



# Select Committee on International Relations

## Corrected oral evidence: UK foreign policy in changed world conditions

Wednesday 4 July 2018

10.40 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman); Baroness Anelay of St Johns; Baroness Coussins; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Baroness Hilton of Eggardon; Lord Jopling; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 15

Heard in Public

Questions 147 - 166

### Witnesses

I: Deborah Bronnert, Director-General, Economic and Global Issues, Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

II: Ulrike Esther Franke, Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations; Dr Andrew Futter, Associate Professor in International Politics, University of Leicester.

### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on [www.parliamentlive.tv](http://www.parliamentlive.tv).

## Examination of witness

Deborah Bronnert.

Q147 **The Chairman:** Good morning, Deborah Bronnert. Thank you for coming before our Committee's inquiry. I am obliged to remind everyone, including those on the Committee, that this is a publicly recorded session. There is a transcript afterwards, which obviously you can have access to and adjust where you wish. This is a very important aspect: everyone has to declare their relevant interests in speaking or addressing any aspect of our inquiry.

I begin straight away with your important role in the Foreign Office and ask you to share with us your understanding of exactly how you see it, to what extent this is a new situation and to what extent you hold a new role in addition to being, as you were, the Director-General Economic and Global Issues. Please tell us a little more about the cross-HMG Global Britain Board, which sounds very exciting, and give us an initial overview of what the phrase "Global Britain" is going to mean, in practice and detail, in your part of Whitehall.

**Deborah Bronnert:** Thank you very much indeed, Chairman and the Committee, for the invitation. As you said, I am the Director-General in the Foreign Office, so the Director-General at board level responsible for Global Britain for the Foreign Office. I led the Global Britain chapter of the National Security Capability Review, the cross-Whitehall process which I chaired, and now I am chairing the new Global Britain Board, which has been asked to oversee the implementation of the recommendations from the NSCR that come under the Global Britain strand. That is in addition to my more traditional DG Foreign Office role.

However, obviously it has to be fully consistent with that because part of the point of Global Britain—I will come to this—is how we adapt the way that we are doing foreign policy to a changing global and national context. In answer to the question 'What is Global Britain?'—I know there has been quite a lively debate in Parliament and outside about the nature of it—for me, it is a description of an approach. It is a signal to the wider world but also to ourselves in government and in the UK that, as we look at a changing global context as we come out of the European Union, we in the UK, in foreign policy and wider international policy terms, will want to stay with our values and the current approach, so there is no huge shift in foreign policy. We intend to remain an open, outward-looking and tolerant European country—I am quoting the Prime Minister here—and to remain internationally engaged and influential in the international space.

Our response to that changing context is not to close in on ourselves; it is a very strong signal that we are going to remain that open, engaged and influential actor. However, it is also a signal that we recognise, with the changes in the wider world and in our relationship with the EU, that we need to adapt and do things differently and that we need to ensure that we are systematic; that we are valuing assets and our capabilities and building on them; that we are making sure that we work together cross-

government, both overseas and at home, which is in part why we have this new Global Britain Board; and that we are able to do the sorts of things in the national interest that we think we should while adapting to the global context.

I will highlight three things that we are doing a bit differently, having said that there is a lot that is the same. One of them is that we are investing more in our global network. I know there is likely to be a follow-on question on this so I will not go into a lot of detail, but we think we need to increase the number of posts in our network. We also think we need to thicken up some of our posts in other countries. We are looking at the bilateral relationships and at the multilateral and regional relationships.

A quick example: over the past year or so, we have increased the number of staff in our mission in Geneva, which interacts with the United Nations and the WTO. We have an extra 14 staff there and are looking at an additional five. That is clearly focused very much on the fact that we are seeking to become an independent member of the WTO, so it is linked to EU exit but also to the role that we want to play in international trade policy and indeed more widely in the UN. Another quick example: we are looking at our relationship with ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the 10 nations in south-east Asia and the organisation that brings them together, and asking ourselves whether we have the right level of representation, given the growing importance of that region. Again, as we come out of the EU we will not be working via the EU structures as we have in the past in terms of our relations with ASEAN. I can give you more examples if that would be helpful, but I do not know whether others want to ask questions.

**The Chairman:** That gives a flavour. Obviously the Committee would like to ask questions. Just to start and to get a better view, “a huge shift in British foreign policy” is a gigantic phrase and implies that the whole machine of Whitehall, and indeed the advice to Ministers, is pointing in different direction from the past.

**Deborah Bronnert:** I beg your pardon; it is not a huge shift. I think it is an evolution; it is the description of the fact that our values and overarching goals are the same, around protecting our people, promoting prosperity and promoting our values, but we are looking at the way that we do it to ensure that we are properly adapting the way that we do it to the big global shifts—and there are big global shifts—as well as the significant change that we are making in coming out of the EU.

Q148 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** I was very pleased to hear you putting as much emphasis on continuity as you did on innovation in this branding exercise, which it does sound awfully like. I imagine Lord Palmerston would have said that one of the eternal values and interests of Britain was to be global, and that was rather a long time ago, so it is good that you are looking at it in continuity terms.

However, do you not think it is making it more difficult for people to understand what this is all about by suggesting that it is just because we

are leaving the EU that we need to become global? We have needed to be global for 350 years and have been quite successfully so, including the 45 years when we were managing to transform the EU's external policies into global policies—something that I had some role in in the 1970s. Do you not think that it would be better if we looked at this as a very long-standing and important aspect of British foreign policy, rather than something new that has been invented just because we have voted to leave the EU?

**Deborah Bronnert:** That is a very good question but I would go back to my comments about the importance of giving a strong signal about the intention of the country. We are doing this very much not only because we are leaving the EU but also because the world is changing around us. Whether we are looking at the growing importance of China and many other economies across the world or at some of the strains that the multilateral system is under, which I agree are not new but perhaps they are more acute at the moment than they have been for a while, it is quite important that the UK says firmly, 'No, we are an open, outward-looking country. We want to remain engaged and influential and we will invest in our overseas assets to help to make that a reality, and we are looking at how we do things to ensure that we are properly adapting'. It is of course part of coming out of the EU—our relationship with the WTO and a number of other organisations will change fundamentally because we are doing so—so there is that link, but it is much broader than that.

**The Chairman:** Would it be true to say that, as Lord Hannay said, these are issues that we should have tackled quite a long time ago, and indeed have tackled? Some of us believe that technology, the changing world, the rise of Asia and the networked world would have justified all these moves years ago, to which I would add that some of us—perhaps this is a rather personal view—thought the Commonwealth network had value and we should send more to it. Would it be fair to say that Brexit has given it a boost but that these are big new trends in world affairs that we needed to pursue anyway?

**Deborah Bronnert:** That is true for many of them. I do not want to say that we did nothing in the past. Looking around at this very distinguished Committee, some of you were involved in the network shift, where we moved more staff into Asia, particularly China and India, and opened up a lot of subordinate posts—outside capitals. That had a really positive impact on those relationships. At the time, we had to do it in a resource-neutral way, so we had to reduce our footprint in other parts of the world. At the moment we are increasing without having to make reductions elsewhere. That is not to say that we are not pursuing efficiencies, which of course we are.

Q149 **Lord Wood of Anfield:** To follow up Lord Hannay's question, I also welcome this initiative. My one simple question is: how is this different from the way the FCO has seen its role for the last 50 to 100 years anyway? I do not quite understand what it is adding that the foreign office of any country would not see as part of its fundamental mission anyway.

**Deborah Bronnert:** It is not just the Foreign Office; we are trying to do this in a cross-government way. One of the ways we are taking this forward is by increasing Whitehall co-ordination and collaboration. The Global Britain Board, which I chair, is a cross-Whitehall board. We are also using it, again, to build on an earlier initiative, which was called One HMG Overseas. As you know, the Foreign Office platform hosts many different government departments, and we had some government departments that were opening offices outside the embassy. That process has brought us together, largely co-locating overseas, but we will use this to take it further so we have even more policy alignment overseas. There is quite a lot of evidence that you get much more value for the investment you make overseas if we work together. I know that is fairly obvious, but we have had to work hard at that and are still doing so.

**The Chairman:** Let us come to resources, because that is a huge measure of change, even more than the intentions and narrative.

**Baroness Helic:** It is a pleasure to see Deborah again. We used to work together, so I am pleased to see you.

**The Chairman:** That is an interest that you have to declare.

Q150 **Baroness Helic:** I was in the Foreign Office, so I could not avoid it. But I declare that interest. I am very pleased to hear from you again about open, engaged, influential and global Britain, which is music to my ears. How you are going to do it may be a big question for you. I know that the Foreign Office is full of talented people who can make anything out of nothing, but we are about to decouple and disengage from the largest platform that enabled us to do certain things through multilateral means that we would not do through bilateral means, in particular through the European Union.

Presumably, resources that are needed for the new Global Britain minus the EU platform will be substantial. Knowing how depleted the Foreign Office budget has been, even with these small adjustments, it would be interesting to know what resources you have and how they will be allocated to promote and make Global Britain more than a statement and rather an active part of British foreign policy. Added to this, perhaps you could elaborate further on which countries, regions and organisations are on your priority list to make this Global Britain vision a reality that really works for the United Kingdom.

**Deborah Bronnert:** We had already received some additional EU exit funding and had decided that we wanted to thicken up our bilateral network in Europe as part of preparing for EU exit. It is an EU exit, but I should stress that Europe is very much part of the Global Britain philosophy, that those relationships need to be strong and influential. On recent events, whether it is Salisbury or our response to a whole range of different foreign policy challenges, we have worked closely with France, Germany and others, including the US. However, it is interesting to see just how strongly we are working with France and Germany in the current context.

We have already started investing in our European network, and I referred to the increased number of staff in our mission in Geneva. At the end of March, we received further funds from the Treasury. We had £45 million for the next two years for Global Britain broadly, and we had just under £30 million for further EU exit work.<sup>1</sup> We are also likely to receive some other funds which will augment this—although not that much, so I am not getting too excited. We will also be preparing for the next spending review.

In the short term, we have received this uplift for the next couple of years. We are using it to look at a whole range of our relationships. You will be aware that the Foreign Secretary announced that we will open nine posts in Commonwealth countries—he did that during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. They are small posts, so it will not take up a lot of money, but I still argue that they are an important signal to the Commonwealth of the value that the UK places on it. We have also announced that we will use the money to deploy another 250 UK-based diplomats overseas, which in terms of our overseas footprint will be quite a significant uplift.

So far, we are coming to the final phase—we only got this money at the end of March—of decisions on around 100 additional staff overseas, and we are in the process of finalising those allocations and looking at where we will put the others. We are doing it on a competitive process internally. We are talking to government partners and asking our teams to be very clear about the value that they will add and the impact that these staff will bring.

On the bits of the world we are looking at, clearly we have some big international organisations such as the United Nations. The EU will continue to be an important partner, and engaging with the US will continue to be critical for us, so we are looking at how we interact with those, both with regard to the EU exit funding and Global Britain. There are different pots of money for Treasury purposes, but in terms of how we see UK foreign policy, the teams are working together to make sure that that is coherent. We are looking very much at the Asia-Pacific as a growing region, and I have already mentioned the Commonwealth. I do not want to say that we are downgrading anyone, because we have a lot of interests globally.

The Committee may be aware that last week we had a special conference of the OPCW—the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. On that we worked very closely with some of our traditional partners, with France, Germany, the US, Australia and others, so that within 30 days we could call that special meeting, which was quorate, and we got through the UK ideas for extending the scope of the OPCW in the face of strong resistance. We could do that partly because countries such as Togo were prepared to turn up, as well as some other very small countries, which could not vote but which were able to come and make

---

<sup>1</sup> There is an additional uplift of £45m for each of the next 2 years, totalling a combined £90m.

the meeting quorate. So although I mentioned some of the big players, I do not want to say that we do not want to work and engage with some of the smaller partners too.

**Baroness Helic:** Would you say—of course you would not—that in the ideal scenario, currently, with all the additional funds that have been contributed to the Foreign Office budget to go through this transition, express Global Britain and make it a reality, that the Foreign Office is currently underfunded?

**Deborah Bronnert:** I am not entirely sure that that is a fair question. Of course you know what I would say. I am conscious that the Government always have to make choices about a limited set of funds. We are now thinking about how we can make a strong and powerful case for public funds going to international policy in a way that is compelling in a scarce resource environment. But we are very conscious that there are many choices—I am looking at a former Treasury official. We think that the changing global context makes a powerful case for more diplomacy. Diplomacy is very cheap, but it is not free.

**Baroness Helic:** That is very effective. Thank you.

**The Chairman:** That is a wise answer.

Q151 **Lord Grocott:** I very much welcome additional resources going to our global strategy, however that is defined. Presumably that means, at least in part, strengthening missions outside Europe in other parts of the world such as the Commonwealth, which the Chairman has already mentioned. You will undoubtedly tread around this question tactfully, but presumably there are savings involved in there not being the same level of intimate relationships in Brussels that are involved in our current membership of the EU. That is not just relations paid for by the FCO, of course; it is many other government departments as well because the boundary between what is a national policy and what is a European policy gets pretty blurred at times.

Given that so much goes on in Brussels—there are so many meetings with Ministers and the constant ebbing and flowing of activity—what proportion today of FCO expenditure can be defined as expenditure connected with the EU directly? I am not talking about individual representations in individual European states, which presumably will strengthen. I would like to get a sense of the scale of that operation and maybe the actual numbers as well. An even more impossible question is whether that kind of question can be answered as far as government activity as a whole is concerned. You have said that yours is a mission that has an impact on other government departments. I am working from the proposition that maybe we will be spending a little less on operations in Brussels and a little more on operations in other parts of the world.

**Deborah Bronnert:** I am not responsible for EU exit so there is quite a lot of that question that I genuinely cannot answer. I am sure we can let you have the figures for, for example, the size and cost of our representation in Brussels at the moment. These are Foreign Office but

actually they are co-owned by DExEU at the moment so the question is not straightforward, and there are a lot of staff there who come from other Whitehall departments.

I would not make assumptions about the size of our representation to the EU after we leave because it will remain an important and influential standard-setting body that we will want to influence and engage with. If you look at the size of mission that the US, Canada or others have in Brussels in order to allow them to interact with and influence the EU, you will see that it is quite substantial. I would expect us to continue to have a substantial presence in Brussels to help us to interact in the right way with the EU, which, as I have said, will continue to be an important partner for us and an important institution.

You are right that globally we will not be part of EU co-ordination meetings; it partly depends, but that is my assumption. So there will be some things that we will not be doing. We will lose some of that power of multiplication that we have via the EU. I think we will gain a bit more space for innovation and creativity independently, but quite how that will play out in relation to resources is quite difficult to judge now. We will definitely need to do things differently with the WTO, ASEAN and some partners with which we largely do things via the EU but will have to do them separately.

**Lord Grocott:** The European External Action Service, which has grown hugely in expenditure over the last few years, is something for which presumably we will no longer need to pay whatever proportion of the expenditure we currently pay towards it, and diplomats will be coming back who were seconded there. Is that part of the equation as well? If you can give a supplementary paper, you could even remind us how much the EAS costs.

**Deborah Bronnert:** I am sure that we have those figures but I do not have them in my head. We are certainly looking at international appointments; that was one of the things that we looked at as part of the NSCR, along with how we could make sure that across the breadth of international organisations—the ones that really make a difference to us—we have the right systems for getting the right people into key positions and continuing to interact with them. That is certainly an important area. As you say, a lot of British staff have experience in the EAS, the Commission or wherever and are very deployable in those sorts of roles.

**The Chairman:** Every member of the Committee wants to ask you questions on this subject area; it is meant to be about resources but of course resources determine everything.

Q152 **Lord Jopling:** Let me ask you about one aspect of the deployment of resources that I think to many people is an inexplicable manifestation of Global Britain. I am old enough to have been a Member of Parliament when the Government decided not to have deployments east of Suez, and for many years I have been a member of the British delegation to the

NATO Parliamentary Assembly. We discussed in the House of Lords two days ago the decision to deploy three warships east of the Malacca Straits, for goodness' sake.

I can do no better than quote Lord Wallace of Saltaire, who made the point that 'We require virtually half of the British Navy to commit to keeping three ships in the South China Sea'. He went on to quote the Foreign Secretary's promise to 'send an aircraft carrier with a full complement of support ships east of the Malacca Straits, with aircraft on board the carrier'—I do not know where those are coming from. He continued: 'that would be half of the British Navy already. Probably most of the British Navy would be committed to the South China Sea'. He then asked the question that I ask you: 'Is that really a strategic priority over the defence of our waters and the seas around Europe?' It seems too grandiose to be sensible.

**Deborah Bronnert:** That is quite a difficult question for an official to answer. Clearly, defence is part of, if you like, our Global Britain posture, and our 2% commitment to defence expenditure is an important part of our narrative around Britain being global and having a wide range of assets and capabilities. We have military assets that can be deployed, relating to a whole range of things. Another part of my role is making sure that we are preparing contingency plans for the Caribbean in hurricane season. Making sure that we have the right assets in the right place is clearly part of Global Britain, but that sort of question is not one that I can answer.

**Lord Jopling:** But you are in charge of Global Britain, so surely you must have a view about deploying half of the British Navy east of the Malacca Straits. Clearly that is part of the manifestation of Global Britain.

**The Chairman:** Is that a statement or a question?

**Lord Jopling:** It is a question.

**The Chairman:** As a matter of fact, are there people from the MoD on your board?

**Deborah Bronnert:** There certainly are, but there are a number of points in the question that I would need to go away and look at. I also do not think that decisions about ship deployments—after all, I am a Director-General in the Foreign Office—are ones that I would take responsibility for. That does not mean I do not have a view on them, but I am not sure it is one that I should express to the Committee.

**The Chairman:** There is a view that having naval ships, particularly smaller frigates, buzzing around the oceans, as the French do, is rather good for trade and promotes our soft power in a very effective way. I think that is the sort of thought behind that question.

**Deborah Bronnert:** Certainly, as I have said, in terms of the overall principles, without commenting on these individual decisions, having a significant defence budget and having military assets that can be

deployed in a whole range of different ways—I have made reference to the hurricane preparedness—and demonstrating that we are a significant military power are an important part of Global Britain. However, precisely where those ship deployments should be is not a question for me to answer, I am afraid.

**Q153 Lord Reid of Cardowan:** Good morning. We have talked a lot in the debate about resources about inputs of personnel, money, the disposition of forces and so on, and you have mentioned some of the activities arising out of that—sending signals, having conferences and so on. My question is rather simpler: would you be able to say something about the product? How do you know that you are succeeding? If I were your Minister, how would I measure your success? Are you able to say at this stage whether there has been any product from this input of resources, reallocation of personnel and so on?

**Deborah Bronnert:** We are going through the process of allocation now. We have not done it yet, so I cannot say to you precisely what the impact will be. I can tell the Committee that we are asking all our teams to define what the impact will be so that we can measure it, because I think that is really important.

**Lord Reid of Cardowan:** You surely must have a measurable objective that is shaping the allocation of resources. You do not put in resources and then decide to make up an objective. You need a way of measuring it. I suppose I am asking what you would consider success, how you would measure it and what the objectives are in both those areas that are shaping the allocation of resources.

**Deborah Bronnert:** I will give you a couple of examples, if that would be helpful. We have said to everyone that all the resources need to clearly contribute in a measurable way to national security objectives in the broad sense. So they have to be part of a government-wide set of agreed goals for foreign policy, and you have to explain what impact putting in additional resources will have. That might be around helping to ensure that, when we need to, we are defending the international rules-based system by extending it—essentially that is what we were doing last week at the OPCW special conference that I mentioned—and we can ensure that we have sufficient allies and partners who will be prepared to engage with us, either as co-sponsors or by coming along with us and voting with us on particular issues. That is a measure of success; if you are expanding your resources in a particular country, does that have an impact on the way in which that country relates to and works with us on a whole range of different foreign policy priorities?

**Lord Reid of Cardowan:** I am sorry to pursue this but, with respect, that is still about the process and the inputs towards the objective. I fully accept that the Foreign Office runs very good conferences, but what is the purpose at the end of it? How would you measure the output from all this activity?

**Deborah Bronnert:** Thank you for saying that we run very good conferences, but we only run them with a purpose. We would never have a conference just to have a conference. For example, we had a series of policy priorities that we were taking forward with Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, whether on girls' education or cyber, a topic that we might come on to—that is, doing more with partners on the cyber protection and policies. With all these, we have a series of policy priorities that matter to the UK and are in our national interest but also have global relevance because it has to work both ways. Modern-day slavery was another feature of CHOGM. The meeting that we had last week was a special conference of the OPCW in order to change the international rules so that the OPCW could attribute responsibility for chemical weapons use. So all these things have a foreign policy purpose; we never do them just to have a meeting or a visit. They are all measurable.

**Lord Reid of Cardowan:** That is an assertion but I am asking about the measurement. How do you measure success from the Global Britain project? We allocate resources, we shift around personnel, we send signals and we hold conferences—which, as I have said, are very useful—but, at the end of the day, how do you know that you have succeeded? How do you judge that?

**Deborah Bronnert:** We have our overarching foreign policy and objectives that are in our annual report. For each one, we ask: 'How does this resource mean that we hit the targets that underpin this?' We are in the middle of the process so it is quite difficult for me to be too definitive. We will want all this resource to add something that can be measured. Sometimes measuring diplomatic activity is quite difficult but we are trying quite hard, not least because colleagues elsewhere in government are very keen that we do so. We also think it is important for explaining ourselves both to Parliament and to the wider public.

Q154 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** I want to ask about areas where it is not just a question of, in effect, displacement. You mentioned the fact that we are having to invest with ASEAN because we are no longer part of EU structures, and we are having to invest in Geneva because we are going to be an independent member of the WTO and we are not going to be relying on our EU network. Incidentally, it seems rather counterintuitive for Global Britain to be based on networks. That said, the National Security Capabilities Review said we are investing in our global network. Where have been the areas where there has been disinvestment over the last few years?

**Deborah Bronnert:** Over quite a period of time, as with the rest of the Government, the Foreign Office has been asked to make significant efficiencies. That has been cross-government and we have done our share along with the rest of government in terms of finding efficiencies. I am thinking of One HMG Overseas: when we collocated and brought DfID, which had a separate office, on to the high commission platform, I think DfID saved \$1 million a year in costs.<sup>2</sup> So some things are just

---

<sup>2</sup> This saving relates to the One HMG Overseas Consolidation of Corporate Services to

savings, but we have also had a series of programmes, all of them public, where we have introduced savings, whether on accommodation or on reducing numbers of UK-based and having more local staff—

**Lord Purvis of Tweed:** Sorry for interrupting, but I was not asking about administration. Paragraph 3 of the National Security Capability Review says: 'As Global Britain, we are reinvesting in our relationships around the world', not in reorganising buildings. Where had there been disinvestment in our relationships around the world that you can point to in order to show that Global Britain is now reversing that?

**Deborah Bronnert:** I would not characterise it that way.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed:** But I am quoting from your document, which you are tasked with implementing. So is the document incorrect or am I?

**Deborah Bronnert:** I would not categorise it in the way you are framing it—that we have disinvested.

**Lord Purvis of Tweed:** Then how do you define 'reinvestment'?

**Deborah Bronnert:** In the most recent exercise, we have identified 100 new staff who will go to about 60 countries, most of them outside the EU, in order to strengthen our capability there. We are not starting from nothing—we already have 274 overseas posts and we are the second-largest network in terms of numbers of posts in Europe—but we think we need to do more. It is about leaving the EU but it is also about a changing world and looking at different global trends, whether it is technology or the increase in economic and political power outside the traditional OECD area.

**The Chairman:** Sorry, I think I must ration us all to one question otherwise we will never get through everything.

Q155 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** Perhaps I ought to declare an interest, having been at the Foreign Office for three years as a Minister. The interest is that I saw how difficult it was to manage the resources against an ever-expanding need. I want to return to something that I am still puzzled about: the relationship between the Global Britain Board, the FCO and the decision-making process that then happens in the FCO about how it deploys the resources. For example, nine new posts around the world are being created in places as varied as Vanuatu and St Vincent and the Grenadines. How did the Global Britain Board influence the FCO's decision—or, indeed, did it?—about how many posts there would be and where they would be placed? What was the relationship between the board and the FCO on that?

**Deborah Bronnert:** That is a good question. In the NSCR, there is a series of recommendations about updating the Government's soft power strategy, increasing skills across government, looking at the international

---

bring DfID onto the FCO platform, with savings at the end of the Programme forecast to be around £6m over 5 years

area, how we strengthen Whitehall co-operation, working together overseas and international appointments. All those things are being looked at by the Global Britain board, and we are in the process of appointing different departments to lead on different areas. All that will come up through the Global Britain board, which will be responsible for reporting through to the centre about the progress we are making on all the recommendations.

The funding stream, at least for this phase, comes through the more traditional structures, so it is on the Global Britain board but is also being looked at by the Network Board, which is at operational end and which is chaired by my colleague, the Foreign Office Chief Operating Officer. As regards the deployments we are making and the additional staff, we are talking to a range of different departments depending on where it is and what the different interests are. So that is coming through the Global Britain board but not only through that. The decisions about posts, which of course are taken by the Foreign Secretary, take account of wider government policy. Obviously in this particular case the emphasis that he and the Government wanted to place was on our Commonwealth relationships, particularly in the context of CHOGM.

**Q156 Baroness Coussins:** I want to ask about an aspect of non-financial resources. What has been and will be done to ensure that the right skill set is present and adequate across all the departments you have quoted that are part of promoting Global Britain, not just the FCO but the Department for International Trade and DfID as well? For example, I see that you speak French and Russian.

What is being done to ensure that the Department for International Trade has enough people, not only with the right language skills but with other technical skills to negotiate bilateral trade agreements for the first time? I know that diplomats are well catered for by the FCO language centre, but what about these people who will be negotiating trade agreements for the first time bilaterally? Would it be helpful for there to be a languages audit across the Civil Service to find out what talents and skills are already there?

The Government have resisted doing this audit for years, yet it would be a cheap and simple exercise to unlock and perhaps regroup some of the language skills we have. It is not just language skills but other technical skills in terms of our increased presence bilaterally and with regard to representation that you have been describing.

**Deborah Bronnert:** That is a really good question, and I agree that skills and expertise are important. Again, it is not that we have been doing nothing. We in the Foreign Office started working jointly with DIT in 2016 to set up a joint trade faculty in the Diplomatic Academy, precisely to help to train up staff, primarily in DIT but also in the Foreign Office, and in many other government departments, such as Defra, that will need trade skills

That faculty has been launched; I think they have certainly done their foundation and their practitioner levels, and there is one more to go.

That is quite a long way down the track, and we have been doing that and starting to train people and offer courses, because that was clearly a skills gap that needed to be addressed. The Diplomatic Academy is open to staff from other Whitehall departments who are going on international postings, so we offer that to the whole of government. Staff are also going on postings to the diplomatic language school. It does not matter which government department they are from; they can use that. I agree with you that it is important that when we are overseas we speak the relevant languages.

As part of Global Britain, it has also been recommended that we start a new international skills profession, which would be across Whitehall, to help civil servants across the whole of Whitehall who need to deal with international issues to make sure that they have the right skills to do that, recognising that that will become increasingly important in the years ahead. That is just starting to get under way. That recommendation has been made, agreed and accepted, as I say, and the Foreign Office will start leading that process, but it will be a cross-government one in order to get it right, and it will be something for the whole of government.

**Baroness Coussins:** Could a languages audit be part of that?

**Deborah Bronnert:** To be honest, I was not aware of the question of a languages audit, but I think you have just said that it is not government policy to do it, so I would need to go and check.

**The Chairman:** Lord Hannay, would you like to wind this up and then go on to your question about wider agencies?

Q157 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** First, just on this question, Lord Grocott continued the search for a Brexit payoff in our representation in Brussels. However, have I got it right that I heard Sir Simon McDonald say to the Institute for Government recently that we will need a bigger mission in Brussels after we leave than the one we have now? That is perfectly understandable, given that a very large amount of the staffing of all the meetings while we are a member is done by people going to St Pancras and getting on the Eurostar. That attendance at meetings will no longer be available, therefore we will need more people in Brussels to keep us in touch with what is going on and to try to influence it. The relative size of the Norwegian mission in Brussels is perhaps some guidance to that. Could you deal with that part of the Brexit pay-off?

**Deborah Bronnert:** We will continue to have a substantial presence in Brussels. I do not want to get into how substantial that will be, but the EU will continue to be an important partner and we will continue to want to influence and engage. You are absolutely right that other partners, such as the US, Canada and Norway, have substantial missions, so that is certainly our working assumption. But on the precise size and whether it will be bigger or smaller, I do not want to say.

Q158 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Could we now go on to the issue of 'siloes', to coin a boring word? But I think you know what it means.

There has been quite a bit of concern over the years, long before the changes now taking place, about a certain amount of excessive 'siloisation', of which perhaps the most obvious over the years involving the FCO was DfID, with its very elaborate network of overseas offices, which in many cases did not seem to be under any kind of central control.

I do not want to look just at the DfID issue, because it seems to me as an outsider that the policy is now moving into more 'siloisation', not less. For instance, the appointment of a number of trade commissioners around the world seems slightly odd. To give you an example, the trade commissioner who has been appointed for Latin America has a day job, the title of which is head of trade and investment in Brazil and consular-general in São Paulo. But she is now apparently going to have to be in charge of trade relations with 25—or whatever it is—Latin American countries.

What will the position be of the ambassadors in those countries? Will they be in charge of Britain's trade policy towards Peru, let us say, or Ecuador or Colombia, or will the trade commissioner be in charge? Is there not a risk of both confusion and undercutting of the role of the ambassador, which will be rather important if we are to negotiate agreements with these countries? The Ministry of Defence side is also quite important, given that we are playing an increasing role in UN peacekeeping, which sometimes involves deployments, which will very much involve the local mission there. Who will be in charge of that?

**Deborah Bronnert:** It is a really good question. In my experience of having served overseas, ensuring that we work together as the British Government overseas is incredibly important to our impact and effectiveness and to the good use of resource. Global Britain and the NSCR restates very firmly that the country leadership rests with the ambassador or the head of mission, and that continues. On the question about some of the detail, you are absolutely right: we are looking at how we underpin some of the trade commissioners to make sure that they can fulfil the full range of roles, because you cannot just add; you have to make sure that there is a proper level of resourcing, and we are doing that with our DIT colleagues.

**The Chairman:** Is it correct to say that in some areas it is now proposed to reunite physically the offices of DfID and of the FCO and indeed, if there are separate offices, of the MoD in some capitals? Is that move actually taking place?

**Deborah Bronnert:** I am not aware of any MoD offices, but certainly over the last few years we have largely brought DfID offices on to embassy or high commission premises. Where they have separate offices, the underpinning is one shared service provider rather than having multiple ones. So we have done that already. I am sure there are a few examples with that you could find where that has not happened for different practical reasons, but what is clear, and what has been restated but was agreed a while ago, is that the head of mission is the lead for the UK Government in-country. That does not cut across accounting-officer

responsibilities and other things, but the lead UK government official in-country will be the head of mission.

**Q159 Lord Reid of Cardowan:** Part of what the Committee is looking at is the effect of new communications—digital, cyber, the internet and so on—on international relations. How are you using new technology and/or cyber capabilities in the Global Britain initiative?

**Deborah Bronnert:** You are absolutely right that this is changing the way that we do all sorts of things, not just in foreign policy but much more broadly. In the Foreign Office we have used digital and social media capabilities quite extensively. We have been one of the foreign ministries that have blazed a trail in this area in the creative use of new technologies, whether it is in our consular area or whether it is just about communicating with and influencing UK government policies. Co-operation on cyber issues is a really important part of a lot of our key relationships—I mentioned that it was one of the outcomes of the Commonwealth summit—and we are investing quite significantly in our capabilities. It is definitely a core theme. One of the questions that we are looking at in global governance is: what are the gaps, and are there gaps that we need to work with others to fill in this area? That is certainly a question that we are looking at very actively. Does that answer your question?

**Lord Reid of Cardowan:** Yes, but I do not pretend that it was an easy question to ask; it runs through everything, and we are quite pressed for time. It is about communication relationships, speaking to populations as well as to individuals, and then there is the subject of cyber capabilities, so it is a pretty big question. I just wanted some indication of where it played in your Global Britain initiative.

**Deborah Bronnert:** It is certainly a factor in it and it is changing the way that we do foreign policy. We had already invested quite significantly in our technology capability. These things always take a while but that is now being implemented. So it is having an impact. There is a lot to come on that side. I do not want to pretend that we have all the answers because there are quite big questions about information, fake news and so on. We need to know if they are being looked at but I am sure that we have full answers yet.

**The Chairman:** Let us move to the final question and talk about what used to be the bedrock of our foreign policy—namely, America, trade terms and so on. Now it all seems a little wobbly, as some of our members found on our recent visit to Washington.

**Q160 Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** Traditionally we have been a great champion of an international rules-based order, and we have depended very much on collaboration with the United States to enforce that. However, we now have a regime in the US that seems intent on totally disrupting that international order. How is that affecting the relationship of the Foreign Office or indeed of this country with the United States? Is it still possible to collaborate with it on this front?

**Deborah Bronnert:** Obviously we have disagreed and do disagree with the US on a number of issues and I think we have been quite clear about that, whether on the Paris agreement on climate, the JCPOA<sup>3</sup> or the recent decision on the UN Human Rights Council, but that does not mean that they are not a really important ally and partner and that we are not collaborating with them really closely on a whole range of things. They were absolutely instrumental in last week's action in the OPCW overnight.

We have worked with them on—I will have to check that I get this right—the fourth or fifth committee in the UN, and there was very close UK/US working to secure that. I was talking to the OECD last week: the US has not been able to agree the last two ministerial communiqués, but that does not mean that we and the OECD are not working very closely with the US on some very important trade standards issues. I do not want to say that there are no disagreements because there clearly are, but that does not mean that we are not working with the Americans really closely on a lot of really important issues.

Also, some of the questions that they are raising about the reform of the international system are absolutely legitimate, and we are trying to work out how we can help them work those through, but we are also disagreeing. I do not think there is an incompatibility. There is a lot we are doing—and will continue to do—together but you are absolutely right that there are significant disagreements.

**Baroness Hilton of Eggardon:** Presumably collaboration is good below the President. It is the President who is causing the considerable disruption in the international world at the moment.

**Deborah Bronnert:** As an official in the Foreign Office, I do not think—obviously, we are looking forward to the President's visit in a couple of weeks.

Q161 **The Chairman:** American policy is not as reliable as it was. Also, we talk about WTO rules, which some people think is a backstop to Brexit, but the WTO itself is under attack and being unravelled by Mr Trump. We are living on a moving platform, are we not?

**Deborah Bronnert:** The US is raising questions about the WTO appellate body, which is at the heart of this. It is asking whether the appellate body has started to expand its remit in a way that was not intended when that body was set up. Clearly we are part of the EU, so we are part of the EU common position on this. These are legitimate questions. Some of the questions about some of the international organisations are legitimate. As I say, on the vast majority of things on which we agree, we continue to work incredibly closely with the US and it is incredibly important for our security and prosperity. But you are absolutely right that we are disagreeing on some quite important things at the moment.

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** I was interested when you said that we have

---

<sup>3</sup> The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

some sympathy with the United States on some of the issues it has raised and would like to help it with solutions. But can you tell me which of the initiatives taken by President Trump in the past six months has contained any solution at all which we could help him with? It is certainly not a solution for the World Trade Organization to fail to appoint members of the dispute settlement process, which is absolutely the backbone of the rules-based trading order. There is nothing there. There is nothing there on Iran, the Middle East peace process or climate change. So how on earth can we help the US if it does not say what its objectives are other than disruption and destruction, which appear to be rather high on the list? I do not know if you have read Martin Wolf's article in today's *Financial Times* but that set it out probably better than I can do.

**Deborah Bronnert:** I read the article in the *FT* this morning. I have to come back to what I said: we agree with the Americans on the vast majority of things. We continue to work with them very closely. But there are some areas—the Paris climate agreement and JCPOA, which you mentioned, Lord Hannay—in which we do not agree with them and do not think they have taken the right approach. We have said so publicly, and we have worked closely with France and Germany in particular on these issues and in our response. The US remains our most important ally—it remains a country and a Government with whom we work incredibly closely on a whole range of issues.

Q162 **The Chairman:** Ms Bronnert, you have been enormously helpful to us. I will ask you a final question, which I hope will not push you too much into the ministerial role—as you rightly say, that is not yours. You said that there has been no big shift—or you are not working within the context of a big shift—in British foreign policy. A decade back, foreign policy could be put in a nutshell: our closest ally was America, our destiny was in Europe and we had to support the UN. Could you put our policy today in a new nutshell?

**Deborah Bronnert:** This is a really exciting time for us in working out how we navigate a changing world. A lot of our big, important relationships and friendships remain, but there is an opportunity for us to extend beyond those to other interests and other parts of the world. We are about protecting our people and promoting our prosperity and values. Fundamentally, that is what we do, and we do it through a series of relationships and partnerships while pursuing our interests.

**The Chairman:** I think the Prime Minister's phrase was, "old friends and new partners".

**Deborah Bronnert:** Obviously, I could not put it better than the Prime Minister did.

**The Chairman:** Good. Thank you very much indeed for your patience and your interest in what seems to us to be the other pivotal part of the whole change that is going on in Whitehall—indeed, in this country's position in the world and in world conditions. We wish you well in this

enormous task.

## Examination of witness

Ulrike Esther Franke and Dr Andrew Futter.

**Q163 The Chairman:** Dr Andrew Futter and Ulrike Franke, thank you very much for being with us this morning and giving us your valuable time. As a formality, I remind you and the Committee that this is on the record. There will be a transcript afterwards, which you will be free to adjust if you think it does not represent what you wanted to say—or said. I remind the Committee that we must all declare any relevant interests when asking questions.

As I think you know, the Committee is engaged in a major inquiry with the aim of presenting a constructive report to Parliament and the Government on the enormous changes in the world, driven largely by technology and the communications revolution, which has entered into every sphere of existence nowadays, and affects, not least, aspects of foreign policy and the deployment of our power and the protection of our interests overseas. We want to ask you questions on that sort of area.

My first, fairly general, question is: what do you think the ongoing technological revolution—the fourth globalisation, whatever you would like to call it—has done to our understanding of the deployment of our power, soft, hard, sharp and smart? To what extent has this altered the old, traditional ideas that power was at the end of the barrel of a gun and if we needed to exert it, we used battlefield efforts and thought we could win the battles on the battlefield. How has all that changed? It is a general question, but let us start with your general views.

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** First, it is important to note that things are very much in motion. Some things are already happening; for instance, we are already seeing the widespread use of military drones on battlefields around the world. At the same time, there are technological changes such as artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons, which we are moving towards but we have not really seen yet. So it is a bit tricky to say what has already happened and what might happen.

I work mainly on drones—remotely piloted unmanned aerial vehicles—and autonomous weapons. When we look at the changes that have already happened, from lowest to highest—from the battlefield to international politics—with regard to actual military operations and changes on the battlefield, more than anything drones have changed our battlespace awareness, or the battlespace awareness of those who use drones. This is what I would consider most revolutionary—actually, more revolutionary than the armed drones that we tend to look at.

Drones range from systems that can take off from the palm off your hand to systems whose wingspan is similar to a commercial airliner such as a Boeing 737. The UK employs the full range of drones, allowing the UK to

see the battlespace in a different way. We have 24/7 surveillance and reconnaissance. This has really changed how soldiers and commanders see warfare. That is the first important change that we are already seeing.

The second, in my view, is what we call remote split operations. These are the drone operations that are done from far away, even very far away. The UK has this capability, as does the US. The UK has drone operators sitting in RAF Waddington, which I am sure you are aware of, who fly drones in Afghanistan. This is what we call a remote split operation. This kind of remote ability to be directly involved in battle while being very far away is also quite new. Until drones, there was a trade-off between being far away, removed from a battle and being safe, or being involved in the battle and being in danger. Ballistic missile operators were removed from the battle and yet had an impact, but they were in no way as involved in the battlefield as drone operators are while being very far removed. This kind of trade-off has changed with regard to drones.

As a last point on drones, individual soldiers' perception of warfare has changed quite dramatically with drones. This is particularly true with regard to soldiers stationed in Waddington or Nevada in the US, who are very much involved in the battle and yet far removed from it. This is also true for infantry soldiers in Afghanistan who have their own, almost personal, drones with them. Drones allow them to look over the next hill or the next compound wall—crucial in Afghanistan—and they have a new awareness of the battlespace around them. This is quite new.

There is also the question of artificial intelligence and autonomy. We do not yet have what we call fully autonomous weapons. We do not have the kind of killer robot-type weapons where artificial intelligence is used to find targets and engage them. But there are some plans to develop these. That could influence warfare as we know it because it could take away even more people from the battlefield, allowing military confrontations with fewer people than before. This could also mean that players that were not as strong before because they did not have as many people, for instance, could become stronger because the impact of the number of people may become less important.

I will stop here, as you may have more specific questions. These are the broad lines.

**The Chairman:** That is a very helpful start. Dr Futter, can you give us your overview of the same area?

**Dr Andrew Futter:** I will take a slightly bigger-picture, broader look at this and hopefully the two will combine nicely. You are absolutely right to suggest that this latest computer, or IT, revolution has changed the modern battlefield. Principally, it has reinforced and augmented hard power rather than shifting it. We can talk about soft power later perhaps. But it has acted as a force multiplier of many things. Interestingly, this digitised context is really being felt in support systems: greater

intelligence collection capabilities, perhaps through drones; better command and control communications; greater precision; and situational awareness through satellites and other technologies. All these have made the use of hard power and force more doable and at least given different options and flexibility in what countries are able to achieve.

We can probably trace this back to the end of the 1980s, when a lot of work was being done in the United States, but also to the 1991 Gulf War and the so-called revolution in military affairs on the battlefield, when we saw the first signs of information-type warfare in the first real modern war, as many people would have it. It is in the backup and support systems where we have seen an enormous amount of change on the battlefield. Of course, the key component of that is that a lot of modern weapons systems—and indeed the personnel—require an enormous amount of stuff behind them to enable them to carry out their missions.

The flipside, in terms of what we are looking at today, is that as weapons systems have gained greater functionality, it has made instruments of hard power more vulnerable. One of the issues we will talk about today is the whole impact of cyber and the vulnerabilities of relying on increasingly complex technological systems, many of which few of us really understand, for military operations. We can go into this in a bit more detail but it is important to think about cyber in two ways. It is a very nebulous concept that is often used in unhelpful ways. We should think in terms of a cyber or digitised context within which the things we do and the way things pan out has changed, and at the same time a new set of tools, capabilities or technologies that might be used to achieve various purposes, on the battlefield or elsewhere.

What we saw happening in the early 1990s in the revolution in military affairs has now percolated up to the strategic level. So a lot of the technologies we talked about in the 1990s—network-centric warfare, a greater role for air power, the suppression of air defence, the use of what was not then known as cyber capabilities but electronic capabilities certainly—have now entered the strategic realm and particularly the nuclear realm as well. This has implications for UK deterrence and the way we think about deterrence and what we rely upon, and more broadly for how we ensure stability globally.

**The Chairman:** That is very helpful. We will come to support and cyber in more detail. What about the actual battlefield? I do not want to sound as though I been watching too many computer war games but one has pictures of drones taking over completely and almost bypassing operations on the ground, advancing against presumably similar counter-drone weapons. Is that a fantasy, or is this a world in which a lot of the battlefield operations will not be on the ground at all?

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** My answer, and I get this question a lot, is that it is important to understand that we may be adding more layers to the battle space but, in the end, to put it bluntly, it will still probably come down to 18-year-old soldiers dying somewhere in the mud. So I do not think that we are moving to wars where no one dies, no one is involved

and it is all with machines. It is more likely that we are adding layers. So, yes, I do believe that, in the next big confrontation, the first attack will probably be cyber and then we will have machines, drones, autonomous weapons of whatever kind fighting the first attacks, but it will always end up with actual people being in war. It is very important to realise that. It is best to think of this as different layers that we are adding, but it may still come down to real fighting on the battlefield.

**Dr Andrew Futter:** I agree, and I would add that there seems to be an assumption with all modern systems that we build and deploy that they will always work as planned when we use them in a military conflict. I would argue that a lot of what we are deploying now would be incredibly vulnerable at the start of any future conflict. It is a futuristic novel, but *The Ghost Fleet* is a good example. I do not want to give the plot away but it explains how reliance on technology could be a real problem and could undermine capabilities as we go forward. I suppose it also comes back to the interesting ethical question about who you want in charge of operations. It might, at least in theory, be possible to have greater autonomy at different levels in military operations, including quite a long way back, but whether that is something that we want to do, and indeed whether it is better, are interesting things to consider.

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** I want to follow up on that. Are you saying that you share the view that there is a real watershed between drones and such like—weapons that are controlled by a human operator from however far away, operating in kinetic conditions in warfare—and fully autonomous systems where there is no human control over the activity once you have set it up? Is that a crucial watershed, either morally or militarily? If so, is it capable of being sustained as a watershed—that is to say, is it possible that we can, by agreement or some other way, not move beyond that into a world where autonomous weapons are being used, at least by some of participants in warfare with very far-reaching implications, both moral and military? Can you explain whether you think that is a real watershed and, if the answer is yes, which I rather detected from your last response, then how on earth do we make sure that it is a watershed and it is not crossed?

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** Sure. Yes, the step between remotely piloted systems and really autonomous systems—for instance, artificial intelligence systems that detect and engage their own targets; we do not have that—would be a watershed, especially in the ethical sense. Humankind really needs to ask itself whether we want to delegate these decisions to a machine. That would be quite a step up, or watershed, as you put it.

With regard to regulating these systems or banning them, I am sure you are aware that at the United Nations, for years now, on the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, there has been a lot of debate on banning LAWS—lethal autonomous weapon systems. It has not really advanced a lot, mainly because there are problems in defining it, which sounds silly but it is a real problem. Personally, as much as I support all

these efforts, I do not think that it is really possible to halt that development; the main reason is that artificial intelligence is dual-use, or even more than that. Artificial intelligence is like electricity or the control of fire by humankind. This is potentially a real change for civilisation that will influence everything in the economy and the way we live, shop and spend our free time. If that is true, it will be almost impossible to keep it out of the military realm because, even if the world were to agree not to move forward with using AI in military weapons, the civilian side would still move along and it would become rather easy to take, for instance, an algorithm designed to identify cute cats on the internet and use it to recognise and use tanks on a battlefield and to have that in our military system.

I am aware that this sounds rather gloomy, but I am not a great believer in the possibility of banning these systems. That being said, I am a believer in talking about this as much as possible and coming to agreements internationally on restricting their use as much as possible or trying to implement certain regulations on where they can or cannot be used. But the moment one actor starts to use them, all the other actors will feel compelled to say that they will do the same, because there are also speed and stealth elements in this. I am slightly worried that this will not amount to as much as we would hope.

**Dr Andrew Futter:** One really useful example in the nuclear realm was the announcement a year or two ago of a possible Russian nuclear-armed submarine drone that may be deployed at some point as one of Vladimir Putin's ideas for rejuvenating the arsenal. That would essentially be an autonomous nuclear-weapon system. It would be very hard to see how it would be controlled or have much human oversight. It may be that we are already seeing and thinking about this in the nuclear sphere at least, and certainly in other spheres.

While I completely agree that trying to ban artificial intelligence kind of misses the point—a bit like saying 'Let's limit cyber', because it is such a big concept—we really need to think about specific instances and things we can all agree that we really do not want to see happen, which might be like the nuclear-armed submarine with autonomy, and work backwards. It is about getting people in a room to find specific things that we really do not want to happen and that we all agree are better avoided, and work backwards rather than looking for a general theory of how we ban or limit something.

Q164 **Baroness Coussins:** With the fully autonomous weapons system that you describe, how would we know whether we are at war and, if we are, with whom?

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** That is a very good question, because what you describe is the problem of not just accountability but plausible deniability. What is already happening—this is a general development, not just related to AI—is that we are seeing the space between war and peace getting bigger. There is a carving out of the space between war and peace. It used to be clearer whether one was at war or at peace. Cyber is

a big part of this. There are cyberattacks now and it is difficult to assess whether these are real attacks, or whether or not they are coming from states. Drones are somewhat related to that, because we now have drone operations even where two countries are not officially at war with each other—such as the US and Pakistan. With fully autonomous weapons, it depends: if you have an autonomous drone system that shoots missiles and attacks someone, there are only a few players worldwide that could even develop that at the moment, so it would not be so hard to find out who was building it. There are ways to trace it back.

You are putting your finger very much on the right wound, so to speak, namely that this area of “unpeace”—as my colleague Lucas Kello from Oxford has described it—is getting bigger because there is more possibility of launching attacks that do not really amount to armed attacks yet or where you cannot be entirely sure whether it is an attack—we have had the little green men and things like that. Autonomous weapons play into that sphere but, at the moment, when we talk about fully autonomous weapons, it is a bigger type of weapons system that only a handful of countries could develop, so we would have some idea of where this would come from.

**The Chairman:** We have moved into the next question. Lord Purvis, do you want to follow specifically on this?

Q165 **Lord Purvis of Tweed:** Thank you, Lord Chairman. For the more traditional armaments and munitions, certainly those that can be exported, there is traceability, as you mentioned. We even recently tried to trace back what shot down a passenger jet and where it was sourced. It was remarkable forensic research, but we were only able to do that because there was an audit trail. That is much harder with some of the new technologies, which can be quite easily exported, certainly if it is software. Who is currently debating or discussing what the equivalence would be when it comes to traceability of the use of some of these new technologies? Is there an international debate going on? Is the UK playing a role? Are there international bodies? Is the UN doing it, or is it currently quite a large gap?

**Dr Andrew Futter:** That is a great question. I do not know exactly what is happening, but it feeds into a broader question, if we look at cyber, which would be the obvious example, or computer network operations, of attribution. With attribution, it is broadly understood that if you have enough time and enough resources you can probably find out who did something and where it came from. The problem comes when you do not have lots of time. A lot of this is context-specific. It is why I believe that the use of cyber and other capabilities are so problematic in a crisis. They can very easily exacerbate things.

On the question of tracing back, the other thing, taking cyber as an example again, is that a cyber weapon, if we want to use that phrase, often has a very specific purpose. Notwithstanding that there have been examples, sometimes it is not as easy as just stealing our weapon because it has been planned to attack a particular system. Stuxnet would

be a good example. It would only really be useful to have both bits or all the bits of that code if you wanted to attack that particular system, notwithstanding that it can infect other computers and other systems, but it will not do the same damage. Yes, there is a problem with time and tracing stuff back, but, when it comes to cyber, I wonder whether the ability to use it on all sorts of different things is quite as straightforward as other technologies, such as a missile.

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** Lord Purvis is exactly right about time and resource. The question is one of speed. It is almost impossible to do an attack that cannot be traced at all. The problem is whether it takes a year or longer, as was the case with MH17, the plane that Dr Futter mentioned. It changes the context if we have to wait for that kind of attribution.

You mentioned export controls. Arms controls also come into this. The problem is that with many of the things we are talking about it is more about software than hardware, which is much harder to control when it comes to export and general arms control agreements. This is one of the things that I try to make policymakers understand as much as possible: all systems of arms control often rely on numbers—you can have 100 nuclear warheads or X number of missiles. This will not be applicable any more with these types of weapons, where it is impossible to see from the outside. Take a drone, which is a remotely piloted or fully autonomous system. It is much more about the software than the hardware. Control is also much harder, because, going back to the dual use problem, algorithms can be used for many things. They could be exported for civilian purposes and then be repurposed for military ones.

Q166 **Lord Reid of Cardowan:** Thank you. That is fascinating. Should we in this Committee and everyone else take a bit of a reality check on autonomous weapons, whether the operator is on the battlefield or sitting miles away, for several reasons? First, if you can carry out a cyberattack on your opponent, thus knocking out their infrastructure with defeat mechanisms, why would you require hardware on the battlefield? A cyberattack might be a much more effective way of doing it.

Secondly, we are working on the assumption that all these software-driven battlefield weapons will work. We do not know that they will, not only because, as you pointed out, no plan survives first contact with the enemy, but because any enemy that we have fought in the past 30 years is not sophisticated in cyber interference with the software that runs the battlefield.

Thirdly, we should take a reality check, because battlefields finish, and the aftermath of the battlefield, whether it is Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya or anywhere else, requires vast numbers of people. Those like Donald Rumsfeld, who has taken the view that we will do this by weaponry alone and that we do not need that number of boots on the ground, have unfortunately been proven wrong in the past and are likely to be in future. I am trying to take a slightly more realistic view of the potential capabilities of battlefield weapons. The enemy has evolved as well and if

we are using software-driven battlefield weapons you can be sure that the opponent has at least an attempt to undermine the very software that is running our drones and autonomous vehicles.

**The Chairman:** Would you like to comment on that or shall we move on?

**Dr Andrew Futter:** That is a really good question. I will make two points in response. First, cyber capabilities currently augment other mechanisms of warfare or foreign policy. As you say, it is unlikely, at least in my mind, to ever be the final arbiter in any conflict. It has to facilitate something else. You would attack an electric grid to allow you to gain escalation dominance.

The other thing that is important to note is the question of whether you could ever be certain enough that you could do something in the cyber realm that would lead you to act in a certain way. There is an argument that the greater the uncertainty in all of your systems, the fact the opposition could do something to them might lead you to greater restraint because you do not quite know what will happen. The overarching point in this, and one of my biggest fears, is that we have not thought how, in a cyber context and with cyber capabilities, crises might escalate differently from how we thought they would in the past. We had certain models or ideas of East-West confrontation in the past, perhaps even in other parts of the globe, but because the context has changed that changes the way we think about how these different dynamics interact and how that would change it.

Finally, as a good way of highlighting this, when conducting research in the past, someone gave me this example. They said, 'Imagine if the Cuban missile crisis happened today', in a real-time, digital news media frenzy. There is no way that the President would have time. You would probably have CNN reporting directly. It is a whole new different way of thinking about a crisis and different capabilities. That is where an important bit of research or thinking has to be done.

**The Chairman:** We must move on a bit, although we have covered the subject already.

Q167 **Lord Jopling:** Let us bring this back, if we can, to the United Kingdom and the effect of these changes with cyber and automation. Dr Futter, your comment about the Cuban missile crisis is covered, as well as many other things that you have been working on, in a fascinating article in the *New Statesman* from 7 May. To what extent do you believe that cyber threats have compromised the UK's existing military capabilities and our nuclear weapons system? The Committee has seen a good deal of what you have written about this, but we would like to hear more from you. In particular, there is a comment in the article that says, 'In 2014, a Pentagon investigation found Chinese-made components and materials in Boeing and Lockheed military planes and in Raytheon missiles'. To what extent are our systems compromised in this way?

Ulrike Franke, with all these changes, as far as the UK is concerned, do our existing rules of engagement need to be changed, or should we be

thinking about them?

Then a question, finally, to you both. Ulrike Franke talked a few moments ago about the difference between war and peace, and she talked about it being extended. I wonder whether it is not blurred and coming together. Lord Hague, a former Foreign Secretary, recently suggested that, given the changes that we have been talking about with cyber automation and so on, there is a case for looking again at Article 5 of the NATO treaty and producing what he described as Article 5B, because certain types of warfare would not be included in the classic definition of Article 5? Should thought be given to realigning and, if necessary, extending, Article 5?

**The Chairman:** There you are—a huge range of questions. Let us start with Dr Futter on compromise. Have we been compromised?

**Dr Andrew Futter:** That is an excellent set of questions. The honest answer is that it is impossible to know how much we have been compromised. I do not know because the people who know would not tell me.

It is reasonable to assume that we could be and that there are actors out there who would want to do so. That is enough of a risk for us to think about it as a serious problem. This risk will increase as systems become more sophisticated, more reliant on complex code—lines that most of us cannot understand. It is also useful when we talk about this threat to the military—I will come to the nuclear aspect in a second—to differentiate between intention and capability. To me, state actors are far more likely to invest in cyber espionage, trying to steal secrets about weapons design or personnel or, in extremis, trying to stop weapons working; whereas non-state actors, who I would argue are a lot less capable for a whole range of reasons that we can talk about in a moment, are more likely to try to exacerbate or cause a crisis in some way—for example, to cause a weapon to go off. These two require two different types of responses.

The same has to be assumed for the UK nuclear weapons system. I am pretty confident that the Navy is aware of this threat, but the truth is that it can never be invulnerable. No one could say that it is impossible that that submarine, that missile, that warhead and the people involved could be attacked or compromised in some way.

When it comes to thinking about UK nuclear weapons, because there is only one submarine on patrol, you do not necessarily have to do something to the warhead, the missile—the real military bit—you could do something to anything on the submarine: its reactor or its navigation, et cetera. It would put the UK in a very difficult position if malware was found in the navigation system or another key system so that it had to come back into port.

A good example is Stuxnet, which I mentioned earlier. Stuxnet entered Natanz, the Iranian enrichment facility, by going through an air gap. If we take the analogy and call this a sea gap, just because the submarine is somewhere in the north Atlantic on the ocean bed does not mean that it has not been compromised before, at the manufacture stage or with a

whole host of other suppliers. Do I think this is likely? No. Is it possible? Yes, probably. It is something that we have to consider. If you work on the basis in the UK that we are 99% certain that the system will always work and, most importantly, our adversaries are 99% certain that we think it will work, if that comes down to 70%, 50% or 60%, we have a different debate about the role that capability and whether it is the right one.

Finally, it is not just the cyber aspect. When you put it into the broader context of more capable missile defences, sensing, underwater drones and tracking, the reliance on that submarine becomes more risky, or at least a new challenge that must be met by those designing the next submarines and the capabilities they need on board.

**The Chairman:** Ulrike Franke, your turn.

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** I think you are asking a crucial question: should the British rules of engagement be changed? My answer would be that I do not think so, it is the doctrinal thinking and writing that should change. In international relations scholarship over the past decades, when we talk about revolutions in military affairs, what is very clear is that the revolution does not come just from the new technology, it comes from how you use it.

The tank is a classic example. It was on the battlefield since 1916. It became a revolutionary system only in the Second World War because of the blitzkrieg doctrine of the Wehrmacht. It is all about how you use a system.

I studied this in some detail in my PhD thesis. The UK has good doctrinal thinking in general, but I thought that when it comes to drones, artificial intelligence and autonomous weapons, it was slightly behind. It was striking that even in 2011 and 2017, in official doctrinal publications, drones and all of that work were portrayed almost as a future capability, although the UK had been using them for a decade in Afghanistan. Very few lessons had been learned from Afghanistan. It is more doctrinal thinking that we need. This is what I would recommend the UK to do: think about how we use this best. This also applies to autonomous weapons, if the UK decides that it wants to use them, or to use artificial intelligence in warfare—how exactly does it want to do so and where do the advantages lie? That thinking is lacking.

Briefly on your question about an Article 5B of the NATO treaty, I disagree. I think that Article 5 is perfectly prepared for different scenarios. It does not specifically state how one needs to react to an attack. One can recognise that there has been an attack on a NATO member, but if the alliance agrees that the attack is not sufficient to warrant a response, there is a lot of flexibility there. I would not want to expand it at the risk of watering it down and adding an Article 5B.

**The Chairman:** Lord Purvis has a question on what other countries are doing

**Q168 Lord Purvis of Tweed:** To some extent, the question has been answered previously, because it is about which countries have the highest capability, whether the UK played its role and where it currently stands. Notwithstanding Dr Futter's point that even the concept of the battlefield is probably different now and has considerably changed to battle spaces across many different areas, are the research capabilities following the path of those who are the largest investors in traditional armaments? Is it the same countries, or are other countries seeing this as an opportunity to leapfrog because, similarly to countries looking at infrastructure investment, they look at technology as opposed to traditional forms of infrastructure investment?

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** With regard to drones, it is relatively clear. The leading powers are the United States, Israel and increasingly China. Israel was the first developer of drone technology and it is still among the leading drone users. The United States has overtaken it because of the sheer size of its defence budget and use. China has emerged as one of the most important players, partly because the US did not want to export its technology. The UK is the only country flying US-armed drones, and China has started to fill this gap and has started to export these systems around the world to countries such as Nigeria, Pakistan and other players.

That said, smaller systems are being built almost everywhere and most countries have their own small drone capability. Also with regard to drones, we now see the commercial sector catching up if not overtaking the military sector. That will clearly become important for AI but is already with drones.

For decades, drones were an exclusively military capability. This is changing now. I can buy systems on Amazon for £1,000 that are astonishingly sophisticated and almost military-grade—not quite, but almost. This is important, because it gives the lead to the commercial sector and because it gives real power to non-state actors. We are already seeing this now.

We have non-state actors, groups from Hezbollah to ISIS, that have used these commercially available systems in their military operations. It went quite quickly from using these systems for propaganda, to reconnaissance and surveillance, to putting explosives on these systems and using them as flying IEDs,<sup>4</sup> to dropping bombs from them. This happened within a few months. It was quite striking. That is another player that comes up.

Regarding artificial intelligence, one of the really important aspects is that the commercial sector is incredibly important. If you were to ask me if someone will develop what we call general AIs—really sophisticated artificial intelligence—my answer would probably be Google or maybe in China by Baidu or Tencent, but it probably will not be by DARPA, which is the US defence agency. It could be, but the real capabilities when it

---

<sup>4</sup> Improvised explosive devices

comes to AI are with the commercial sector, which has to do with the fact that this is the sector that has data. Data is what fuels AI. We are currently witnessing a shift. This is crucial for military operators, because they will then have to work with commercial actors—with the private sector—to advance in this area.

That said, these commercial actors are, of course, based in certain countries. If I bring it down to countries, we come back to the same players: the United States, with Facebook, Google and Amazon, which have enormous data that they can use to develop AI; and China, with Baidu and Tencent, which are firms that can collect data and are helped by the Chinese Government. Again, there are rogue actors who will soon be able to take publicly available algorithms trained on data available somewhere and use them for their purposes. I expect that at first we will see the already big actors benefiting most from this, because they have the capabilities, the money and the data, but there is a possibility that it will rebalance after a while when this becomes widely available, because, as we discussed, it becomes very difficult to control this.

**Dr Andrew Futter:** I broadly agree with that. I will add two things. First, if we see a shift more towards private companies and industries holding or at least conducting a lot of this research or being the experts in it, that raises a big question for open societies and societies such as ours where there is a big split between them. That might give more of an advantage to those more closed societies where industry is much more closely associated with the military structure. That could be an interesting advantage as we go forward.

The second point is to broadly agree. At the moment it is reinforcing the balance of power, but we may be coming to the end of US superiority in this field, which goes back a long way, but certainly, as I mentioned earlier, to 1990-91. Other people are catching up and spending a lot of money, notably the Russians and China. This would be another way for aspirant powers to try to get a seat at the table—to invest in different technologies if they believe it is likely to be a game changer sometime in the future.

Finally, we live in a world—this is particularly important for us here, not least because of the current political climate—where we tend to assume that the US will be the leader in these technologies and in this field, both quantitatively and qualitatively. I am not sure that we should assume that into the medium to long term.

**The Chairman:** We see newspaper reports that the Chinese are moving ahead of the United States in various aspects of weapons technology.

**Dr Andrew Futter:** That is at least possible.

**The Chairman:** It is a guess.

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** At this point it is very clear that everyone is investing in artificial intelligence. We have seen amazing discoveries and

developments in Israel, for example. Technologically advanced countries in specific areas can definitely get ahead of everyone else. It is very important to emphasise this problem, if you like, especially for European countries, where we tend to value data security and privacy a lot, which is absolutely the right way, but it will be very difficult for us to square the circle of developing good AI, which depends on good data, while making sure our data and the data of our citizens is secure. This is a challenge that European countries need to take on.

**The Chairman:** The final question is from Baroness Anelay on how we are doing.

Q169 **Baroness Anelay of St Johns:** Indeed. Building on your responses to Lord Purvis and Lord Jopling, I am thinking about the future. Against the background of what you have described as the involvement of the commercial sector and the ethos of western Europe having an open society, how well placed do you think the UK is to be able to assist in setting new global norms about the battlefield, depending on how we define the battlefield? I am thinking in particular about whether this is an all-of-government activity. We have thought in the past in terms of what the MoD does and of what diplomacy is in the FCO, but have we now gone way beyond the MoD in looking at setting new norms for the battlefield?

**Dr Andrew Futter:** Taking that question slightly tangentially, we are in a position now where we can recognise where the greatest threats in the future will come from, whether it be on the battlefield, strategically et cetera. We know roughly where we are. I made a list: hypersonics, remote sensing and precision, autonomous systems and quantum computing, which we have not talked about but will also have an impact. The UK is in a position where we can be a norm leader in this regard, or we can be a country that pushes one of our most important allies, the United States, in this direction, or at least try to. A concerted effort needs to be made about some of these things before they get out of control, rather than, as in the past, waiting until they get out of control, when it becomes a lot more difficult. So I hope there is a role for the United Kingdom in thinking about arms control and even about whether that is the right term, and about ways of minimising the risks associated with stuff, and at least making sure that we have a public debate so that people understand some of the risks.

I think it probably is increasing, because we are a long, long way away from professional armies fighting battles on a battlefield 200 years ago. Although that could still be part of warfare, it is no longer the whole story. So, yes, it is certainly a debate that needs to happen across government, and also across society, to think about and understand the impact of this.

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** The UK obviously has and is playing a role. For instance, one current autonomous weapons system project is BAE Taranis, which is a British-developed weapons system. It is at the demonstrator or prototype phase, but it has been tested for five years or

so in Australia and can already do quite a lot. Here, the UK is moving forward with the development of these systems. It is of course also involved in the current discussions at the United Nations on the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

The problem is that I am not entirely sure that the UK is playing a role that it should be—for instance, with regard to the definition, as I mentioned earlier. At the moment, the UK's definition of autonomous weapons is so enormously broad that it is very easy for the UK to say 'We are not doing that' or 'We are clearly never going to do this'. At the moment, the UK defines an autonomous system as 'capable of understanding higher-level intent and direction'. A lot of people say that, if that is the definition that you apply, it is very easy to develop all kinds of things while never really going there. This problem has been criticised by the House of Lords Artificial Intelligence Committee in a recent report, and we have just got the answer from the UK Government that basically amounted to 'We do not want to change the definition'.

More needs to be done on this—definitely an all-of-government and an all-of-society debate. This is really important. As I mentioned, a lot of these questions are for humankind. That might sound a bit grand, but it is true. This decision on whether humankind accepts weapons taking decisions over life and death is an ethical discussion and an ethical decision that society needs to make. Society has played an enormous role in bringing this to the forefront and causing the debate, really. In the UK especially there have been non-governmental groups that have started the public debate and moved it along, but more needs to be done.

**Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** I was interested that you made rather a plea for the United Kingdom to take a forward role in this and said that we are well placed to do so, but surely, as in all international discussion and negotiation, you have to consider whether the United Kingdom in fact counts for very much in the future. You have a President of the United States who does not look as if he is likely to pay much attention to what the United Kingdom might say, and you have China and the United States, which are probably the two main players here, which again will not pay a huge amount of attention to the United Kingdom. I suppose that the countries with which the United Kingdom might be most in sympathy on these matters, France and Germany, we will be further apart from than we were. That is where the diplomatic reality, rather than the technical reality, catches up with you, does it not?

**Ulrike Esther Franke:** That is certainly true; I must admit I would have said exactly the same to almost any country, really. I think every country can play a role in this, especially when it comes to arms controls and so on; sometimes you have quite small countries taking on important roles. I would not say that the UK is perfectly placed to take on this role, because of the problems that you mentioned, but I certainly would not say that the UK is not well placed. Many countries can play different roles. That said, I tend to agree with much of what you said. When it comes to global norms and working together, there is a Brexit component

as well. I would also urge the European Union to move forward on these issues. But, again, I would urge pretty much every country to formulate their own stances more clearly and bring them to the international scene, and the UK should be doing that.

Q170 **The Chairman:** Dr Futter, there is a big question there: tier 1 top-level military, or just protecting our own interests and trying to keep our citizens safe on the street? They are slightly different; which can we do in this technologically dominated future?

**Dr Andrew Futter:** An interesting way to think about this is not necessarily UK action but how the UK can shape the debate. It depends on your view, I suppose, but an example of the ability to shape the debate is the nuclear ban treaty of last year, driven by a humanitarian initiative and by certain think tanks to put something on the agenda. I do not think that will lead to disarmament tomorrow, and the P5 is not hugely engaged, but it shows how you can change the climate of thinking around some of this, and the UK has a role in shaping that debate.

To go back to something I said earlier, let us begin to think through what these different technologies could mean. What are the questions that need to be addressed? It feeds into something that I mentioned right at the start, but it is really important. A lot of what we are discussing seems to be driven by a certain technological determinism: that just because we can do something, we should. This happens across society. The things that you can do from your laptop or your telephone are very different now from what they ever were, but it does mean that that is a good thing, particularly when it comes to weapons. It is worth thinking about whether we need to resist this march towards ever-greater complexity and digitisation.

Finally, we need to make sure that we focus, even in this era of emerging technology and lots of new challenges, on people. It is people who will write the code, build these systems, make decisions based on them and operate them. We have talked about the technology part, but the human interaction with the technology is important as well.

**The Chairman:** Our time is up, but that is a good note on which to end. We thank you very much indeed. You are opening new avenues and new worlds that challenge many conventional views on military dispositions and the hard power of our deployments. You obviously have great expertise, which you have shared with us. Thank you.