

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Global Islamist Terrorism, HC 735

Tuesday 2 April 2019

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Members present: Dr Julian Lewis (Chair); Leo Docherty; Mr Mark Francois; Graham P. Jones; Johnny Mercer; Mrs Madeleine Moon; Gavin Robinson; Ruth Smeeth; John Spellar; Phil Wilson.

Questions 78-171

Witnesses

I: Lieutenant-General Doug Chalmers, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Military Strategy and Operations); Chris Felton, Head of Joint International Counter-Terrorism Unit, Home Office; Rt Hon Mark Lancaster TD MP, Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence; and Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP, Minister of State for Security and Economic Crime, Home Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Ministry of Defence](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lieutenant-General Doug Chalmers, Chris Felton, Rt Hon Mark Lancaster MP and Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP.

Q78 Chair: Good morning and welcome to this final session on global Islamist terrorism where we are blessed with the presence of not one, but two Ministers—a Security Minister and a Defence Minister—as well as a senior official accompanying each. I will ask the two officials who are here to briefly introduce themselves for the record.

Chris Felton: My name is Chris Felton. I am the head of the Joint International Counter-Terrorism Unit, which is the cross-departmental team responsible for our strategy for doing counter-terrorism overseas.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: My name is Doug Chalmers. I am Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff for military strategy and operations. Pertinent to today, from 2015 to 2016, I was embedded in the US as a deputy commander in the coalition joint taskforce that was leading the counter-Daesh fight over that period.

Q79 Chair: Equally succinctly, I invite whichever Minister who would like to do so to set out for us, given our primary focus on the work of the Ministry of Defence, the way in which that relates to the work of the security dimensions of the Government's structure.

Mark Lancaster: From our perspective, the short version is that, obviously, this is effectively a Home Office lead and we support it where we can and where we are asked to.

Mr Wallace: That is pretty much it. Counter-terrorism investigations are effectively owned and started here under MI5. In the pursuit of people doing bad things, both at home and abroad, the Government effort calls on support from a range of actors, from the other intelligence agencies to the MoD, to deal with or capture the terrorist threat.

Q80 Mr Francois: Good morning. Mr Lancaster, perhaps we can start with you, as you touched on this briefly. What role does UK Defence play in the counter-terrorism strategy? For instance, is it more effective to build partner capacity with allies than to intervene militarily?

Mark Lancaster: We will perhaps discuss in greater detail the counter-terrorism strategy, or CONTEST, as we go through, because that is very much the framework—the four p's are prevent, pursue, protect and prepare. As I said in my opening comment, it is really the UK's role to support where we are asked to do so.

With specific reference to the second part of your question, I suppose I sometimes get slightly frustrated when we view things such as counter-Daesh with Op Shader and the military contribution there, particularly the air campaign, as the default setting for Defence's contribution. In many ways, that is simply not the case.



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There are certain circumstances where a military contribution such as that is appropriate, but in most cases it is about partner capacity building. Indeed, much of our Op Shader relationship is about building capacity. For example, in Iraq, we are part of a much wider coalition, and much of our activity is building capacity in the Iraqi security forces.

We have to find that balance, because it is not simply about a military capability. We are all clear that, ultimately, a military solution is not going to defeat this terrorist threat. It is about building lasting relationships with actors on the ground and our partners in the region. So it is literally a balance; there is no single answer as to which is best. It depends on the scenario and where Defence can best contribute.

Q81 Mr Francois: Would you accept the proposition that, ultimately, in these situations, however you employ military force, it is the political solution that is required?

Mark Lancaster: Absolutely, and I think you can go back to other theatres away from our current fight against Daesh. You only need to look to Afghanistan, where it was very much a comprehensive approach of going to not just a military solution but a political solution, and indeed, involvement from the Department for International Development. We have to create that environment where you can provide the comprehensive approaches we adopted there.

Q82 Mr Francois: I do not expect you to go into the minutiae of the targeting board process, but could you give us some idea, when the MoD intervenes militarily, of how hard it tries and the lengths that it goes to, as far as practically possible, to avoid casualties among the civilian population?

Mark Lancaster: We think that is absolutely vital, because of course, potentially, there is a connection between causing civilian casualties and further radicalisation. There is a direct link there, so we go out of our way to try to minimise any form of civilian casualties. Also, it is important that that is connected to a positive narrative, which is trying to counter much of the information that is put out there. If we were to be reckless in the use of military force, that would be entirely counterproductive.

We, I think, are recognised, through the processes that we use, as being very responsible. Indeed, we use intelligence to try to ensure, through pattern of life, pre-targeting intelligence and post-action event, that we always minimise any form of civilian casualties.

Chair: Before Mark Francois moves on to his next topic, which I believe is more focused on Ben Wallace, Johnny would like to come in.

Johnny Mercer: You make an interesting point about people understanding the UK Defence effort towards counter-terrorism. Can you talk about that for a moment? It feeds into the whole narrative of how we get people to understand what Defence does. One of the tough things that advocates for Defence have to wade through is things such as the policy that you seem to have adopted on Syria of no civilian casualties,



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and then, when there is a civilian casualty—some poor chap on a motorcycle gets it—we make a big deal of it.

The reality is, people think, “Well, you’ve dropped 4,500 pieces of ordnance. Of course the idea that you haven’t killed any civilians is nonsense.” There seems to be a disparity between the public front of the MoD, which is not particularly realistic, and the willingness to engage in a difficult conversation with the British public—that actually, if you are going to keep the British people safe, you will have to interdict in foreign fields with those pretty nasty people.

Mark Lancaster: That is a perfectly reasonable point, but let us be absolutely clear: it is not our position that there has been only a single civilian casualty as a result of our military action. What we are saying is that we have evidence of only a single, or what we believe to have been a single, civilian casualty. That is a rather different position. There are challenges here. While I tried to describe some of the detail about how rigorous we are when we go through the targeting process, at the same time, unless you do have boots on the ground with which you can go and verify after action, it is difficult always to prove exactly what has happened as a result of a strike.

That is not to say that somehow we are remotely complacent about the approach we take when it comes to carrying out these strikes, but there does seem to be a narrative from what you say that we are suggesting there has been only one civilian casualty. What we are saying is that we only have evidence of one civilian casualty; the two are slightly different. I am not trying to be clever or dance on the head of a pin. It is just where we are.

Johnny Mercer: That is clear.

Q83 **Chair:** Just before we move off this topic, you mentioned that you cannot defeat an ideology by military means alone. That is absolutely true, but where, if at all, does the concept of containment fit into this? The Northern Ireland operation took 38 years from beginning to end, and it did indeed, as I think Mark Francois said earlier, end with a political solution, but it ended with a political solution because of the work of the military and security forces in showing one side—an insurgency—that it could not win. Does one not have to face, in certain sorts of conflict, the possibility that you are not going to win, and you are not even going to get a political settlement for a very long time, but that does not mean to say you should not have a policy of containment to make sure that the other side does not win?

Mark Lancaster: That is a perfectly reasonable point on the basis that we are probably naive to think that, ultimately, this is going to be a 100% solution. We can go to a certain point where we do contain, and the geographical defeat of Daesh now is a definite step in the right direction, but are we going to delude ourselves that we have removed all the threat to the UK because now nobody is potentially a foreign fighter still in Syria? Of course not. But we do seek to get to a point of minimising the threat to the UK.

Q84 Chair: Doug, does the strategy of containment figure anywhere in your thinking as an MoD military professional, as it were, or is that regarded as a relic of the Cold War?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: If I can go back, to bridge on to your question, Mr Francois, my career has spanned all the various elements. As I mentioned, I had the privilege of serving back in Iraq on the counter-Daesh thing in 2015-16, and what we learned there in terms of building partner capacity is that there is training and there is definitely some equipping for the task that they need. There is some advising, which helps them perform better against the threats that we come to. Then there is also assist. We have talked about the targeting element and how we might help that. But a lot of that is helping them.

This is what we have learned, particularly on the counter-Daesh bit: it needs a local political solution, not one sent from far away. Often, we are advising and supporting the local forces to find their way to that local solution, which, just as you described on Northern Ireland, can be very hard. So sometimes we are supporting the local militaries in finding the line between some sort of containment to allow that political solution to come through.

The answer to both of you is: absolutely, but each problem we face is slightly different in what the causes are behind that—as it was in Northern Ireland—and how they reach those solutions. Different countries do have a strategy of containment as they find it, and our part of it is to try to advise and assist them to deliver it in a way that meets our CT Needs as well as coming to some sort of solution in the meantime.

Q85 Chair: The problem with very long campaigns is that if you are an external body and you are taking casualties, it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain them. But if it is your country, and we are working through local forces, basically they have a much higher incentive, do they not?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: They do.

Mark Lancaster: On that point, if I may add one thing on casualties, I would like to pay a tribute. I would like the Committee to note that, when it comes to our partners, over this conflict the Iraqi security forces have had 13,964 soldiers killed in action and 62,738 wounded. Equally, the Syrian Democratic Forces have had 1,512 soldiers killed and 3,526 wounded in action¹. It is right to put that, and our recognition of it, on record.

Chair: Thank you very much for doing that. Before Mark Francois moves on to his next topic, I have the last intervention on this topic from Madeleine.

Q86 Mrs Moon: How difficult is the concept of containment if you are dealing with an opponent such as Daesh, whose members see martyrdom almost

¹ Numbers for period 2014-2018



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as a victory? Is containment even feasible in that scenario? Is it different if you are dealing with, say, the Taliban? Has there been a difference in how the strategy works?

Mark Lancaster: Physically, clearly martyrdom is an option where they would be contained ultimately. It is more the ideology. The physical defeat of Daesh on the ground is one thing, but none the less fighters will still exist and potentially melt away. We don't know where they might regroup, which is why we need to be very clear that just because we have physically defeated Daesh on the ground that is not the end state at all. Also, there is the ideology. Where Daesh have been so good is not physically on the ground, but through the internet and through their social media. That is where it potentially continues. It is not just about fighting on the ground, but also fighting that. Seeing the evidence from some of your earlier sessions, that is one of the most relevant points.

Chair: Thank you. We will come on to that later.

Q87 **Mr Francois:** Mr Wallace, that is the end of the over and we will let you take strike at the other end. Ben, how do you ensure that UK military counter-terrorism activities overseas don't increase the risk of Islamist terrorism back home?

Mr Wallace: This does slightly link to Mark's earlier point. If the UK demonstrates that what it does is proportionate, necessary and follows the rule of law, and we communicate that to the public—we are not revelling in this or enjoying it; we do it because it is what we do as our duty to keep people safe—that plays well in our local communities and can be used to divert people from being radicalised or recruited at home.

Alongside that, we demonstrate that military action is one of the options. It is not our go-to option every time. We range against the threat everything from diversion, community effort, justice in the British courts and restrictions, to allowing people to turn to a new course of how they live their lives, if possible, alongside the hard end—the crunchy end. That is the way to make sure that we are contained in what we do, in a way that keeps the community on side. So far, that is working.

The military campaign that has been going on is quite well established; it is no surprise to any member of the public. In the last 24 months, we haven't seen an increase in people being radicalised in our communities as a result of that. We see the increase of threat and where it comes, from the remaining ISIL and al-Qaeda voices using the internet to recruit, but not really as a result of British actions overseas.

Q88 **Mr Francois:** I think the Committee accepts that we have two Ministers here who are completely across this. We acknowledge that. Could you give us some idea about how you work in the domestic context? Mark has said that their job is essentially to support you. How do you co-ordinate that between the two Departments? Is that at Cobra or do you have other bodies at a lower level that liaise on a daily basis? How do you make that work in practice day to day?



Mr Wallace: Day to day, it will effectively be done through the lead investigators. MI5 own the lead on counter-terrorism in the United Kingdom. They will build cases around subjects of interest or thematic threads. In that process, embedded with them—and vice versa—will be a range of other Government bodies, including MoD. As solutions present themselves, that investigation will obviously follow that path. It may well be that we build a case around a subject of interest who was originally British based but who is potentially active in Syria, Iraq or another country. It may be that the threat they specifically pose to us is electronic in so far as they are groomers or they are trying to recruit other people. The investigative lead plus the counter-terrorism police will think about mitigation in that space. It is really done on a day-to-day basis, incredibly well integrated, in the tactical operational space.

Overlaying that is the National Security Council for governing the strategic direction, and beneath that the NSSIG, as it is called, with senior reporting officers; my director general of OSCT as the governance; and a senior reporting officer for counter-terrorism. They do a monthly strategic check. In the NSSIG are the MoD, the intelligence services and other Government Departments—it is much broader than you might think—trying to grapple with the counter-terrorism challenges that we face.

Q89 **Mr Francois:** That's very helpful. I apologise now: I will have to pop off to another meeting on a different topic. We are looking mainly at global Islamist terrorism here, but, while we have you both here, are you finding right-wing extremists coming up on your radar in a similar way? We hear about Combat 18 and all that. Are those sorts of individual beginning to appear on your radar as a threat as well?

Mr Wallace: Absolutely. Of the people who have been referred to Prevent and require further assistance—they have been sifted through—nearly half, about 43%, are extreme right-wing neo-Nazis compared to 45% Islamist. In different parts of the country it is higher. The north-east is one particularly high area. The north-west, where I live, is also a high area. The methods that bring these people to our threshold are predominantly through the internet. Historically, they had no friends. They sat on their own and couldn't talk to anyone else. Now they live in a virtual safe space. They communicate through the internet and learn how to do their awful attacks. Sometimes we find them looking at ISIS terror manuals to learn how to make bombs—obviously for a different reason. They use the internet to join themselves up and it has given them better organisation and better momentum. That is why the Government proscribed National Action in November 2017—December, November—and it is a case of concern. It has not yet reached the point where they are at the same level of determined conspiracy or cultural religious depth that we see in the Islamists—I think that is the right way to say it—but individuals are starting to pose significant danger. That is why Prevent is very important to head them off.

If I go back to the early 2000s when ALM and Mr Choudary were fomenting and recruiting, before these people crystallised into ISIS fighters and volunteers, that is where we are seeing the far right. It is



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bubbling a group of extremists, and we need to get in there using Prevent and diversion to prevent them from becoming tomorrow's terrorist groups.

Q90 **Mr Francois:** Lastly, is it a relatively recent phenomenon?

Mr Wallace: There have always been, as we know, neo-Nazis at large, but it is a recent phenomenon that they are more capable, more organised and more able to live in a global community, which is also the same as ISIS and Daesh. The reason we are joined up is simply because there are not the international boundaries that there used to be.

Q91 **Chair:** Thank you, Mark. I think we are in danger of over-focusing on the UK counter-terrorism situation, which is not our main thing. We are talking primarily about global Islamist terrorism. To wrap this up and to bring you into it, Chris, if I may, has any analysis been done on the extent to which our military action overseas has impacted on the recruitment of people at home?

Chris Felton: If there has been, I am not aware of it specifically. I know the drivers for recruitment and radicalisation at home are complex: a combination of both societal and personal factors. I know that the efforts of the global coalition against Daesh have radically reduced the capability of the communications efforts within Syria and Iraq to put further influences into UK communities. That has helped to reduce the risk of radicalisation. The narrative of success of the so-called caliphate has also been reduced, which is also a factor in the attractiveness of the organisation.

Q92 **Chair:** It is certainly true that, whenever people who have been radicalised at home are questioned about their motives and why they support atrocities, they very often couch it in terms of revenge for perceived military oppression in lands far away from the United Kingdom, isn't it?

Chris Felton: I am not an expert in that area. I would not be surprised if that was the kind of language that they used, without it necessarily being the underlying driver of it.

Chair: Ben, briefly?

Mr Wallace: There have been studies. We regularly look, using the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, at motivations, why people do things, who they are, who makes up the current population who have been involved in foiled attack plots and so on. This is certainly a factor, but far and away the biggest factor is a thing like UK foreign policy overall, as opposed to the military itself. How the UK deals with Islamophobia can be exploited in communities, certainly around Islamist terrorism—whether there is one rule for one and one rule for others. There is a huge amount of distortion in the propaganda, but in no way is UK military action the No. 1, No. 2 or even No. 3 factor in why people are being radicalised.

Q93 **Chair:** Not necessarily UK military action, but perhaps American military action?

Mr Wallace: You will hear phrases like “the west” or “crusader military action”.

Q94 **Chair:** Taken as a whole, how much is that a signpost to radicalisation?

Mr Wallace: It is a strong part of their recruiting narratives, but it is still the fact that few people go beyond— They become extremists, but the proportion of people who cross the Rubicon to go to violence is very small.

Q95 **Chair:** Okay. Chris, I’d like you to take a moment or two to tell us about the work of JICTU, and particularly how your organisation develops our overseas counter-terrorism strategy.

Chris Felton: The first thing to say is that our overseas counter-terrorism strategy is an integral part of CONTEST, the revised version of which was published in June last year. There is a chapter in there on overseas counter-terrorism, which I think is the first time there has been an entire chapter on it in CONTEST.

The way that we develop the strategy is through the NSSIG processes, which have already been mentioned. That is headed up by NSSIG CT and Tom Hurd. Through that process, we bring together the different players— with both domestic interests and, crucially, overseas interests in counter-terrorism—to identify our priorities and objectives for doing counter-terrorism overseas. What we have now is a strategy that sets out common objectives at global, regional and country levels for the things that we want to achieve.

Based on the specific circumstances of each of our partner countries, we develop a range of collaboration or activity with them, based on their willingness to engage with us, their ability to comply with human rights obligations and the type of risk to the UK there, and then we decide what activity we should undertake. The MoD is a very important partner in that. Two members of my team are from the MoD. They are working with us and are fully involved in the agreement of the counter-terrorism priorities, which we agree across Government.

Q96 **Chair:** Obviously without asking you to lay out your strategy in too much detail for the benefit of our enemies, can you give us some basic assumptions on which you operate, particularly in relation to the role of the UK military?

Chris Felton: We break down what we try to achieve along similar lines to the four p’s of CONTEST. We have a strand of activity on preventing radicalisation and removing the drivers for radicalisation. We have work around denying groups access to the materials and resources that they need to conduct their activities. We support countries in the investigation and prosecution of those activities. We also have a strand on protection and preparing a response.

There is a particularly important role for the MoD in the second strand— around degrading terrorist capability—through the global coalition that has been focusing on degrading capability within Syria and Iraq. There are also the other areas that the Minister talked about, such as developing

capability on border control or disabling devices. Those are also important elements within the strand 4 “protection and preparing” part of our work.

Chair: Thank you very much; that is very clear.

- Q97 **Mrs Moon:** I would like to get a picture of, when you are building capacity, whether both political and military criteria are taken into account. How do you balance the criteria and the risk?

Mark Lancaster: There is a balance. Much of our work that we call Operation Monogram² is across Africa and the Middle East, and you are right to say that we try to find a balance between two of the strands—pursue and prepare. That perhaps goes back to some of my earlier comments, because key to this is acting not just after the event, but through the stabilisation route. All the way back in 2010, the focus was very much on the SDSR, but to my mind, the more interesting White Paper was “Building Stability Overseas Strategy”. It mentioned trying to get upstream intervention to prevent such situations—not in the prevent-strand sense of the word—from coming to fruition.

In Africa, for example, there is a lot of work in that area, and we are working with fragile states that could become places in which such threats could grow. A good example of that is our work in north-east Nigeria where—this goes back to my earlier comments—there is military activity and support. However, building on what Chris just said, this is also about us working politically with the Nigerian Government, and delivering a comprehensive approach, including tying in DFID. We also provide specific military support. I recently visited Nigeria; given my background, I am particularly interested in the counter-IED work that we are doing with the Nigerians. We are trying to do both things, and militarily we offer a number of different lines of support. I have mentioned some of them, but this is not just about working with countries after the event when the threat has materialised; it is also based on the building stability overseas strategy, and trying to get ahead of the game.

- Q98 **Mrs Moon:** Are you finding it easy to get by? In nations where we identify risk of extremism, is it is easy to get by through working with the problems that we see emerging, or is there a reluctance to accept that those problems are bubbling away and need to be tackled?

Mark Lancaster: I will not go into specific countries, as that would be unreasonable, but I suppose I view this almost from the reverse position. If a third party were to turn up and say to the United Kingdom, “We think you’ve got a problem, would you like our help?” our immediate reaction would be to say, “That’s very kind. Thank you. Potentially yes, but we think we can deal with this ourselves.” There can sometimes be a working relationship in which we start small by offering limited support, and then people start to gain trust and realise that it is very much a partnership of equals and of mutual benefit. Not only is that partnership dealing with the internal threat in that country, but we can convince country x that it is

² Op MONOGRAM is the UK MoD programme which provides CT training and equipment to foreign security forces.



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also in the UK's interest to deal with that threat at source because it has a knock-on impact on the UK. Those relationships must be persistent. It is quite difficult just to turn up and say, "Here we are. We are here to help." This about building relationships over a long period, step by step, and slowly building them up. We have a good track record of doing that, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

Mr Wallace: I think it is important to go up one step above the political-military criteria. What drives the UK is building capability where first and foremost there is a British national interest. Whether that is about British interest, because our allies have requested assistance, or because millions of British tourists go on holiday there every year, that drives our proactive outreach.

You and I go to a place on holiday, and there is a threat: how are we going to ensure that you and our allies are protected? The first consideration is where the threat is and where it is pointed—both short term and long term—and what we will do to help ensure that we keep Britain and her interests safe.

Once that decision has been effectively made, two things can happen. The first is that, depending on the host country, we get together with our international partners. After the string of very nasty attacks in Tunisia, for example, the G7 got together. We deliver a range of CONTEST-type, in-country assistance to Tunisia, which has made that whole atmosphere far more hostile for terrorists, diverted young people out of terrorism and helped deliver capacity in their police and other agencies, right up to straightforward protective security in airports.

That is an international response. In other areas, such as Kenya or Lebanon, we do work in a bilateral relationship with those countries. It is always a political-versus-military balance, but we often let the posts explore in-country what is best to deliver. They will then bring back to the centre of Government what they believe is the best—I will perhaps ask Chris to talk you through how that process works—and we will bring together all the Departments to help deliver it. First and foremost, it is British national interest, the safety of Britain's citizens and of our allies, and what we can do to help with that.

Chris Felton: The two points I was going to mention were on UK interests. We are trying to do some more work on risk. We have been looking at pure threat up until now, but also at the risk—particularly based on the capability of our in-country partners to be able to respond, because there might be high threats, lots of exposure and lots of tourists. We would not necessarily look to work with them if the country concerned is pretty good at handling these types of issues, or if the threat is in a different part of the country from where UK interests are. We are trying to take a slightly more sophisticated approach to this, thinking particularly about where we prioritise our effort.

The other point I was going to make about balancing it out is on thinking about how we adopt the fusion approach in how we do this, and working



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with the other NSSIG. Our primary focus is through the NSSIG on CT, bringing together all CT domestic and overseas effort, but we also integrate our overseas counter-terrorism into the other NSSIGs that are looking at broader regional issues, be they political, economic or development. Security and counter-terrorism were included in those discussions and approaches to try to balance out, in-country, the different types of factors that you have been talking about, including a willingness to engage with us. Obviously, it is a hindrance if a country does not want to engage with us on this.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: The JICTU work. I sit on a lot of these NSSIGs, and what has been described for the CT one is often where the two come together. There is a UK CT interest that plays into a regional approach that we are trying to take. When they get them together, that is where we have a really good inter-agency-type discussion, balancing out the political and military bit. You could describe it also as acute and chronic, and which order, and how the future that we want to try to get to. We are normally an enabler of solutions. There is a lot of Prevent that comes through the DFID stabilisation activity and diplomatic activity that goes into it. Bringing those two NSSIGs often together helps to get after what you are describing in trying to ensure that you have a balance between the political and the military. There is often that challenge of acute versus chronic. Sometimes we would like to have started in a different place, but we are where we are with our partner.

Q99 **Mrs Moon:** How better are we at having those early signals that say, "Oh, hang on"? It is a bit like the frog in the water: sometimes you don't notice how hot that water is getting until it is getting riskily hot. How acute is our sense of rising risk? Are we getting better at identifying it? That was a nice nod there from Chris.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: We lean very heavily on their work. Before JICTU, it was probably not as good. From what I see and live with, JICTU is now very good at trying to give that sort of prediction at the various NSSIGs.

Chris Felton: I have a vested interest in saying that it is getting better. I believe it is. Internationally, we are pretty good at this. I think that is because we are not operating in a silo of counter-terrorism—we are talking to other bits of the system, and there is also the outreach to academia and the research communities, which is an important part of that as well, because they have a bit more space to really think about this. What we have been able to do, because we look at the strategy, is to take a slightly longer term view, rather than getting too involved in the day-to-day response to what is happening on a particular day.

Mr Wallace: On the political and military side, one of the reasons that the political is so important is that even where a country has capability of spotting the threat, we have to work incredibly hard at maintaining the political relationships in those countries so that they tell us. Certainly where I sit, when it comes to things like aviation security and judgments around different countries around the world, if you get a response of,



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"Nothing to see here—move along," but I know there is something to see, I say "You are asking me and the Prime Minister and the other Secretaries of State in the room to take risk on behalf of British citizens—to say, yes, fly here or yes, go on holiday—but you are not quite telling us what is going on." That is not very good for us to progress in that relationship. The political is really hard work, often, but really important. Ultimately, the thing that allows Ministers to carry the risk on behalf of its citizens is whether the relationship is honest and transparent—if they need help, will they ask for it, and will we be able to deliver that?

Mark Lancaster: Crucially, if I may add, it almost takes us back full circle, because often whatever the political to political relationship—which can go up and down between nations, and the level of trust in governments comes and goes—one consistent factor is normally the positive military to military relationship. That is precisely why the persistent engagement of militaries, as countries' Governments come and go, is so vital for building that trust and then enabling the feedback loop that Ben talked about.

Q100 **Mrs Moon:** Thank you both.

There is quite a lot of paranoia about why the UK doesn't publish who we are working with. Why don't we publish it?

Mark Lancaster: We currently work with 17 nations. We try to be as open and transparent as we can and we publish that information in our annual reports. There is also a reality that some of our partners don't want that relationship to be discussed in the open, and we have to respect that. Also, that work varies tremendously.

I can give some examples of countries that perhaps we would not automatically think that we work with. That includes the Philippines, where we train scout ranger units in jungle warfare and use our knowledge of trauma risk management for individuals. We share that with them as well. You may not expect that but that is what we do, and it is a vital component and supports the Philippines.

In Cameroon, next door to Nigeria, because of the threat of IS West Africa and Boko Haram, we train their intelligence analysts. In Kenya, we have a very strong programme where, because of the regional threat from Somalia and the Kenyan involvement with AMISOM in Somalia—we saw that manifest itself with the attack on the hotel complex recently—we do troop deployment training with the Kenyan forces, who are then going to become part of the AMISOM force.

If you want an example of what I was just talking about on the value of persistent engagement, there is our very long-standing relationship with Oman, recently culminating in Saif Sareea 3, and the ability to open the new port of Duqm, so that we can use it when it comes to our new carrier strike capability.

Those are just some examples of the variety of work that we are doing with countries that sometimes directly contributes to the counter-terrorism



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narrative and sometimes indirectly contributes. The variety of work that we carry out across the world is enormous and we do try to be as transparent as we possibly can be, when we can be.

Q101 **Mrs Moon:** That is helpful. Mark, if there are other good examples of what we are doing, will you give the Committee sight of that where you can? This is good work. We need to have it recognised.

Mark Lancaster: Sure. I equally accept your general premise, that somehow not being open and transparent creates a suspicion. I have tried to explain why we cannot always be as open and transparent as we want, but where we can, we should be. That has certainly been my approach over the last couple of years.

Q102 **Johnny Mercer:** Can we talk about the fusion doctrine and how that is currently used in the counter-terrorism strategy? Obviously, Mark Sedwill has been a pretty prominent campaigner for it, but it has existed for a number of years, as I understand it. How does it work now and how does it feed into defence?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: As I mentioned, I am fairly new to this and, as you know, over the years that you are seeing through, we have had a number of attempts at comprehensive approaches and all those sorts of ways to do it. The fusion doctrine as it is now, chaired by the national security staff with SROs allocated across the area, has brought a power of convening and of pulling things together which, for me anyway, is great. Often, when we have a new topic that comes in or we are reviewing a topic and trying to get a better intelligence understanding of where the predicted future might be and what a tolerable outcome of that would be, we then work collectively across the various instruments and Departments on what we can bring to try to bring that outcome together. That is what it means by fusion—trying to integrate. You have seen the snake diagram used as we step through the process.

One of the steps as we go through the process—it has been touched on already and Tunisia is a good example—is where we internationalise and look at who else is trying to achieve something, so that our power is part of a sum of others. That is often a key element for us as we go through, because for a lot of these problems we have certain skills and capabilities to bring, but another nation may have another set of skills and capabilities to bring. By cohering that and bringing it together, both at the policy and then at the delivery level, we have come a long way.

Q103 **Johnny Mercer:** So there are loads of obvious opportunities associated with it, but what are the real threats to the fusion doctrine and ensuring that it works and does what it is designed to do? What are the real threats to advancing progress further and achieving ever-closer integration to make the systems work better together? For example, one threat might be our attitude and aptitude for political or tactical risk in this country, or what we have seen recently with the problems around legal jurisdictions when it comes to prosecuting servicemen and women. What are the risks and threats to the fusion doctrine at the moment?



Lieutenant-General Chalmers: I think I understand. You are right that there is a danger of officials, if I can describe us this way, self-censoring down. One thing—definitely in Defence but, when I speak to my other colleagues, not only in Defence—is ensuring that we do not overly self-censor and we present the choices up that eventually go to the NSC, which is where that balance and appetite is. There is a risk that we would self-censor down, but there is enough challenge function to ensure that we present what the choices are left and right, and both the Minister and the Secretary of State are very clear that they want to be sure about that, and then we provide our professional advice on the balance of those choices. That would be one risk that we guard against.

Mr Wallace: I have attended a few NSSIGs as well as NSCs, and the risk from my point of view, if it is going to endure, is that with the NSSIGs Ministers take the risk—we are the risk holders—and officials do not. The key of the NSSIGs is to be the engine and to drive that integration on both a tactical and operational level, to start delivering what the NSC has said, but if NSSIGs do not refer back or elevate up, they risk losing the political governance and going off doing their thing and then, suddenly, a Minister or a Secretary of State puts a handbrake on it and says, “I’m not going to take that risk.” That is one of the key challenges in the way it functions, to ensure that Ministers and their Secretaries of State are proactive in getting that from their officials who attend. Nearly all the NSSIGs, my officials from the Home Office attend all the different functions, and I am very proactive in finding out from them what was discussed, what was agreed and what they want to do next. If you do not do that, and politicians do not know about it, that is when they will put a handbrake on it.

Mark Lancaster: To add to that, if I may—Doug and Ben articulate it well—there is a tension between the self-censorship of officials through the pyramid before it gets to being a ministerial submission and, at the same time, as Ben quite rightly says, the interest from him and I, and I am sure other Ministers as well, about being informed on the process. There is also the brutal reality that there is a function of time with everything that Ministers are responsible for. It is about trying to find that correct balance, where there is a constant political ministerial involvement, so we do not end up going off at a tangent, while at the same time not simply overloading Ministers with a constant flow of information. It is not always easy to get right, but from my couple of years in this particular job, it is definitely a path. It is a relatively new concept; we are learning all the time and it is getting better.

Q104 **Johnny Mercer:** I think I know the answer to this, but on the experiences of troops on the ground—for example if you are working with the SDF, or any of those partnering and mentoring organisations—how are they directly fed into the decision-making cycle at the National Security Council? How are you making sure that individual tangible tactical day-to-day experience is being represented at the strategic level?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Having spent most of my life in the field, I have been quite deeply reassured that some of that is reflected back. Stuff that I used to write from the field does get through. Part of my job



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now is to go through all the reportage that comes in and then engage directly with the people we have forward to understand that. When I go to those NSSIGs, I am the military adviser, in that I represent some of those tensions that they feel on the ground. That is a core function that I bring to the NSSIG—that military feel.

Q105 **Johnny Mercer:** Am I right, Doug, in thinking that judicial engagement is one of your responsibilities?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Actually, it is the policy side. As you know, we are sort of a triumvirate. Dominic Wilson provides the policy side and I sit beside him as the military advice of our double-headed team. We often go to one of those NSSIGs as a pair.

Q106 **Johnny Mercer:** How has the recent uptick and focus on historical allegations affected how those relationships work with each other?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: It is a good question actually—a deep question—and you could spin it in a number of ways. I think we have collectively learned a lot, I would argue, over time. I feel that a lot of what we are trying to do is to make sure that what we have learned in the past, we set in conditions to make sure that we are better set as we go into the future, rather than relearning the lessons that are already past. The directorate of judicial engagement sits within our collective organisation. A lot of that is looking at the historical, but also making sure we learn the lessons from the historical to go through.

Q107 **Johnny Mercer:** So Mark, are you completely happy—

Mark Lancaster: I am never completely happy about anything; it is the way I look.

Johnny Mercer: I can see, but are you entirely content that there is no legal framework that we have wrapped around ourselves, which is not wrapped around other countries that we are operating with, that constrains the safety of this nation in any way?

Mark Lancaster: I cannot give you an absolute answer to that, because I would be foolish to do so, on the basis that I simply do not know the detail of the legal frameworks of every other nation around the world, or indeed have the oversight of the great detail of each country that we are currently operating in.

Q108 **Johnny Mercer:** Take the Americans, for example. They would have a clear answer to that, would they not?

Mark Lancaster: No.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Not quite, actually.

Johnny Mercer: There are self-imposed legal restrictions.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: If I can pick one to expand on, it comes into the idea of capacity building that we have been talking about so far. When we identify a partner who we want to work with, we run through an



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overseas security and justice assessment that we go through, wherever that is, and the risk that is exposed from that. If the risk is low, we are fine. If not, it goes back to ministerial judgment for approval to accept that. That is often a discussion that we have as we run through that.

Having been embedded with the Americans for some time, I know they have a thing called the Leahy law, which provides a similar constraint on them, although different. In many ways, our OSJA process allows us to take risks that for the Americans are sometimes harder to take because of their process of having to go back up through Congress to challenge that.

Mark Lancaster: Equally, the OSJA process we carry out is very valuable. At the end of that process, risks may well still be identified, but at least you have the framework to make a political judgment as to whether those risks are acceptable. But what the OSJA process doesn't do is effectively eliminate all risk. So, forgive me: that is why I am not prepared, or would be mad, to answer in absolutes.

Q109 **Johnny Mercer:** But you are broadly content that the balance is about right?

Mark Lancaster: Well—

Q110 **Johnny Mercer:** Would you like to be able to do more?

Mark Lancaster: Of course we would like to do more. A serious answer is that, of course, we would like to do more and we always seek to improve that process. That is precisely why the OSJA process has been introduced in recent years, to try to mitigate some of the risks that you are talking about.

Q111 **Johnny Mercer:** Away from that particular process is the historical allegations process. Does that have any constraint whatsoever? Can you categorically say that what has happened, from Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere, does not impact on operational capability in this country?

Mark Lancaster: I think you have already seen a progression from Iraq to Afghanistan through the Northmoor process.

Q112 **Johnny Mercer:** Of course, but my question is: can you confirm to the Committee that how we are dealing with historical allegations has no impact on our ability to conduct operations at the moment?

Mark Lancaster: Can I confirm it has no impact? That goes back to the earlier discussion about the OSJA process. So far it has not constrained us but I can't guarantee it would not constrain us in future in the way that I think you are asking the question, because it depends on the process and the risk process that we take. Certainly, our aspiration is to continue to improve the process and move forward, so that it doesn't.

Chair: I think we are getting into the area of another ongoing inquiry we have, which this is very pertinent to, so we may well come back to this topic in that context. But I think we need to move on, if you are okay with that now.

Q113 Gavin Robinson: Good morning. To keep going with you, Mark, if you don't mind. What role does UK defence play when there is an attack on UK soil?

Mark Lancaster: Of course, we have unfortunately had two recent examples in 2017, but this goes back to the start of this session, where the principal role of defence is a supporting one. We have the MACA process—military aid to the civil authority—and we can talk about that in detail if you want. I will probably ask Doug to do that.

It is very much a supporting role. We have, for example, Op Temperer, which was called twice in 2017 and effectively uses the military; it mobilises an element of the military through the first stage to release police officers to do other roles. We also have niche capabilities that we can deploy, for example, EOD or working dogs or CBRN, as we saw in the Salisbury aftermath.

Q114 Gavin Robinson: Is it always the case that that will go through the process of MACA, maybe COBRA—that there will be a decision taken at a given point in time that there is an additional requirement to invoke the military? Or do we understand that, in planning and preparation and prevention of terrorist attacks in the United Kingdom, the military are playing a growing role in that process?

Mark Lancaster: The important thing is to remember that the police have primacy, so it is their lead. It is fair to say that, as a result of terrorist attacks, we do have a framework for what a potential likely response would be, and may require, so we are prepared for that, but there is a MACA process that has gone through.

Mr Wallace: There are standing MACA authorisations, like bomb disposal here in the UK, which is predominantly a standing MACA. Every time it is deployed, there is no conversation between me and Mark and police and armed forces. It is a standing one. There are the big obvious ones like bomb disposal etc. Temperer is an example of the other extreme, where a COBRA decision often follows and there is a specific, "We are going to deploy this." That is another MACA. Sometimes that takes place simply at the COBRA because everyone is in the room.

Q115 Gavin Robinson: So we have a range of examples. The biggest example is back filling, security and protection of key infrastructure. If you go back to 2007 with the Glasgow airport attack, I think there was some consternation about the mode in which service personnel were on the streets, armed, and vehicles that people were not familiar with seeing on a regular basis. You had deployment, I guess, in niche mode around Heathrow and Gatwick quite recently around drone strikes.

Going back to the Olympics, there was quite a footprint there, with surface-to-air missiles and so on, and the capacity that was there in a preventive role. Is there a uniform approach? I think the answer to that is that it depends very much on standing authorisations and so on. But when we try to translate the UK experience and counter-terrorism rules to theatres outside the United Kingdom, we know from experience in



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Northern Ireland, for example, that presence is not always welcome and there can be a hostile reaction, even in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

Minister Wallace, you will know very much from your experience in Northern Ireland that there is quite an industry now of collaboration and support throughout the world, through NI-CO and so on, in appraising people of our experience in the policing sphere. Do we do similarly outside the 17 nations we engage with on defence? Do we do similarly in sharing that experience and training others around the interface between counter-terrorism and defence?

Mark Lancaster: This goes back to the conversation we had earlier. We basically offer a bespoke package, which is down to the needs of the individual country we are working with. That can vary equally depending on how mature our relationship with that country is. It really does vary.

Q116 **Gavin Robinson:** But are we doing that specifically? Are we doing it enthusiastically? Are we going out and saying, "We have this experience here in the United Kingdom of integration between the military and police spheres"? As I say, we are selling the experience from Northern Ireland through NI-CO and so on. Do we do exactly the same in the military sphere, or is that just an aspiration—a reflection of what could be the case should the relationship require it?

Mr Wallace: One of the best silver linings of the lessons learned from Northern Ireland is that we are exporting them around the world. At the softer end of prevention, community cohesion and community policing, we fund a number of those projects around the world. I will not say in which particular countries. I have visited at least two of them—maybe three. That work, on the basis of those long and hard-earned lessons, is incredibly refreshing and is proving very successful. People have embraced it. My biggest regret is that none of us has enough money to do the rest of the country you are helping, or something, where there is proper friction between communities.

Mark Lancaster: I could probably give you one specific example where we have enacted the processes you describe and it has worked over a period of time, and that is Sierra Leone. If you hark back to the initial military intervention there and consider where we are today, that has been exactly the process over a period of time.

Q117 **Gavin Robinson:** We recognise police have supremacy when it comes to civilian protection in the United Kingdom, so could you talk us through the tension in the interface between police and military? What consideration do you give to a negative public reaction should they face a martial law-type imposition, or the interface with the military not being what they are used to with the civilised role of the bobby on the beat?

Mark Lancaster: I do not recognise the concept of martial law in the United Kingdom.

Q118 **Gavin Robinson:** I know you don't, but it is the fear of the public, who are already seeing that interface.



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Mark Lancaster: Actually, to be fair, it is a reasonable question, on the basis that before Temperer was first called in 2017, there was an understandable degree of nervousness in Government about what the public reaction would be. Actually, I think we would probably all agree post event that there was a positive public reaction to seeing members of the Armed Forces offering reassurance on the streets. Of course I recognise, given the history, that Northern Ireland is in a different place because of the Troubles, but actually this is a process that we have learned from.

You talk about tension between the primacy of the police and the niche capabilities of the military. I have never picked up any tension, because there is such a well-regulated framework about who does what and who is in charge, and there is no question about who is in charge. I do not think there is that tension. We are in a supporting role.

Gavin Robinson: That is reassuring.

Q119 **John Spellar:** Thank you, Minister, for referencing Sierra Leone, which was a very successful operation. I was the Minister at the time.

Mark Lancaster: I hope to have such a fine legacy after my time, too.

Chair: It is good to see our witnesses have evidently done their homework.

Q120 **John Spellar:** I would like to move on to message. Is countering the extremist narrative a role that Government can ever perform effectively?

Mark Lancaster: Gosh. Well, there are many strands to this, but I think we are beginning to make positive progress. I think technology has helped us with that. We have learned some lessons, particularly about consistency in message, engaging persistently with the local population—be it here in the UK or overseas. Basically, it is the speed of response as well.

We have been quite successful, for example, in countering the Daesh message, where I think we have seen an 88% reduction, or 82%—an above 80% reduction—in the output of that messaging. This is one of the things I think we have been relatively successful at, but once again, do I ever think we will completely counter it? No, because there is always going to be a residual threat there.

Q121 **John Spellar:** So who actually calls that together, both in terms of the strategic messaging and long-term planning, but also in terms of not just tactical response, but seizing tactical opportunity? What is the mechanism by which that happens?

One of the problems with Government dealing with this is it gets quite clunky, has to have too much sign-off, and therefore loses the ability of speed that our opponents have. For example—and you will be particularly aware of this, Mark—aren't there lessons to be learned from the Second World War and the PWE during that period?

Mark Lancaster: Well, I was not in the Second World War.

John Spellar: No, but your unit—

Mark Lancaster: Yes, indeed. We may get to my unit later, I don't know—or we can do it right now.

John Spellar: No, we'll do it later.

Mark Lancaster: You are absolutely right that first and foremost, there needs to be an overarching strategy, and then there needs to be empowerment through social media policy for the tactical situation—for tactical opportunities to be taken when they appear. As long as there are clear bounds about who can do what and when, and you are speaking on message and aligned to the overall strategic message of Government, there shouldn't be a problem doing that.

Forgive me, Doug; I am going to pass to you, given your personal experience in this as part of the coalition—because, of course, this is not just about Government messaging. We are part of a wider coalition against Daesh, so the real challenge is not necessarily cohering and aligning the HMG message; it is actually the coalition message. However, we were quite successful in leading that on behalf of the coalition, weren't we?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: I think we all recognise what you have described there: it is countering the message, and we have talked about Daesh ideology and other parts of it already. If I were to pick that example, having been in the coalition, what was clear was that there was a global message, which has been touched on already. That really comes into the messaging, both the HMG controls in our homeland—which the others will discuss shortly—and the away part of it, where we took the lead.

We co-chaired a thing called the global Counter-Daesh Coalition Communications Cell, and that then sat on the ground. We nested the local messaging into that, both in Iraq and Syria; using locals to do that, to nest into a global comms cell. A lot of the stories are done locally, because although Daesh had a lot of foreign fighters, we should never forget that the vast majority who were responding to that sort of message were still Iraqi and Syrian. It does become a multi-layered piece: home here, home there, and then the global virtual message that has to be pulled down.

What we found was that a mechanism that coheres all that together, makes it better than the sum of its parts, and brings in a lot more civilian expertise to run that sort of framework and understand who is going to bring what, roughly where and when, will never be perfect. You are talking about a communications empire that would not obey a nice, neat military sync matrix and a tidy order, but you end up with a forum where people are trying to bring their cultural elements in, to be able to go back into their own messaging system. That proved to work well, and all the way through to the territorial defeat of Daesh, I think it has. The Minister has



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referred to the degradation we saw of publications of *Dabiq* and other elements of that over time.

As the campaign has changed, we are obviously in a new element where the territorial defeat is done, and we now need to improve the message back. One of the constant challenges of counter-messaging is the counter-message. As we move through, locally, globally and at home, that is not the same. That is where the nuance of some of that needs to come through.

Q122 John Spellar: What is your positive counter-message?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Here at home? I will defer to—

John Spellar: I mean at the Home Office.

Mr Wallace: John, since your time some things have moved on a bit. We are still trying to fix your point about it being rather clunky and across different Departments. The Home Office leads, through its Prevent Oversight Board, a programme and the support for counter-messaging. In the Prevent Oversight Board we will have MHCLG and the MoD. That will look at not just Prevent, but what narratives we can use to divert people away from being radicalised. It is quite joined-up now.

We recognise that Government are often not the preferred partner of communities to communicate a counter-narrative, so we use Prevent and MHCLG to empower the community through other funds—for example, building a stronger community, which comes from MHCLG, and diverting young people away from crime, etc. We use community groups and that funding, to help shape an alternative and a diversion away from that narrative.

At the same time, we work with the online companies, to try to deny service and take down the horrendous radicalising stuff. We set up the counter-terrorism referral unit, which has taken down 300,000 pieces of material, which is a Met police-hosted unit. We deny the information that is radicalising. We try to get the community groups and other Government Departments to ensure that they fund diversions or empower the good guys—the voices that say, “This is not what you want to be doing.”

There is also an area about reaching with the military into safe spaces where some of this narrative is being broadcast from. How can we stop outside voices coming in? ISIS had a specific propaganda committee—I think that is what it was called—that was out there broadcasting and trying to recruit. If we can deny their reach, we can safeguard our families and our communities.

The natural tension in Government is that you can have a narrative that says, “Don’t go there. It’s not heaven. It looks awful and your lives will be destroyed.” But the theological challenge is the next big question mark for any Government. If you read the ISIL or al-Qaeda publications and propaganda—*Dabiq*, *Inspire*, *Rumiyah* and all these things—two-thirds is ideology and one-third is about how to kill lots of people. They attach a lot



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to their ideology. That is why we have to, in my view, be prepared to reach out to our friends across the world, to find a narrative in there. I was going to bring Chris in to talk about how we do that abroad and through JICTU.

Chris Felton: First of all, to emphasise the last point, the narrative is best delivered by the people who would be believed by the audience. Often it is not best for the Government to deliver that message. That is why we do support and empower local groups, but the narratives are coming from those local groups in the local community, who can argue the counter-narrative more effectively.

We build on that through the expertise that we have, both in Europe and in other countries. There is the European Strategic Communications network, which is something that we have been working with, to spread across Europe how to do this type of counter-messaging. We have also been working in other parts of the world on how they empower their communities where equally Government voices are not necessarily heard as well.

The way in which Government can help on this—we have had recent examples of this—is how we talk about different types of terrorism. One of the things that we might do that does not help the narrative would be to refer to certain types of terrorism as terrorism, but refer to right-wing violence as something other than terrorism. So having a clear narrative that we treat all types of terrorism in the same way is a way in which the Government can help to counter some of the narratives that there is a culture clash under way. That is something we have been trying to encourage some of our other international partners to think about a bit more: where that distinction between Islamist terrorism and other types of hate crime not linked to terrorism needs to be thought about a little bit more.

Q123 John Spellar: You talked very helpfully about how you have managed to interdict a lot of the narrative on social media, but how the narrative develops within the more general mass media—sometimes deliberately by some mass media arms of various organisations—gives publicity to the lines of these groups. How do you go about trying to counter that?

Mr Wallace: The mass media is quite a challenge. When reporting on different community politics, attention to detail is really important. Being lazy—“It’s Muslim”—whips up all sorts of tensions and is certainly exploited by ISIS/Daesh and so on. It is also about making sure they understand the role they play in spreading.

I will be going to see a number of online editors of major broadcasters, because we see that when the likes of ISIL have broadcast their initial new publication or beheading video in the past, that has reached a point where we are all working to shut that down as quickly as possible, but once it has got out further and a mainstream media outlet picks that up and puts it on to its online platform, you get a tsunami of second-tier broadcast around the country and the world. That is really dangerous, and they need to



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have that pointed out to them. Sometimes, they do not even change the title of the video, so while they might cut out the very nasty bit, if I wanted to find the video I could do so easily because they have told you where to find it and what it is called.

So they have a role that we are going to have to help them with. I am not going to ban freedom of speech and all that stuff, but ultimately it is quite disturbing when you see that broadcast second wave. The Government is going to publish the online harms White Paper imminently—I am promised—and within that will be both a legislative framework as an option and other ways of trying to ensure that people take a duty of care towards what they publish online.

Q124 Chair: Let us pursue that a little further. To what extent and how effectively do you work with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on its efforts to make the internet safer?

Mr Wallace: The online harms White Paper will be a joint paper between the Home Office and DCMS. “Good cop, bad cop”, as I sometimes say—in the Home Office they are not bamboozled by beanbags and Google. It will be about trying to deal with the very real threat that we see, certainly in the security space, posed by the online space. So we work very closely to the extent that we share drafts. There is the inevitable interdepartmental “We’d like to do more in that and you do less in that” and vice versa. But, yes, it is now joined up. Everyone across the international community has lost patience; something has got to be done.

Q125 Chair: Given the rate at which material can be uploaded via social media and the internet generally, would it be true to say that if the companies in charge of these sites will not take the initiative in preventing this from happening, no other power on earth can possibly take them down more quickly than they can be re-uploaded? Without the total co-operation of the people who own and manage and run these sites and make this facility available, any individual, no matter how crazed or malevolent, can publish things to the entire world. It seems intrinsically an impossibility to suggest that if companies allow this material to be put up, any outside agency, any separate agency, could take it down more quickly than people could replace it.

Mr Wallace: We have always said, and we have seen in the rise in response, that these companies could do more, quicker, to prevent it from going up.

Q126 Chair: That was not the question; I am going to come on to what the companies could do. Sorry, but I want us to stick to the point. The point is that if the companies themselves will not stop this stuff going into the ether, then no matter how effectively any outside agency, blocking agency, reporting agency—whatever you care to name—tries to counter it, there is no way they can possibly take down this material as quickly as it can be constantly re-uploaded, is there?

Mr Wallace: They can contain it. They can’t stop it entirely. The quicker anyone can divert it from its initial publication, the less chance it has to

echo around the world. So you can certainly contain it. At the moment, if you are a dedicated ISIL follower using a virtual private network, using a messaging system that is not within our jurisdictions, you can certainly speak to yourself. Reaching further into our communities is one of the barriers that we can erect, and we can very much prevent more than we currently do from getting in there.

Q127 Chair: Yes, but I don't understand why you are resisting my question, which I think is self-evidently true; I want to come on to what the companies could and should do and how we ought to try to make them do it. When you say that you can contain it, what you mean is that you can keep it up there for as short a time as possible, I suppose, instead of it remaining there indefinitely, but the reality is that at any point in time, because it is so much easier to upload this material than it is for an outside body to remove it, you are always going to be on the back foot and reactive, aren't you?

Mr Wallace: I don't agree with the premise of your questions, Chairman. There are different steps you can take to mitigate the impact of it. Can you 100% stop it?

Chair: No one is suggesting 100%.

Mr Wallace: No. If all the players in the chain did more, you could contain it more than it currently is contained.

Q128 Chair: All right. I am not making progress with this, so I shall move on to the second half of the question. I don't know why you had such difficulty with that particular proposition, but what I am trying to get at is this. Isn't the truth that the only way this stuff is going to be largely stopped is to make sure that the companies that are providing what we might loosely call the broadcasting facility construct their machinery in such a way that most of the material will not get through in the first place? And isn't the way to deal with that to hit these companies in their pocket? Maybe you are going to tell me that that is what the new plans involve; I hope so. You can be quite sure that if these companies knew that they would pay major financial penalties in the event of their permitting violent, extremist material to be propagated on their website, they would pretty quickly develop tools to prevent that from happening. So are there any plans to hit these companies where it hurts, in their pockets, big time?

Mr Wallace: On the first part of your question, I totally agree that the real way to prevent this material from being broadcast is to get the companies preventing it from being uploaded—

Chair: In the first place?

Mr Wallace: In the first place.

Chair: Thank you.

Mr Wallace: I think 99% of the 40 million removals by the big CSPs last



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year were done by artificial intelligence—it was automated—rather than by people sitting in rooms. Of course, we were told a few years ago that that was not possible.

Chair: Exactly.

Mr Wallace: Now it is. However, there are technical limits because of the way the internet is constructed. Should we be dealing with a fictional CSP whose servers are based in North Korea and Cuba, for example, our ability, because of the structure of the internet, to control that—well, it is much harder. You have heard in your Committee previously about the concept of safe spaces. The safe space on the internet is just as potent and dangerous. We have to constantly work out ways that we can do it.

Q129 **Chair:** Most people use the tech giants, and they are accessible to us. If you then isolate from the tech giants the ones that are in hostile countries and so on, that would surely be where our cyber counter-measures could be used to attack such hostile structures, should they be beyond our reach. As a start, would you not accept that major financial sanctions would be a massive incentive? We would suddenly discover that organisations such as Facebook—surprise, surprise—were actually able to stop the vast majority of this poisonous material going up initially.

Mr Wallace: First, I agree that we are in the game of stopping the mass public being subjected to this type of material. That is why the big CSPs are key. They are also key in driving innovation about what automated systems are doing. That is why the Home Secretary has been twice to see them in the United States. I think his predecessor did, too. We set up the Global Internet Forum to get them to work on that.

I will get to the regulatory side of it. What you say is absolutely the case. We definitely believe they can do more. It is constantly my regret that it seems to be often that they talk about their policies as if there is some Government policy that they will choose when to do it and not. For example, if we compare the policies on child sexual exploitation, two things become apparent. When in law they are made to do something, they do it. The PROTECT Our Children Act 2008, which came through the US Congress, mandates that all CSPs should report child sexual exploitation images to law enforcement and to foreign law enforcement. We get 4,000 referrals a month from that route.

Funnily enough, if you ask the CSPs the question when it comes to terrorism content, and they say, “We remove 14 million”, or, “We remove 300,000”, and I ask the next question, “How many did you then report to the police?” there is usually a stony silence. In one case, one said to me, “It is not our job to report it to the police.” They do respond to regulation, and it is possible for that to have an effect.

Q130 **Chair:** Are we planning to apply such regulation?

Mr Wallace: Secondly, to your point about where it hurts, they absolutely do seem to respond to money. They are shareholders, after all. I am on the record, when it was not Government policy, saying that we should



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explore tax. If they cannot provide the reassurances we need, I need to spend more money on surveillance and police to mitigate the effect. As they sit around on their superyachts, I am sure they can help fund some of that. If you want to change behaviour, you have to look at that.

When it comes to what the Government will do, the online harms White Paper—I do not want to anticipate or undermine it—will look at a range of models, including regulation and tools within that regulation to make them do more, as well as voluntary things. I think the stick alongside the carrot will be a very important thing for them to change their behaviour.

I notice that Mark Zuckerberg commented the day before yesterday, recognising that they would like to be supported by Government in producing regulation. I think we will decide what the regulation is, rather than him, but nevertheless they realise that we are going to come at them with regulation if they do not act. We will try to do it pan-European and pan-G7, as well as domestically. The biggest challenge for us all—you alluded to potential alternatives—is that the construction of the internet is an overall unit that is hard to get to grips with. In other parts of the world, internet freedom against oppressive regimes is incredibly valuable. It is not as easy as saying, “Switch it off or we will switch you off.”

Q131 Chair: I just want to come back, and then we have to move on because of time. Let us face the fact that we are talking about vulnerable sections of the community being radicalised. If they have got to the point where they are drilling down into the deep, dark net, then they are already pretty well radicalised. Surely, what we should be concerned about is the mass of vulnerable young people in the tech era who get drawn to this because it is the mainstream online media.

My last question on that point is how much longer do we have to wait before we realise that the mainstream online media are not going to do what is necessary and they have to be faced with massive financial penalties, whereupon they will suddenly discover that they can do what is necessary to protect people from being poisoned in their own homes by this horrific material?

Mr Wallace: I would say that the penny has dropped with them, from the comments of people like Mr Zuckerberg. I think they recognise that patience on that has run out. You are right. I have three children and my concern is about some of the algorithms within their own business models. YouTube make money out of making you watch YouTube. The seductive nature of their business model is all about keeping you hooked, as opposed to responsible viewing. In that case I think there is a lot more that they need to do.

I also recognise that, for example, Brazil tried at one stage to switch off WhatsApp. That didn't work, because the nature and technology of the internet makes it a challenge. We have to make sure that we use effective carrot and stick to get the internet companies in a place where they do much more. I do not think you will find a single parliamentarian, Mr Chairman, who does not think that internet companies can and should do

more. I think more and more members of the public think that internet companies should do more.

One of our challenges is that different jurisdictions have different tolerance of hate speech, for example. The first amendment in the United States would present some difficulties with us, with neo-Nazi stuff, for example. Colleagues often ask, "Why is it still on the internet, when we've been trying to get it shut down elsewhere?" There are technical measures we could take and I would welcome your input to the White Paper, which is coming imminently.

Q132 Chair: Are proposals to improve children's digital literacy through the national curriculum a way forward? Finally, I ask about human moderation of content. We are on a scale where the role of human moderation is necessarily limited, but there is also the question about the effect on the moderators of having to examine this vile material in order to protect the rest of us. What do you think about those two aspects of the problem?

Mr Wallace: On your last point about the moderators, the people I would pay tribute to are the police, the national crime agency and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command. That is the very worst part of law enforcement, in that they see all the referrals every month and they have to see the most horrendous stuff. The fact they do it for us is extraordinary. There is relief for them—and the same for moderators in the private sector—in the form of automation. Artificial intelligence can be applied to this, but the automated process is going to be the way that we are really going to make a difference. In fact, the figure is 99% to 1%. It was responsible for 14 million take-downs. I think that is the key.

I am sorry I have forgotten the first part of your question.

Q133 Chair: It was about the national curriculum and whether children should be taught internet safety.

Mr Wallace: Without being completely negative about the CSPs, they have an outreach programme. They have come to some of the schools in my constituency and they teach children at primary school internet safety. A number of schools, including the school my children are at, teach internet safety. We all, as parents and schools, need to take responsibility, but the likes of Google and Facebook, as they come here to make money, need to be even more proactive in their responsibilities for digital safety online. A number of people have been radicalised into IS and al-Qaeda, and a significant proportion of them spanned the ages of 15 to 22. It is the ages of 15 to 20 where we should really be working.

Q134 Chair: When internet companies say to children, "You should be safe and you should be aware of this", I wonder how they deal with it when the children turn around and say to them, "If this material is so damaging, then why do you have it on your site in the first place?"

Mr Wallace: Those are the questions that children are usually very good at asking. There is a fact—this is completely off the military thing, but ISIS



deliberately go out to try and target children, both in the physical space and indeed in the online space. And we all have to take our share of that, but the credential service providers really have to step up.

Q135 Graham P. Jones: This feels like a 300-ball over to Ben—just never-ending. Some capacity-building programmes are focused on short-term goals. Prevent funding often seems to be short-term, but there are also programmes such as the effective tent procurement. How do we ensure that these programmes increase the ability of our partners to counter terrorist groups?

Mark Lancaster: If I may, I will give Ben a break and I will deal with that. Perhaps it is best to answer this using an example of tent purchase. We talked earlier about Somalia and the regional risk that al-Shabaab presents. We saw that manifesting itself in the hotel attack in Kenya, which indirectly then impacted us here in the UK. So, as part of the wider coalition there in Somalia, we hosted the Somali conference; as the UK, we have taken a lead in trying to do our bit there.

One of the things that we are seeking to do, and it is logical to counter the threat from al-Shabaab in Somalia, is to build a Somali national army. It is a challenge, because of the regional nature—the way that Somalia was split up—but we are one of several partners training the Somali national army.

Historically, one of the challenges there is that previous armies in Somalia tended to be very much bush-orientated, so they will literally operate from the bush. That means that you can train them through low-level tactics and effectively try to create the army, but then they can rather disappear off into the bush, because historically that is what they have done.

So it may seem odd, but the simple provision of tents as rudimentary accommodation means that you can keep the unit together. It enables the commanders to exercise command and control, and it is the first step in providing the infrastructure so that the military unit can act as a military unit. So, while it may seem odd buying tents, there is actually a very good reason for it. And you can see the golden thread that starts from providing accommodation for a rudimentary army in ultimately countering al-Shabaab in Somalia.

Q136 Graham P. Jones: The battle against ISIS was characterised by large-scale urban warfare; I think we saw the state of Mosul, Raqqa and some of the other urban areas. What lessons do you think the British Army are learning about how to fight in such urban terrain? And do you think that things have changed in terms of maybe an urban warfare manual in the way that ISIS particularly defended Mosul, and how should we prepare in the future?

Mark Lancaster: In a moment, I will hand over to the expert, which is Doug, on the basis that he was involved. However, what I will say is that we have to recognise that Raqqa and Mosul were probably the two most congested conflicts since World War Two. And from a UK perspective, I think it is really important that we maintain the moral high ground here,



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so that through, for example, maintaining the use of the law of armed conflict we do not allow ourselves to lower our standards somehow in the way that Daesh were using human hostages.

There are a number of things that we can do. We have to be prepared to exercise restraint, not only in what we do but in relation to the timelines that we perhaps operate on.

Information was absolutely key, and the ability to share information with our coalition partners. We all understand the existence of Five Eyes and the ability to ensure that information that we had was passed to our coalition partners, so that that information could be shared. Obviously, there are our intelligence assets; our intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance, or ISTAR, was absolutely vital.

When it did come to using kinetic activity, the ability to use precision weapons was absolutely vital. That goes back to some of the earlier lines of questioning—if at any point, we lowered our standards and we started to increase the number of civilian casualties, that potentially goes across the whole narrative that we are trying to portray. I invite Doug to add some further detail.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Did we learn a lot? Yes. I will try to give a feel for it. We have talked about large-scale war and then we have often fought in urban areas for quite some time, whether that be Iraq or Afghanistan or elsewhere.

Definitely for me in 2015, it took us a while to understand the type of fight we were in. Each time you are fighting in an urban area, it is going to be slightly different. We had trained the Iraqi army. If I pick that and go through the pain we went through relearning how to secure Ramadi, which was the first major sort of city where we evolved some of these tactics, techniques and procedures, they were approaching it very much as a counter-insurgency, the way we had done before, with EOD operators slowly clearing before them. That wasn't working. They were frankly being killed—the EOD operators were being killed—because Daesh had operated a much more conventional defence with minefields, berms, booby-trapped houses, and overlapping arcs of fire on to those elements.

We actually had to go back and pull some stuff out of our conventional book. There is this thing called a SOSRA³ drill, which means that we have to provide suppressive fire, we then have to obscure with smoke, then secure the breaching site, then reduce the berm and the minefield to get into it. That is stuff that our forefathers in the Second World War learned. We had to bring that back into the muscle memory and then provide the equipment. We had to train the Iraqis how to do that and we then had to equip them. Armoured bulldozers are, for example, a particular thing that I ended up being very passionate about bringing, which gave them the confidence to get through some of these breaches, and to get on top of that.

³ Suppress, obscure, secure, reduce, assault



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Relearning old lessons was part of it, but it was much more than that, because you were in large cities with large populations. Smartphone technology brought much more to that game—the ability to communicate among ourselves, and the ability to advise from a distance, but also our ability to reach the population, which is also on smartphones inside the area. That is a new layer to it. On top of that, the ISR that the Minister has mentioned, and how you monitor that and bring that into that. As we try to look at how the fights in Mosul and Raqqa went, there is a bit about old drills being relearned, but it is more than just the Army. What I am highlighting is that there is an aerial dimension and a virtual dimension, which the new smartphone technology has brought, which we are trying to integrate.

It is not just us. The Americans are going through exactly the same thing. The US Army have a big lessons process on how to drag out of Mosul what they have learned. I have watched the Iraqis and the Syrian Democratic Forces go through a massive learning exercise in combat, which was painful. In Ramadi, for example, we lost 15 battalion commanders from the fight just learning some of these lessons. The learnings were very hard and painful and, frankly, we have been able to learn through their experience and have tried to bring that back into our own lessons and chain.

Q137 Graham P. Jones: You talk about technology used by both sides. How would it be used by ISIS? In this Committee in the last few weeks, we have had discussions about drones as well, which were part of the urban conflict.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: You have had a conversation on drones, as you just touched on. We definitely saw ISIS use that over time. How we counter that was part of our technological innovation and trying to work that through. On the smartphone side, we have talked about how quick they can be with the stories and the news and how they federate from camera-phone footage to get that sort of stuff out there. We spent quite a lot of time with the Iraqis, and my personal experience here was of explaining their need to be first with the story to counter the disinformation that would come through. They embraced that. Once we unlocked that and they realised that it was the governor talking back to the population to be able to leverage some of that—

Q138 Graham P. Jones: Are smartphones being used as a battlefield asset? We hear about them being used in Ukraine, for example, for gathering information and intel, crowdsourcing the intelligence, the Russian militia.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Definitely that. We can do that. We do that.

Q139 Graham P. Jones: I am talking about ISIS as well; I'm asking about both sides.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Both sides, yes.

Q140 Graham P. Jones: In what way?



Lieutenant-General Chalmers: You've just touched on some of the crowdsourcing elements. The prevalence of it on our side—I am talking about how we would advise and assist the forces going through them—these forces would often have applications on their phones that we could connect to. We could therefore understand where they are. It would be a secure application to try and prevent the opposite side from having the same bit. Those will also enable us to provide what we call virtual advising. The best example I can give is of an Iraqi EOD operator facing a complex device being able to secure face time with an expert EOD guy to talk him through what he was seeing and how to do that. That is something we just couldn't do before the smartphone technology went through: to be able to track, crowdsource and then directly engage in advice when they come across something they don't understand.

Q141 **Graham P. Jones:** And shutting down networks as well.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Yes.

Q142 **Graham P. Jones:** Finally, with all these lessons that have been learned, is the British Army considering how best to train partner forces now in urban warfare on the back of this?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: Yes, and it is not just us. We are still providing training teams, as you know, in Iraq and elsewhere. What we do, very much in the capacity-building that has been described already, is make sure the lessons we have learned from training our partners in the counter-Daesh fight are expanded elsewhere and share them as best we can. There is a danger, of course, as not everyone is facing the same fight. The way we had to go back to very old breaching drills to get in would be way overmatched and not proportional to how to operate in some other urban things. So it's that judgment to make sure the right lessons are passed down.

Q143 **Phil Wilson:** I want to ask about Daesh. Is there a possibility of it becoming the military force it once used to be? We know they are hiding weapons and money and so on, and there are still a lot of fighters in Syria. Is there a credible possibility of them becoming a military force like they were just a few years ago in Iraq and Syria?

Mark Lancaster: At the moment, we have got to a point where, territorially, they have been defeated and dispersed. As long as they are dispersed, we won't be returning to a point where the caliphate exists over an area the size of part of western Europe. That is a very positive message there that we are all keen to make sure we do not give them that opportunity.

Mr Wallace: Not at the moment. If the ingredients that allowed it to happen—the failed state, the internet, easy, open travel across the world, and in Syria, certainly, access to oil and oil money—are elsewhere and we certainly see them looking, then there is a potential these things could come back. We saw in the Philippines and the insurgency in the southern Philippines, for three months ISIS held a town. The casualties inflicted on the Philippine Army were significant and they held out for a long period of



time. That flared up mainly fuelled by hostage-for-ransom payments, but if the ingredients are there, it is possible.

I would say this, but I slightly blame the difference between this century and last century, the internet, in that it gives them the ability to spread the propaganda, the glories of the new homeland or whatever they try and con people with. That is why the work we all do to make sure states are resilient and do not become failed is one of the best ways to see it off. They are looking and they will continue to fantasise about another caliphate. It is part of their fate, or whatever they call it, to have another caliphate. There are a number of them before they reach the ultimate Armageddon, so they will look.

Mark Lancaster: It goes all the way back to my earlier comments about why I believe that the building stability overseas strategy is so important. With that upstream intervention, we can prevent the sorts of scenarios or the coming together of the various factors that Ben just described as being a reality. That would be an opportunity that we must ensure does not happen.

Mr Wallace: The lesson to learn is that we spot these ingredients converging. The lesson from the early 2000s was that, as these start to converge, the allies or the west were not prepared for what it turned out to be. Ultimately, what the militaries have learned on the ground and what they have seen, and what we have learned in the intelligence picture, is the key. We now know what to look for, and it is why both our JICTU and our overseas capacity building through CSSF is aimed at stopping the next one.

Chris Felton: One of the things we have talked about here is Daesh in Syria, Iraq and other parts of the globe, but one of the things we have not forgotten about is the enduring threat from al-Qaeda as well. While there is an enduring threat from Daesh, whether as an insurgency or reoccurring elsewhere in the globe, we do not want to lose our focus on al-Qaeda as an organisation that has endured and has had some presence in that particular area and other parts of the globe. Whether it is the resurgence of al-Qaeda or a new phenomenon that grows out separate from either of those, we want to ensure we are looking at the threat broadly, rather than necessarily focusing on Daesh as an individual organisation.

Q144 **Phil Wilson:** So the threat could grow elsewhere, but you do not see the threat reoccurring in the way it did before in Syria and Iraq?

Mr Wallace: Not at the moment. In the judgment of the Syrian regime and the SDF, they are all consolidating. Others will say how the Iraqi forces are progressing in Iraq, but the conditions do not look as they did in the early 2000s, which allowed them to grow. They have not gone away, and as you rightly pointed out there are thousands out there. Some have gone home, some have not, some are dead and the race is on to see what we are going to do about them.

Q145 **Chair:** May I interject at this point? The business of seizing and holding



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territory that ISIL/Daesh engaged in was very much an aberration from the normal terrorist model, wasn't it? I think it is true to say that al-Qaeda and al-Zawahiri, their theoretician and leader, were opposed to adopting that model. Do you think that the fact that they did declare a caliphate and were physically in charge made them vulnerable to conventional military counteraction in a way that terrorist groups are not normally? Do you think that added especially to the inspiration of people worldwide to become radicalised? Do you think we need to remind ourselves that, before that aberration occurred, we were worried about al-Qaeda, which did everything it could to remain invisible, according to the traditional terrorist method? That is presumably what we must expect from ISIL/Daesh in the future.

Mr Wallace: First of all, we should never forget that al-Qaeda are absolutely as potent—they are out there, organising and reorganising, refocusing and biding their time. They have not gone away. Prophecy, dreams and ideology drive both al-Qaeda and ISIS much more than most other terrorist groups. The prophecies that ISIS are wedded to are about caliphates until you eventually get to Armageddon.

The fundamental ideological difference between it and AQ at the time is that AQ do not quite believe in that step-by-step caliphate until the end of days in the same way that ISIS do. ISIS were trying to fulfil their own prophecies that they believed in, to the extent that they predicted this end of the caliphate, because you cannot have a new one until this one ends. They slightly missed their goal—I think there was a certain town in Iraq where they had to be and it all had to end there, so they slightly got that one wrong. But that will still drive them.

In other countries, we see a difference; where tribe meets ideology they are not so attached. On a Monday they wear the al-Qaeda T-shirt and, depending on the power and who has the upper hand on a Tuesday, they may align themselves with ISIS or something else on a Wednesday. Certainly, the Syria caliphate that we saw created was empowered by the sense of people wanting to belong, which is something that we have to deal with at home and across Europe. There are a lot of young people attracted to belonging to something, and that was definitely used to groom people to go and throw their lives away, as we have seen.

Q146 **Chair:** So hopefully, even though the threat has not gone away and has reverted to the more traditional international terrorist model, it will be less inspirational for young people now that it no longer has a physical reality in territorial terms. Is that what you are saying?

Mr Wallace: For now. If I look at the statistics for this year compared with last year, aspirant travellers—people wanting to travel—have massively declined from Europe into Syria. We have not seen it immediately pick up and people say, "Oh well, I'm not going to Syria now; I'm off to Africa," or other parts of the world.

Q147 **Chair:** Or, "I am going to blow myself up at home."

Mr Wallace: That is what we have seen a shift in: we have seen a significant switch from what we would call directed and enabled attacks in Syria to inspired attacks at home and across Europe.

Q148 **Chair:** Which is what we had before ISIS with al-Qaeda.

Mr Wallace: Although we had inspired attacks with al-Qaeda, they required top-down permission. It was literally a man in a cave who went down to deliver the messaging, all the way from the FATA to back here, to give permission to do it. There was a much more solid command-and-control structure in al-Qaeda than there was in ISIL, but ISIL will sometimes now lay claim to almost anything. You can inspire yourself in your bedroom, which is good enough for them.

Q149 **Phil Wilson:** We have touched on smartphones, with the increase in open-source information interconnectivity and smartphone use. In your operational theatres, which were Iraq and Syria, how does that impact on operational security for our armed forces out there?

Mark Lancaster: Greater use of smartphones and open-source information is both a threat and an opportunity. It is clearly an opportunity for us to use that information, although one of the biggest challenges is just the sheer volume of it. It is pretty challenging to extract from the whole dataset exactly what you want to know. The use of artificial intelligence and other tools to interrogate open-source material effectively is very important. There is a big difference between what we would potentially extract from open-source information and what we then use as part of our decision-making cycle.

It is also a threat when it comes to both operational and personal security, which is why we need to be very careful with our forces about their use of smartphones—what they are saying on social media, and when they are turning devices on and off. That is partly why we impose restrictions on exactly what some of our armed forces can and can't do with their smartphones when they are deployed overseas, and when they can and can't use them. As I say, this volume of information is both a threat and an opportunity.

Phil Wilson: Doug, do you want to add anything?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: No, I think it's been captured perfectly.

Chair: I think we have largely covered the next question on our list, which is about the number of civilian—

Q150 **Graham P. Jones:** I wanted to ask one question, which is on an issue that I have raised before. We had Major-General Rupert Jones come before the Committee, and he talked about the challenge of human shields being used by Daesh. You might have seen the transcript of the Defence Committee and read about the horrors that he described. We then moved on to Airwars, and I asked, "When we have these situations that were referred to by Major-General Rupert Jones, do you calculate the civilian casualties as coalition civilian casualties?" If the transcript is right,



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the witness intimated that yes, he did. It is a major problem, and I want to ask for your opinion. In the meeting that Major-General Rupert Jones attended, he said, "Ultimately, every time a civilian is killed, he or she is the indirect victim of Daesh." An issue raised is that there has been only one civilian casualty, but there is a much broader issue about civilian casualties and the use of human shields for the political propaganda purposes. The videos that emanate from these kinetic events are replayed back, as if the human shields are victims of coalition air strikes. The Major-General said that that is not accurate. What is your view on this?

Mark Lancaster: I go back to my earlier comments, particularly on fighting in Iraq or in Mosul, where it is absolutely right that we maintain the moral high ground. We must be meticulous in our planning of strikes and we must be able to compare and contrast our approach, through our commitment to do everything that we can to minimise any form of civilian casualty, to the approach that Daesh take, where they actively use human shields. That is part of the wider narrative that we must construct, because it is a very powerful approach.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: I would just add that I handed over to Rupert the day before. What he describes there is very much the fact that—particularly when you move in those congested urban areas—you cannot see everything, from any angle. Even if you are on the street, you cannot see it. When we have done deliberate strikes—when we have seen the enemy before and have tried to understand them—we are very careful about how we do them, very much as the Minister described. That requires a lot of observation and oversight beforehand to make a calculated judgment, which has been referred to already.

It is harder when we are in support of troops on the ground who are actually directly engaged. Then there is the conundrum about protecting the force that you are trying to look after and balancing that out, which makes for some hard calls. The nature of the urban environment is that you cannot see into every room inside of the building that you are attacking to remove the machine gun nest or whatever it may be.

Q151 **Graham P. Jones:** Could I ask two brief questions, then? Is it right that Airwars add human shields to the list of civilian casualties of the coalition, as they do? Secondly, does aggregating civilian deaths not feed ISIS propaganda and encourage human shields to be used for the purposes of propaganda?

Mark Lancaster: Any civilian death is a tragedy. I can only go back to what I said before: we do everything that we can to minimise the risk of that. It is not really for me to comment on the approach of Airwars. It sounds odd to me, certainly, and I read the transcript of your engagement during this session—I am grateful that you have been rather kinder today. I am not sure, with respect, what you want me to say. That is certainly not something that we agree with, but it is for Airwars.

Q152 **Graham P. Jones:** I think that answers the first question. I wonder about



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the consequences of that. I suppose I shall ask Lieutenant-General Chalmers.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: On the civilian harm bit, which we have focused on here, they are civilians. One of our lines of effort was to expose ISIL's true self. The fact that they are willing to use civilians in that way undermines their narrative that they are warriors when they prefer to hide behind women and children in that way.

Q153 **Graham P. Jones:** Are we facilitating that by aggregating all civilian deaths, including of those who Major-General Rupert Jones said were human shields? Are we feeding that narrative and propaganda by aggregating all civilian deaths?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: It is a difficult line to draw, because if you do not, you do not regard them as civilians who have been misused by an enemy in that way. They are civilian and need to be considered as such, but it needs to be explained, which is why I say that part of it is about describing why ISIL has done that. They are local citizens and civilians—there is no pretending that they are anything but. The narrative that you described earlier on—they are effectively casualties of the way that ISIL was fighting and therefore attributable to the manner in which ISIL was fighting at that stage—is part of the description to try to unveil ISIL's true self and the way that they have behaved.

Chair: Thank you very much, Graham—that was worth asking. The finish tape is within sight. We have a couple of questions from Gavin and a final one from Phil, unless anyone feels inclined to leap in to interject.

Q154 **Gavin Robinson:** Mark, we heard from you about the opportunity that is there, and we have also read about the internet and connectivity. This question is really focused on counter-information, or counter-disinformation. We have heard that there are brigades of folks involved in counter-disinformation, but they do not have the permission or ability to simply send a tweet. Is that right, and are they being constrained by bureaucracy?

Chair: I think Mark ought to declare an interest in relation to 77th Brigade.

Mark Lancaster: Right; I remind the Committee of my registered interest and Member's interest of being a member of the Army Reserve, and in that capacity, I am a member of 77th Brigade. If we are talking about 77th Brigade, then yes, I am well aware of that brigade.

When it comes to the broad question, though, we actually have a digital policy—in fact, it was recently published across the MoD—where we have sought, within the strategic narrative and bounds, to encourage military units to tweet. If you were to take 77th Brigade as an example, those bounds would be that it has a proud history as the Chindit brigade during the Second World War. In my view, there would not be an issue with it being able to tweet about, for example, a reunion of Chindits. However, I do not think that 77th Brigade necessarily would be tweeting about some of the activities that it is carrying out.



Q155 Gavin Robinson: So we are not talking about their history or their activity, but actually tweeting to counter a narrative; to get involved in disseminating information that is there to counter the propaganda that they face on the internet. Just to be frank, the evidence we have taken is basically that the approval process to challenge a message is labyrinthine. You need to go through so many prisms, whether it is military focused or “Do we need to bring in DFID officials? Do we need to bring in FCO officials? Can we get a narrative that can counter a message that is disseminated at any given point in time?” It takes far too long, then, to issue.

Mark Lancaster: That is exactly the framework that we are seeking to work through, because as we have discussed earlier, it is important. There are sometimes opportunities at a tactical level that you wish to be able to seize. It is complicated, because there is cross-Government input into this, but we are seeking to do exactly that: to get a framework whereby we can ensure that there is a degree of agility in our response. As we move forward, agility is very important.

Q156 Gavin Robinson: So there is a recognition, then, that there is a deficiency currently in that process. There is a lack of agility.

Mark Lancaster: We can always do more to be more agile, and that is exactly what we are seeking to do.

Q157 Gavin Robinson: When we asked the question, “Who are the world-leading experts in this field?”, the answer was “the IDF”. Are we engaged with them? Are we learning lessons from how they do their business in counter-information and tackling these online propaganda tools that others are using?

Mark Lancaster: I will allow Doug to answer that.

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: This audience focus has been around a while. It has been in doctrine and conceptual thoughts, and we are trying to understand how that works. Of course, it is not just a tweet; as we message into an audience, we are trying to make sure that all of the things we are doing communicate. Whether it be an aircraft overhead, a tweet or a tank, we are trying to ensure all that stuff is communicating with everything else, and we are trying to understand how that works through.

We are trying to get a better understanding of the audience, and we are working on our target audience analysis, as we describe it—that is much more complex, because of the virtual domains and linguistics and cultural bends—to understand that better, and to make sure that we can organise all of our activity to ensure that we are communicating the message we are trying to send. It is not just us: where it does get complex is the inter-Government bit, from economics on one side of it, Treasury instruments, down to DFID and the stabilisation tools to do that.

We are trying to better organise how to do that, and we are learning as we are doing it. We are looking at a whole range of different people, country-



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wise, that have different mechanisms to do that, but they have to fit with our accountability, our need to be truthful and our need for consistency of messaging.

What I can tell you is that as we are going through that learning, as we try to get that gearing together, the bureaucracy that existed two years ago about delegating a commander to be able to tweet is dramatically less today. As the Minister said, are we as good as we would like to be? Not yet, but what we do not want to do is break that consistency of message, which is so important to what we do.

Q158 Gavin Robinson: Is there a specific answer to my question, which was focused on what we were told by the world-leading experts on the IDF when we engaged with them?

Lieutenant-General Chalmers: We engage with the IDF, as we engage with many, many other countries around. We also engage, as you know—you had some of them here—with some of the very people who have sat in front of you before, to help us to understand other elements too. Think-tanks and those sorts of bodies are also trying to help us to understand. This is a new domain for how we operate, with our need to be truthful and our need to be auditable—to run through in a bit. We are trying our way through that. We are seeking as much advice and support as we can to get better.

Q159 Gavin Robinson: Mark, you may have a view on this; I am not sure why. I have not been asked to ask this question, but I will ask it of you anyway. Should 77th Brigade be a corps?

Mark Lancaster: Well, if I am going to remain the deputy commander, then definitely. On a serious point—I see the general is desperate to get in now—it is an incredibly exciting and growing capability. It is very much on a journey. The direction of travel is upwards.

We have focused on just one aspect of the role of 77th Brigade, which is web ops, but it also encompasses some of the traditional capabilities we also have, be that what we would know as CIMIC—civil-military co-operation—the outreach group or the media group. By bringing all those components together, you are effectively updating what was a 20th-century capability for the 21st century and the introduction of the web and the internet. There is no doubt that information advantage is very much a key component of all the work that we will be doing in the future.

I will give one example of interest to us as politicians, where recently I went on an exercise. Traditionally, military exercises tend to escalate upwards, but actually the key component there to allow de-escalation, which of course politicians are always interested in, was the use of information advantage and the web. I am personally convinced that there is only one direction of travel for 77th Brigade, and that is its growth. Will it become a corps? I doubt it will ever be that big, but we are certainly growing, and that is the right direction of travel.

Q160 Gavin Robinson: Are you still itching?



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Lieutenant-General Chalmers: I have read the transcript and sometimes, even as I was going through this beforehand, we look at a brigade and turning it into a corps, and we think that is reflecting on size. My reading of the stuff is not so much that; it is more about a corps being a strand of expertise, a skillset and a professional development career path. The answer to which is, we are still trying to work that out.

We know that the skillsets required are new—how do we culture them and create a career path to bring them through? That is work. The growth, as the Minister described for 77th Brigade, is more about how the corps word, if I could describe it, would be, rather than necessarily one of just size and structure—the expertise.

Mark Lancaster: The real strength of the brigade is not simply size; it is the way that we have combined Regular skillsets, Reserve skillsets and civilian skillsets—experts in their field who all come together in a fused way. The output is just very impressive.

Q161 **Gavin Robinson:** In the next question, there is an element for the Home Office and an element for the Ministry of Defence. The United States recently reallocated resource from counter-terrorism to inter-state rivalries or competition.

Can I ask, Minister Wallace, have you noticed or do you believe that that will have a significant impact on any UK programmes? With the US withdrawal from Daesh operations, how do you think that will have an impact on our presence in the Middle East, Mr Lancaster? The counter-terrorism impact first and the withdrawal of US resource on that strand of work.

Mr Wallace: In the security and intelligence space, we have not seen a noticeable resource change in the US disposition. I think it is mainly down at the military side, and therefore I will not comment on that. It is correct, however, that across the board we have seen an increase in hostile state threat. That means that we will all examine in our different areas—overt, covert, intelligence and military—how we flex to meet that threat.

Mark Lancaster: Militarily it is important to recall that this is a reduction, not a withdrawal, by the US, and there is also a global coalition within the region. It is not just entirely reliant on the US. It probably reflects where we are, having now got to a point where we have territorially defeated Daesh. However, as we have explored in the earlier questions, it is important that that coalition continues to ensure that we do not now have a resurgence. But, on balance, we think that we will continue to contribute through our Op Shader, as will other nations.

Q162 **Gavin Robinson:** Have you got some information to indicate that, while there has been a reduction of US forces, it is not a continuing trend downwards, but will, if necessary, be inflated?

Mark Lancaster: It is not for me to predict what the US position will be. We have established that while there will be a reduction there, now there



appears to be an established baseline, which for the foreseeable will be maintained. That is our impression.

Q163 Chair: Can I ask a little follow-on from the question of the 77 Brigade and the way in which it reaches out to harvest the talents of people in other walks of life?

I was reminded of a recent occasion where Cambridge University was bidding for a sort of contract from DSTL in relation to applying its expertise to psychological warfare techniques. After a degree of soul-searching they decided that they did not want to participate. I think I know the answer to this, but do you feel that sometimes in trying to harness those areas of expertise in wider society to meet with the necessary defences in the digital age, for information warfare and defence, there will be a problem with some institutions feeling that their reputations are at risk as a result of working to support the Government's efforts in this regard?

Mark Lancaster: Clearly, given the example you gave, there are some who do feel like that. Broadly speaking, I have been impressed in my time by the number of people with expertise who are prepared to come to be involved, and that programme continues. But it is clearly down to individuals and organisations as to whether they wish to be involved.

Chair: I think we ought to pay tribute to those many individuals who do offer their services to 77 Brigade without any payment whatsoever.

Mark Lancaster: Absolutely right—there are a number.

Q164 Phil Wilson: The US has criticised the UK's unwillingness to repatriate and to try UK foreign fighters. Has this had an impact on our relationships with local partners? Are you looking at working to update the law of treason, to make it easier for the UK to try UK citizens who have gone over to Iraq and Syria?

Mr Wallace: I saw the reports about the US criticism, but I never saw the reports about the two US citizens who were not allowed back into the United States. The foreign fighter phenomenon is a real challenge to all of us. I attended the G7 in Toronto last year where one of the main topics, among all the different countries there, was how to deal with foreign fighters who have based themselves in a failed state—a non-state—and how international law plays in that space. What about the interaction with non-state actors? The SDF is a non-state actor. That makes how we deal with these people a big legal challenge.

First, the thing that is often not talked about is that if we were to go into these failed states and take people against their will—even if it was to try them for justice—that would be called unlawful rendition. That would undermine any prosecution we had. We cannot just fly in, pick them all up and bring them back. That is a big challenge, never mind the risk of actually going there as a member of the British state.

Then it comes to the challenge of, "What we are going to do about it, and is treason one of the options?" First, in the new counter-terrorism Bill that



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we took through with cross-party support, we put in a new offence with a designated area, which will very much help us deal with foreign fighters in future.

We will designate areas and they are reviewed every three years. If you go there without a reasonable excuse, such as being a member of the armed forces sent on our behalf or being a member of the UN under UN-sanctioned aid, you can face up to 10 years in jail just for being there. The French have an offence that is easier to deal with around that; the Danish have that and so do the Australians. We have put that to try to fix the problem going forward.

The challenge is also about the current people who say they want to come back but pose a real risk, and how we are going to deal with them in future. That is where it has not come across recently in the media that deprivation is one of the tools that we use. We use a range of tools. We prosecute them when they come back if we have the evidence that we can use in court. We will prosecute them, but, of course, we don't use intercept evidence and we have to be careful with other countries' intelligence, so it is not as straightforward as, "We'll just bring them back and lock them all up."

Q165 Chair: On that point, of the number who went to support ISIL/Daesh, for what proportion has it proven possible to gather enough evidence of what they actually did there, other than support a declared enemy organisation of this country? Of those who went, what proportion realistically were we able to prosecute on specific offences?

Mr Wallace: Of the approximately 400 who have come back, about 40.

Q166 Chair: One in 10?

Mr Wallace: I am honest about this: it is a challenge. They have been in a failed state. We may have lots of intelligence about people, or we could use some evidence but it would expose intelligence capabilities that we shouldn't, so it is very difficult. There is also recognition that 20% have been killed, have not come back at all. They faced the ultimate penalty for what they did and they died on the battlefield.

Some have come back. It is important in the current discourse, with a lot of them giving interviews at the moment, to know that the foreign fighters you are seeing on your screens are the hard core. The ones who are disillusioned and disaffected and were a bit part in the process came back long ago. You are not seeing some of these people on telly because they just decided to break out and tell everyone how awful it was. It is because they were captured in the redoubt of ISIL's collapse. These are the real deal that you are seeing and we shouldn't make a difference between men and women on that. They are the hardest core.

When deprivation appears—deprivation has been around for 150 years; it is not a new thing—the Government looks at a range of tools it can use. Its first preference is to bring people here, put them in jail—on trial—so that justice is seen to be done and they are put in prison. That is what we



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knew worked in Northern Ireland. That's how you say to communities, "This is how we deal with our own. That's the way we do it."

If there is an excessive threat or a dangerous area and different barriers are in the way, one of the tools is deprivation. Other tools are stopping people going in the first place. We take away their passports; we have TPIMs where we try to control people when they get here. Or we work with our allies to see if there is a prosecution more appropriate elsewhere in theatre.

It is one of the tools, but it is definitely a problem and we are going to have to work out how we are going to deal with it, within our international law obligations. Unlawful rendition, for example, we have just— Imagine if we put people at risk, brought back here some of the most dangerous people against their will and the case was thrown out.

Chair: I do not think anyone is suggesting that we should bring back dangerous people against their will. The question is what we do with dangerous people who want to come back and who, if they were allowed to come back, couldn't be prosecuted, for lack of admissible evidence, and couldn't be trailed 24/7 without expanding the number of watchers in the security services to East German/Stasi proportions. That didn't end too well either.

If people want to come back, but we can't specifically prosecute them for individual acts while they were abroad, presumably we need to have a means to prosecute for the very fact of having sworn allegiance to an organisation that had effectively declared war on our own society. That surely requires a change in the law.

Mr Wallace: Who knows what is going to happen on a day-to-day basis at the moment, but the potential of a reform of the Official Secrets Act and the Espionage Act and a whole area that has been viewed as out of date has been sort of trailed. The Treason Act is ancient, as is the Official Secrets Act.

Q167 **Chair:** Forgive me: it is recognised that the Treason Act is very old, but it is still there because the concept is fundamentally sound. In the Second World War they adapted it and I believe they brought in something called the Treachery Act.

Mr Wallace: Which was then repealed.

Q168 **Chair:** Which was then repealed at the end of the conflict. Precisely. Therefore, surely while this conflict is going on and while there is a very real danger of human time-bombs—literally in some cases—coming back, having failed over there to do their worst over here, there is something to be said for having an Act of Parliament that would mean they were not able to carry that out.

Mr Wallace: I am not opposed to the principle of it. I think when you drill down and ask whether there are other offences that, if you had the same type of evidence, you could prosecute—yes there are.



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Q169 **Chair:** The only evidence we have in the cases I am positing—which are 90% of the people who come back, or the 90% that you haven't been able to prosecute—is that they swore allegiance to this organisation and/or went there to fight for it.

Mr Wallace: Well, you might not even have that. Sometimes terrorist groups are not— The IRA used to have a whole green book process and, at one stage, you almost got a membership card. If you look at how ISIL claims its membership, it often claims on actions or behaviour, rather than a swearing in.

Q170 **Chair:** That is all the more of an argument for something that has to be necessarily wide-ranging.

Mr Wallace: The Government doesn't rule it out. The Government does know that there are a range of offences currently that, if we had the evidence to trip into treason, we would also have the evidence to trip into some of those other prosecutions.

The other thing to reflect on is the effect of treason on some of these people. Do they want to be known as a traitorous martyr? Do they want that narrative to play? What we know from the Second World War prosecutions is that a large proportion of them weren't hanged. Some got very short sentences, but it was the stigma attached. If it is about stigma, that is certainly a powerful message for the state to send out, as long as the person who is receiving the stigma doesn't use it for their own glorification.

It is certainly the case that the statute is old—13-something.

Mark Lancaster: Is it 1351?

Mr Wallace: It is 1351 or 1350. I remember that one of my ancestors, William Wallace, slightly scuppered the prosecution by saying, "How can I be tried for treason in a foreign land? I don't actually live here." I think there is definitely merit in updating a number of the statutes. The Official Secrets Act refers to an enemy of the Crown or the state, and you have to prove that you are working on behalf of a foreign state as opposed to a foreign terrorist entity. We are looking at all that. The Law Commission is due to publish a report on it—certainly on hostile espionage—and I think we will be open to it, as we deal with it at the moment.

In the meantime, the designated areas offence is an offence that we hope will bring some prosecutions to bear on some of these individuals. We are all going to have to think about how we are going to deal with foreign fighters. I think this is going to be the concept of the 21st century.

We have seen people trying to recruit people to come and fight, in the Philippines and parts of Africa and so on. Many of those have travelled and have been involved in a number of issues. The first time we really saw it was in Bosnia, probably, with the mujaheddin brigades. We have to think about how we are going to deal with it, but it is often hemmed in with international law, and that is a challenge.



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Q171 **Phil Wilson:** Has it caused any difficulties with local partners in those countries?

Mr Wallace: We work very closely with local partners to let them know, where it is appropriate, and to talk to them. We are not the only country to use deprivation. Some of those countries themselves do. Whatever we do when it comes to deprivation, it is done within international law. We do not make people stateless. There are some allegations that we did—we will not. When the deprivations come before me and then the Home Secretary, it is based on a national security case—it is not picked out of thin air. At the same time, it is based on a legal case, making sure that we don't make someone stateless.

Chair: Our target to finish was 1.30 pm, and it is 1.30 pm. I thank all four witnesses for very comprehensive testimony. We are very grateful to everybody who has prepared and participated in this morning's session. The session is now concluded.