



Select Committee on International Relations

Corrected oral evidence: UK Foreign Policy in Changed World Conditions

Wednesday 25 April 2018

10.40 am

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Members present: Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman); Baroness Coussins; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Jopling; Lord Purvis of Tweed.

Evidence Session No. 11

Heard in Public

Questions 101 - 111

Witnesses

I: Sir Andrew Wood, former Ambassador to Russia; Sir Tony Brenton, former Ambassador to Russia

II: Dr Oksana Antonenko, Visiting Senior Fellow, Institute of Global Affairs, London School of Economics and Political Science; Dr Natasha Kuhrt, Lecturer, Department of War Studies, Kings College London.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witnesses

Sir Andrew Wood and Sir Tony Brenton.

Q101 The Chairman: Good morning, Sir Tony and Sir Andrew. We feel lucky to have you with us today—two very distinguished ambassadors to Russia in the earlier Putin period. I am obliged to remind everyone that this session is on the record. A transcript will be taken, which can of course be altered afterwards in any way you wish. I also remind members of the Committee about declaring any relevant interests when they ask questions.

Sir Tony and Sir Andrew, in this inquiry we are focusing on how Britain can adjust the machinery of its diplomacy and its priorities in foreign policy to completely new world conditions, which are obviously influenced by the information revolution, technology and other changes. We hope to work out how Britain can become more of a nation with a global reach and focus, although we have a pretty good global reach already. However, if we want more, we need to know what we are reaching out to, so we are looking at the great movements in the world initiated by changes of policy by Russia and China, America coming out rather differently, the Middle East in chaos and so on, without having to try to rewrite policy in all these areas and without getting too bogged down in current issues, many of which are very hot. There is a great deal of coverage on our relations with Moscow. We really want to get your wisdom on how we got to this position. We want to know what kind of Russia we are really dealing with. That is the focus, if I can put it like that.

I will begin with the first question. Why has Russia changed? In particular, why did it change between the two Putin presidencies? At one stage there was even talk of Russia joining NATO, whereas today it is creating an endless series of hostile postures and acts, some open and some more concealed. What kind of power are we dealing with? Russia is a very small economy; it is not a superpower any more. I am told that its GDP is only 7% of that of the United States. It is dwarfed by NATO. It has many economic weaknesses. It lives on a sea of oil and gas revenues that could dry up at any moment. What is this Russia that we are now dealing with? Later, we can begin to think about how as a nation the UK might reposition itself. That is my opening question. It is a big one, but if we could start with a general summary from both of you, that would be a great help.

Sir Andrew Wood: Thank you, it is good to have the chance to speak to this Committee. I had intended to begin by making a few short comments on the theme that the Chairman has just introduced. Looking at the next Putin term, which in principle takes him to 2024 and means that he will not run again after that, although we do not know, my first point would be that Russia is ruled by an opaque and shifting power structure that is centred on the Kremlin. It is now devoid of authoritative institutions that would enable it to develop into a fully functional state or to work out a

reliable or accountable way to ensure a creative succession to Putin in 2024.

Secondly, much-needed structural economic change is essentially not on the cards. Without it, Russia's growth will be mediocre at best, and the natural pathology of the Putinist power vertical is for repression and corruption to continue to rise. Thirdly, Professor Peter Reddaway, who happens to be a friend of mine—please forgive me—puts it this way in the conclusions of his aptly titled new book, *Russia's Domestic Security Wars*.

It was particularly emphasised to Putin back in 2012 that a privileged group comprising the KGB, the FSB—the siloviki: the people who in theory are in charge of law enforcement but have wider interests—started to fight over the country's most lucrative assets. That pushed a shift towards a more aggressive Russian nationalist ideology, playing to popular feelings of deprivation and international status. That is how Reddaway puts it. However, quarrels within the FSB and the other law enforcement structures continue none the less.

Putin's foreign adventures have had limited success. Their domestic appeal is questionable over the longer term, but the Putin regime's room for manoeuvre is also limited. The Cold War between the USSR and the West was different in nature from the Kremlin-induced rivalry with the West and Russia's neighbours that now prevails. We should be particularly cautious about drawing parallels between our experience of the Cold War and the experience we have now. The Soviet Union was an organised state. It was not to my taste, but it was an organised state overseeing and commanding a bloc of substantial countries in Europe, which Russia is not. That collapsed under its own weight. The essence of Putin's foreign policies now is to restore Russia's ability to control its immediate ex-Soviet and more distant neighbours, which is incompatible with allowing them to work out their own policies.

The Chairman: Thank you for that opening summary. Obviously, it raises all sorts of points that we would like to pursue. Sir Tony, can we have your overview on why Russia has got to where it has? They gave you a pretty rough time when you were there, so we would like to hear what you feel about it.

Sir Tony Brenton: Thank you, Lord Chairman. I did not arrive with prepared comments, but I will very quickly answer your question of why Russia has changed, and what is at the core of the Russia we are now dealing with. If you look back at the period after the collapse of communism in 1991 you are looking at a very untypical period, not only in Russia but in world affairs. The West was absolutely dominant, while Russia was broke and utterly dependent upon the West just to keep its economy going, quite apart from anything else. It therefore slotted in with the requirements that the West placed on it and remained pretty quiet about things it was actually very angry about in western behaviour, such as the expansion of NATO and the Kosovo war, to name but two.

With the rise of the oil price, beginning at about the time Putin came to power at the beginning of 2000, Russia lost its financial dependence on the West, so it began to recover some self-confidence in its dealings with the world. Russia is a country with a great-power complex, a bit like the UK—"We are big, we should be taken seriously internationally". It began to recover the feeling that it could live up to that complex. At the same time, particularly with Putin in charge, resentment at the way the West had treated it rose to the surface: the anger about the expansion of NATO and all that; the feeling that it had been systematically humiliated and neglected by the West, particularly by the United States; and the determination that that would not happen to it again.

In two big Putin speeches, in 2007 and 2014, he made that position absolutely clear. So we are now dealing with a Russia with regained self-confidence, deeply resentful about the way the West treated it when it was down and almost out, and determined, if you want to put it that way, to regain its place in the sun and to be taken seriously again in international affairs in a way that it was not between 1991 and 2000 or so.

I add one other point. Of course, a lot of this is due to Putin, and no doubt we will come back to him. There is too much tendency in the West and among western commentators to say, "When Putin goes, that is it, it is solved". It is worth noting that Putin has very substantial support among the Russian people. The election in March was, of course, a farce, but the turnout, which again was jiggled around with, demonstrates that he has a very extensive support among the Russian people. That is not an accident; he is seen by them as having brought back economic prosperity, having brought control to the streets, which were out of control under Yeltsin, and having revived Russian international pride by standing up to the West. He is doing the things that the Russian people want done. He has, as we have seen, extensive popular support. He certainly has elite support, despite what he has cost the elite over the last few years, and I would guess that when he goes, if he does go in 2024, we need to resign ourselves to a sort of Putin clone replacing him.

As you look at policy towards Russia, I strongly urge you to assume that the Russia we have is the Russia we will have for some time to come. That is the Russia we are going to have to deal with.

The Chairman: That is a very good start and raises all sorts of fascinating questions.

Lord Grocott: It was indeed a fascinating opening. I am sure that phrases about the Russian view of the world such as, "resentment", "humiliation" and "anger" are correct. The changes have been absolutely dramatic for anyone in their sixties or seventies, or even younger, in Russia—the move from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation, the eastward move of NATO, et cetera. My question is simply this: do we treat those aspects of state psychology, if that is the right way to describe it, by saying, "Tough. Get over it. The world has changed"? Or do we in the West recognise that that degree of resentment, anger and

sense of humiliation is at least understandable and try to adjust and accommodate to try to diminish it? That is the question, is it not?

One can hardly accuse Russians of paranoia in respect of the West, because they have been fairly regularly invaded by the West. I just wonder how we deal with this psychology of the Russian state.

Sir Andrew Wood: May I respond, because I have a slightly different take on this from Tony? The resentment is certainly there. I do not believe that they Russians were actually humiliated by the West, certainly not intentionally. They were humiliated by their collapse, which is something different. I do not think that the expansion of NATO was willed on them by the wicked Americans. If you think back, the countries that had recently freed themselves from Soviet—Moscow—control also had a reason for feeling that they deserved to be treated seriously and do not now deserve to feel that they are under Russian pressure. The expansion of NATO was at their request, not American or UK insistence.

There are two contrasting streams of consciousness. A further element in Russian feelings, which is understandable, about the situation they found themselves in was also squashed or evaded to a considerable degree in the period almost immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. That is what they did to themselves, the trauma they inflicted on themselves, and the reversion to a kind of Stalinist approach: "We won the war, that is the only good thing we have ever done and we are going to stick to it". That sort of feeling is very strong within Russia, too. It fuels a good deal of the narrative that Putin and his regime since 2012 have been very anxious to put across. They are in a worse mood with us now than they were then.

The psychological elements in this are extremely complex. I do not see that our suddenly beginning somehow to apologise for the way the world has evolved makes any difference. I do not see that, because they are angry with NATO and the West, they have a right to invade Ukraine or Georgia. I believe that we owe a duty to other countries within Europe to stand up for their independence as well. That will inevitably mean tension with Russia, because Russia is taking the opposite view, to an increasing extent, and it is shutting down internal dialogue within Russia which might touch on the difficulties in its present approach. We are dealing with a nation that has certainly suffered trauma and is reacting accordingly, very understandably, but it is not a trauma that we should accept as a reason or an excuse for their actions. That is something different

Sir Tony Brenton: I do not want to get into the expansion of NATO. I simply observe, in response to what Andrew has just said, that taking a member into NATO requires a decision by two sides. He is right that lots of countries wanted to join. The decision was for us, however, as to whether to admit them. Prominent names, such as George Kennan and ex-President Nixon, deeply deplored the fact that we opened the door. There were in fact plans in hand—the so-called partnership for peace, to create a long-term waiting period—which were then overrun in Mr

Clinton's enthusiasm to get himself re-elected in the mid-1990s. That is a separate historical point.

You asked what we should do in response. I offer four points in rising level of difficulty. The first and most obvious one is that we should make sure that our interests are properly defended, that our Armed Forces, our security agencies—all of that—are fully up to the Russian threat. That is not because I think the Russians have it in for us but because I think that if they see a vacancy they will go for it. We need to be fully prepared and equipped to deal with whatever challenge Russia offers us.

Secondly, there are lots of cheap items of respect that we are not giving at the moment. What on earth is Her Majesty's Foreign Secretary doing comparing Russia's World Cup with Hitler's 1936 Olympics? If you are looking for a single statement calculated to really infuriate the Russians, there it is. And Her Majesty's Defence Secretary told the Russians to, "shut up". Elementary diplomatic courtesy goes a long way with the Russians and we need to get back to that.

Thirdly, we should talk to them. Like it or not, they are a major player in the world. Like it or not, we are not going to deal effectively with Islamic extremism, for example, without the Russians helping. We are not going to solve the current chaos in cyberspace, which I think we are coming on to, without the Russians being involved. We need to get into dialogue with them on those subjects. We in the UK are right at the back among major western countries in looking for those sorts of dialogues. Even the United States, if it can get themselves sorted out in Washington, has played with some of these ideas.

The fourth point is that there are really difficult issues out there that we are not going to solve easily. However, we are going to have to do business with the Russians on Syria; that is the obvious one. There is no solution to Syria without the Russians being involved, and while you may disagree, eastern Europe is another. Taking a random example, the Russians are not going to let Georgia join NATO. We have had one war on that subject and we could have another—and even more so, Ukraine. You can say all you like about small countries' rights, but in that part of the world it comes down finally to a matter of power, of realpolitik. We have to talk to the Russians and find the deals that will enable us to avoid a really tragic outcome in that part of the world.

The Chairman: That is a very clear message.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: On the issue that Sir Andrew mentioned, that of looking back to the Cold War, and trying to dispose of it for the purposes of this evidence session without it popping up all the time, does it not seem to you both that it is pretty academic to be asking whether we are or are not at risk of another cold war when we actually have one. We have had one since Russia took Crimea and destabilised Ukraine.

That does not mean anything particularly dire. We lived through a Cold War with the Soviet Union and we did not stop talking to it. As you have

both said, at times in the Cold War we had much better engagement than we have now, so admitting that we are in a cold war does not mean that we should not engage, with which I strongly agree. However, it is a bit foolish of us to say that we must not in any way have another cold war.

Of course it is not the same cold war because it is not world wide; the Russians no longer have the outreach of power to Latin America, Africa and south-east Asia that they used to when they were the Soviet Union. Would it not be simpler and more straightforward to recognise that the logical conclusion of what you are saying is that we are going to have to live with Cold War II, as it were, but that does not mean that we should not be doing some of the things that you have suggested we ought to be doing in order to understand each other better?

Sir Andrew Wood: I agree, essentially. Where I would part company with Tony is in his apparent acknowledgement that a policy of "might is right" is an acceptable one for another country to follow. I do not think that there is a great deal of profit at the moment in discussing with Moscow a possible solution to Ukraine. There is a so-called process that is not working, but we owe it to Ukraine, and ultimately to Russia, to allow that country to do its best, which is more than Russia is doing; that is, to arrive at new solutions to its own problems for itself. That is the right of the Ukrainians and it is in Russia's interest that Ukraine should evolve into a more accountable and properly structured state than it is at present.

However, it is doing that more than Russia is doing. Russia is moving towards a fate in which in a sense it will have no Government. As I began by pointing out, it will have a small group at the top which is devoted to its own interests and has no tangible structure to produce a legally based, answerable and accountable society. I simply do not agree that we should somehow be party to overriding Ukraine's interests in that.

I agree that we should talk with courtesy. The Foreign Secretary may have been wrong to make a rather well-judged but none the less unacceptable comparison, but for that matter so should the Russian ambassador to the United Kingdom feel rather cautious about accusing us of injecting the Skripals with a nerve agent. If we listen to the Russians' account to themselves in their media of what the West is like, it is absolutely poisonous and is intended to be poisonous. We can and should show respect for each other, and on the whole I think we do that towards the Russians, but that does not mean to say that that respect involves endorsing some of their actions. They did use nerve gas in Syria.

I think that Syria is going to become an increasing mess for the Russians that will be more and more difficult to resolve. It looks good as a projection of Russian power, but I do not think it will prove to be fruitful in the long run. I also do not think that what the Russians have done in Ukraine is going to be profitable for them in the long run. The prime business of the Russian Government should be looking after the Russian people, not foreign adventures.

Sir Tony Brenton: I love Andrew's last point. For us to tell the Russian Government what their prime purpose is seems a little presumptuous. They will behave as they behave—

Sir Andrew Wood: That is the role of any Government.

Sir Tony Brenton: That is what we have to change, if we can, although I suspect that our capacity to do that is very limited, or we have to adjust, which is what we have to deal with in Ukraine.

Lord Hannay is right that the phrase "cold war" is unhelpful and misleading. We are in a confrontation with Russia, a country that is no longer willing to live by the rules of the so-called holiday from history—the moment of absolute western dominance which I would guess finished quite early in this century. The Russians are not unique in that, and there are similar problem countries such as China, Iraq and obviously Iran.

However, having said that the phrase "cold war" is unhelpful, it is a useful signifier of one thing. I lecture on the Cold War in Cambridge. The current state of relations with Russia is very dangerous. On at least two, and probably four or five, occasions, policymakers on one side or the other contemplated using nuclear weapons. We are back there now, but we are in a slightly more dangerous situation because Russia vis-à-vis the West, like Pakistan vis-à-vis India, does not have the conventional capacity to protect itself as it feels it needs to, and so the threshold of moving to nuclear weapons is lower. The Russians have already talked about the possibility of using them on several occasions. So, yes, the "cold war" phrase is unhelpful, but it is equally unhelpful to forget some of the dangers that were attached to that time and now seem to be back.

The Chairman: You are right to remind us about the nuclear capacity.

Q102 **Lord Jopling:** I will ask you to speculate about the future. You have talked about rebuilding the Soviet Union and you have used the phrase "foreign adventures". Leaving aside most aspects of hybrid warfare, cyber and so on, which I am sure we will come to later, the Russians have been quite successful with their territorial excursions in Ukraine, Crimea, and previously in Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. To what extent do you think Putin would still contemplate territorial expeditions like the ones that he has relatively succeeded in? Do you think that an excursion into the Baltics might have been snuffed out with the deployment of the battle groups in the Baltics and Poland? Could it happen in Moldova? They could use their base in Transnistria to move territorially into Moldova. Could it be in Armenia? To what extent do you think the current ructions in Armenia are part of Russian mischief? If we are going to come later to the Eurasian Economic Union, again, do you think that Putin might be contemplating further territorial expeditions with regard to the Middle East that are similar to the Syrian situation? I am asking you to speculate on where you think he might be tempted to move.

Sir Andrew Wood: That is a very difficult question. The easy answer would be, "I haven't the faintest idea", because so many of his moves and his ideas are instinctive rather than fully thought through.

The Ukraine issue goes deeply into Russian history. Putin has said to several people that the Ukrainians are really Russian, and again that goes right back into Russian history. It was therefore surprising to him to discover that the Ukrainians were going to resist. The cost to the Russians of the conflict in the Donbass region is quite considerable and would be even higher if they were to seize proper control of it, and therefore become responsible for its operation. It would be foolish in principle to go further into Ukraine, but the temptation is there.

One must not forget that Putin does not really have a proper machinery to rely on that can argue the options. It operates more by working towards the leader—people trying to please rather than to argue the options. Certainly the invasion of Crimea and the further invasion of the Donbass included a very strong emotional complement. One can understand that for historical reasons. Georgia was more connected with trouble in the Caucasus, which the Russians had in any case, so that too had a certain logic to it as well as an emotional element.

If one was going for expansion on a more rational basis, one might think of northern Kazakhstan as an option. However, I do not think it is guided by that so much as it is also guided by strong emotional feelings of resentment about the way history has gone—to take up Tony's point. Putin thinks that it is our fault.

Sir Tony Brenton: I did not say that.

Sir Andrew Wood: No, you are right. After you mentioned NATO expansion, we were not going to go there anyway. I am not sure that there is a rational answer, but that is partly because Russia is ill governed and does not have a mechanism for determining what accountable decisions will be taken at the top, and it is not likely to develop one.

As regards Armenia, that would be very interesting to see. It is not something that the Russians would have wanted. It has elements that remind them of what happened in Maidan, but it is also a country that they have pretty firmly under control because of the quarrel with Azerbaijan and Armenia's dependence on Russian defence. The person most likely to emerge from there as critical is not someone who is particularly enamoured of Russia or the Eurasian union, which has its own tensions within it, caused not least by the way Russia tries to impose its will on other countries. If you are the ruler of Kazakhstan or even Belarus, you are going to look askance at what Russia does.

The signal in the Baltics would be if they stirred up the Russian-speaking population, which may or may not be relatively easy to do. A lot of the Russian you hear in the streets of London is from the Baltic states, as members of the EU, and that is not something that people in Lithuania or wherever are likely to want to disturb.

I do not lie awake at night wondering where Russia will invade next, but again, as Tony said, this is a dangerous situation that may become more dangerous as, in my view, Russian weaknesses begin to eat at the self-confidence of the regime. But again—I am repeating myself—that is essentially a matter of internal development rather than because of our obduracy or whatever. I just do not see that it is in our interests or in Russia's interests for us to be too amenable to its acquiring bits of other countries' territories or the whole of them.

Sir Tony Brenton: Very briefly, my short answer to your question is no, Russia is not a revanchist power and it will not expand all over the place. People regularly quote Putin's statement that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, but they fail to quote him from what I think was the same speech where he went on to say, "While we can all feel the collapse of the USSR—those who do not feel it have no hearts—those who want to reassemble it have no brains". He is very clear on this issue, although not much quoted in the West.

If we look at the charges against Russia of revanchism made in the West, it was actually the Georgians, not the Russians, who started the war. The Russians retaliated in the way they did and occupied most of the country, but then they pulled out. In Ukraine, again the Russians saw it as basically a thing initiated by the West. Putin does not believe in spontaneous demonstrations so there was obviously a CIA hand behind the Maidan demonstrations; it was NATO increasing its grip on a close Russian ally so Russia had to do something. Please do not ascribe these thoughts to me, but they were obviously his.

The Russians did what they did. They have taken Crimea—that is the one act of territorial annexation which they have done. I do not know if we want to go into the history of the Crimean issue in depth, but let us just say that it is very special in Russian minds and indeed in some Crimean minds. For the rest, in the war in the Donbass, you will recall that in 2014 the region was offered to be acquired into Russia as part of a crooked referendum, but nevertheless a referendum, which was rejected. So whenever the Russians have been offered or have gained the possibility of acquiring extra territory other than Crimea, it has been in response to things that have happened outside and they have not taken the opportunity.

Finally—I do not want to get into Armenia—as regards NATO countries, it is worth recalling that Russia is a weak state. Its spending on defence is around a tenth of that by NATO. It is not going to get into a war with NATO that it knows it would lose and therefore it is not going to attempt visibly to annex NATO territories—I think that the Baltic states have been mentioned—as long as we can convince it that we would deliver on NATO's Article 5 principle.

Lord Purvis of Tweed: It is interesting to note that Sir Andrew has painted a picture more of a Tsar Vladimir rather than going back to a cold war structure with the way that the court and all that has now been

converted. It is equally interesting to note from previous sessions how much China uses in its current political language the century of shame, resentment and restoring pride in the country. That is quite standard in a nationalist narrative, and we can see something similar in the United States.

One element that was almost liberating in the Cold War was that there was a competing view on the political philosophy. With communism seemingly ousted from the economic policy of both China and Russia, we seem to be competing on similar ground when it comes to how market economies operate. In the most recent example, our narrative in the UK and the EU was about stronger values and rule of law principles. If we see Russia as an adversary to a certain extent, who in the West establishes our value sets for how we govern and how we can be stronger and more resilient in the long term? If there is no alternative narrative about value sets for governance, I cannot see how we will be able to say that our system is better than their system.

Sir Andrew Wood: I do not think that we need to argue that, really. Experience shows that on the whole you get better investment if there is a proper legal structure to protect and encourage it. If you have a structure that is essentially and increasingly corrupted, that is an inhibition to the proper development of society as a whole. I do not think we have to argue that—it is just true. The Russians do not actually have a proper system in that sense now. Their reliance on the Russian Orthodox Church as a validating idea is pretty hollow.

I do not want to get into religious questions, because we do not have time, but what Putin is offering is national pride. Recent polls show that trust in government organisations within Russia is extraordinarily low. Even Putin now rates less than 50%, while Prime Minister Medvedev rates about 10%, which is possibly accurate. The law enforcement agencies rate none. There is fear about what would happen if they were not there and fear about what may happen when Putin goes, because nobody knows what is going to happen. The amount of positive ideology for their order of things is actually pretty low.

Also, the idea of democracy as we understand it—the vote being decisive and necessary—has been greatly weakened. In my view, the foundation of democracy is a proper, accountable legal system. That is how we started, even when we had King Richard II or whoever. That was the basic philosophy behind it. The Russians have never had that and they have a fundamental problem in deciding who they are, what they are for and so on, which is compensated for by a huge number of mythical assumptions about their superiority, their messianic traditions and so on. I do not think there is now, as there was in Soviet times, a serious discussion between a communist system and a western system. I think they are struggling to find any answer to that.

Sir Tony Brenton: We are all good democrats, I am sure, in this room. I certainly am and I think that a significant proportion of Russians are, or would like to be—the educated middle class, and the young to some

extent. As Andrew said, the rule of law is very weak in Russia. Commitment to the sort of values that we believe enable capitalism, in particular, to prosper has been extremely etiolated in Russia—most notably, it has to be said, over the last 10 years or so. When I was there in Putin’s second term there was slow but real evolution towards proper independent courts, proper judgments. I used to meet businessmen who would say, “Gosh, I just defeated the Government in a tax case”. Those sorts of developments are crucial to a proper market system emerging and therefore, if our history is any guide, the civil basis for democracy to also emerge.

The sad fact about the period since 2014, in particular, since we introduced sanctions and so on, is that that process of a very slow convergence of Russia towards our values and systems has gone into reverse. The Russian economy is gradually being cut off from the West. The capacity to bring in western standards, through using courts in London or what have you, is being diminished for the very good reason that the Russian Government are taking more of a grip because they see the West as an enemy and a subverter.

If we want to change Russia—and I would like to see Russia change—the way to do it is not through our current approach of sanctions, saying “Get rid of your awful President”, and cutting off their businessmen, which is provoking a totally negative reaction in Russia. The best way to change Russia is to integrate it into the global economic system, to encourage its people to travel, to give them help in building up the systems which will, over time—this will take time—turn them into a much more normal European country.

The Chairman: If only. Is that not what we tried to do from the very beginning?

Sir Tony Brenton: We did, and it went well for a while.

The Chairman: It did not work.

Q103 **Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** May I make an observation? I have been to Georgia and Ukraine many times and I think that what we heard from NATO last week was disturbing in that it thinks Georgia is imminently going to join NATO. That seems to me an unnecessary provocation. That is just an observation before I get on to my question, which is about technology.

Do you think the current use of cyberwarfare is the way that Russia is going to go and has that changed its approach to diplomatic and foreign relations? Should it still operate at a human level with traditional diplomacy which, as we have heard, we have not been very good at lately? My question is about technology. You did not want to talk about the expansion of NATO, so I did not ask about that.

Sir Andrew Wood: I would just make one comment. It was not the sanctions in 2014 but Putin’s return in 2012 that introduced repression and increased corruption.

The technology question is probably beyond my intimate knowledge. It seems to me that there is a worldwide problem of managing information conveyed through technology, which has produced a good deal of populism—that is the approved word—in many countries, including the United States. The Russians certainly try to use it, and have been quite successful, to present alternative theses, the most recent case being Skripal. Sometimes it reaches elements of high farce, but it does seem to carry some conviction. That in turn, in so far as it confuses and alters the questions that the public are asking, obviously has an effect on more formal diplomacy.

I guess that, even in the Skripal case, you could say that the attempt to establish a kind of understood right of the Russian secret services to murder their own abroad has produced a good deal of confused reaction on this side. But in the end there is no substitute for formal agreements reached by Governments on particular issues, and the expectation that they will be enforced and accepted. The Russian record in accepting such agreements has also been vitiated over the past years. The Russians do not trust others. The Russian Government do not trust their own citizens and the result of their mendacious behaviour makes it much more difficult for us to trust them, so we have a problem in reaching comprehensive and fertile agreements. Nor do I think that Russia is in much of a mood to have them. Nice ones like lifting sanctions are fine, but actually working towards firm, new constructive arrangements with other countries, not just the West, does not seem to be on offer right now.

Sir Tony Brenton: On the technology point, I think that the Russians have rather taken to this. They think they are good at it, and for all I know they are. They certainly have the skills and the technological and human basis for being good at cyber warfare. They have, in my time, launched at least three major cyberattacks. One was on Estonia when I was the ambassador—it was a rather crude distribution of service attack. One was on Georgia during the war in which they got pretty close to closing down all of Georgia's internet systems, and the most recent was the NotPetya attack against Ukraine, so they are getting pretty accomplished. Why is that? As I have said, they are conventionally a weak nation in military terms and this is a poor man's weapon. If you have the skills, you can do it, and I think that they have built those skills up as a clear demonstration that they are effective in areas off the conventional battlefield.

Finally, I would amplify a point that I think Andrew has made. The Russians have shown themselves open to discussing, at least with the United States, some sort of agreement to get cyberspace under control. The Americans already have such an agreement with the Chinese, albeit a limited one, so these sorts of discussions with other countries have already started. It seems entirely obvious that we should be starting these conversations with the Russians.

Sir Andrew Wood: It has been suggested, but it is very difficult to arrive at an agenda. On the weakness point, you can be weak in general but rather strong in particular areas, as the Russians were against Georgia, for example.

Lord Jopling: A good deal of my question has already been answered, but I would like to put a point to Sir Tony. You tells us that we ought to link arms with the Russians and regard them as our old friends, but how does that sit comfortably—

Sir Tony Brenton: I think you are misquoting me.

Lord Jopling: How does that sit comfortably with the things that they are doing on hybrid warfare and what we have seen recently in Salisbury? I really cannot understand how that is a sensible approach to the present attitude and policies of Russia.

Sir Tony Brenton: You are quite right, or at least I agree with you entirely, that what happened in Salisbury was intolerable, and I think that our reactions against it have been extremely effective and justified. I was massively impressed by the Government's ability to get so many of our allies expelling Russian diplomats as well. As far as I know, that has never happened before. I was the ambassador at the time of the Litvinenko murder, where again we tried to get support from our allies. While we were given lots of warm words, there was no action. What the Russians did was intolerable, and I think that the reaction was entirely justified. If they do other things like that, you react proportionately and make life as uncomfortable for them as you can. That seems to me to be incontestable.

But we also need a change of mind set about Russia. If we regard the country as a sort of rogue out there to be tamed by getting rid of its President by caging him up so that sooner or later it will come to heel, I would say that that expectation is wrong. The Russia that we have is the Russia that we must expect to live with for the foreseeable future. That gives us a choice. Either we continue the confrontation, the pointless sanctions and not talking to them in the hope that things will get better sooner or later, or we look for ways of bringing the temperature down where we can. I have already suggested discussions on cyberspace and on Islamic fundamentalism.

An obvious gap in the international agenda at the moment is discussions about the control of strategic nuclear weapons. All of that, if we engage in it with the Russians, could begin to create an atmosphere where, first, they are less tempted to do things like Skripal, and secondly, there are people in the Russian system who have a stake in saying, when someone comes to a Kremlin meeting with the bright idea of going out and killing someone, "What about our talks on cybersecurity?. What about our trade talks and all the good things we have got going?"

Actions like the attack on the Skripals would become less likely because of the internal dynamics of the Russian system. If they have a stake in

good relations, it then becomes harder for them to decide to do bad things. I am not saying that we should just throw our arms around them, as I think has been suggested, but I am saying that while we should be tough where we need to be tough, we also need to begin to rebuild a relationship where we can. That is because they are going to be around for a long time.

May I add a final point? It not in response to a question but it is something that I want to put on the record. While we in the West are conducting our current hostile, "get off our turf" policies towards Russia, there is a very major world power that is doing exactly the reverse, which of course is China. It is working hard at building up economic relations. China will be Russia's largest trading partner in two years' time—more than all of the EU. Even as we speak, gas pipelines are snaking across Siberia to build up the economic link. If you believe, and I think it is a plausible belief, that looking 20 years ahead the most likely geopolitical fault line on our planet is going to be between the United States and China, with us obviously on the side of the United States of that line, it becomes quite an important question which side Russia falls on. At the moment we are pushing the Russians on to the Chinese side quite successfully.

The Chairman: You are touching on the basic Russian dilemma: is it a European or Asian power? You are saying that it will become an increasingly Asian power unless we can somehow attract it back into the western fold.

Sir Tony Brenton: That is not the way I would put it. I am saying that the Russians are turning their economic links to the east because we are not giving them any choice. They are exercising with Chinese armed forces. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is basically an east Asian anti-NATO group. There is a whole set of complexities in that. Andrew is right to say that the Russians have a long and difficult history in their relations with China. It is true that they fear Chinese growth and power, and they fear the possibility that their far east will fall into Chinese hands. All of that is true, but nevertheless, in the current circumstances, if you are looking for a good working relationship between two big powers in the world, which is quite difficult to find in today's world, the Russia/China relationship may well be it.

Q104 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Could we turn now to Russian policy towards what is loosely known as the international order—or disorder, depending on your taste? First, what are the Russians trying to do? To many people, it looks as if they are playing the role of the spoiler. Basically, they are no longer interested in the functions that President Gorbachev played such a big role in promoting, such as the United Nations and many other organisations. They are not interested in climate change, although they go along with it because the decline in their economy has meant that they can fulfil the Paris obligations without too much trouble. Have they had any success in trying to spoil the international community? Do we need to face the fact that they will play a spoiling role where they can,

such as with their veto in the Security Council, but that on the whole they are not terribly relevant to how all these institutions will work? Perhaps we ought to be worrying a good deal more about what role the Chinese are going to play in them.

Sir Andrew Wood: I think that that is a correct statement. I do not think that we are conducting a deliberately hostile policy towards Russia. That is not the object of our policy, and if it is, getting rid of Putin is a very unreal one. We do talk to them and try to determine in which areas it might be useful to work with them. It has been very difficult to identify any such area, in part because the basic aim is clear. It is to make Russia great again, to use a nice phrase, but it is not actually much more than that. Other than that, it is about dominating neighbouring countries, and I do not see how that helps us to come to a better world. There are certainly criticisms to be made about the mess we have got ourselves into in Syria, but there are also many criticisms to be made about whether it is really in Russia's national interest to become effectively an ally of Iran and whether that will help it to control its Caucasus problems and so on. For me, it is very difficult to identify subjects where we have a concrete chance of negotiating new and viable agreements.

It is the agenda that is missing, for me. I do not think that that is our fault particularly. I think it is a result of the system that the Russians have concocted for themselves. I do not think that that system is going to last for ever. Quite how it changes is beyond me. It could easily change in more of a Maduro than a Gorbachev direction, but it will change. In the meantime, it is our duty, basically, to try to enforce agreements, to try to make sure that other countries respect agreements—very much including Russia—and I agree with Tony that we should talk to them as much as we can, particularly when we can get a concrete subject to discuss. That is difficult right now.

Sir Tony Brenton: When the Russians hear the words "liberal international order", what they think is, "US unipolarity". They see the current international system as having been created by the West for the West's interests and still being driven largely by those concerns. It is not only the Russians: the Chinese feel exactly the same way. I do not think it follows from that, as David suggested, that they are intent on spoiling it but they are intent on making sure that what they see as their vital interests are protected within it.

To offer a rather random example, when we accused the Russians—accurately—of breaking international law with their actions in Ukraine, their response was, "You, the West, broke international law with your actions in Kosovo". They are willing to use the phraseology of the order, but against us. That attitude is not going to change. You will see Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council, continue to use its veto there if it thinks its interests are under threat. So I do not think the Russians are launching some great campaign against the order. I do think they mistrust it intensely and they will stand very firmly up for what they see as their interests in the context of the order.

Baroness Helic: Thank you both. It has been fascinating hearing two sides of the very important story that we need to know about. I will go back, if I may, to the international order and whether Russia is actively trying to disrupt it, reverse it, et cetera. So far we have focused on the Russian neighbourhood, rightly so because this has always been seen as a sphere of Russian influence, but there is a part of the world we have not mentioned so far: the western Balkans. The day before yesterday, Valentina Matviyenko, the speaker of Russia's upper house, visited Bosnia-Herzegovina. She gave a speech in the parliament and she called the Balkan countries' ambitions to join NATO a "dangerous experiment" that goes against the will of the sizeable pro-Russian faction in the population there.

My theory is that Russia is doing absolutely everything to ensure that what we call the liberal international order in western-leaning countries loses its appetite, both for joining NATO and joining the EU. I think of Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Kosovo and Serbia. I would argue that there is an active policy of finding proxies and useful fools in a region such as the Balkans so that without having to send in troops on the ground you create your own sympathisers who will take forward whatever policies you have.

I also argue that they mean to prove that the western system of democracy is not going to work and take hold in the western Balkans. I make it clear that Russia was never present in the western Balkans—the territory of the former Yugoslavia—and the break with the Soviet Union in 1948 was never patched up, even in the post-Khrushchev era. I would be grateful for your thoughts.

Sir Andrew Wood: My thoughts, having spent eight years of my life in Yugoslavia, and having had the pleasure of talking to many people there, including Milosevic, are that what you say is absolutely correct. Whether it is a sensible policy for Russia to adopt is a rather different matter. I just do not see that NATO including those countries is actually a direct threat to Russia. It is a direct threat to Russia only in the sense that Russia regards itself as having a right to a defining role in that area, which, again, is an ancient argument.

If I were governing Russia in the interests of the Russian people I would not see the point of getting involved in that. What are you going to do—put Russian troops there? Why would you do that anyway? They ought to be getting on with the business of governing their own country properly. If they get involved in Bosnia, that is a particular can of worms that many of us wish we had never got involved in ourselves. I do not know how the Russians can possibly help solve it. So I agree with the implication of your question.

Sir Tony Brenton: Andrew is much more expert in this area than I am. What you say sounds plausible to me. I just want to make a quick point about the expansion of NATO. Andrew's point that the expansion of NATO is not a direct threat to Russia is true but the Russians do not believe it. They see NATO as a threat, whether we like it or not, and they see every

move we take to expand NATO as adding to that threat. Okay, you can say that that is barmy but we have to deal with the Russians as they are and that is a very settled Russian prejudice. They will do everything they can to limit that expansion. It is quite clear that with regard to at least one country—Ukraine—if there were any talk of Ukraine entering NATO, then we would have a war because there are some things that they simply will fight to stop and at that point we would find ourselves in a difficult situation.

If you think about the vision of the structure of the alliance that emerged from the Cold War, at least seen from the Russian point of view, what has been developing is movement towards a situation where every country in Europe is a member of NATO, except one—Russia. Obviously, that is not a comfortable prospect for the Russians and they will not let it happen.

Baroness Helic: I would just add that Russia has added its reluctance to see the countries of the western Balkans join the EU, which kind of defeats the argument. I can almost understand that the Russians are worried about the expansion of NATO because they are not in the alliance.

Sir Tony Brenton: You are right, and this was not the case until 2005-06; I am not giving you a date but 10 years ago, say. Then the Russians woke up to the fact that something like 13 countries had joined the EU and then gone on to join NATO—that in some sense the joining of the EU and of NATO had become inseparable. At that point, having woken up to that fact, their opposition to NATO expanding, which is entirely comprehensible—if mad—extended to the EU expanding as well.

The Chairman: We have left to the end the key question for us here in the UK. Lady Coussins.

Q105 **Baroness Coussins:** Sir Tony, you have said several times that we must talk to the Russians, we must develop dialogue and build relationships. Perhaps you can say something about whether you think Whitehall is equipped with the necessary skills to do that. I remember that three years ago when you gave evidence to one of the EU sub-committees, which I was sitting on at the time—we did an inquiry into the EU-Russia relationship—you were asked a very similar question.

The report said that there had been a decline in the analytical skills in Whitehall in its engagement with Russia. You said in your evidence that UK diplomacy “has suffered because of a loss of language skills, particularly in the Foreign Office”. Despite the excellent resources in the Foreign Office language centre, we are facing a pipeline that is drying up, with, as I am sure you know, fewer than 3% of state schools offering Russian at GCSE and A-level, and you can do a Russian degree at only 17 of our 130-odd universities.

Bearing in mind the scope of our inquiry, which is UK foreign policy generally in a changed world, not just with regard to Russia, could you comment on why, in this world of artificial intelligence and Google Translate, it is so important that we have human beings with the

language and cultural skills to engage with Russia and the other countries that we need to engage with?

Sir Tony Brenton: Okay. You do not want a full-blast reply to that, so, very briefly, the Russians are very difficult to understand and quite a lot of their recent policy has come out of the blue—the interference in elections, the action in Ukraine, all that. We work quite hard to keep up but at the end of my time at the Foreign Office, and it carried on for some time after that, basically the Foreign Office had lost interest in Russia. There was nobody at the top of the office who had Russian experience. At one point, famously, in an internal meeting there was a discussion about various things and Russia came up. The most senior official in the Foreign Office at the time said, “Why are we wasting our time on Russia? They’ve got a smaller economy than Belgium”.

As I understand it, given the current situation, there is renewed awareness of the need to have people who understand Russia—to the extent that anybody understands Russia—and at least have the skills to do so. Those skills include the Russian language. The most useful thing I did as an ambassador in Russia was sit down with a senior Russian and have a reasonably open discussion. There were no secretaries, no interpreters, nothing. It was just me and him—it was always a he, I am afraid—and he never spoke English. It enables you to get into people’s heads in a way nothing else does. We need people rising through our system who can do that—who can go out into the Russian provinces, talk to people on the street and get a real feel for the place.

As I say, the attention to that is improving, although I would also add that 23 of our diplomats have now been thrown out of Moscow and they will almost certainly never get back. Some of them learned Russian in their earlier career, and that strand of their career is now cut off. For people coming up, that is a disincentive to even beginning to learn Russian, so we have to get over that.

So, yes, I remain worried. Paradoxically, of course, the fact that Russia is now the ogre on the block is actually rather helpful. Suddenly, we have to pay attention to it. There has been much improved co-ordination, as I understand it, among Whitehall ministries on tackling Russia; there are people from the MoD and so on sitting in the Foreign Office, and vice versa, which is a massive improvement on how things used to be. I hope that attention will be sustained.

The Chairman: Sir Andrew, a final word on the theme of togetherness with Russia.

Sir Andrew Wood: Plainly, you have to speak Russian and understand their culture and so on in order to have a feel for the difficult aspects of the matter. Plainly, not only the Foreign Office but this country as a whole and most western countries, the United States included, have lost attention to Russia. That is not altogether surprising. As an economic temptation, learning Russian is considerably lower than it used to be; we are not investing, for very understandable reasons, and so on.

Seeing Russia as a danger or a problem is a different matter. Not everybody who pronounces on that speaks Russian or is able to think Russian at all. There are plenty of people who are going to do that. Nor is it my experience that everybody who does speak Russian makes a very good—. Some of them fall absolutely in love with it.

It is a problem. I do not see a future. Within the Foreign Office you could pay more attention to making language knowledge and returning to the post of whichever language you know more of a career pattern than it is now. Since people are now allowed much more latitude in choosing their own posts, their choice is obviously not to go back to the disagreeable places.

The Chairman: If this were America, I would call you Ambassador Wood and Ambassador Brenton, but as it is you are Sir Andrew and Sir Tony and you have been very helpful to us, giving us different points of view, which is very healthy and useful for us in evaluating what we do next in this country. We are extremely grateful to you. We have touched on all sorts of issues—only superficially, but that is the time limit, I am afraid. On behalf of the Committee, thank you both very much for a fascinating series of exchanges.

Sir Andrew Wood: Thank you for letting us talk.

Examination of witnesses

Dr Oksana Antonenko and Dr Natasha Kuhrt.

Q106 **The Chairman:** Dr Antonenko and Dr Kuhrt, my apologies for keeping you waiting. I think you heard what was going on. It is very hard to cover all the issues. I remind you that this is a public session. It is recorded. There will be a transcript afterwards, which you are free to change as you wish. I remind members of the Committee to declare any interests they have before they speak. You will have heard enough of the previous session to see what we are trying to get at, which is not a grand overview of our total relationship with Russia but an understanding of how it has changed radically in the past 10 years and what changes we need to make to adapt to all that. Obviously, they are very big changes indeed.

Beginning with the first question, one used to hear Russia say, "We want to be a great power again", to which the answer was, "If you want to be a great power, you have to behave like a great power". Obviously, Mr Putin is trying to pursue that assertion of Russia's importance in the world. Is it giving up on Europe altogether and seeking its future as an Asian power? Is this going to change our attitude to it? Perhaps you could give us an overview of where you think Russia wants to place itself in the world before we get down to the detail of how we handle it.

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: I work a lot on Russia and Asia. Although there has been what they are calling a pivot to Asia, mirroring US language of a pivot to the Asia-Pacific, we should not overestimate this. Despite all the

tensions with Europe, I do not think that in the long term Russia will completely reorient away from Europe. Europe is still extremely important to Russia. Civilisationally, it sees itself as part of Europe.

Of course, there is a lot of rhetoric about Russia being an Asian country, having one foot in Asia, and so on, but we should recognise that despite growing trade with China, for example, Russia still needs Europe and Europe is in many ways its significant other, if you like. Its identity is European and it achieves a certain kind of status through its interactions with Europe. I do not think it will reorient away from Europe completely.

There are tensions in the medium term, but there are also, despite appearances, still many unresolved tensions in the relationship with China. Russia is extremely uneasy about the rolling out of the belt and road initiative, particularly in central Asia.

Dr Oksana Antonenko: I will give a slightly longer answer. From the perspective of someone who grew up in the Soviet Union and has spent a lot of time in Russia, I have a feel for the debate about Russia's identity. Anyone who has lived and spent time in Russia can feel that all the time. Clearly, throughout history, if we look far back, Russia has been both part of Asia and part of Europe. It started as part of Europe, with the Viking settlements and the various influences Europe had on making Russia democratic, but then spent 250 years under Mongol rule, and that was when the Russian state emerged. Many Russian historians argue that the relationship between the citizen and the state—in which the citizen is serving the state, not the other way around—has not really changed since. At its core, the relationship between the state and the individual in Russia is very Asian.

Then Russia had many centuries of European culture and closeness to European royal families, including this country's, but it has never really followed what happened in Europe. It never went through the Reformation, formation of independent political institutions, creation of the rule of law and constraints on political power. Its connections to Europe remained by way of culture and the political elite, but they were never very deep. The reforms the Europeans tried to bring to Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries have never really been fully implemented or had a systemic effect.

When we look at today's Russia and the continuity of history, at the core of what Russia represents today, even though culturally and physically many Russians look much more European than they do Asian, there is more influence from Asia than from Europe. The geopolitics have now caught up with that Russian political identity. We really have to understand that when we look at Russian-Western relations and what we can expect from them.

If we turn away from history and look at the contemporary politics, again, I would not argue that Russia has ever aspired in the post-Soviet period to become part of Europe. Clearly, as the successor of the Soviet Union, Russia aspired in the early stages after the end of the Cold War to be part

of the transatlantic community, and it still saw the United States as a core counterparty—its significant other—more than Europe. Europe has always been very important culturally and economically because of the energy inter-dependence, but in strategic, foreign policy terms, it was always the relationship with the United States that was important. I would argue that today this relationship is still more important than the relationship with Europe, which, one has to admit, has completely broken down.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has had this aspiration, which Gorbachev clearly articulated, of a common home from Vancouver to Vladivostok—it was not really from Lisbon to the Urals but a very much more global aspiration. The expectation at that time was that Russia would become a member of the integrated Euro-Atlantic security system, even at some point an integrated security system based on NATO membership. We should remember that as far back as 2000, when President Putin became President, he gave a CNN interview in which he said, “Yes, Russia may one day consider joining NATO”, even though NATO was not prepared to accept Russia at that time. There was an expectation that there would be a sharing of wealth between the West and Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the peaceful end of the Cold War, which Russia enabled. Gorbachev played the key role in this process, we know that the scenario could have been very different.

Of course, none of those expectations has materialised. Instead, in the 1990s Russia went through a collapse of the economy. Its poverty levels shot up to 40%. The intellectual elite of the state was destroyed. The humiliation those people went through is unprecedented among our generation. I saw it with my family and friends. I come from a background of scientists. The kind of horror that people lived through in the 1990s is incomprehensible to anyone in the West, perhaps with the exception of the post-world war generations.

Of course, all this time, the West was prepared to engage with Yeltsin and to support what at that time was called the transition of Russia to democracy, although we know that Russia has never had free and democratic elections. As a result, the kind of perceptions that are now very deeply rooted and are shaping why President Putin is so popular today for standing up to the West are the function of what happened then. The perception of the western approach to Russia is based in what happened in the 1990s, when instead of welcoming Russia to the joint Euro-Atlantic institutions, enabling Russians to be economically viable and supporting real democracy, the West supported Yeltsin’s corrupt oligarchy who brought money here to London or manipulated elections very much with the support of the West. Those are the perceptions that now dominate public opinion.

Putin came to power in 2000, and in the first few years he very much made an effort to join the West. He supported the US-led intervention in Afghanistan; he practically supported it. He offered Bush very strong co-operation on the military, security and intelligence side. He did not

strongly object to the Baltic states joining NATO, even though Russia opposed NATO enlargement.

What did Russia get in return? Withdrawal from the ABM treaty and a kind of marginalisation of Russia, a decoupling from the West. Tony Brenton described here very well the prevailing view at that time—that Russia just does not matter any more. Perceptions in the West were: “Russia is too weak. Its concerns should be ignored”.

As a result of all that, we now see revanchist Russian policy, which Putin now symbolises. In that sense, the relationship between West and East is the product of his recent legacy. His shift away from the transatlantic community—I will not say Europe, because Russia always saw itself as more than just a part of Europe—is based on an understanding that the transatlantic community has rejected Russia and that Russia cannot get a place as an equal partner whose interests are taken into account in the transatlantic community.

Russia had to shift its priorities to China, and I strongly agree with Natasha that that was not an easy process. Russians are fundamentally very anxious about China. China is on the border. Only about 10 million Russians live in the Russian Far East and eastern Siberia, and we know how many Chinese are just across the border. Most Russian natural resources are in eastern Siberia, very close to China, and developing a close relationship did not come easily.

There is a perception in Moscow that there is no other choice. Russia no longer has the choice to go back into the transatlantic community; the kind of confrontational relations that Russia and the West now have will endure for many years, if not decades, and may get much worse. I certainly share that perception. Building stronger relations with China was the only way Russia could go to have both financial investment and geopolitical support—as we see at Security Council level, where China and Russia quite often co-ordinate their positions.

In technology, China is of course becoming a technological champion—going back to your inquiry—and Russia is increasingly receiving more technology from China rather than the other way around, as was the case a few years ago. The relationship has been transformed and there is a clear disagreement in Russia about whether it is in Russia’s interest. President Putin himself certainly believes that forging an ever closer alliance with China is in Russia’s interest, and he is determined to pursue that path. He has a very close personal relationship with President Xi; they have an array of common interests that go beyond geopolitics to encompass the types of political systems and relationships with the elites they want to establish.

Within the Russian business community, there are different voices. Much of the Russian business community is still interested in reviving and maintaining a relationship with the West, but more and more are looking to develop business links with the East and with China. If we look at the expansion of trade and investment, even the number of Russians who are

now learning Chinese versus those who are learning English and the western languages, there has been a fundamental shift. Of course, we also have regional governors in the Far East who used to view China with fear, because of Chinese migration and the fear of China one day laying claim to territories in the Far East. Again, they have completely changed, because the only investment they can get now, in the absence of what Andrew described as the western investment, comes from Asia, and primarily from China.

China is now investing everywhere, from very small businesses in the Russian far east all the way to the top strategic energy projects. They have just taken a large stake in the Yamal LNG project, where China will be a dominant financial player. It is now investing—very much on Chinese terms, one has to agree, because Russia has a very weak negotiating power at the moment—in the massive development of eastern Siberia.

This relationship is bound to become ever stronger, both in the energy field and increasingly in the military field and geopolitically. I fear that, despite the expectations that we had at one point that Russia would somehow be a balance between the United States and China in this famous G2 world, now the policy of the United States and the West has pushed Russia into ever closer alignment with China, very much as a junior partner. It is prepared to accept the role of a junior partner because it feels that from the Chinese side there is at least a deference in understanding and appreciating Russia's interests, while it was not able to accept the role of partner with the West.

The Chairman: That is a very disturbing analysis.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I have a question, but I think you have got very close to answering it already. It sounds rather as if Russia is fated to be disappointed; it is not going to be treated as an equal in the way the Soviet Union was treated, because it is not a world power any more outside its immediate neighbourhood. That is a source of great frustration, as you have explained, and one of the reasons why it has ceased to be interested so much in looking west.

But Russia is not going to be treated as an equal by the Chinese either; there is not the slightest chance of it. The Chinese are realists; they know perfectly well what the real balance is. Russia seems to me, on its present course, to be fated to be disappointed, and since President Putin puts so much emphasis on national grandeur, this could lead to some quite dangerous reactions when this disappointment is brought out. Would either of you comment on that?

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: I agree with a lot of what Oksana has said about the Russia-China relationship. I do not agree that Russia is an Asian power. I have been to China and spoken to people there, and according to the Chinese, Russia is not viewed as an Asian power in the Asia-Pacific. It is viewed as essentially a European power, or possibly a Eurasian power if Eurasia is still important—if geographical regions are even still important.

The point about the belt and road is that it recognises no regions, essentially; it is a completely cross-regional project.

Also, Russia is receiving some investment from China, but it is still very little. It spends quite a bit of time complaining about the low level of investment. Russia is still not a good investment opportunity, and the Chinese will not invest in a bad investment opportunity. There has been a bit of an uptick in Russia-Japan relations, quietly, behind the scenes. You may or may not know that Japan has not applied any strong sanctions on Russia. That is a direct result, though, of the greater rapprochement between Russia and China. As Japanese officials will readily admit, the convergence between Russia and China has made them think twice.

Dr Oksana Antonenko: I agree that Russia is not an Asian power, but in relative terms it is becoming more engaged in Asia, including in east Asian affairs, than even 10 years ago. It clearly has a much better relationship with almost all the Asian powers than it has with the Europeans. There are very few strong bilateral relationships left in Europe as a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the sanctions that were imposed on Russia by the EU. If we look at east Asia, the situation is very different, South Korea has never introduced sanctions on Russia despite being put under a lot of pressure by the Obama Administration to do so. Japan, as you said, introduced very superficial sanctions but has by now pretty much waived them. Japanese companies are actively engaged in trying to secure energy deals with Russia and other investments in the Far East, and of course the relationship with China is blooming.

In accumulated terms, the level of investment that Russia has received from the West cannot be compared with what it has received from China because it is a relatively new investor. However, in relative terms, per annum, China is definitely now a much bigger investor than anyone else. Let us look at where the Chinese are investing. They are investing in the most strategic sectors. I agree that they are very good at identifying and understanding opportunities, particularly in the oil and gas sector but also across the board.

Lord Hannay has asked an excellent question: is Russia going to be disappointed? I am afraid my answer is that the Chinese are much more skilful than the Europeans in knowing how to win their way without disappointing their opponent. China has clearly become the pre-eminent power in central Asia, but it has never had any tension or friction with Russia.

The One Belt, One Road initiative was famously unveiled in Kazakhstan, which caused some concern in Moscow, but what did the Chinese do straightaway? President Xi travelled to Moscow and signed a bilateral deal with President Putin that gave him what he wanted. Whether it happens in practical terms we have yet to see. The whole OBOR project is a kind of pipedream at the moment, but in practical terms he acknowledged that the Eurasian Economic Union has to be taken into account, and the OBOR map was redrawn to show that will now go through Russia. Again, I do not know the extent to which it will materialise, but he promised this.

President Xi has always treated the Russians very well on the political level, acknowledging their interests a great deal and showing them that China understands that Russia has concerns in the region. That is how the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was developed. The Chinese are now pursuing very active bilateral diplomacy—they won energy contracts in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, and they did so without alienating the Russians. The relationship goes from strength to strength, bilaterally, while China has become the pre-eminent power in central Asia and Russia's influence in the region has declined very rapidly.

This is in total contrast to what has happened in Europe. We could have resolved the Ukraine issue in a way that would not have produced what is happening now. Now, all the tensions between Europe and Russia over the common neighbourhood, if one can put it that way—the shared neighbourhood, or whatever the politically correct term is now—have resulted in more conflict rather than less, given the substance of the differences that we have. The Chinese have treated them well and the Russians now understand that this junior partner relationship is what they are up to.

I am a member of a group of Western academics and former senior officials that meets with Putin every year. Once upon a time, we had a chance in those meetings to have a real conversation with him. Nowadays, it is all very staged and you cannot have a real exchange. However, five years ago when the relationship with China was just picking up, Putin told us an anecdote about how he thinks that he understands completely how to negotiate with the Europeans. He has a lot of background knowledge from his security days and he understands what to say to them, but he said that when he walks into the room to start negotiating with Chinese leaders, they say, "Come back in 10 years' time".

Of course, that is how the Chinese view the whole region and indeed the world; they have that perspective. They are confident about where they are going, whereas Russia desperately needs investment and technology, not in 10 years' time but now, because it is in a precarious position. This is something that the Chinese are prepared to give, given all their interests.

Russia is going into this junior partner relationship with its eyes open. That is my judgment. The Russians understand that it is never going to be an equal relationship, but it is one in which at least their interests will be taken into account, as opposed to a relationship with Europe or the transatlantic community where they believe that not only are Russian interests not taken into account but they are not even acknowledged.

The language we use in the West is that Russia does not have any legitimate interest in its neighbourhood; it has no legitimate interests in Ukraine or the Caucasus. The West considers claim for such special interests to be a product of Russia's neo-imperial or post-imperial legacies, and we are not prepared to engage. We do not want to give Russia a veto. We do not even want to consult it on the common

neighbourhood, because it is not Russian business, it is European business. That is very different from the way the Chinese treat Russia in central Asia, and that wins them friends.

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: I agree, but a lot of concern is still being expressed by Russian analysts, who acknowledge that while China has been extremely helpful to Russia in the difficult period after 2014, if Russia were ever to try to go against Beijing's interests, that would be very difficult to do. They do not like that prospect.

So I would say that, in a way, Russia has no choice, and that, for now, China has been taking Russia's interests into account with the signing of the agreement, although we do not know what it will really mean in practice. There is still a certain amount of concern and disquiet, so trying to improve the relationship with Japan and to a lesser extent with South Korea is important. But the trade with these countries is fairly low, and even with China the trade cannot make up or compensate for trade with European countries.

The Chairman: You have answered a good many of our questions already in that assessment, but we should press on.

Q107 **Lord Grocott:** Thank you very much for that description of the Russian identity, which I think is how you put it. I found it very compelling. What has happened in the last couple of decades is incomprehensible in some respects. In my view, that is something that any country ought to be able to recognise. At a much lesser level, we in Britain almost had a nervous breakdown when it looked as though Scotland was going to depart from the United Kingdom, and lots of people are getting very anxious indeed about Britain's role in the world post Brexit. One must surely have some understanding of and empathy with other countries' identities in order to have good international relations.

To an extent, you have answered one of the two questions that I was going to put to you. One was whether, in the light of all you have said, you could give a very short answer, in the context of the detail you have given us, on what are the principal drivers now behind Russian foreign policy. I think you have answered that, although perhaps you could distil it into just a few words.

The other, related, question on the relationship between Russia and the West, if we can still describe it like that, is about sanctions, which is a live issue right now. I just put this to you. The sanctions were imposed because of Russia's occupation of Crimea. From my perspective, and leaving the rights and wrongs out of it, it is almost inconceivable that Russia would simply withdraw from Crimea saying, "Fair enough, Crimea is part of Ukraine and let's go back to where we were before".

Is that a reasonable assumption on my part, and if it is, what should the West do? Should the sanctions continue in perpetuity? It is so much easier to start sanctions than it is to stop them. I just wonder how you see that developing.

Dr Oksana Antonenko: The drivers of Russian foreign policy at the moment are twofold. First, Russia certainly now feels—perhaps we will have this discussion later on; I heard a little of the previous session—that the global world order is changing, that the post-Cold War order is broken and that a new one is emerging. This new world order is not so much about the kind of co-operative security that we talked about but the willingness and ability of countries that want to position themselves as sovereign great powers.

Of course, there is an objective measurement of a great power and there is a subjective one. I would argue that it is much more important how a country sees itself, as we see clearly in the Brexit debate. Russia feels that now is the transitional period to the new order, in which what is called a multipolar or polycentric world is going to emerge, and that Russia has to assert its role, not only as a regional power, which it is still recognised as, but more as a global power. That is what it is doing in Syria—demonstrating not only its ability but its willingness to project force on a unilateral basis. That very much drives what Putin is doing, I think.

The second point concerns domestic politics. This is a very popular proposition in Russia, although public opinion is also shifting. We have seen over the past year, prior to the current crisis with Britain, that the number of Russians who want to see improvement in and normalisation of relations with the West has more than doubled. Almost 25% of the population now wants to see that, and 49% of the population want to see Russia ending its engagement in Syria and bringing the troops home—so quite a large proportion.

None the less, the policy that Putin has pursued in Ukraine, particularly the annexation of Crimea, has prompted the huge elevation of his popular support. It went straight to 85% and stayed there throughout the deepest recession that Russia has endured, with four years of declining real incomes, which hit many sections of the population very hard. But all the polls show that Russian people are still prepared to tighten their belts for the greatness of the motherland. We know the history of Russia in the 20th century: they are prepared to tighten their belts for a very long time. This national ethos still very much exists. Of course, one can argue that the elites have exploited that need for the Russians to compensate for any humiliation and feel great by pursuing these goals.

Going back to the sanctions issue, I work a lot on this. I will try to be brief, although it is difficult to give a brief answer. After the annexation of Crimea, sanctions were not part of the West's policy. They were a substitute for policy. Policy-makers felt that something had to be done, that it could not be left without any response, but at the same time there were no viable options for the West to reverse the annexation of Crimea. Nobody was prepared to go and fight the Russians there. There was no other option on the table. So the natural course of action was to introduce sanctions.

However, the sanctions have never been introduced in the context of an overall strategy—what we want to achieve with Russia, whether or not the sanctions will help us achieve it, and what the real instruments of sanctions are, because we all know from the international relations literature that sanctions have a lot of collateral damage, not only on the people we want to sanction but on the broader dynamic within the country. We know that from Iraq, Iran and other places where we applied sanctions for many years. But there was not the luxury to have that debate, because everyone was taken by surprise in 2014 and there was the need to do something.

Since the sanctions were put in place in 2014, there has never been a discussion about whether they are actually achieving anything. There have been several proposals. Two years ago in the European Council meeting, the Italians proposed a debate about sanctions, but that was basically stopped. There is no appetite in the policy-making community for a fundamental debate about sanctions, because everyone understands that the remarkable unity that the West managed to achieve in the wake of the annexation of Crimea might be eroded because more and more people are saying, as you did, that we have had a very long period of sanctions and that the Russian economy has now returned to growth. Last year it grew by 1.5%. There is a consensus in the forecasts from the IMF, the World Bank and others that growth is likely to continue. Sanctions are having no visible impact in Russia to the extent that could compel it to change its policies in Ukraine or indeed elsewhere—in Syria, say, or interfering in elections.

At the same time, the collateral damage of sanctions is twofold. First, the healthy parts of Russian society, including many in the Russian middle class who shared the western values of the rule of law and transparency, were grown from the bottom up by western investment, mostly from Germany but also from Britain and elsewhere. At one point they were becoming quite a substantial force. We saw the protests in Moscow in 2011-12. It was that part of the Russian middle class that was in the street.

Now, after four years of sanctions, isolation and recession, the Russian state has supported the state corporations—all Putin's cronies—but the private sector element of the economy has shrunk considerably, so these people are no longer there. A lot of them went out of business, many of them emigrated, a lot of their companies were consumed by the state. That whole section of society, which we in the West tried to grow, has now been substantially diminished. So we need to ask whether the sanctions can be adjusted in order to help engage with the private sector elements, but we cannot have that sort of debate.

Secondly, in the meantime we have seen the collateral damage of sanctions in strengthening Russian state-sector elite, which has a vested interest in the perpetuation of the sanctions. We have also seen that in Iraq, everywhere. Sanctions distort the economy. There are vested interests who want the sanctions to continue because they do not want

competition; they benefit from all these untransparent subsidies. Because of sanctions, for example, the Russian Government had to stop publishing the tenders for procurement contracts because they feared that the companies that participated in tenders might then be targeted by sanctions. That means that competition in the tendering process, which was healthy and positive, has been eliminated, and only the people who are close to political authority can participate. That is one vested group. There are many others. We can have a long debate about it. These people will do everything they can to keep the sanctions in place.

Therefore, we have a dynamic in which the sanctions have not delivered any change in Russian behaviour and policy but have created an unhealthy environment. I am not arguing that sanctions should be lifted—certainly not; maybe they should even be strengthened—but we need to have a serious debate and assessment of Western strategy vis-à-vis Russia and what we want to achieve, how the sanctions fit in with the strategy, and how we calibrate the sanctions and keep them flexible so as to minimise the collateral damage but at the same time strengthen what we want to achieve.

However, the current environment is divisive; the United States is no longer even interested in consulting Europe about the sanctions policy, and Europeans are increasingly divided on their policies towards Russia. At the last European Council, in which the Skripal case was discussed, not all EU member states took steps to support the British position, although the majority did; Austria and other countries did not do so. This is the first time since 2014 that the unity of the EU has broken down. We are now entering the next phase, in which an extension of sanctions will be debated, and the precedent of this disunity may influence this process. We are scrambling to keep the sanctions going, but in my view we do not have a strategic vision of what we want the sanctions to achieve and how.

The Chairman: Dr Kuhrt, how do you feel about the sanctions thing?

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: I have studied sanctions a lot in relation to Iraq, Yugoslavia, all sorts of cases, and there is a huge problem with sanctions. They are an imperfect tool. As Oksana says, they often become a substitute for policy. Of course, they retain importance in sending a message; there are people here who remember the sanctions imposed on South Africa, for example. They retain some importance: the conferral of pariah status can have quite a significant effect, but it takes a long time. You have to be in there for the long haul.

We saw with Iraq that there was a problem with having very comprehensive, open-ended sanctions with no end-date. As somebody said, it is very difficult to lift sanctions once they have been imposed. Within the UN you have much more of a regime now and much more of a process for deciding how sanctions can be lifted. There are sanctions committees that regularly review sanctions, and so on. That would probably be done through the P5, plus maybe a few other people on the committee, but as Oksana said, with the EU with its large number of

member states and the very different economic and trading interests with Russia, it becomes that much more difficult.

Also, the United States has a very different approach and very different interests. The United States and Russia do not really have any significant trading or economic relationship: their history has always been one of engagement as two superpowers, engagement through arms control, global security architecture and so on. I think that is one of Russia's preoccupations, actually: that that is all falling away. The US is no longer going to be Russia's main interlocutor.

The Chairman: You do not think that these targeted sanctions against individuals and wealth holders and much more intervention on the banking side to prevent financial activity by Russians could be considerably more painful than general sanctions.

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: They could be, but then we would have to do a lot more than we are doing now. Obviously we cannot abandon them completely, because they do send an important message in the absence of any other tools we can use. The trouble with financial sanctions is how to target other sources of income. They have so many different sources of income that we may not know about, so many different ways of circumventing the sanctions. It is possible, but a lot more work would need to be done to determine how to achieve this.

My other concern about sanctions is that they are more grist to the Kremlin's mill. There is a rallying around the flag effect, which of course we have seen in many other instances, such as Iraq and Iran. The regime can use the sanctions to rally the population around the idea of a besieged fortress, which has been fairly successful in Russia—that essentially there is a kind of trench warfare now. The term used just the other day by a Russian analyst is that we now need to accept that it is about trench warfare: we are not going to be getting back to any kind of normality any time soon.

Lord Grocott: You mentioned South Africa as the exception. The huge difference there was that the sanctions were supported by huge sections of the population in the "victim country".

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: Yes, so the West could reach out across the heads of the regime to the population. That is very difficult to do in the Russian case.

The Chairman: We have a few more questions and we are running out of time already.

Q108 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** You mentioned technology before, so you may be able to respond quite briefly.

Putin has used rhetoric, as many other leaders have, about the impact that technology and AI will have in the future. Perhaps you can reflect on my amateur observation that the number of tech start-ups from Russia is way behind Nigeria and Egypt, and less than 15% of those within the UK.

It may fall foul of lack of support for the private sector, but the perception is that technology is being used as an assertive or disruptive tool by state organs, rather than there being a very healthy environment where technology can be part of a transformative tool for the Russian economy and civil society groups. Would you say that that is a fair observation, or is it problematic?

Dr Oksana Antonenko: Clearly, Russia is officially nowhere near the top ranking of countries for innovation. The 2017 global index of innovative development placed Russia in something like 45th place. It exports about 57 times less technology than China. According to official Russian data last year about 194 new patents for technology were developed, which is not much at all.

Having said all that, Russians are traditionally very good at maths and IT, so there is quite a lot going on from the bottom up, and education in that field is still very strong in Russia. Although it is weaker than it was in the Soviet times, it is still very strong.

So there is a lot of potential for bottom-up innovation, but the minute you can develop your own product, why would you, as a tech entrepreneur, remain in Russia? There is no rule of law, there are no property rights that are protected properly by the rule of law, and there are very few working guarantees for intellectual property rights. As a result, a lot of people in Russia who develop new technologies from the bottom up prefer to emigrate. A lot of brain drain still happens out of Russia. Russia still educates its people to do that kind of technological innovation, but they then realise that potential outside of Russia. Silicon Valley and other places have a very large share of Russians working there in the IT sector. Unfortunately, that cannot be changed unless Russia fundamentally changes its whole approach to economic development. It needs to open up the economy and really strengthen the rule of law.

Those are the kind of reforms that a lot of Putin's advisers are talking about at the moment. Be it Mr Kudrin or even the technocrats in government now, they are saying that if you do not do something today—really, in the next five years—Russia will be so far behind in the technology field that it can no longer catch up, not only with the West but with Asia and China. In the first part of Putin's famous speech before the election, in which he showed videos of Russia's missiles flying towards Florida, he actually acknowledged that more needs to be done and that reforms are needed. However, there is generally a lot of scepticism that they will ever be implement such reforms in practice, because creating a more horizontal and open economy cannot be done without changing the political system—making it more open, horizontal, transparent and accountable. So far, we see no credible movement in that direction.

As for the state using technology for its own means, that seems to have been Russia's approach for the last several years—very much trying to replicate a sort of Soviet system in which top-down, state-led technological innovation was implemented. As a result of that we have seen a proliferation of state corporations that are involved and engaged

in technology. But we also know from the analysis that very few of them are very successful in developing civilian technologies. They may be good at exploiting it, including for Russia's foreign policy aims, but innovation cannot be done just from the top down. In that sense, Russia does not, in my view, present a real challenge to the West when it comes to getting ahead of it in some technological field. It is very far behind in technological innovation.

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: On the matter of the military and the technological issue, the fact that Russia is still quite far behind makes a huge difference in military terms. Ninety-five per cent of electronic components on Russian ships, for example, are foreign-made, and with sanctions and so on it will be very difficult to find any replacement for them.

The Chairman: We have already dealt with Russia's approach to international law, so I will ask Baroness Helic and Baroness Hilton to put their questions. I think that is the best way to deal with both questions. Please put your questions as briefly as you can, as we just do not have time.

Q109 **Baroness Helic:** I have three very quick questions, and I am sure they merit long answers, but I will ask just one—about Russia's attitude to the existing international order and how it approaches multilateral institutions. My view is that it is trying to frustrate them, paralyse them, and break them.

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: It is not necessarily trying to paralyse or break them. It wants to maintain those that already exist and to ensure that the locus of international authority remains within the UN Security Council. Russia is a member of the P5, and according to Russia the UN is working very well at the moment—obviously, from its perspective—and organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, although somewhat moribund, are still important, even if only symbolically; they have now brought India in.

The Chairman: Can I stop you there, because that is precisely what Baroness Hilton wanted to ask?

Q110 **Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** Russia has been joining these organisations in the Far East in its attempt expand itself further east. My question is really about how we should approach those organisations—the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation? Should we encourage their existence, or should we deal with them directly?

Dr Oksana Antonenko: I would also add the multilateral institutions. I think the Russian perception of the multilateral institutions is that they have been broken for some time now. In many ways, that is part of the reason for the annexation of Crimea and the Russian intervention in the Donbass: they kind of felt that there was no longer any platform on which Russia's interests could be heard, respected and acknowledged.

Remember that the Russians' last effort to reform the European security institutions was during the Medvedev presidency, when there was a US-Russian reset and an improvement in Russian-western relationships more broadly, and he proposed the signing of the European security treaty. That was yet another attempt to integrate Russia into the European security domain.

Of course, the response from the West was, "Why do we need an extra treaty? We already have institutions, which are created very much around the principles and the norms that we in the West support". Of course, the Russian response was, "We don't believe that these institutions take our interests into account, so we want, once more, to try to put this on the table". Of course, they had very few friends in Europe. The Greeks ran this process under the OSCE umbrella, but it has not really delivered anything. So, in a sense, we had a situation in which Russia's trust in institutions had broken down.

Now, we have a situation in which pretty much every institution which Russia and the West are members of is being paralysed completely. I was just in the OSCE in Vienna, which I hold very dear; it is absolutely essential that we sustain and somehow again develop confidence-building measures like the Vienna document Open Skies and mechanisms to prevent incidences. At the same time, it is being paralysed. It is very hard to see how agreement between Russia and the West can be reached. The same is true at the Security Council, where we have not had a serious, common approach to anything for a while.

In that kind of environment, I do not expect the institutions to be the places where Russian-western relationships are going to be reconciled. There is no longer agreement on the norms, or the ability and willingness to reach a compromise at the institutional level. Therefore, institutions oftentimes become just platforms on which there is endless debate and controversy. Some of the institutions, such as the NATO-Russia council and the EU-Russia summit, or Russia as part of the G8, have been suspended completely or are barely functioning, as in the NATO-Russia Council.

So in terms of institutional development, Russia no longer sees any institutions, with the exception of the Security Council, in which it still wields the veto over the West's policies. As we know, this veto is not effective all the time—look at the recent missile strikes in Syria, for example—but, apart from that, its veto does not really exist.

We are in a very dangerous phase now in which there are no institutions—as I said, there is disagreement about norms—for arms control, for confidence-building mechanisms. All is completely destroyed. If Russia and the United States do not agree to extending the strategic arms control treaty, which is highly likely, and the INF treaty collapses in the next few years, we really will be in a new world where there is no strategic arms control, no real institutions, not even the processes by which we sit around the table with the Russians and can really deal with the fundamental disagreements that we now have in the security domain.

As for the other institutions, it is not just the Russians who set them up. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation was created jointly by China and Russia at a specific time. As I alluded in response to the first question, China and Russia needed to reconcile their interests in central Asia in a peaceful manner, so they created this framework in which almost all policies were discussed and, at least in theory, the central Asians had a right of veto because all agreements had to be reached unanimously.

We have no example of a central Asian state exercising its veto when the Russians and the Chinese agreed on something, but in theory those are the rules. The organisation had a high time when it played a major role, but its importance is now declining for two reasons. One is that the Chinese are losing interest, because they now have the one belt, one road project and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The Chinese always wanted the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to become a more economic institution. The Russians are losing interest, because they have their own institution in the Collective Security Treaty Organization, but again that is not functioning terribly well. The Russians are not as committed to the SCO as they were before.

What should the West do? I think it is better to talk to those institutions rather than hope that they will go away, because they will not, but whether it is possible for western countries to get any status in them is questionable. For instance the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has Turkey as a dialogue partner. It would be useful if Western countries or even institutions can also get this role. SCO is one institution where India and Pakistan are full members discussing their security issues, so it would not hurt to be a part of it.

On the Eurasian Economic Union, there is very little that the West can do in practical terms either to influence the existence of the institution or to engage with it. It is in its early stages and is a very dysfunctional institution from within. It is based on the premise of recreating the EU model of delegating sovereignty to a kind of supranational structure among states for whom sovereignty is an absolute value. Can you imagine President Putin, President Nazarbayev or President Lukashenko delegating part of their sovereignty to someone else? As a result, the integration and co-operation is happening at a low and technical level. European officials are also engaging with the EEU on the technical level, and I think that that engagement is going to continue, but I do not think it will on the political level.

The Chairman: We have time for one final question.

Q111 **Baroness Coussins:** The final question goes to focus of our inquiry. Throughout this session you have both been using the terms "the West" and "Europe". Can you pick out the UK from those terms and comment on how Russia views the specific role of the UK in Euro-Atlantic and global affairs? What might be any specific implications for the UK of that view?

The Chairman: Please be as brief and as blunt as you can. We have

heard some pretty blunt things from the Russians.

Dr Natasha Kuhrt: Obviously, with Skripal, the view is that the UK is essentially a partner of the US and that in a way it has never been seriously interested in Europe in the way other European countries have been, and now there is Brexit. In a way, the Russians try to portray the UK as the sick man of Europe.

Dr Oksana Antonenko: I slightly disagree with that, although I agree completely that the Skripal case has put the relationship not only into a frozen state, which it has been in for a while, but now right in the deep freeze. We cannot see how relations can be improved for the time being. The Russians have always regretted the disparity between the human and business engagement with the United Kingdom on the one hand and the lack of political dialogue and willingness on the part of London to really engage.

Clearly the Litvinenko murder had a huge impact and resulted in UK support for tough sanctions, but that does not mean that we could not have had any other agenda. I strongly recommend to the Committee the wonderful work done by RUSI over the past two years in running UK-Russian meetings and producing a thorough and in my view extremely credible report on where the bilateral agenda can go. It takes stock of the whole relationship. I was part of some of those meetings, and I have to say that the Russians have engaged fully in the process at a pretty high level.

Throughout the whole process I have heard nothing to suggest that they are not interested in exploring further improvement in relations. Even with Brexit and all the other things, there has always been an historic affinity with the Russians, even if it is a love-hate relationship. There is an historic legacy to the relationship that unfortunately does not correspond to the very low level of dialogue which the two countries have had. But after the recent developments, I too am now a sceptic, and I do not believe that we will be going anywhere. Indeed, I think we will be more deeply in crisis moving forward.

The Chairman: You have both touched with great insight on the enormous range of issues that arise from the enigma that is Russia and our relations with that country. We are grateful to you. On behalf of the Committee, I thank you both very much indeed for sharing with us your understanding of the problems of that mighty country and its future.