitted to the Committee, that you worked for the Advanced Research and Assessment Group. I spoke in the House recently about the way in which the UK's ability to understand Russia has been, from my perspective, diminished since the cold war, with groups such as the ARAG being closed down. What is the extent of the MoD's in-house Russian language capabilities as an asset to deal with state-based threats? For instance, do any of you speak Russian? In speaking with allies, such as we have seen, for instance, in the Baltic states, it is clear that they never lost that capability. Why did we? I know that was a bit long, but I think it is something that we need to look at.

Dr Monaghan: There are a number of reasons why it was reduced. It was decided that Russia was no longer an important strategic priority. We have spent much of the last 25 years looking elsewhere. It is not purely, it must be said, a question about language. This is also about technology. I know



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that the Committee has often talked in the past about pointing towards understanding Russia, and I definitely underline that, but this is also about how you go about posing the questions of this.

It is all well and good—and we do have good capability—to understand Russian civil society, human rights and legal aspects. Those are all very important, but the number of people who really understand the Russian military in the UK is very few. We have Justin here, but otherwise there are very few.

Let us take two or three other questions to be specific about the nature. The number of those who understand the Russian economy and how it functions is very few. Even fewer are those who understand the Russian security services, and security structures writ large, and how they may or may not work. There is too much echoing back to the idea of a cold war—“we are returning to the cold war”. That is why I prefer us not to use it, because it allows us to have some sense of over-familiarity with something that is changing quite dramatically.

There are some technical aspects that I will make explicit for the record. We do not have capability outside one or two very restricted areas on Russian space. Since the Russian air force is no longer called the Russian air force—it is the Russian aerospace force—this is something we ought to be looking at.

It is not just a question of us not really understanding Russia. I am not disagreeing with you; I would simply add to what the Committee has said in the past. We do not have the resources for dealing with specific, hard technological and technical questions. That is probably the biggest shortfall that I would point out here, in the interests of time.

Q138 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Justin, do you have anything else you would add?

Justin Bronk: On the first point of your question about where we to focus, through the MDP process, specifically on deterring state threats, by that I assume we must mean Russia, since it is the only enduring state threat that NATO could conceivably face geographically. I would suggest looking at what the Russians seem to really get upset about in terms of our military capabilities. Deterrence in terms of what would make us be deterred is, I would argue, fairly irrelevant. We need to try to work out, where possible, what the Russians would be deterred by, if at all, on military capabilities.

All their war planning, as far as can be made out, focuses on ensuring that any conflict with NATO is short, sharp and on their terms and, crucially, concluded, if necessary, by nuclear escalation, but by whatever means necessary before a majority of Western heavy forces can be brought into theatre. The Air Force, I am sure, could be of huge importance, but would largely be tied up in defending UK airspace from things such as potential cruise missile strikes—especially since most of our military is based on only a few strategic bases, which are obvious targets, and we do not have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

strong air defence on the ground, so we would have to keep a lot of air power back. Likewise, the Royal Navy would mostly be in the North Atlantic, so I think that leaves us with the Army.

If the modernising defence programme intends the Army to be mainly of use in deterring Russia, it needs new tanks and proper modern artillery capable of at least matching the range and "shoot and scoot", as it is called, capabilities of the new Russian systems such as the MSTAR as well as their rocket artillery. It needs to be forward based because if it takes a month-plus to get there, it is no use whatsoever.

Q139 Graham P. Jones: Adam, what UK capabilities are particularly valued by our NATO allies? Are any vital to NATO?

Sir Adam Thomson: I would like to echo Justin's point about understanding as a first requirement, and to echo the remarks of, I think, the Lithuanian ambassador about the need for a stronger NATO strategy on Russia. There is not a consensus on how we understand Russia in the North Atlantic alliance at the moment. That makes it impossible to have a completely coherent deterrence strategy, because deterrence is in the mind of the adversary, and we are not very good at getting into that mind. Excuse me; that was not the answer to your question.

Across NATO's 21 capability shortfalls, it is the Europeans who fall short, not the United States.

Q140 Graham P. Jones: United Kingdom and United States?

Sir Adam Thomson: The United States meets the requirement in all the areas where there is merely a so-called relative NATO shortfall. There are a number of NATO shortfalls where even the United States does not have enough capability to give to NATO.

My point is that NATO would welcome a UK contribution in any of those capability shortfall areas but especially those where there is an absolute NATO shortfall, such as precision-guided munitions, suppression of enemy air defence, cyber. In general, though, for NATO, the UK's greater value is in its capacity to provide a framework for NATO operations for smaller allies. It is some of the softer capabilities that we have in terms of command and control that are particularly valuable.

That said, when I left NATO, NATO allies were incredulous at how little Britain, as a great naval power, contributed to NATO naval capacity. There is a strong hope in the NATO international staff that the UK will eventually be able to achieve the capability of two divisions and not just one on offer to NATO. The list goes on. There are some specific areas where, if you press a NATO military commander, you would probably get a quick answer that they would like more of this or that, but almost anything more would be welcome.

Q141 Graham P. Jones: Focusing on the supplementary to that, which of the UK's assets are vital to NATO?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sir Adam Thomson: My answer to that is really of a piece with my previous answer. NATO has set itself a level of ambition, a major joint operation plus. That means it sees itself as deficient in quite a number of capabilities. If the UK were to withdraw from any of those, it would do more damage to that level of ambition. It might not be terminal. The only area where the UK is really distinctive that I can identify is nuclear, alongside France, as a different centre of decision making.

Q142 **Chair:** Amphibious capability is pretty specialised.

Sir Adam Thomson: That is major but, if you assume that the United States is going to be there alongside its European allies, in most areas, the US could in principle make good.

Q143 **Chair:** Yes, but the US has specifically said how anxious and worried they would be if we were to lose our amphibious assault ships. I think they have specified that.

Sir Adam Thomson: Indeed, and the lack of maritime reconnaissance until the SDSR 2015 was another area that was strongly felt in NATO. I think the ability of the United Kingdom to do high-readiness land operations is one of the really key areas for NATO in the new circumstances where we are once again having to look hard at collective defence.

Justin Bronk: I want to make a point on theatre entry specifically. I can only agree with Sir Adam on the centrality of Britain's ability to deploy high-readiness land forces and also to offer forces with the scale to command as a Framework nation. However, if, for example, we were to go down a light forces expeditionary route, we might find countries, even less so than now, not perhaps lining up to be under British command if they are the ones in future providing the tanks and the majority of the men, not that it is all about tanks, but Russia does count tanks and they are one of the hardest things to move fast over large distances.

On theatre entry, I have yet to see any credible scenario—having been to goodness knows how many run-throughs—of a sudden need to reinforce under competition or threat where large amphibious ships with such protection as the Royal Navy could offer, which is not to be trifled at, but is still limited, could be moved anywhere near the Baltics under the multiple layers of ground, sea and air-based anti-ship threats that Russia can offer. Nor could we, I would suggest, conduct any form of opposed parachute drop. I believe the last time we did that was in 1944 and it was quite dicey then. So, in terms of high-readiness forces, absolutely essential; in terms of getting them there, I think both amphibious ships and para drops are perhaps a little optimistic.

Q144 **Chair:** We did a very serious study into the amphibious capability and we were not talking about rerunning D-Day. We were talking about stealthy insertion of significant numbers of forces from the sea and also, of course, the extraction of civilians from areas under threat. As we say, in the context of a stand-off with Russia, that is not our top priority, is it?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Justin Bronk: No, it is not to denigrate at all the usefulness of amphibious forces for many operations, but specifically in the context of reinforcing the Baltics under Russian threat, I would suggest they are too vulnerable.

Chair: Point taken.

Q145 **Graham P. Jones:** Without a dramatic shift in Russian behaviour, can we have normal relations with Russia?

Sir Adam Thomson: No.

Dr Monaghan: No.

Graham P. Jones: My answer is no, but I am asking you.

Sir Adam Thomson: It takes either a dramatic shift in Russian behaviour or a dramatic shift in Western behaviour. Both are worth thinking about. You had a good answer from Andrew Monaghan earlier about the range of fundamental differences now on display between Russia and NATO as these two sides think about security. There are a large number of important differences.

In a sense, it is NATO and the West that have been unconventional in going in 1990 for the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace, something that I think you can safely say Russia has no longer fully bought into, unless it were on its own terms. Russia has a vision, and I don't think Russians would fundamentally disagree with this characterisation, that as a great power they are entitled to a certain say over what goes on in their neighbourhood. That is not something that modern NATO, the modern West, really accepts.

We are looking at a very protracted period of competition and confrontation in the security sphere with Russia. Therefore, there is an important set of questions about how to manage that so it is as low risk and as low cost as can be arranged with the Russians. That is something that I know your Committee is beginning to ask itself about—whether dialogue is any longer worth while. I would like to close with the point that even dialogue with an enemy can still have real utility. Small agreements can have value, even if you cannot settle your big strategic differences.

Dr Monaghan: I agree very much with what Sir Adam says. When you say, "without a dramatic shift in Russian behaviour," I see no grounds for expecting that to take place in the foreseeable future. It would therefore require a shift in our behaviour, but I do not see any particular likelihood of that taking place. I think we will end up with a protracted period of competition and probably confrontation. That will not be limited to the Baltic states. It will probably also be much further afield. We will find that our policies differ in Libya, for instance, and perhaps in central Asia, the Arctic and as far away as Antarctica. We have a much wider set of disagreements.

Dialogue is always worth while, because it is an important way to keep some form of connection going and to remember that you are dealing with



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Russians, not with some abstract Russia. You also come to have a feel for the people with whom you are dealing. In many ways, deterrence is a dialogue. That is also part of the sense—the idea that the UK should have a relationship with Russia is open to question, but it should not be either deterrence or dialogue, as has been mentioned two or three times. Neither of those are ends in themselves. They are pillars of a proper strategy that would go until 2020, 2025, 2030—knowing how we get whole-state co-ordination and development of a relationship to where we want to be. Without that, I think we will be in quite a lot of trouble.

Q146 **Chair:** Justin, any last thoughts?

Justin Bronk: On the defence side of things, just to emphasise once again that the best way to deter Russia is a strategy—a deployment strategy as well as a procurement one—with allies of course, which emphasises in any particular theatre that we are worried about that there is not an easy route to a short victory. I do not see Russia as an inherently militarily aggressive state for its own ends, but of course, if we leave the door open for what looks like an easy win, we should not necessarily be surprised if, with newer, greater forces and an atmosphere of competition, it tries to take an opportunity.

Chair: I seem to remember that the phrase “short, victorious war” was first used by Russians in the Russo-Japanese war, and that did not work out too well, as I recall, from their point of view. On that note, I thank you very much. We have gone on a little longer than expected, but we have covered a tremendous range of ground. We are extremely grateful to you all.