



HOUSE OF COMMONS

## Defence Committee

### Oral evidence: Work of the Chief of the Defence Staff, HC 1562

Tuesday 4 December 2018

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

Questions 1-99

#### Witnesses

I: General Sir Nicholas Carter KCB CBE DSO ADC Gen, Chief of the Defence Staff.



## Examination of witness

Witness: General Sir Nicholas Carter KCB CBE DSO ADC Gen, Chief of the Defence Staff.

**Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this general session on the work of the Chief of the Defence Staff. It is a great pleasure to welcome you, Sir Nick. I think this is the first time you have been before the Committee since taking over as CDS. We will get straight on with the questioning, which will begin with Leo Docherty.

Q1 **Leo Docherty:** General, welcome and good afternoon. You have been in post for nearly six months. Will you lay out for the Committee what your main priorities are for UK defence and how you intend to achieve them?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Thank you. When I took over nearly six months ago, I said very publicly that my main priority at that point in time was the Modernising Defence Programme. It remains my priority to deliver that particular piece of work, but of course that belies a whole load of other issues. Essentially, I wanted us to become very much focused on the threats as I saw them, and I saw them as very different from what we had perhaps looked at two or three years ago. They had come to pass at a speed that we had not necessarily predicted in SDSR 2015.

I was conscious that the capability that was needed to meet those threats needed to evolve quite rapidly in certain areas. I was also conscious that the money was something that one needed to keep a very close eye on, because balancing the capability with the nature of the threat was going to be critical to me. I was also conscious that the military strategic balance, if I could call it that, was not necessarily as long-term sustainable as it needed to be. I felt that the relationship between our effort on "fight tonight" versus "fight tomorrow", which is how the Americans describe it, was perhaps very invested in "fight tonight" and the extent to which we needed to be invested in the future was an important criterion. As part of that, I wanted to make sure that our strategic ends were being realised with the right tactical activity, and that remains a work in progress.

I was also very conscious that our international relationships were going to be very much our centre of gravity as we look to whatever the world might bring in 2019. So the extent to which I could become a member of the key groupings at Chief of Defence level, both within NATO, but also importantly within our Joint Expeditionary Force, which is a subset of our approach to NATO, and also bilaterally, with our key American, European and more broadly Five Eyes partners, would be critical to all that. I was very keen that we as Defence would lean very proactively into Government as a whole. I was very excited at the idea of fusion doctrine, which I know the National Security Adviser has briefed you on, and how Defence could play a greater part in fusion doctrine and become a much



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more outwardly facing institution, to be able to enable that notion of fusion doctrine and all that it means—you might want to come back to that.

Then I was very struck by the importance of having a decent HR strategy, and that remains a work in progress. That is something that I will focus on significantly during my time as the Chief of the Defence Staff.

Those are very much my priorities, but I have described in a sense the what, not the how, because I have certain cultural things that I feel very strongly about, the first of which is accountability. That is not necessarily because I want to sack anybody—more to the point, I believe that the obverse of accountability, which is essentially empowerment, is a very stimulating thing for people.

I found that as the CGS. I felt empowered and accountable. The upshot of that was that one had a motivation to do things differently. I feel very strongly that that notion of empowerment should be cascaded down to very low levels in Defence, but that comes with accountability. That chimes with the recommendations of Chilcot, which I also feel very strongly about.

As part of that, I wanted to make sure our governance—our operating model at defence level—would serve that purpose of accountability but, importantly, would also be very transparent and work in such a way that the levers necessary to deliver the what, as I have just described it, were effective. There are often times when one pulls a lever and it comes off in your hand. Of course, what you want is something to happen at the end of the lever. That is fundamentally to do with accountabilities and the operating model that you sit over the top of.

As a long-term soldier, I was clearly very keen to try to transfer my khaki credentials into purple credentials. In my first town hall address to the Department, I said that I would be guided by the memorable quote of General Omar Bradley, the first US general of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He said: "American armed strength is only as strong as the combat capabilities of its weakest service. Overemphasis on one or the other will obscure our compelling need—not for airpower, not for seapower—but for American military power commensurate with our tasks in the world." I have worked hard over the last six months to establish joint and, if you like, strategic-level credentials, which I think means that the Services respect me for what I am, not for the fact that I was a soldier.

Finally, I am very keen that we get head office, the Ministry of Defence, in both its guises—as a Department of State and a high military headquarters—to take a strategic perspective. Not much was wrong with Lord Levene's recommendations, which were executed about five years ago, but there was one area where I felt greater emphasis was needed, and that was the strategic framework that head office would provide for the top-level budgets to operate within. I also felt it was important that we gave new meaning to the Chiefs of Staff Committee. I know that this Committee has shown a great interest in the role of the Chiefs of Staff



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Committee. That is part of the operating model, and you might want to explore that further.

Those were my priorities for the what and the how. Inevitably, they all remain a work in progress, but I hope that sets out my stall for what I hope to try to achieve in the next two to two and a half years.

**Q2 Leo Docherty:** Absolutely—that is very useful. What are the barriers to achieving that transformation and change? Are you seeking to overcome them, and, if so, how?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** They always say that culture trumps strategy. What we have to do, in seeking to be a transforming institution—as the armed forces but also as the Ministry of Defence—is to work hard to change culture. Part of that is about what I said about empowerment. It is also about leadership, which needs to be driven downwards. People need to become more values-based and downwardly-looking in their approach. It is about having a culture that tries to espouse the kinds of principles that we understand when we go to war—what we soldiers call mission command. It is in our doctrine—the sense of being prepared to take risk. We need to be prepared to take that sort of risk in peacetime if we are going to unlock people’s potential. We have to change that culture. If we do that, we will—I used this expression the other day—unfreeze ourselves, and then people’s potential will be realised.

**Q3 Leo Docherty:** I am sure other Committee members will have other questions, but can you give me an example of innovation? If UK armed forces are going to transform themselves and become more modern, innovation will be at the heart of that. Can you give an example of the kind of innovation that you are embracing and driving—in terms of war fighting, particularly?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** For every top-level budget, each of the three Services and the Joint Forces Command has an innovation hub now. Those innovation hubs have money that underpins their activities. To use the Army as an example, there is an exercise going on at the moment on Salisbury plain called Autonomous Warrior, which I think the BBC might have filmed this morning. That is an example of where unlocking the potential of a particular brigade to think imaginatively about how it might acquire stuff quickly and do so in a way that achieves the innovative effect that you are describing is probably the sort of effect that we want to have. We have to do that at scale. One of the things that is happening at defence level is the idea of an innovation fund—an innovation capability—which people can plug into if they have got good ideas to try to realise a more rapid way of doing things.

Part of the big idea in MDP will be to try to look at this differently. I talked about the balance between “fight tonight” and “fight tomorrow”. If we are to realise a true modernisation in defence, we will have to realise that it will really only come through technology. Technology is challenging to acquire in the current way we acquire equipment and capability. We will have to think very differently about how we do that.



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My sense is that that means we will have to return to an era when we experimented routinely—you have to go back almost 75 or 80 years for when we last did that. What we need to encourage, as one of the key outputs of modernising defence, is the idea of investing in experimentation again. That will take resources but also force structure which will, I suspect, adjust the balance between what we apply to “fight tonight” and what we apply to “fight tomorrow”. The best way to describe it is an aviation term: wing-walking. We do not know what that future will look like, but we need to test all sorts of possibilities. The right way to do that is in partnership with the private sector, which in technological terms is ahead of us these days, and that is where the best ideas and technologies are.

We must also recognise that it will not be one technology that makes the difference; a combination of technologies will give us the disruptive effect that we need, and that should be right at the core of what we do with the Modernising Defence Programme. That will require us to think differently about how we contract for capability. Under the current process, we tend to tie the requirement up in a very specified way, with the i’s firmly dotted and the t’s firmly crossed. We then put it out to tender, which drives a behaviour and timeline that probably is not appropriate for the nature of technological development these days, so we will have to do that differently. That means that our commercial capability will be at the tip of the spear. If we can get the commercials in the right place, there is a reasonable chance that we might be able to create the sort of framework in which we can experiment and innovate collaboratively with the private sector to deliver the sorts of outcome that I think you are suggesting.

**Q4** **Leo Docherty:** That is extremely useful. Is that doctrine in the MDP, and when do you expect it to be published?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It will be published very soon—I think the Defence Secretary opined on that the other day. I am not quite clear about the date, but he certainly made a promise that it will be published very shortly.

**Q5** **Chair:** Before we move on to a different topic, I would like to drill down a little on to some of what you have just said. This Committee approved strongly of the move to strip out the MDP—the defence strand—from the national security capability review. Did you approve of that as well, and if so, why?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes, I did, because I felt that a number of issues were particular to defence and needed to be looked at in a defence context. That is not to say that I disagreed with what the NSCR suggested and its core recommendations—I approve strongly of the idea of fusion doctrine that lies at the heart of its thesis—but I felt that it was important for defence to be looked at in isolation after NSCR, and then to play that back into some of the NSCR deductions.

**Q6** **Chair:** For the benefit of those who are not policy wonks, could you say a few words about the fusion doctrine as you understand it?



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**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Absolutely. For a number of years we have had a National Security Council, which is chaired by the Prime Minister, and that is informed by a committee below it, called the National Security Council (Officials), which does what it says on the tin—there are clearly no Ministers there. That is now fed, in the light of fusion doctrine, by 15 or so different national security groupings, which are pulled together by a senior responsible officer. They operate on a thematic basis, but also in some cases on a regional or geographical basis. Those are multi-discipline groups on which NSS Government Departments are represented, together with outsiders from time to time. The effect is that you get a very coherent view of the issue. That then comes up to the National Security Council (Officials), and there will probably be two or three different engagements on the issue before it goes to the National Security Council.

The upshot of all that is that we get a much better perspective on all the instruments of national power being orchestrated and synchronised to achieve a collective end, which means that we tend to think about how to achieve what Mark Sedwill calls a “catalytic” outcome. How can a relatively limited investment from wherever it might be—certainly nationally—achieve an outcome that creates an exponential effect, rather than simply the sum of the parts? That is what we are trying to achieve. It is a work in progress and something that probably needs to become more dynamic. The nature of the “grey zone”, as I describe it, in which we find ourselves at the moment, manoeuvring against our competitors below the threshold of what was defined as conventional war, requires one to operate quite dynamically in that environment. We are all striving to work out the best modus operandi to achieve that.

Q7 **Chair:** Would it be fair to say that it was as part of this fusion approach that the defence strand was originally included in the national security capability review?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes, because it would be odd if you did not include defence as one of those key instruments or levers of national power.

Q8 **Chair:** That is why this Committee in particular was very concerned about the inclusion of defence, and very relieved that the Secretary of State managed to strip it out again. The reason, I am sure you are well aware, was financial, because the national security capability review was said to be cost neutral.

That, therefore, meant that, if it were decided, in the context of such a review, of which defence was by far the most significant strand in financial terms, that more money had to be devoted to meeting new technological threats of the 21st century, such as we hear constantly emphasised by the Prime Minister, every pound additionally allocated to deal with such new threats would be a pound less for the defence budget, which is already under immense strain.

I note and acknowledge fully that it is not your role to argue about the size of the defence budget—that is a role for politicians—but would you accept that probably the greatest danger of the fusion doctrine in that



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way was that defence was going to be hollowed out even more, if it was decided in the context of an overall national security capability review that more money had to be found to deal with hybrid warfare and cyber warfare and other new threats, even though pre-existing, more conventional threats have not in any way diminished; rather the reverse?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I certainly agree that it was necessary for us to be clear about what defence required, and then to argue that back into the overall national security arrangements.

Q9 **Chair:** It appears that there will be a reduced number of uniformed personnel working in Whitehall posts. Does that inevitably reduce Service exposure to Government Departments? If so, does that in some way limit the development of senior staff, including the people who will come after you in your high position?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I think it belies a bigger issue. We have got to become more strategic about our career structure. We need to be very clear about what is required at the top of the career structure, which is, of course, going to become increasingly specialist as we head towards a much more technologically based world. That requires us to have a really clear idea of how we grow people up different career spines and to the very top, with the qualities, capabilities, skills and experiences that they need to do that.

I think it is a bigger question than simply Whitehall. But it is a very reasonable point to make that the number of people who worked in Whitehall, certainly when I was a young major working in Whitehall 20 years ago, is significantly less. We do need to be conscious that we have got to grow the right people to be able to play at the strategic level in the way that we all understand instinctively.

**Chair:** Thank you for being so detailed in your opening answers, which have helped set the scene. Unfortunately, there is a probability that we are going to lose some time because of a vote, possibly around 4 o'clock. Knowing that you have got a hard stop at 5 o'clock, we are all probably going to have to tighten up a little bit now. If I see the time is allowing us to open out a bit more, I shall signal that.

Q10 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Nick, in terms of your inputs and recommendations to the MDP, do you believe that they have been accepted, in the six months that you have been in position? Do you expect all the elements in the Joint Force 2025 to be delivered by then, as promised by SDSR15?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes. First, on the Department's pulling together of MDP: I have obviously been instrumental in that in all sorts of ways. In terms of how it has been accepted across Whitehall, my key contribution to this has been to be very clear about the threat and the nature of the capability that we need to deal with that threat; indeed, to be clear about where there might be some shortfalls that need attention.

That has been entirely accepted by those who have overseen the process in the Treasury, the Cabinet Office and more broadly, so I feel reasonably



confident about that. In terms of the delivery of JF25, the welcome uplift that we received in the Budget keeps that plan on track and, of course, we now look towards a spending review at some stage next year, which will be the critical point to go beyond the following financial year to make sure that we deliver on what JF25 suggested.

That said, the MDP is going to look beyond JF25, and we will be looking to something rather different come JF35—if I can call it that—which will be more domain-based rather than Service-based. That might whet your appetite to ask a further question, but I think that we will clearly be arguing for the longer term once we hit the spending review this summer.

- Q11 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** You mentioned the £1 billion. Forgive me for asking you how that extra £1 billion from the autumn Budget will be spent. Where will it be allocated?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Predominantly it will be about taking us through to the financial year after next. It will provide us with a welcome platform, which means that we do not have to do anything destructive to ourselves. It also gives us a platform whence we can make choices, and there will have to be a conversation about that as we step through the spending review, which we expect next summer.

- Q12 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Would that include a choice on the second strike brigade, because there is a suggestion that that may not even materialise?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We are going to look at a number of different things as we look into the spending review. That is not necessarily one of them. In the light of this uplift, we will be able to look hard at things such as cyber and also, importantly, at things such as how we protect our critical national infrastructure and some of the things that we need to be able to mobilise ourselves to deal with the immediate threats that we face. I find that a more reassuring position than where I was perhaps three or four months ago.

- Q13 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Let us look perhaps a wee bit more in-depth at the MDP and how it modernises defence. How and when will the MDP modernise defence? You were also talking about accountability and about the £1 billion that the Treasury has given, which will only last a year. Can you expand a bit more on that?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** There are three key ingredients to the MDP. One is about mobilising to meet the threats of today. Another is about modernising, and I gave you a slight sense of what that was about, but I will elaborate in a moment. The third part is about transformation. Transformation is fundamentally about putting defence on to a sustainable financial footing, but also about getting after our culture, in the way that I described earlier.

On modernisation, as I described earlier, part of it is about how you wing-walk to a not necessarily certain future, but one that keeps your options open in terms of technology. The other part of it is how we view our force



structure. Hitherto, and certainly in SDSR 15, we looked at our force structure on the basis of the three Services. The MDP will focus through the prism of five domains—space, cyber, maritime, land and air—with information as an ingredient running all the way through all five domains.

That is important because it will require us to integrate in a different way from what we have done in the past. It will give new meaning to what people perhaps think about joint, and it will require us to think radically about the way in which we evolve our workforce and the way in which the career structure evolves with it.

- Q14 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** You talked about wing-walking. We seem to be flying by the seat of our pants rather than wing-walking on some of these elements, when I look at some of our northern European neighbours making their planning structures. Sweden, for instance, which I have written about before, has its defence commission, which acts as a conduit between its Ministry of Defence and its Parliament. It has multi-year defence programmes, where there is accountability at committee. In the United States, Congress has very good democratic oversight. We are often told in this Committee that we are the best informed within the UK, yet all we get over a year is a couple of Ministers coming to speak to us every now and then, and the CDS, if we are lucky, comes once a year. For some of us, there is a concern that the planning and the policy-making will not fit the existing policy framework, because there is no real accountability on some of the difficult questions. How do you overcome the culture when the accountability culture does not fit the process that you want to bring about?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** One of the big changes that we have just implemented in our operating model is the idea of a strategy development group, which is chaired jointly by me and the permanent secretary. The group would take a range of difficult policy and capability issues on a monthly basis. That will provide the strategic context in which our top-level budgets and the domains that I have described will go forth and deliver. That is a much more effective way of getting us to look over the horizon. I think it will provide the sort of rigour that is necessary for head office—if I can call it that—genuinely to provide the strategic direction of travel and, indeed, the accountability that you describe.

- Q15 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Have you measured that type of approach against any other parliamentary democracy, especially in northern Europe, that already has multi-party agreements about how they engage in that process? I am wondering whether this is just coming off the top of somebody's head or are we measuring its effectiveness in assisting you in your work?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** There are two parts to that. We have certainly measured it against the Americans, who are often first in class in the way that they do strategic development and, indeed, in terms of accountability.



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We are also introducing the idea of net assessment, which I am sure you are familiar with. That essentially gives you the ability, not only to challenge some of your well known and enduring assumptions, but to provide proper empirical evidence, both in the match to your opponents and to your allies, so that your strategy becomes rooted more in data and analysis than, perhaps as you are slightly suggesting, anecdotal advice.

- Q16 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** That is a step in the right direction; someone is talking about evidence. Finally on this, when do you think the MDP becomes SDRS 2020?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Funnily enough, I asked the National Security Adviser that very question the other day. His view is that it is important to have a quinquennial cycle because it provides you with a moment to consolidate and genuinely assess from first principles your direction of travel.

I also happen to think that, in between times, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels and there will need to be a process of constant adaptation that challenges the assumptions in the way that I have just suggested through net assessment and other means. But you do need to have the bookends of an SDRS to ensure that you consolidate, and also to give people who provide you with your parliamentary accountability, and others, the opportunity genuinely to examine the direction of travel and to be sure that you are doing what you need to be doing.

- Q17 **Ruth Smeeth:** Good afternoon, General. What are the main operational consequences of the delay to the MDP?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I don't think there are any operational consequences to it. I think we are getting on and delivering what we need to do in operational terms, without the MDP. There might have been if the money had become more challenging, but in the light of the Budget we feel confident that we can deliver our operational outputs over the next couple of years.

- Q18 **Ruth Smeeth:** There might not have been operational requirements but has there been an impact on the equipment and procurement processes?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Things have slowed down but our expectation, in the light of the help that we have recently had, is that the approvals process will speed up again, and we will get to the position where the things that our servicemen and women urgently need will happen.

- Q19 **Ruth Smeeth:** You will appreciate one of the issues for the Committee that has been regularly raised: as procurement exercises have been delayed, costs have increased. Do you think that is going to be the case this time?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** There is no obvious evidence of that, no.

- Q20 **Ruth Smeeth:** Is Joint Forces Command under review in the MDP?



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**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I would not say under the MDP, but it is under review. There are good reasons why we are doing that, if you would like me to go into them. First and foremost, we are around seven or eight years from its genesis. We wanted to make sure—the architect of it, which was essentially my predecessor’s predecessor—it was going in the direction that we wanted it to go when we created it.

We felt, though, that a couple of things had occurred. The first was that it had become a competitor to the frontline commands. People have often used a cricketing analogy: it had become the fourth stump rather than the bails on top of three stumps. We wanted to make sure that it became the home for integration, and you would, therefore, get a much better collective output from the three stumps that it sat on top of.

The other risk about it was that, because it was a top-level budget, and it did not necessarily feel that its integration was entirely nested inside the Ministry of Defence, it made balanced investment judgments that were slightly counterintuitive.

If you had some big strategic things in there, such as cyber and future, it would look odd if you were disinvesting from doctors and investing in cyber. That was a decision that should probably be taken at the strategic level. How you set it up for success, in terms of the way that it thought about its role, required us to have a look at it. We are learning, I think, that if it is reset slightly, it will give us the opportunity genuinely to get after strategic capabilities and integration, and to set the sort of digital and information framework and architecture, as some people call it, to ensure that when we buy stuff, it is bought in the right defence architecture and you do not end up with something that will not fit and that cannot talk to something else. That is really important.

Q21 **Ruth Smeeth:** Can I confirm that this is a repurposing rather than a scrapping, and it has nothing to do with budgetary concerns?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** No, not at all. It is a check, first of all, and a repurposing, to give it that strategic focus, which will help us in so many ways. We expect the outcome from the review to materialise by February or March.

Q22 **Ruth Smeeth:** Is this being done with a blank piece of paper for financial resources that may need to be allocated to it, to ensure it can do its job appropriately?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** They have started on the basis of first principles. Clearly, it will be resource-informed. How do we get the best outcome from this idea to deliver the effect that we want, which is a much better integrated set of procedures? More importantly, it is in recognition that we have this grey-zone manoeuvre I talked about. A lot of the capabilities that you would want to manoeuvre in the grey zone are likely to be contained in this organisation, whether it is cyber or information manoeuvre.

Q23 **Ruth Smeeth:** Are all the Chiefs committed to this repurposing?



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**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes. Even the owner of it.

**Ruth Smeeth:** He is the one that I would expect to be happy.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It depends which way it goes.

Q24 **Ruth Smeeth:** Yesterday, the Secretary of State said that we can expect the MDP to be printed in full and presented to Parliament before Christmas. Is that accurate?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yeah—I guess if that is what he said. My expectation is that it is imminent, but if he said before Christmas, that is great.

Q25 **Ruth Smeeth:** One of the issues we have had is that we have been expecting it imminently for the last six months. Do you not have a date yet?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** No, but we are keen to publish it.

Q26 **Leo Docherty:** One very last point on the MDP. General, can you confirm that the MDP will deliver a massively increased offensive cyber capability for the UK armed forces?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Offensive cyber is definitely part of it.

Q27 **Ruth Smeeth:** With the new budget allocation for offensive cyber, do we have enough money not to have to re-evaluate the funding and resources available to our traditional equipment programme?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Honestly, I do not think we know what it will cost. I say that because I think you have to approach it a bit like a tech start-up. You need to get it going and you need to have an open mind. That is very scary, I know, for those who count beans.

Q28 **Leo Docherty:** In terms of capability, what scale do you hope that the MDP will increase it by? Are we doubling our capability? Budget aside, what kind of scale of increase do you expect?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** In terms of our expectation coming out of human beings, we will grow to have the skills to do it. It is a huge leap forward. We are talking several thousand people.

Q29 **Chair:** Do you agree that it would be a terrible mistake to assume that, just because we have to find extra money to deal with these new threats, that money should be taken away from the traditional armed forces? That was what was going to happen under the old structure of having defence in with the national security capability review.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We have to be really wide-eyed about what range of capabilities we need to deliver the overall effect. I suspect that that balance will veer and haul between traditional capabilities, information-centric capabilities, space-based capabilities and so on and so forth.

Q30 **Chair:** You know that this Committee has taken the view—I do not expect



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you to comment on whether you agree with the figure—that we ought to aim to get defence back to the same sort of proportion of GDP that was spent on it not during the cold war years, of 4.5% or 5%, but during the decade after, which was 3% of GDP. If Father Christmas were to grant our wish, would defence be able to spend that money wisely, or would it be more than you would know what to do with?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It depends how quickly it became available. It is very challenging to spend money in the first year or two—you have to plan to spend it. You used the word “wisely”, and that is the other ingredient in the decision making. We would want to be clear that what we spent it on was genuinely wise.

Q31 **Chair:** So, for example, the new CGS has stressed the re-emergence of Russia as a major threat, and a threat that—I presume you agree with him—exceeds the threat posed to us by non-state actors. Can you see circumstances under which, with our existing defence budget, we can credibly continue to try to contain the threat from non-state actors and meet the threat of a resurgent Russia?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I do agree with what the CGS said. Indeed, I made a fairly big speech back in January this year about it. I feel very strongly about that threat. I would say, however, that I do not necessarily see that Russia has the intention to go to war with us in the conventional sense of the term, but I think there is the risk of miscalculation prompted by escalation that is not necessarily controlled.

To the point you make, the answer is that we need to invest to be able to pick up on some of the capability shortfalls we have. That is where the idea of net assessment is important to us. We need to be clear about the comparison that we make over time, particularly in terms of the NATO alliance in relation to a potential opponent like Russia.

**Chair:** Gavin will continue on that theme.

Q32 **Gavin Robinson:** Apologies, General, for having to nip out; it is no discourtesy to you. Drawing on the Chair’s remarks, you have highlighted some of the capability gaps that we have and the need to invest to address them. How able are we today to meet the threats that exist today from Russia, China, Iran and non-state actors?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** One would not want to take them all on at the same time, which I do not think was the implication of your question. The answer is that we see our defence through the prism of alliances. If you look at it on the basis of where we sit in relation to our NATO partners and how we would fight and operate with them, particularly with our American partner, I think we are able to deal with the sorts of things that you describe.

That said, as the Chief of the Defence Staff, there are a number of capability areas that I would like to see us improve. There is work we need to do in terms of anti-submarine warfare—I feel strongly about that. We need to protect some of our critical national infrastructure. There is work



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to do to make sure that our air force is able to fight in contested airspace, and is able to fight from properly protected airbases. There is work that needs to be done to deal with things like ballistic missile defence.

We have talked about cyber, which is a factor. We need to make sure that we are able, in land terms, to deal with air defence again, in a way that we slightly ignored during the counter-insurgency campaigns that we have had over the last 15 years. We also need to re-capitalise some of our armoured fleets for them to be able to manoeuvre in the land domain in the way that we would like them to.

There needs to be effort placed on things like fires and on their intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. There is definitely stuff that needs to be done to get us up to the sort of threshold that I sense we need to be at to compete with our NATO partners with the sorts of threats that you describe.

**Q33 Gavin Robinson:** Does that mean that, today, as we sit here, those are existing vulnerabilities?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It is all a question of risk. It comes down to the question of how likely you think that is to occur. At the moment, I think we depend hugely on extremely skilled and able people, and we need to make sure that they are as well equipped as they need to be for the sorts of things that we have described.

**Q34 Gavin Robinson:** Your answer was framed around allies and interdependence as well as interoperability—an interdependence on some of the protections and capabilities that they have. Is that true of national infrastructure, for example, which you mentioned? You highlighted national infrastructure as somewhere where we need to invest, but surely that is not an area where we would expect allies to protect our steel infrastructure.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** No, I was more talking about how military capability plays with allies. There is the big question of interoperability and how you achieve that, and how it plays into our alliance relationships. There is much we need to do to make sure that we give meaning to interoperability and that phrase “international by design”.

**Q35 Gavin Robinson:** Closing the circle, are you confident that what is within the draft MDP means that we will be able to increase the capacity sufficiently, close the vulnerabilities, and make sure that we are ready for the threats that have been identified?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We have got to win a number of arguments in the spending review next year.

**Q36 Gavin Robinson:** Still?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes.

**Q37 Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Just quickly, I wanted to ask about some of those elements that Gavin mentioned around capability and vulnerability.



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I believe you said we need to look at it as a “tech start-up”. I must admit, that concerns me. Our largest ally, both in spend and geography, the United States, is way ahead in terms of some of the tech stuff, and one of our smallest allies, Estonia, is light-years ahead of anyone in the NATO alliance. If we are talking about things from quantum computing to blockchain in terms of defending national infrastructure, my concern is that we are already seeing national infrastructure issues in some of our other allies, both inside and outside the alliance—take Ukraine, for example, where it is believed the Russian Federation turns off the electricity at whim. It has also happened, some would say, in the United States. Are we learning from the United States and from people like Estonia, so we are not reinventing a wheel that already exists? I am sure members of the Committee would rather we weren’t spending our money on something that one of our closest allies is doing. We would rather invest it in our own specific capabilities that our allies don’t have, which we can bring to the table.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** The answer is that, as a close partner, both in terms of our enhanced forward presence, but also in NATO more broadly, we absolutely are connected to Estonia. We have a good understanding of what they are doing, and much of that feeds back in terms of best practice to us. In terms of our American partner, you well know that we are very closely connected to what they do and what they develop.

Q38 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** So we are not going to duplicate anything they are doing already? The Estonians are light-years ahead of anyone else in the alliance.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Duplication is not what we are trying to achieve. What we are trying to achieve is the best possible national capability that can complement our partners.

Q39 **Chair:** Thank you, Martin. Let us go a little further into strategy making and decision making in defence policy. You were kind enough in your opening remarks to refer to the concerns the Committee expressed previously, about the Chiefs of Staff and their role. In your later remarks, you talked about the strategy committee, involving yourself and the permanent under-secretary of the Department. What do you now see as the role of the Chiefs of Staff Committee? Is it still the case that you can get to be head of the Army, the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force and have only the most indirect input into the formulation of strategy? Do you feel sometimes disadvantaged in being the sole uniformed voice who has strategic input to the considerations of the National Security Council, which is of course top-heavy with politicians who fancy themselves as armchair strategists?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** There are a number of issues that that question rightly illuminates. The first one is, I think, that one needs to be clear that as a single Service Chief of Staff and arguably as a member of the six Chiefs of Staff that we have, you have three different roles. The three single Service Chiefs and Commander JFC are TLB holders. In their



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capacity as top-level budget holders they are, through the Levene delegation, responsible for delivering the ends that are laid upon them in a defence plan. That requires them to behave as chief executives, in all sorts of ways.

The second really important requirement that they have is that they—the three Single service Chiefs—are responsible for the institutional health of their Single services. How that aggregates up into the institutional health of the armed forces is very much my principal concern.

The third thing that they do is that they bring to the body that is the Chiefs of Staff many years of institutional, operational and strategic wisdom, which reinforces the judgments and decisions that I have to take across the road to the National Security Council. I have to confess that how I get the best possible input from them into the delivery and formulation, if you like, of military strategy is a work in progress, but as the Chief of the Defence Staff I am absolutely determined that I will bring them more into the formulation of military strategy and utilise their wisdom at the right moment, to give me better credence when I have to deliver the messages I have to deliver.

- Q40 **Chair:** What do you think about the idea of this Committee, which was originally put forward by General Mungo Melvin when he was advising the Committee, that one way to properly integrate the operational experience and the strategic understanding of the heads of the armed forces would be for the Chiefs of Staff Committee, among other things, to be formally constituted as the military sub-committee of the National Security Council? Wouldn't that integrate them better into the system?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes, possibly. I think, in a way, it is probably within my gift to give it that sense of purpose by making sure that the way I use it, how frequently it meets and what it considers are able to inform me when I go across the road.

- Q41 **Chair:** Isn't it still the case that the Chiefs of Staff now have been dispersed geographically and no longer sit in MoD, or do they come together in MoD on a periodic basis?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I bring them up every fortnight, so we have a rhythm, and that rhythm accords with the National Security Council rhythm and the other bits of battle procedure and battle rhythm that I have to sit through.

- Q42 **Chair:** The history of warfare in the last century was very much the struggles between the uniformed professionals and the amateur politicians, and no less a figure than Winston Churchill learned a bitter experience, as a result of the Gallipoli campaign—how unwise it is for politicians, no matter how gifted, to override their military advice. That was why, in the Second World War, he never did override their concerted advice, even if he often protested against it and sought to persuade them to change it. So is it not the case that you are in a naturally weakened position if all the input of strategic wisdom from the uniformed heads of the Services has to be channelled through you as one individual who



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then, as you put it, goes across the road to argue the case?

To give you one example, there was the infamous occasion when one of your predecessors, General Richards, sought to explain to Prime Minister Cameron that what it was proposed to do in Libya was against the strategic interests of the country. The Prime Minister brushed this aside with some phrase along the lines of, “You do the fighting, and I do the politics”—something of that sort. Now, if, in fact, there had been not just General Richards, who himself is a formidable and persuasive character, in that room with the Prime Minister, but the Prime Minister had had to sit in what used to be called a Staff conference with the other Chiefs of Staff, would it not have been much more difficult for a Prime Minister with a bee in his bonnet, or her bonnet for that matter, to brush aside the considered military view, when they were part of a roundtable with strong military representation, rather than just one voice, no matter how well qualified, such as your own?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I think both the Defence Secretary and the other members of the National Security Council—and, for that matter, the Prime Minister—know that when I speak at the National Security Council, I speak with the voice of the Chiefs. I think that they understand that it is the collective opinion of that body that is being represented around that table.

Q43 **Chair:** I am sure they understand that theory, but in practical terms if there were four voices in that room, rather than one voice, it would be much harder for a politician on a mission to brush aside the military advice than when they only heard it from one person, no matter how eminent.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We do have recourse to bring them together and to go across and speak collectively if we need to.

Q44 **Chair:** And it is still the case, isn't it, that the Chiefs of Staff retain the constitutional right individually to ask for an audience with the Prime Minister?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Absolutely it is, yes.

Q45 **Chair:** So how will all this mesh with your new strategy committee, with the permanent under-secretary?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** That is an MoD-level strategy development group, and the individual Chiefs of Staff are able to have their views represented around that table.

**Chair:** Okay. It just seems a little bit of a complex system compared with a system that was very simple, very straightforward, and that won the Second World War.

Q46 **Leo Docherty:** A quick question about land capability, General: are you confident that the concept of Strike is being built from a concept into a deployable capability, and are we on track to have two deployable Strike brigades by 2025?



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**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It is definitely a concept that we are invested in. The goal is to have two Strike brigades. Whether they are delivered by 2025 I think remains a work in progress. How well-found the concept is in a joint context I think is also a work in progress, but nobody is in any doubt that it is the right way to go.

Q47 **Leo Docherty:** Okay, so given that there is uncertainty about them being delivered by 2025, on what factors is that delivery dependent?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Of course, the word "delivered" is the key word. You need a whole load of ingredients to deliver the concept, not least of which is the new land environment tactical command and control system, which provides you with the ability to talk over distance and project the data over distance, but also to integrate in an effective way. That is not going to be delivered as quickly as that, and then there are other capabilities that you need genuinely to deliver the sort of effect that Strike was supposed to deliver.

Q48 **Leo Docherty:** Clearly, cost will be a big factor.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Cost is a factor; all sorts of things are a factor.

Q49 **Leo Docherty:** As it stands, though, it is on track?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It is on track to deliver some capability by 2025, but it will not be the full deal for some years to come, I suspect, because it will be an evolutionary process that requires other capabilities to deliver the full potential of what the concept is talking about.

Q50 **Leo Docherty:** But you feel the concept is still sound?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Absolutely, yes. Funnily enough, we have tested bits of it in Exercise Trident Juncture in October. It was pretty remarkable when you think that we projected 375 vehicles over 2,500 km. That idea of projecting land power over land at reach is something we will have to test, given the nature of the threat we are now up against.

Q51 **Leo Docherty:** Indeed. On that note, what progress are we making on interoperability with our allies and what do we still need to do to improve our interoperability?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Interoperability is about probably three different key things. The first one is human factors, which is about relationships and depth of relationships. The second is about ensuring we have a shared understanding of our doctrine, tactics and procedures. The third thing that requires investment is the technology. What you are looking for in the land environment is the ability to be able to share a common operating picture, to communicate it in secure terms, but importantly to share things such as digital fires. At the moment, we are not where we need to be for that. We have made huge inroads with our American relationship, but in our Joint Expeditionary Force, which is the eight northern nations, we are not yet in a position where we can do all those things in the way we need to do them, and I don't think they will be



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fully realised until some of the NATO initiatives come forward and until we have acquired the new land environment tactical command and control system that I have talked about.

Q52 **Leo Docherty:** What else would you like to see our NATO allies deliver in concrete terms?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I always use the example of when I took over as the commander of Regional Command South in Kandahar in 2009—a multinational command of several tens of thousands of people. To talk to my seven taskforces, I needed seven different telephone systems, to put it in its most simplistic way. By the time I left, something called the NATO mission network had been put in place, which meant we could all talk to each other and share data. We could not quite do digital fires, but in essence we had a common operating platform in information terms. That is the sort of thing we need to deliver real interoperability within NATO.

**Chair:** By way of housekeeping, we are expecting the vote in about 10 or 15 minutes. But for that, we would be running bang on time to get through all our questions, so we will now have to lose about 25 minutes, because there will be two votes, so it is not worth coming back before having the second vote. Could colleagues please bear that in mind, given that CDS has to leave at 5 o'clock sharp?

Q53 **Mr Francois:** I apologise for being late, General; I was busy elsewhere, but I would not let you down. On my favourite company, Capita, is the recruitment and manning crisis all Capita's fault?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** The straight answer is no, it's not. From its inception in 2012 there is no doubt that the Army shares a large part of the blame as well. It has taken a while to get it back on track. I will elaborate: first and foremost, Capita's bid, when it competed for this contract, was ambitious. I think it was overly ambitious, and that would be its fault. On our side of the house, we stated the requirement in a very over-specified way. If I told you there were 10,000 sub-specifications in the tender in 2012, I can see you might well be amazed.

We made three or four big errors. The first error we made was to think that you could outsource the notion of a recruiting sergeant. If somebody is making a decision to join the Army or, for that matter, the other two Services, they need to see a role model in the process at the front door, and that was outsourced.

The second thing that was outsourced, which was definitely a mistake, was the ability to nurture candidates through the process from application to enlistment. That was not something that could be handled by an anonymous call centre, which was the plan.

The third thing that was outsourced, which in hindsight was a big mistake, was the medical process. The great advantage of the previous system was that medical policy, which is considerable, needs interpretation and cannot necessarily be looked at in black and white terms.



**Mr Francois:** Absolutely.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** The upshot of all of that, as you know from that very helpful report that you wrote the year before last, is that that needed to be fixed. Mistakes were made. One of the big mistakes that we made was on the IT. There was this assumption, which is always risky, that you would be able to get the internet-based IT to be able to talk to the Defence Information Infrastructure—with a contract with a company called ATLAS—and that that would be able to make the whole thing come together. Of course, we have learned between 2015 and the present day that that is very difficult to do. Only within the last couple of months has that been fixed and is now delivering the right sort of IT-based function, which is much better than what we had in the past. It has taken from 2012 until the middle of 2018 for that realisation to be fixed. That definitely caused trouble on both sides, and was certainly something to do with the way in which we specified it.

The thing we got the most wrong was that we did not think about simplifying the requirement at the very beginning. Believe it or not, we still recruit 240 different career employment qualifications. It is only over the last 10 months of four-star involvement, and other involvement, that we have simplified the requirement and worked on the basis of, “We do not need to have all of those career employment qualifications at the beginning; let’s actually recruit for the Army and a few subcategories, and that will make everybody’s life easier.” That is going to change things significantly. We are now beginning to see people moving through from application to basic training more quickly than they did in the past. The goal is to have a mean time of flight of 90 days between application and enlistment. The other day, somebody was offered enlistment 39 days after they started the process, which is remarkable and will not be achieved everywhere because people need to move at their own particular pace. The indications are that that is improving.

I am not going to tell you that all is right yet, because it is not. We will still undershoot in terms of Army recruiting this year, by a figure of around 3,000 recruits. That is fundamentally unacceptable. However, if things continue to improve in the way they are now, my expectation is that we will do much better in the next recruiting year—2019-20—than we have done in this one. This year has of course been completely messed up by the move to the new IT—the so-called DRS system—which, again, you commented on in your report. The plain fact is that we are now through that, and we can therefore have some confidence that that will be right.

The thing that I think has changed the most is the governance and leadership. Capita now has somebody called Jon Lewis, who I very much hope the Committee and you, Mr Francois, will see. He is a very effective chief executive who has made it very clear that the RPP is one of his signature programmes in the significant number of programmes that he has as chief executive. He is absolutely not prepared for it to fail. I think his partnership with General Ty Urch is a model for how, in outsourcing terms, you can get the two sides of the relationship to work together in a



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strategic way. By the right, we have learned some appalling lessons between 2012 and 2018, and I very much hope that those lessons will be rolled out more broadly across Government when it comes to outsourcing, because there are some real truisms there that should not turn us off outsourcing, but make us really clear-eyed about why we outsource and what the advantages and disadvantages are to doing it in certain ways.

**Q54 Mr Francois:** That is a very helpful summary. As we are tight for time I am going to be slightly punchy in my questions, if I may. The Secretary of State described Capita's performance as "atrocious" and said that he would not hesitate to sack them if they did not improve. What word would you use to describe Capita's performance?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I think they overpromised and it took them a while to work out what they could actually deliver. I think that, for a range of reasons, they were unable to be innovative in the way that they would have liked to be, because we constrained them from doing that. As I said earlier, at the end of the day, the blame lies on both sides of the relationship.

**Q55 Mr Francois:** It takes about 10,000 recruits a year to maintain an Army of 82,500, as you know. In the first couple of years of the contract, they were 1,500 to 2,000 short. For the next three years, they were about 3,000 short. Lieutenant General Poffley and Lieutenant General Nugee have told this Committee that this year they think they will be nearer to 5,000 short. You are saying it is only 3,000, but two of your three-stars contradicted that and said it's worse. Even if it is only 3,000 short—we think it's worse than that—they are still plateauing. They say the number of applications is up, which is true, but the hard currency is the number of enlistees who actually join at the end of the process, because lots get so fed up with the delays that they vote with their feet.

So even this year you think they will be 3,000 short and we think it will be worse. I think the difficulty is that we are operating two slightly different paradigms. Your paradigm is that there were a lot of cock-ups at the start and it's not getting any better, but it will get better. Our paradigm is that it is actually getting worse, you guys are in denial and you are going to have to do something about it, rather than being a bit Mr Micawber-ish and hoping it will get better. What do you have to say to that?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** What I would say is that we have done a significant amount to make it better. We have put more military manpower into it. More importantly, we have put the right sort of military manpower into it: we have put in young role models. If you remember, when we set off on this thing, we were on combat operations in Afghanistan, and we thought the military manpower we would leave in it would all be Full Time Reserve Service manpower. Of course, those are not necessarily the role models that your son or my son would want to match up to when they join this. What has now happened is that we have made this into an aspirational career opportunity. We have put into it people who are genuinely role models: they are young and they are people that recruits would definitely want to get after and copy and replicate. What



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has also happened is that Capita has put different people, more quality people, into the front end of the machine.

- Q56 **Mr Francois:** General, I am going to cut across you because of time. I apologise for being rude. I have one last question after this and the Chairman is kind of giving me the eye; I don't mean to be rude for one minute. The contract runs till 2022. If it is going to get better, in what year will Capita actually hit the target?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** They will hit the target before the contract expires.

- Q57 **Mr Francois:** Is that in 2021-22?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes, I think you are turning round a supertanker here. You have to look at the context. The economy is vibrant. We are as small as we have ever been. The connection with society is extraordinarily difficult to do. What if I told you that gusting 50% of 17 to 35-year-olds are not healthy enough to get through the selection process? We are in a very difficult market. We are, though, putting together a machine that will be, I think, a reference customer for many others who want to copy this way of recruiting.

- Q58 **Mr Francois:** Lastly, is it true that, in the Army, DRS is colloquially known as "Doesn't Recruit Soldiers"?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It certainly was true, and it's a very fair observation from quarter 1 and quarter 2, but in quarter 4 this year people will be saying that DRS "does" recruit soldiers.

- Q59 **Chair:** We have a few more points on that, but we will write to you with those, if that's all right—

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes, of course.

**Chair:** Because of the constraint of losing a quarter of our time. We will now hear from Leo briefly.

- Q60 **Leo Docherty:** Briefly, given the failings of the contract that was signed in 2012, has anyone been held to account in the MOD?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Certainly some people's careers have not profited as much as they would have liked.

**Chair:** Which is the nearest thing you ever get to a sanction inside the Civil Service. We will now hear from Ruth.

- Q61 **Ruth Smeeth:** Still on recruitment, why are we reducing the barriers to Commonwealth recruits?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We need all the skills we can get. We also need to have role models that can help us reach out to the black, Asian and minority-ethnic society that we have in the UK. But more importantly, I think that this resonates historically. At the upper limit of this, we had around 8,000 soldiers, sailors and airmen serving with our armed forces in 2013, and we will, if we recruit the sort of numbers that we are talking



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about this year, put that number back to about 5,000 or so. This is something we have always done. We as a military and particularly as an Army have always had a very close connection with the Commonwealth. When you think that there are 1.7 million Commonwealth graves for those who fought in the world wars—there is a very close historical association with the Commonwealth that I think it is good for us to invest in.

- Q62 **Ruth Smeeth:** I agree. One issue for currently serving Commonwealth personnel is that they are having to pay for visas for their families to join them. The cost is potentially over £1,200 per person, and there has been a pay cap, so if we are going to increase the number of Commonwealth Service personnel, can I ask you to look at that policy and see what we can do to help those families, as part of an inducement to recruitment?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I think that is part of the issue; I think it's a bigger issue than that. I think we have to do significantly better on welfare for them.

- Q63 **Ruth Smeeth:** We very much do. I think this is a good policy, but can I just double-check that we are not having to undertake it because the package available to potential British recruits is not good enough?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** One would always want to keep our offer open and under review, but I do not detect that that is necessarily the reason why people do not join the armed forces. I think it is more profound than that and is to do with what the other possibilities are and the connection we make to society.

- Q64 **Ruth Smeeth:** And the challenging Capita contract?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Indeed—the challenges that your colleague has so rightly pointed out.

- Q65 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** On the issue of being really committed to HR, would that not be assisted by the members of the armed forces having access to an armed forces representative body based in the Police Federation?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** To be honest, I have not really thought about that. I think that we can make the connection in the traditional ways; you all help us to make that connection. We just need to be much more open minded about how we reach out and the story that we tell. We have some significant problems to overcome. I worry that we have profited hugely from public support over the course of the last 15 years of difficult campaigns that we have fought in, but that people think of us as victims. It is very sad if that is the way in which we are regarded. When making that connection to society, we want to be respected rather than regarded as victims.

- Q66 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Perhaps by the time my private Member's Bill on an armed forces representative body comes through next March, you may be more supportive of it. I will wait and see.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I would like to read it and see what it says.



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**Chair:** A nice pitch and a diplomatic answer.

Q67 **Gavin Robinson:** General, when will the 0.9% one-off pay award be made?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It has just been made. The rest of it will be made by 1 April.

Q68 **Gavin Robinson:** Will it be pensionable?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Not as far as I am aware.

Q69 **Gavin Robinson:** Is it realistic to put aside money for a 1% pay rise when the Government's inflation target was 2%?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I am not aware that that is the assumption we have made for next year.

Q70 **Gavin Robinson:** That would be an erroneous understanding on my part, would it?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It is an assumption I am not familiar with.

Q71 **Gavin Robinson:** A question about culture in the armed forces: why are women and BAME personnel in the UK armed forces more likely to complain about being bullied, discriminated against or harassed than their male or white counterparts?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** The straightforward answer to that question is that, sadly, they are a minority. For minorities it is always more challenging. We have made it very clear that we want people to come forward and to complain and report these things. We have a much more transparent culture towards that than we have had before. We have made the opportunity for these things to be outed properly, which is a good thing.

Q72 **Gavin Robinson:** Is the blokeish culture too much?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I worked very hard on this when I was CGS. One of the things I did was to have a series of appraisals conducted. We had a review in 2014 and another one in 2017, the results of which have just been published. We learned through all that we had work to do and we still do to create the sort of environment in which everyone feels respected and understands that they have something to contribute. That is fundamentally about leadership.

I said right at the beginning in my remarks that we must encourage everywhere in the armed forces a sense of downward-looking leadership that creates the circumstances in which people build teams. We can never afford to take our foot off the gas on that.

Q73 **Gavin Robinson:** Recognising your leadership in that role as CGS, will you retain an interest in the continual review, appraisal and change of systems, or does that stay with the new CGS?



**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** As you know, I do not exercise command over the three Service Chiefs or Commander JFC. You can rest assured that my leadership and enthusiasm for this has in no way diminished.

- Q74 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** How can the UK armed forces ensure that people have the confidence to come forward and make a complaint of sexual harassment, knowing that it will be taken seriously and will not have an impact on their career or create further tension and problems in any unit?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We have a well-trying and tested process where people understand how they can complain. They have the means to put that up a chain of command in a way that does not prejudice their position with the chain of command. They also have the opportunity to refer their complaint to a Service complaints ombudswoman, who shows a very tight, close and helpful interest in all those sorts of things. This is fundamentally about culture and people realising that it is healthy to enable a culture in which people can complain. The challenge is to do it in such a way that you don't end up with it always becoming a formal complaint. It is about command culture. I go back to my point about downwardly looking leadership. We have to get people to understand that it is healthy to have a divergence of opinion about the way that they are treated and then for it to be properly resolved at the local level. That is what we have to encourage.

- Q75 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** How do you ensure that Service police investigations into sexual assault are not carried out in a threatening or intimidatory manner?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Indeed. At the moment we are reviewing Service justice and Service policing. We have to acknowledge that we live in a more complex environment than we might have done five or 10 years ago. It is really important that we question the right way for these investigations to be conducted. I am not directly going to say yes or no to your question. What I am saying is that we need to review this because I am not necessarily convinced that we have got the right system at the moment genuinely to get to the heart of some of these complaints and problems.

- Q76 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Most public services would recognise this. You talked about engagement that can drive cultural change. I go back to the question I asked you a moment ago about why there is not an armed services representative body in the United Kingdom, unlike Australia, Germany and most Nordic nations, where members of the armed forces can inform policy such as HR, even pay, through their lived experience, rather than through the commendable work that so many forces charities do, but as members of the armed forces directly themselves. I am sure you understand that there is evidence that that does work.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I can see that. While not copying directly what you have described, we have tried to create networks. For example, in the Army there is an Army servicewomen's network and that has proven to be a very good forum for outing some of the policy and more practical



challenges that servicewomen have operating in the environment that we have.

We have created the idea of command sergeant majors, which provides us with the ability to reach down into parts of the organisation that the chain of command necessarily can't touch. That has proved to be very effective. I am often very well informed by the senior warrant officers in the three Services working to my newly appointed senior enlisted adviser to the Chiefs of staff Committee. That provides us at the top end with very good information and directed telescope activity into what is going on at lower levels. The answer is that we have an open mind. If there is another way of doing that that can provide the sort of touch and feel that we need to be able to run the business better and command more effectively, so much the better.

**Q77 Ruth Smeeth:** General, you and I have had this conversation before. How are the UK armed forces ensuring that personnel with far right or extremist views are being identified at an early stage?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** This problem has predominantly been in the Army. The Army has been very transparent and proactive in getting after the challenge. The notion of counter-intelligence, which is something we didn't think we would have to do much when the cold war came to an end, has been focused on this sort of activity as well. That is the right thing to do. It is then about being very public when you out these people.

Pronouncements, such as we saw from Glenn Houghton, the Army sergeant major at the time, on social media, driving down through the sergeant major network, are to get people to understand that this is simply counter to our values and standards. In relation to the question from Mr Robinson about diversity, teamwork, bullying and harassment, this is something that does not sit easily with our culture and must be looked at on a zero-tolerance basis.

**Q78 Ruth Smeeth:** Given your focus on HR, do you think the military has a responsibility for de-radicalisation? Not just casting out, but engaging at an early enough stage to stop these views happening or emerging.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We have absolutely got a responsibility to police it and to change the culture within our institution. Looking further afield, if that is the implication—

**Q79 Ruth Smeeth:** No, within your institution.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** We have an absolute obligation.

**Q80 Ruth Smeeth:** De-radicalisation requires a different skill set from just finding them: to work with them to explain rather than dismiss.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It depends whether you think you can rehabilitate them. Not all of them will be the same. Some of them have been rehabilitated. To your point, we have attempted to de-radicalise them, to give them a chance to carry on serving.



**Q81 Mr Francois:** Recent YouGov research on public perceptions of the armed forces suggests that young people and some in the media see service in the armed forces as damaging. What are you trying to do to counter that?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** You are entirely familiar with the veterans' strategy and all that is involved in that. What we have to try to do is to get the point across, first and foremost, that you cannot generalise when it comes to veterans. Of course, veterans are of all ages—people leave at different points in their service—so generalisation would be very dangerous.

What we have to do is market, as you well know, the very good things that come out of service. It is entirely reasonable to suggest that gusting 99% of those who serve leave as better people and as great contributors to society, whether that is with skills, experience or leadership qualities, or just as sound citizens. There is a story to tell, which we have to do through our engagement, so that people can understand the virtuous circle of joining the military and leaving the military, and what it does to society.

We also have to recognise that this is a problem not just for the Ministry of Defence or for the armed forces, but for us as a society. This sense of service, which underpins what many of you have done and what we do on a daily basis, is not always understood and perhaps does not resonate as closely with the coming generation as it might have done in the past. When they join the armed forces, one is in no doubt that they get service, but those who do not join the armed forces do not necessarily understand what service is about and what duty is about and the loyalty that comes with that. There is a bit of education associated with that.

I was very struck—I do not want us to become Americans—when I was walking around Washington in 2010 in my combat dress when I came back from a one-year tour in Afghanistan. I was going up on the hill and I remember the number of citizens who stopped me, shook my hand and said, "Thank you for your service." That is probably not for us in this country, but that sense of understanding what service is about is really profound, and we all need to reflect on what is actually underpinning the idea of a veterans' strategy and how that connects to serving people and those who have retired.

**Q82 Mr Francois:** Just to say that sometimes the glass can be half full. One thing I tried to get through the MOD when I was there was a veterans' ID card with some helpline numbers on the back, so if Corporal Atkins was ever having a really rough time of it, he could ring a number and someone would come and help him. I never got that through, but far more competent Ministers than I have now got it through, and I understand that we will start to issue them shortly. Any ex-serviceman who has that in his pocket has help one phone call away, which must be a good thing.

I have a suggestion for you about the recognition of service, which I



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believe is important. When you join the forces, you go through your basic training, then you have a passing out parade and your parents and loved ones are there and you get a beautifully taken photograph to sit on the mantelpiece, but when you leave, there is no equivalent. You kind of leave quietly and on your own. Would it not be appropriate, when people leave the forces, for them to have some kind of ceremony where they surrender their MOD 90, get given their veterans' ID card, get thanked by the CO for their service and have their friends and family there to watch?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Some of that happens. I am not sure that friends and family are there, but certainly—

**Mr Francois:** It is very ad hoc.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Certainly in the Army, there is a process where the commanding officer formally says farewell to an individual when he leaves service and the sort of exchange of ID cards and things that you describe happens in administrative terms. But anything we can do to encourage people to realise that they have contributed something in a formal way might well be worth consideration.

**Mr Francois:** Lastly—the bells have not rung yet, so we will make the most of it—or do you want to go on to the next question, Chair?

**Chair:** I would like to explain briefly what we are going to do now. We are expecting to have to take 25 minutes out, so it will cut largely into the remaining time. We have one main topic left, which is the legal persecution of veterans. I think we will get started on that now, and hopefully we will be able to continue for at least a few minutes after the Divisions before you have to go.

Q83 **Gavin Robinson:** We previously heard in evidence from Jorge Mendonça and Tim Collins that they felt they had been let down by Army commanders and Chiefs on the issue of lawfare. You have previously said that you will not stand for former personnel being chased by those making vexatious claims. What initial steps have you taken since your appointment as CDS to protect Service personnel?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** My experience as a Chief of Staff goes back right to when I took over as CGS. You will recall that at that particular time we were very much wrestling with IHAT and all that that stood for.

You will recall that I was on the record—indeed, I wrote out to the Army—as emphasising the importance that I attached to the chain of command providing support to those who were being investigated by those sorts of investigations, but importantly also making the point clearly that, if people are in the dock, one needs to be clear that we cannot compromise our values and standards. If an appropriate investigation needs to occur, that is fine, but the bottom line is that we need to provide people with the necessary support as that is taken forward. I am very clear about that.



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Now from where I sit as the Chief of Defence Staff, I worry that we, from a military perspective, could end up, if we do not provide the right legal and ethical framework, on future battlefields with junior leaders who are not prepared to take the sorts of risks that are necessary for us to prevail against the sorts of enemies that we will be up against. It is therefore vital that we provide the right framework nationally for our armed forces to operate within.

Northern Ireland is a very complex political issue. It makes me deeply uncomfortable, as a military officer, to see what is happening, but I have to place my faith in politicians, who are going to have to resolve this, because it is essentially a political issue. Naturally, I am very supportive of those who find themselves being investigated as part of this process.

**Q84 Gavin Robinson:** One of the things that I have raised continually—I fear it never trickles upward to someone of your level—is that in Northern Ireland we have numerous groups and bodies that are either publicly funded or receive charitable or philanthropic donations that strategically go from one case to another where there has been a killing. They read across from one another. They probe through court processes for information.

One of the issues that you are responsible for, ultimately, will be disclosure in the court setting—what information the MoD gives. I think there has been a substantial failing on the part of the MoD to have a similar process recognising that the release of information in one specific case may not prove fundamentally difficult in that case itself, but could have read-across into other cases, identifying other personnel, and have an impact on other veterans. Is that something that you have considered? Do you see the deficit, and are you prepared to create such a system?

**Chair:** Before you answer, what advice would you give to Service veterans who get letters out of the blue from solicitors, for example on behalf of the Northern Ireland coroner? I have been contacted by a friend of mine with a special forces background and the Military Cross, who said that it seems that the MoD has learned nothing from the Iraq inquiry. He named a firm appointed by the Northern Ireland coroner to do their legwork, and they appear to be paid by the number of veterans' names that they can garner rather than anything intelligence led.

He said that he is astonished by the sheer numbers of veterans written to who were not in Northern Ireland at all at the time of the Ballymurphy incident in 1971, and he concluded that it is a fishing expedition. Would your advice be to someone receiving a letter out of the blue from a firm of solicitors decades after the event to put it in the bin, or to reply to it?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** The advice is available through the DJEP process. That is where your starting point is. I think we have issued very clear guidance, or the Ministry of Defence has, to different regimental associations and so on and so forth about how people should behave. If it comes to an appearance in court, there is legal advice available—

**Chair:** With respect, that is the first question that you have not answered



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directly today, so I am going to give you 25 minutes to think about it.

*Committee suspended for Divisions in the House.*

*On resuming—*

Q85 **Chair:** The sitting is resumed. So, CDS, my question was if a veteran of Northern Ireland, 30 years after the event, receives a fishing letter about what they remember or do not remember from their time three decades ago, should they respond to the letter or should they put it in the bin?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** My advice is that they should respond to the letter, and if they have nothing to fear, then they should trust the system to wrap its arms around them and make sure they have the appropriate legal advice which will lead to the right outcome. However, of course, it is an individual decision at the end of the day.

**Chair:** My advice to them would be to put it in the bin, so we will see which of us they follow.

Q86 **Gavin Robinson:** The Chair came in on the back of my question, which was not so much about the individual legal advice that any veteran receives. It was more about an overarching overview of the information that is being sought, and the implications that information that seems quite innocuous in one case may have on another. Have you considered the creation of such a structure?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** A significant improvement in all of this is the team that the Secretary of State has created, which although it is aligned with the Directorate of Judicial Engagement Policy, is underneath the Chief of Defence People. That team is having a very constructive set of conversations with the Northern Ireland Office, and my sense is that this will lead to some sensible announcements next year, which will get after the sorts of challenges that you describe.

Q87 **Gavin Robinson:** Are those discussions framed around the Stormont House consultation process? Do they go beyond that? Are they looking at the political quest for a statute of limitations?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** They are looking at a whole range of different possibilities, and I do not think it is right for me to go into the detail of what they are looking at at the moment, because clearly these will be judgments for policy makers at the end of the day.

Q88 **Gavin Robinson:** How do you feel about colleagues—former Service personnel—being questioned about events that happened 40 years ago, sometimes 45 or 50, and being judged by today's standards when those were not the standards in which they were operating 30 or 40 years ago? Do you feel that with the passage of time, with no additional evidence, with no way to use modern-day techniques and technologies, and with the deaths of witnesses and so on, there can ever be a fair trial in those circumstances?



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**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** As I have said many times on the record, as a military officer this makes me deeply uncomfortable. One of my heroes in my military career is General Sir Frank Kitson, who is now in his early 90s. He is a very brave and eminent soldier who contributed a huge amount to the British Army over a long career, and contributed a huge amount to the security of Northern Ireland in his time there as a brigade commander. He is being placed in the sort of position that you currently describe, and it would be tragic if he were to pass without his name being properly cleared. It is those sorts of very human tragedy that we have to try to find a way through, and I thought the letter that was written by the anonymous guardsman to the *Sunday Express* this weekend absolutely captured the sense of the military perspective on all of this.

- Q89 **Gavin Robinson:** Do you struggle with the political endorsement there has been for the release of paramilitaries and terrorists, and the short sentence that anyone made amenable today would have to serve, in contrast with the way in which we are treating our veterans?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Having taken part in the Northern Ireland campaign, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in Iraq, and in Afghanistan many times, I absolutely understand as a soldier that wars come to an end when there is reconciliation. The challenge is how you manage that reconciliation.

- Q90 **Gavin Robinson:** Would you like to see greater balance in the recognition of that challenge?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Again, I think these are matters for politicians, but as a military officer, I understand that there often needs to be some form of compromise if conflict is going to be ended.

- Q91 **Gavin Robinson:** The Secretary of State's team that you have talked about is engaging in Stormont House consultation, and it is considering our Committee's report, for example, as to proposals for how you move this forward. Do you think their work is energetic enough? Do you think there will be significant opportunity in the proposals that they will bring forward, and do you feel that those proposals need to move beyond Stormont House and recognise that Northern Ireland is not the only theatre of conflict where such historic allegations can be made, or have been made?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I think that it is being pursued very energetically. I have a very energetic Defence Secretary who feels very strongly about this, and the team is therefore responding sensibly to his direction. I absolutely believe that this is something that needs to be thought of in the broader contexts. As I said a few minutes ago, it does matter profoundly to our armed forces that the next time they are employed on complex military operations, they are provided with the necessary legal and ethical framework to enable them to take the sorts of risks that are necessary to prevail against what will often be the sorts of enemies you have to be able to be fleet of foot to defeat.

- Q92 **Chair:** Can there ever be a war fought on the lines that wars have always had to be fought, with all their brutality and messiness, though under



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broad considerations like the Geneva conventions, if the standards of the civil law are applied to the battlefield? To carry this to its absurd conclusion, would it not be possible in principle for thousands of personnel who fought on the right side in the Second World War, if they were still living and breathing, to be brought before the courts now, if these sorts of legalistic techniques were applied to those who won the Second World War? Are we not in an absurd, unrealistic and frankly subversive situation with these sorts of prosecutions?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I think we can learn a lot from history and the plain fact is that the nature of war never changes. It is essentially a political issue. It is, as Clausewitz has described, and we have all read in our history books, therefore an extension of politics by other means. Therefore you have to look at the politics of each of these incidents, each of these campaigns, each of these wars. The character of conflict evolves, and we see that happening rapidly at the moment with technology and information. We have been involved over the last 15 years in conflicts which have had their own political conditions, which are different from those that our grandfathers fought in, in World War Two. The answer is that one is comparing, I think, apples with pears. I think that we have to look at the political context of all these conflicts and be very clear about the authorities, the permissions and the rules of engagement that are appropriate to win, in the political context in which they are being fought.

Q93 **Chair:** Often, isn't the problem not so much that some innocent soldier will be convicted—usually, such people will, at the end of a very long process, be found to be innocent—but that a huge amount of expenditure and time will have been consumed by this process, and a huge amount of stress and strain placed on the individuals? Therefore doesn't the solution have to involve some method of ruling out what are clearly unrealistic and vexatious methods, which are currently being applied on a systematic scale to try and hobble the ability of our armed forces to take part in any conflict in the modern era—or indeed in any era, if these methods had been applied in the past?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Yes. I think we are agreeing with each other. Next time the armed forces are used, whatever the conflict may be, it is absolutely essential that they are used in a way which protects their ability to be able to fight in the way that they will have to fight on that battlefield.

Q94 **Chair:** But it is not just a question of the way they are used. It is a question of the way they are protected against legal persecution. That clearly does require some radical change to the conventions and restrictions under which they are operating and under which they can be deemed to be capable of being prosecuted, doesn't it?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** They must be protected, so that they are able to do what they need to do on that battlefield, recognising, of course, that there are certain values and standards that must apply.

Q95 **Chair:** And that requires legal change, doesn't it?



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**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** It may well do, depending upon the political circumstances of whatever that conflict may look like.

Q96 **Chair:** I suggest it requires legal change for any conflict, given what has been proven by the methods that have been employed to try to pursue veterans long after a succession of different conflicts in different contexts?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** I am not disagreeing that we must protect our armed forces.

Q97 **Chair:** Let us finish on a slightly more upbeat note: nuclear war. What about the question of the international treaty on intermediate-range nuclear forces, which we both remember from the 1980s? It was the result of the successful pursuit of a zero option by President Reagan and NATO, which caused the then Soviet Union to get rid of its SS20s, SS4s and SS5s in return for our removing the Pershing 2 and Cruise missiles from five NATO countries. What is your reading of the situation? Are you convinced that Russia has broken the treaty in a significant degree, to the extent that we now ought not to be continuing with it ourselves?

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** My view is that Russia is in breach of the treaty, with the deployment of some of its systems, which break the 500 km to 5,000 km range. I am in no doubt that we need to call them out on that breach.

Q98 **Chair:** And if they are not persuaded to remove the offending systems, your view then, presumably, is that we should reluctantly withdraw from this treaty.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** That is one of the courses of action, but we also need to work out what measures we would take to try and get them to obey the rules that we laid and prescribed.

Q99 **Chair:** Of course, the key to the success of those negotiations in the 1980s, when NATO stood firm against all the protests about deploying our missiles to counter the SS20s, was the dual-track decision; so we combine negotiation with the determination to take what action we need to take if the negotiation is unsuccessful.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Indeed.

**Chair:** On that moment of convergence, I think our time is up. Thank you very much indeed for your forbearance given the interruptions of the votes. I would like to thank colleagues on the Committee for enabling us to get through our full programme of questions in the reduced time available. The session is concluded.

**General Sir Nicholas Carter:** Thank you.