



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: US, UK and NATO, HC 608

Tuesday 15 March 2022

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Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Stuart Anderson; Sarah Atherton; Dave Doogan; Richard Drax; Mr Mark Francois; Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck; Gavin Robinson; John Spellar; Derek Twigg.

Questions 28-66

Witness

I: Lord Robertson, former UK Defence Secretary and Secretary-General of NATO.



Examination of witness

Witness: Lord Robertson.

Chair: Welcome to this Defence Committee hearing on Tuesday 1 March 2022, here in the House of Commons, where we will be looking at the relationships between the United States, the UK and NATO, particularly taking into consideration what is happening in Ukraine.

We have one very senior witness here today. I am delighted to welcome Lord George Robertson, who is now a senior counsellor at the Washington DC-based Cohen Group, but who was also the NATO Secretary-General from 1999 to 2003. Of course, prior to that he was here in the House of Commons, not just as a parliamentarian but as Defence Secretary. We are really grateful for your time this afternoon. We know you have been suffering a little bit from covid, so we are very grateful indeed to you for taking the time; we do appreciate that. We have lots to get through this afternoon, so I am going to invite Stuart Anderson to kick us off.

Q28 **Stuart Anderson:** Welcome, Lord Robertson. I would like to draw your attention to the time period since 2021, where we have seen NATO involvement in both Afghanistan and now Ukraine. I would like to get your view on how NATO has responded to both those crises initially.

Lord Robertson: Clearly, the withdrawal from Afghanistan was not NATO's finest hour. What it did was to underline a degree of internal lack of cohesion and a lack of consultation. I think that was a bit of a wake-up call to all of us, because we had complacently assumed all along that the United States would consult pretty well every inch of the way in relation to what was one of the longest-standing NATO missions in Afghanistan. The Ukraine experience has proved to be the exact opposite, because the West has now woken up and come together.

Putin's objective to stop any further NATO enlargement has now produced the opposite effect, with Finland and Sweden, and even Switzerland, realising the benefits of collective defence. He wanted to split off the United States from Europe, and he has welded them together. He wanted to divide Europe, which he thinks is a dissolute group of nations, and he has united them as never before. He wanted to stop the mobilisation of troops in the areas and the new countries, and the exact opposite has taken place. Of course, he wanted to effortlessly reabsorb Ukraine back into Russia, and certainly into Russia's sphere of influence, and now he has ensured that that will never happen.

Both of these operations have been contradictory in terms of the lessons that have been learned. In recent times, NATO has shown a degree of resolution and unity that is hugely important for all of us.

Q29 **Stuart Anderson:** That is interesting. You talk about the polar opposites and I agree that Putin has been successful in uniting everyone, as probably all parties believed would happen. Looking at the unity we have



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got from the Ukraine crisis, hindsight is a wonderful thing. Is there more that NATO could have done in the build-up to what has been happening in the Ukraine crisis?

Lord Robertson: It is difficult to know precisely what could have been done, and in many ways we did do quite a lot. I am not entirely certain that Putin had a long-term plan for the invasion. A lot of what has happened since then has suggested that it has been ill-thought-through, badly planned. This is a radical thought for me to give you, but I wonder: did we goad him into doing it? Was he assembling the troops around Ukraine in order to harvest some security guarantees but, at the end of the day, felt that his credibility would be diminished if he did not invade? That is a heretical notion, and history will prove me right or wrong, but a very senior Russian was in London before the invasion saying, "There is no way he is going to invade, but every day he doesn't invade he loses a bit of credibility."

So, what NATO could and should have done, and did do, was to be ready and conscious of the fact that Ukraine is not a NATO member but is a partner country, and to do as much as we possibly could to prepare it for the possibility that Russia was going to invade, as it seemed to be threatening with the troop formations that were put in place.

Q30 **Stuart Anderson:** Can you expand on the point about whether we goaded him—as you said, that is quite radical thinking. If it was viewed that way, do you still think he would have invaded if we did not actually do the build-up we did?

Lord Robertson: I do not know the answer, and I cannot see inside Vladimir Putin's head. He is a very different individual to the one that I dealt with when I was NATO Secretary-General and I met him on nine occasions. All I am suggesting is that some of the more optimistic views that he must have had about how easy it was going to be to invade showed signs of a lack of preparation, a lack of intelligence, on his part. We thought we were right in exposing our intelligence that he was going to invade, that he had made preparations for the invasion, but then he would, if he was going to extract the maximum from the bargaining process. Only history will tell, but there is no doubt at all that this has been a badly planned operation, and he will rue the day that that invasion took place in the way that it did.

Q31 **Sarah Atherton:** Lord Robertson, can we look at NATO's response history? We had the annexation of Crimea, the Salisbury poisoning, allegations of electoral fraud, and China's aggressive stance in the Indo-Pacific. Did NATO, in your opinion, act correctly, and what did they do?

Lord Robertson: NATO is not a monolithic organisation. NATO is the sum of the nations who make it up. There is a misapprehension around about what NATO actually is. NATO is not the United Nations, with a huge elaborate and permanent bureaucracy. It is not the European Union, with a huge organisation behind it. NATO is made up of a very small central staff—you would be quite amazed at how small the international staff is within NATO as a whole. It is made up of the nations themselves, so if



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there is a success by NATO or a failure by NATO, it is down to the collective will of the nation states, collectively operating. NATO will be resolute if the nation states want it to be, and it will be reluctant to move if the nation states do not believe something can be done.

So, in each of the cases you mentioned, decisions are taken that in retrospect might seem to be less than ideal, but at the time reflected the will of the collective itself. When the attack on the United States took place on 11 September 2001, at that point, the NATO Council decided that it would invoke article 5 of the treaty. That was not a given: a couple of weeks before that, if you had had a roundtable discussion as to whether or not a terrorist attack on New York would be the subject of an article 5 declaration, I think we, the experts, would have come to the conclusion, "No, it was designed for a Soviet attack on the West." But on the day, the nations were absolutely resolute and said America had been attacked, it was an attack on one country, and therefore it was an attack on all. That applied when we took over Afghanistan, and afterwards when a decision was taken about Libya. Those were areas where NATO actually took resolute action, but there were other areas where the nation states, for their own reasons, collectively decided that they were going to do less than maybe, in retrospect, people might have thought they could have done.

Q32 John Spellar: George, how critical would you say United States support, equipment and enablers are to NATO decision making, and also operations?

Lord Robertson: The United States is the essential part of the alliance. If you look at the various parts of NATO, politically, the United States is crucial to the decision making. It is not the determining factor, but it is crucial to it, and of course at SHAPE—Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe; basically, the operational headquarters of NATO—the critical elements there are supplied by the United States. As you said, we call them the enablers, but essentially they are the component parts of a military headquarters. Clearly, the Europeans have not yet got to the point where they can rival the capability that America has in all these particular areas.

Yes, America is a crucial part of it, but then NATO adds to United States defence; it multiplies and amplifies the defence of the United States of America. I think each Administration has to discover that as it comes in. I was there when the Bush Administration came in, and I had to almost lead them to the process of saying that the alliance and NATO was actually in America's interest—that it was an extension of America's defence. Because if you remember, after Kosovo, Donald Rumsfeld was moaning and complaining about war by committee, which he believed had been one of the features of Kosovo. That was absolutely a wrong impression that he had, but eventually, they regarded NATO as an addition to America's defence.

The Trump Administration went through the same learning process. Even President Biden, with a long-standing connection to NATO, has had to



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come to the conclusion after Afghanistan that NATO is not about just defending Europe; it is about defending the United States, its friends and its values.

- Q33 **John Spellar:** Would you assess that, with the rise of isolationism in the United States—not necessarily the Trump Administration, but Trumpism in the Republican party, if they come back into the ascendancy—that might be put at risk?

Lord Robertson: I think we should always be worried about American isolationism. We have been in the past. It is why we, as a country and Europe as a whole, need to keep close to the United States of America. It is a very big country, it is a long way away from the rest of the world, and isolationism is deeply rooted in the Republican party but also in elements of the Democrats as well. However, I think that Ukraine has now opened Americans' eyes to how intimately their future is connected to what is going on in Europe and in the big-power rivalry that exists in the world today. On that degree of isolationism that under the Trump Administration was certainly a danger, I think that Ukraine will have changed the metrics, as it has changed the attitude of the German nation quite dramatically over the last few weeks. I think that there are elements within America who might be going through exactly the same mind-shift of realising how precarious the world now is. I said, last week, that we have had a bonfire of complacency, and that is very true. I think that applies in the United States as it does in Europe as a whole.

- Q34 **Chair:** Would you have liked to have seen the MiG-29s that Poland offered to have found their way into the Ukrainian air force?

Lord Robertson: It is a complicated issue. I can see why NATO as a whole was reluctant to get engaged with the MiGs. The adaptation of MiG-29s in order for them to be used by the Ukrainians would have been a very substantial operation as a whole. We are right to be wary about stepping over various lines here that might lead us into confrontation with the Russians at this point. Therefore, the consideration of handing over weaponry like the MiG-29s at this stage is something that has to be very carefully thought through.

- Q35 **Chair:** That was diplomatically put, but ultimately are we not now moving into a new Cold War situation, where we have to at least consider higher-risk decisions? With an offering such as this, as Ukraine requested—I understand why, for example, a no-fly zone might be ruled out—is it not exhibiting a little bit of weakness, a timidity if you like, on the utility of NATO not to explore, without getting on that escalatory ladder, what more we can do from a hard-power perspective to support Ukraine?

Lord Robertson: Yes, I think we should, and we do. Countries are doing that at the present moment, but putting the likes of fast jets like the MiG-29s into the air over Ukraine at the present moment, first, risks escalating the matter in terms of a confrontation with Russians. It is like the no-fly zone. On the face of it, it sounds uncomplicated and straightforward, but I took over no-fly zones at the Ministry of Defence when I became the Secretary of State in 1997, because John Major had instituted no-fly zones



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in northern Iraq. They were very effective, but they had required the suppression of Iraqi air defences before they could be put there. We could not put our planes—

Chair: My question was not about no-fly zones; I deliberately avoided that because it absolutely is another level. I am concerned—

Lord Robertson: I know, but—

Q36 **Chair:** If I could just finish, I am concerned that we are now moving from defensive weapons, the NLAW, for example, to Starstreak, which is more of an offensive weapon. We are getting sucked into a proxy war, are we not?

Lord Robertson: I am saying to you that the same thing applies. If you put adapted MiG-29s into the air over there, will they simply be shot out of the sky? These are the considerations that have to be weighed up before you can do it. But other elements of defensive equipment can and should be given to the Ukrainians. In fact, the more that we do and the more that we threaten to give, the more likely it is that the Russians will recognise that they have no long-term future in occupying whatever parts of Ukraine they have conquered at the moment.

Q37 **Derek Twigg:** Lord Robertson, before I come on to the issue of American engagement with Allies around Russian security guarantees, I would like to go back a bit. There is a narrative—some people have felt this for a very long time—that we are where we are today with NATO and Russia partly because NATO, particularly under the Clinton Administration and led by the Americans, of course, expanded too quickly and too much. What is your view on that?

Lord Robertson: Well, we didn't have any plan. I resist the words "NATO expansion" because NATO enlarged because, one by one, countries applied for membership and had to qualify for membership as they went along. I think that was a process that was gradual. First of all, you had the three Visegrád countries coming in, and then you had the seven other countries that came in in 2004. I had the responsibility for ensuring that they went through the processes up until then. I do not think that we did it too quickly; I think that we did it systematically.

I recall—you might be interested in the anecdote—the Prime Minister of Bulgaria came to see me at one point during the process, and at the end of our meeting, he said, "I wonder, Mr Secretary-General, if I could ask you this: are you as rude to every Prime Minister as you have been to me today?" I said, "Mr Prime Minister, I'd rather be rude to you today than apologetic to you in 2002, when you didn't get into NATO." It was a fairly brutal process of getting countries to conform to the standards—both military and political—that we laid down. We did it in a gradual way.

I think it is important to say that during the three years that I knew Vladimir Putin as President—I met him nine times—at no point in any of those meetings did he complain about the enlargement of NATO. Indeed, on the one occasion when the matter was raised—that was about the



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Baltic states and their troop deployments being part of the CFE agreement on the Russian side rather than on the NATO side—he actually stopped the Foreign Ministry from making further complaints, so he did not complain at that point, and had no reason to complain, either.

Q38 Derek Twigg: Just to sum up, then, from what you have said, you do not accept that the speed of enlargement, and the number of countries that came into NATO, has anything to do with the present situation, in terms of Russia's belligerent attitude towards the Ukrainians and, of course, the west.

Lord Robertson: No. It is my strong view that Vladimir Putin and the Russians around about him—that small clique around about him—are more worried about EU enlargement than they were about NATO enlargement. NATO it is a military alliance, and Russia is—

Derek Twigg: Which was slower than NATO enlargement.

Lord Robertson: Yes, and much more systematic. The accession process to the European Union, chapter by chapter by chapter, basically transformed countries—they moved from command economies to mixed economies, from the rule of the party to the rule of law—in a fundamental way. If you remember, the crisis over Ukraine started with an EU agreement, which President Yanukovich at the time was going to accept from the EU but was told by the Kremlin to reject it. The democratisation of these countries was much more of a potent threat to Russia than NATO. NATO is an easy demon, because people know about it, and years of propaganda allowed them to use it as sort of the bully. But, in fact, it is the rising tide of democracy, especially in Ukraine, which is so close to Russia, that I think worried Russia much more than NATO itself.

Q39 Derek Twigg: Coming up to the present day, do you believe that the US consultation and co-ordination around the Russian demands for security guarantees is an acknowledgment that, following the Afghan withdrawal, they have to do things differently and keep their allies much more closely informed and consulted? Isn't that being speeded up by the Russian threat?

Lord Robertson: Yes, there is no doubt about it. I think the reaction by the Allies after the exit from Afghanistan pretty well shocked the American establishment. I think they recognised that this mission had been embarked upon collectively, had been conducted collectively throughout and, at the end of the day, because of the Trump agreement in Doha the year before, and President Biden's own particular views on withdrawal, had been done in the wrong way. So even before Ukraine came along, I think America had recognised that if the Allies were going to be part and parcel of NATO and value what it meant it for American security and defence, things had to be done in a completely different way, and Ukraine has underlined very much that that is an absolute essential.

Q40 Chair: Can I just advance that question about who is responsible for continental European security in relation to the United States? We saw Donald Trump and then Biden row in behind the decision to depart from



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Afghanistan, and the rest of NATO had to follow. We are now seeing, dare I say it, a little bit of hesitance, perhaps, from Joe Biden—he was the one who decided not to approve the MiGs being transferred from Poland to Ukraine. That is an illustration—I think his own words were, “I don’t want to start World War Three.” To that end, if there is a hesitance, is there an opportunity—let us put it positively—for European leaders to work more closely together to focus on European security solutions in the longer term, or can we only do things knowing that America is going to be there in the leadership role?

Lord Robertson: I think the Europeans now recognise that they have to do much more. I only have to direct your attention to what has happened in Germany, where we see the awakening of that particular country. I used to go and see Chancellor Schröder and ask him to spend more money on defence and to give me more troops for Afghanistan. He used to tell me that, for 60-odd years, the British had been telling the Germans that they did not want German troops outside German borders and did not want Germany to be more offensive in terms of defence. He said, “It is in our soul.” But Chancellor Scholz, overnight, has changed that completely, with a huge new increase in defence expenditure. Even in the last 24 hours, Germany has announced the decision to buy F-35 fast jets to carry the nuclear bombs that are part of the dual-capable aircraft decision, and to share the nuclear burden in Europe. That is a clear indication of how that one European country, as an example, has now gripped the fact that it has a big responsibility itself, as well as a responsibility to stand by the Americans and the alliance as a whole. So I think the centre of gravity has changed, and it has done so quite dramatically. I think that will change the balance inside NATO, and the Americans should welcome that.

Chair: That leads us nicely on to Mark Francois’ focus.

Q41 **Mr Francois:** Lord Robertson, the NATO Foreign Ministers recently discussed the need to go from what they called deterrence by presence to deterrence by defence. Do you, from your experience, expect to see a return to large-scale physical troop deployments in Europe?

Lord Robertson: I think that is almost inevitable. We were inhibited from doing that in the past because the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1998 actually specified that we would not have permanent stationing of troops in the new countries. I think all of that is now going to have to be rewritten, since Russia has completely abandoned its own obligations under the Founding Act and the Rome declaration, which endorsed it, in 2002.

It is worth making that point to you, because President Putin is going round saying that essentially he didn’t sign any of these agreements: the Budapest memorandum, the Helsinki accords, the Paris treaty—they were all done by somebody else and Gorbachev was tricked. I have the piece of paper here—that is the signature of Vladimir Putin on the Rome declaration, which endorsed the Founding Act, which itself said that individual countries had a right to choose their own security fix. I make that point in passing.



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If we are now going to start looking at troop stationing in the aftermath of Ukraine, that is going to have to be something that we look at. I am a great believer in what Basil Liddell Hart said about strategy being about looking beyond the war to the peace that comes afterwards. A lot of thought now has to be given, by Committees such as yours, to what follows on from there. Whatever the eventual peace deal actually is, Russia will still be a problem for everyone—including for China, it has to be said. Therefore, troop locations and permanent stationing will have to be dependent on the situation as it applies there and not the situation that we promised in 1998.

- Q42 **Mr Francois:** Wearing your former Defence Secretary hat for a moment, as well as your former Secretary-General hat, what do you think are the implications for the defence and security policy of the United Kingdom specifically? Are we, for instance, likely to see some return, even to a much scaled-down version, of BAOR, the British Army of the Rhine?

Lord Robertson: When I came in, in 1997, we had the defence review, and I looked carefully at whether we should be taking troops out of Germany. We did the cost-benefit analysis at that time and came very firmly to the conclusion that it was cost-effective to keep our troops in Germany and also provided massive opportunities for training that would not have been available in the UK. Therefore, the conclusion of our defence review was that we should keep our troops in Germany. I therefore objected when the 2010 defence review decided that they were going to take all the troops out of Germany at that time.

I think we are going to have to start looking at where we are going to put the stationing of troops. The Americans, under Donald Trump, took sizable numbers of their troops out of Europe, which gave exactly the wrong signal, it has to be said, to the Russians, but also produced a disadvantage to the United States. Having the forward deployment of troops made it much easier if America was going to be involved in any future conflict or future problem. These forward deployments were extremely useful to them—as they were indeed to us as well—so I think we have to look very carefully in the post-Ukraine situation at where it is that we and the other Allies locate our troops, in order to ensure that we have the maximum deployments for the security of our nations.

- Q43 **Mr Francois:** Following directly from that, this Committee, which as you know well is an all-party Committee, has been quite critical of the integrated review because, among other things, we thought it was too relaxed about the reduction in mass and also because it took too much risk too early over the time period of the review. Do you think, bearing in mind what you just said, that we now need to review the review, as it were? Are we going to need to go back to the drawing board in the light of what really, in security terms, is at least on a par with a 9/11?

Lord Robertson: There is no doubt in my mind at all that we need to look at the integrated review again. The world has changed out of all recognition as a consequence of Ukraine, and it will not go back to the status quo ante—to the world that existed before. We have got a



completely different set of global circumstances that mean that we really have to look at what it is we do, how we do it and what resources we are willing to commit to it.

In a lecture I gave to the Royal College of Defence Studies last Thursday—I am sure the Committee will circulate a copy of it—I made the point that we need to work out what it is the nation needs to do. I believe we should have a national conversation. It may well have been that the pandemic meant that, after the integrated review was published, there was insufficient opportunity to actually get out and about and debate the various component parts of the integrated review, but it is all the more essential now that that national conversation takes place. The point of view that you have articulated is not something that you are articulating on your own, and I read the debate in the House of Commons last week. There are a lot of different views out there about what we should be doing, how we should be doing it and how much of the nation's resources will be devoted to actually doing it.

I have been critical of the integrated review up to now. I think it is a good overall strategy for a non-EU United Kingdom, but it lacks priorities, it lacks a timescale, and it lacks a delivery mechanism. However, it is at least the bones of where a national discussion should take place, and that national conversation would involve that whole question you have put forward about how we are actually going to spend the money on defence that has been allocated to it.

Q44 Mr Francois: I think we will come on to resources later, but I have one last question on this theme.

It could be argued that for the last couple of years this Committee was becoming increasingly hawkish about Russia. On one level, you might expect the Defence Committee of Parliament to be more hawkish than, say, the EFRA Committee, working from first principles. None the less, this Committee—an all-party Committee—was trying to sound the alarm about increasing Russian adventurism. It gives us no pleasure to say that perhaps we were right. But in terms of starting this national conversation, as you call it—I think that is a good phrase—some would say that we need to focus on operational imperatives now and then do all that later. Others would say we need to start doing that right now. Where are you on that spectrum?

Lord Robertson: When we set about doing the defence review in 1997, we basically brought everything back to a clean sheet. On the basis of a foreign policy baseline that was agreed inside Government, we then built the capabilities in defence based on that. I think in many ways, although time is short, roughly the same exercise has to start taking place. What is it that we are going to have to do? As you say, you were hawkish on Russia, but other people were more obsessed about China and how it was developing, and that could certainly be said about the Americans in the context of what they were doing. There are other people who were focusing on the hybrid elements of warfare and how we were going to deal with that.



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The NATO report “NATO 2030”, which I think was largely written by somebody in No. 10 Downing Street, is actually a brilliant report about where NATO needs to go in the future and where the balance has to be between emerging threats, existing threats, hybrid threats and conventional threats. I do not think that NATO did enough to disseminate that as a discussion document inside the nations. Indeed, it is very difficult to find the report. I was looking for it the other day in order to quote it, and it is not easy on the NATO website to find what is such a pivotal report. I do not know whether I am answering your question specifically, but we need almost to go back to bare bones in order to establish the kind of world that we are going to face post Ukraine, and what this country can do, and can do best.

Q45 **Mr Francois:** You basically said that the integrated review has been overtaken by events, at the risk of putting words in your mouth. I think you have said that pretty clearly.

Lord Robertson: It has been. The integrated review was written at a different time. There is no doubt in my mind, and in many other people’s minds, that the world has changed quite dramatically. We have a situation where a sovereign nation state inside Europe—a huge one—has been invaded by a next-door country, and by a nuclear power. The whole centre of gravity and the whole nature of our defence relationship has changed, and we have to start rethinking where we are and how we do things best.

Q46 **Dave Doogan:** To develop that theme further—this moves on quite nicely—given the currency and validity challenges that the integrated review now has as a consequence of actions in Ukraine, would you expect, drawing on your experience, to see a further increase in UK defence spending as a result of that seismic shift in threat?

Lord Robertson: I would have thought so. I would have thought that there would be a good case for it. If that happens, obviously it comes out of some other expenditure as well. That is the balancing act that the Chancellor has got, but I would have thought that inside Government as a whole the shock of what has happened in Ukraine in these last few weeks has woken people up to the fact that national security is of supreme importance to people in the country.

I would have thought that there would be a good case for increasing the defence budget, but that in itself is not the answer to the question; it is what you would spend the money on. What is the nature now of the threat that we face, and how can it be dealt with? I was always very reluctant about the 2% in NATO, because it was a metric that did not involve capabilities. When I went to NATO, on my first day there I said that I had three priorities in NATO. Priority 1 was capabilities. Priority 2 was capabilities. Priority 3 was capabilities. That is the way that NATO remains credible.

I give Jens Stoltenberg huge credit for the fact that he has now built into the 2% metric readiness and capabilities—equipment—so that you do not have a situation where in some countries a big chunk of the defence



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budget is taken up with military pensions, because that does not translate into military capability at all. Simply increasing our defence budget without focusing on where it is going to be spent is a waste of time, because other budgets are going to be screaming at us at the same time. More emphasis on the defence of the nation is, I think, something that the country would definitely want.

- Q47 **Dave Doogan:** That being the case, you will be very aware that the detail of the integrated review revealed plans by the MoD to cut some fairly significant operational platforms in the interests of reshaping UK defence to a different dynamic, including but not limited to the Indo-Pacific region. As well as re-examining the cost envelope of the integrated review, do you believe that there is also a case for the Ministry to go back and look at some of their decisions to remove certain platforms from UK capabilities, drawing on your “capabilities, capabilities, capabilities” point?

Lord Robertson: There are always balances that you have to make, depending on what your priorities actually are. The tilt towards the Indo-Pacific was something that I was in favour of. I was part of a study that was done by Policy Exchange before the integrated review took place, which led on to it being part of the integrated review. I think that is going to have to be looked at very carefully now, in the light of what we have seen in Ukraine.

That is why rather than—off the top of my head, or indeed off the top of all of our heads—coming to judgments about us needing more ships or more tanks and rest of it, you need to systematically look at the world beyond Ukraine, what the resources are and where the accent has got to be. Therefore, tough decisions will have to be made if we are actually going to secure sensible balances in the defence budget in the future.

- Q48 **Dave Doogan:** Finally from me, it would not be unreasonable for the Secretary of State for Defence to knock on the Chancellor’s door, looking for more money on the basis of what you said about a greater budget. Similarly, it would not be unreasonable for the Chancellor to say, “However much you want, how about you save some of that from the wastage that goes on within the Ministry of Defence annually?” Would that be a conversation that the Chancellor could reasonably have with the Secretary of State for Defence?

Lord Robertson: It would not be the first time either, I can tell you. I used to have it with Gordon Brown, who represented the same part of Scotland that you do at the present moment. He was forever telling me about efficiencies. Actually, I took it on board. I found the cost overruns in many programmes to be quite offensive to me as the Defence Secretary, interested in strong defence, but also as a taxpayer it seemed to me to be absolutely appalling. I instituted a process of smart recruitment, which was part of my defence review, where we actually brought in integrated teams, and we made sure that someone was responsible for a programme from beginning to end, because all too often you had nobody to blame because so many people had been involved.



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Unfortunately, after I left I am not entirely sure that that process was as rigorously pursued as I was determined to do it at the time. I just say to you that when I became Secretary of State in 1997, my deputy in charge of procurement was John Gilbert, Lord Gilbert. On his desk were a number of programmes that had been on his desk 18 years before, when he was the deputy to the last Labour Government's Defence Secretary. Things like the Eurofighter were still on his desk at that stage. We tried to sort that out, but maybe not enough.

Dave Doogan: It is certainly still a challenged environment, Chair. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you for that, Dave. I think Emma wants to come in.

Q49 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Good afternoon, Lord Robertson. As a follow-up to my colleague's question—and this might be an impossible question, so tell me if it is—you said that there likely should be an increase in defence spending. If you were still Defence Secretary, what kind of increase would that be, and what would you spend it on and prioritise?

Lord Robertson: That would be speculating. Ben Wallace achieved quite a substantial increase in the defence budget in the last round, and got it over a lengthy period of time. That was quite an achievement I must say for a Defence Secretary. It may not be enough given what we see in Ukraine at the present time, but it was an achievement and I pay credit to Ben for being able to persuade the Chancellor in that regard.

I wouldn't specify; I think it has got to be done systematically and on the basis of an examination of the world as we are now going to find it. That may mean that we have to reorientate our thinking—our foreign policy thinking, our intelligence thinking and our technology thinking—to come to a wise answer on the nature of the defence that the country is going to require.

One of the crucial things that comes out of this whole episode is the importance of deterrence. Deterrence is essentially getting into the minds of your opponent. There is an article 5 line that is drawn around the NATO countries, and it is a line that is drawn inside the head of every commander inside the Russian armed forces. That is a line that they don't cross. Deterrence is made up of a whole series of different factors, including the nuclear deterrent, which I think has come to be ever more important, given the noises being made by President Putin—quite irresponsibly—in terms of his nuclear weapons. Nuclear deterrence, conventional deterrence, is the absolute, so we have got to make sure that we have the instruments for making sure any adversary believes that if they cross the line, they pay a disproportionate price. Building deterrence has got to be the basis of whatever judgment is made about the eventual defence budget.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: That is helpful. Thank you.

Q50 **Chair:** We know that the percentage of GDP spent on defence is a very crude indicator, but it is a helpful indicator of your commitment as to how



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much you are going to spend. Looking back through a former Defence Committee report, you enjoyed a spend of up to 2.7% of GDP in your time. We are on about 2.2% at the moment. There is an urgency, in the sense that Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, will be coming to Parliament in the very near future to make his Budget spring statement. You could argue that this will be an opportunity for us to recognise that the world is changing, as you have articulated, and that we should increase defence spending in the longer term. Would you agree with that?

Lord Robertson: I think we have to. There is now no doubt at all that the Ukraine experience has told us that national security is hugely important. My defence review—that was 20 years ago—was based on power projection; it was to do with going far, hitting hard and staying long. Now we are going to have to look much more at territorial defence and national resilience—protecting the homeland. At the time I was involved, we basically thought, as somebody said, we had a holiday from history. Things were pretty benign in Europe; the Cold War had finished, the peace dividend had been taken, and we thought that things were relatively calm and ordered inside Europe. We had very good relations with Vladimir Putin in his early days. We thought, therefore, that the main problem was going to be global terrorism and the over-reaching of certain countries; it was going to be intranational conflict rather than state-on-state conflict.

We have had a rude awakening from that holiday from history. Our complacency and our wishful thinking have been tested to destruction. We need to start to do a very careful rethink now about what is needed and what the country wants. I make the point that it is essential that this is something that engages the country. If it is a bunch of us experts—your Committee and people like me—deciding, and people don't have a say in the process, it will all fall apart at some point. A national conversation isn't just a useful add-on—it is an absolute essential.

Q51 **Chair:** You make a critical point, which goes to the core of what this Committee tries to do, which is to advance beyond Parliament what is happening out there and why we perhaps need to spend more on defence. Mark Francois mentioned the integrated review. Dave Doogan also touched on it. There are still individual cuts that are yet to be implemented—cuts to our tank regiments, cuts to Warrior, cuts to the Hercules air fleet—which could still be reversed if we recognise that. I appreciate your point that this is not all just about hardware and a list of kit, but if we get rid of these assets it would be hard to replace them should we need them. Perhaps there needs to be a moratorium on some of the decisions that are yet to be implemented but are still buried in the integrated review.

Lord Robertson: Yes, but I do not want to go into the specifics. I am not the Defence Secretary. I am not even the shadow Defence Secretary. I am a historical figure, I suppose, to do with that.

Chair: You are an influential figure, which is why we are listening to you today.



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Lord Robertson: I am touched by that. I played a part in history. I look with great concern at what is happening today. Sometimes tough decisions have to be made. In my time, sometimes an argument was made for keeping an array of capabilities that may well have been irrelevant to the kind of threats that we faced. When we did, as part of my defence review, a stocktake of what we had, we found out that we also had the parts for the Manchester bomber, which was the predecessor of the Lancashire bomber, because, you know, "One day it will come in handy." You have to be very tough sometimes.

I agree with you in terms of losing a capability. For example, the Nimrods—there's an example of a programme that went out of control and was abolished and then left a capability gap that had to be filled expensively by an American aeroplane.

Given Ukraine, I think the Defence Secretary should probably now be looking very carefully at each of these decisions to see whether or not it would fit with the post-Ukraine world that we are going to face.

Q52 **Chair:** I don't think it is the Defence Secretary that needs persuading. Privately, I think he is onside. That is why it is important that we make these comments publicly.

I want to touch on article 5. The article 5 you dealt with is a very different one to the article 5 we look at today. There is cyber, there is space—there is even an attack on a nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Would that count as a breach of article 5? As we move forward into this new era of instability, do we need to reconsider what a breach of article 5 actually means?

Lord Robertson: It will become obvious when the time comes. As I said before, the normal sort of group of academics and experts sitting round a table would never have said article 5 applied to what happened on 9/11, but the nations themselves decided. It was my initiative, but at the same time, they agreed that that was relevant. So you have got people who say, "The Germans are not involved," or "You wouldn't go for article 5 if Estonia was invaded" and the rest of that. I think that is nonsense. When the day comes, people know exactly what would happen.

The public opinion polls that said a couple of years ago that in Germany there was no majority for an article 5 guarantee to Estonia have now been contradicted by the fact that the moment Ukraine took place, Germany's foreign and defence policy changed dramatically, and overnight as well. So the circumstances will be there. If the Russians or the Chinese, the Iranians or the North Koreans—let us not confine our threats simply to Russia—were to do something, whether it is cyber or a nuclear power plant, the nations would have to make the decision at that time on whether it was an article 5 assault or not. I am perfectly confident that inside the alliance, a wise decision would be taken at the time.

Chair: Let's hope so.

Q53 **John Spellar:** You talked about wishful thinking. Was it not therefore



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both regrettable and a mistake for the authorities to degrade, and basically almost eliminate, their Russia-watching capability?

Lord Robertson: I must agree with you. I think it is completely crazy that over the years we diminished our intelligence aspects in regard to Russia. I was always a great Russia fan. I like Russia, and I like the Russian people. I think we have to make sure that we differentiate between Putin and the Russian people. He wants us to see him as embodying the Russian nation, but I think they have been denied information about what is going on. They are not party to this grotesque assault on Ukraine.

We need to step up the World Service and the British Council. All the instruments we used during the Cold War, which have been degraded and diminished, have got to be reinstated. We live in a world now where the information war will often be as important as the war on the ground. Our adversaries have discovered that. They have spent their time outgunned by us militarily over the years, but they have gone for the soft underbelly of our democratic systems—interfering in elections, corruption, organised crime and disinformation. We now have to reinstate our capability for dealing with information and making sure that we do not lose out in the war of the narratives.

Q54 **Sarah Atherton:** Relationships and alliances are even more important now, going forward. In your opinion, how does NATO perceive the UK?

Lord Robertson: The UK is one of the key nations inside NATO. I think we were slightly diminished because we left the EU, because the relationship between NATO and the EU was an important one for the future. We are absolutely central to NATO, and we will continue to be so. It is a cornerstone of our defence, and I think we are seen inside the alliance as being one of the key, important component parts of the alliance and its strength.

We are also the country that holds back on increased finances for NATO. It is worth making the point, even 20 years after I left NATO, that it was a reluctance by Britain to spend more on NATO when NATO was taking on a whole series of extra obligations that made sure that it did not have the real capabilities in some of the areas where it would want to spend money. After the Americans, we are the second military power inside NATO. I think we have a political as well as a military role to play, and it is a very important one.

Q55 **Sarah Atherton:** You mentioned areas of joint working. Are there any areas that you feel are weak, or strong, around the UK's relationship with NATO members, or even the US-UK relationship? I am thinking around foreign policy or common standards.

Lord Robertson: We are a formidable country in foreign policy and defence terms, and I think nobody underestimates the clout that we have got. Brexit notwithstanding, we are still crucially important in that regard. In many cases, we lead the debate, and so we should. We are a trusted partner of the United States, but we are also still a European power of some consequence. I am not sure precisely what it is you are driving at



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here, but I think in terms of the various components that make up NATO—both political and military—the United Kingdom plays a very strong and important role.

- Q56 **Richard Drax:** Good afternoon, Lord Robertson. Do you believe that, as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion, there is now NATO member agreement on what the threat is?

Lord Robertson: I think we always knew what the threat was; it is now sharper than it was before. I think we had always hoped that Russia would not go to the extent that it did, and maybe our policy, based on wishful thinking, led us in the wrong direction. But trying to discover what is in the head of somebody like Vladimir Putin maybe requires a psychiatrist rather than a military expert. Just as he has overestimated his military power in terms of taking over Ukraine, and underestimated the resolution of the Ukrainian people, maybe we underestimated the Russian capability for mischief and for destruction. It is a wake-up call to all of us that we need to look at our all adversaries carefully and calmly to make sure that people in the country are safe.

As I say, Russia has now sort of expressed a view that would indicate that we should be more cautious about adversaries in the future—China, Iran, North Korea are all elements in the equation that should be measured as well.

- Q57 **Richard Drax:** What is the impact on the NATO defence planning process, and are we likely to see a better integrated NATO force with long-term commitments to defence spending and to ensuring that nations can work together?

Lord Robertson: I think so. There is no doubt at all that the wake-up call that has been given to all of us at the present moment will lead to a lot more thinking being required. One of the things that I always felt about NATO was that defence planning was something that was done as a sort of bicycle spoke thing. We did not talk about individual countries; we talked about the collective at the end of the day.

I think that now, in the light of Ukraine, much more attention will be paid to what individual countries have got, what they need and what the collective need of the alliance is going to be. Again, looking at Germany and the decisions that have been taken by Chancellor Scholz, a sea change is taking place. I see the North Atlantic Council now focusing very much on the kind of collective organisations that have been built up in the past—the NATO Response Force and the like—to make sure that we have the capabilities that will be required for the new world that we see developing in front of us.

- Q58 **Richard Drax:** I just wonder whether politicians, who, after each conflict, seem to make the same mistake of disarming—because it is so tempting to cut the Armed Forces for other priorities—will finally learn the lesson that we cannot afford to do that.



Lord Robertson: This has been a shock to the system, without any shadow of a doubt. Today, we have three Prime Ministers, or three Presidents, going to Kyiv as an act of solidarity with President Zelensky. I think these countries now recognise—must recognise—that they now have a greater obligation to building strong defence than they probably had before. Maybe it takes a crisis to force us to see what it is in our own best interests. I often used to say that we were our own worst enemy, because we were not capable of seeing what the threats were and the tools that were required to deal with them. We have gone from being our own worst enemy to being Vladimir Putin’s worst nightmare.

Richard Drax: Thank you.

Q59 **Gavin Robinson:** Lord Robertson, you mentioned that you find the NATO 2030 agenda hard to access on the website. It is an interesting document—a well-written document, I think you said, but hard to find. Do you think that what we have experienced over the past three weeks should change the focus on that 2030 agenda?

Lord Robertson: It has got to be looked at again. Everything will have to be looked at again. The formulation of a new NATO strategic concept is under way at present, and that will be affected by what we have seen. Nothing remains the same—that is the crucial thing. The kaleidoscope has been twisted and we do not know what the pattern is going to be at the end. The world has changed, and it will never be the same again. We have a velocity of change happening in the world today, combined with the velocity of change in technology and the rest of it. That has produced new vulnerabilities, and Ukraine has told us that some of the things that we have taken for granted do not apply now. The sight every night of a central European power being bombed and destroyed before our eyes must change the public view, not just about refugees but about how we ensure our own security and defence in future. NATO 2030 and the integrated review have to be looked at again. As I say, that is part of a national conversation.

I read NATO 2030. As you probably know, there is a Northern Irish component in the writing of the NATO 2030 review—it is good and excellent, yet it was just buried and was not really seen again. The integrated review, because of the pandemic, suffered in the same way. We need to involve that national conversation basically to look at how we defend our own nation, and also how, as part of a collective in NATO, we defend the way of life that we have grown used to.

Q60 **Gavin Robinson:** Thank you for that. To square the Irish connection, I was taught by that gentleman’s father, but I am afraid that none of the stardust has worn off on me, so you will have to have another question, Lord Robertson.

I think you are right, and I think that it has been widely acknowledged that the actions of Russia have galvanised the collective will in NATO, and all are disgusted by what they have seen and all are resolute in condemning the actions of Russia. In acknowledging that change is



needed to the 2030 agenda, and acknowledging that that process needs to be under way in short order, do you think that that unanimity will be sustained, or do you think that there will be fissures with some nations that clearly do not have the capacity or with some that may fear the consequence?

Lord Robertson: It is a good question and it is one, three weeks into the horrors of Ukraine, that people are going to ask. When the television pictures change and the next crisis comes along, will that unity prevail? I think that it will, frankly. There is a shock and horror about what has happened that will galvanise opinion on a pretty permanent basis. I do not think that people can be complacent any longer about the idea of external threats, or say that we have to prioritise social expenditure over the defence of the nation. After all, the defence of the nation is the primary responsibility of any Government at the present time.

In Europe as a whole—they are much closer to Ukraine than we are—the shock to the political system has been very dramatic indeed. I think it will galvanise that degree of unity and resolution into the future. For some people who had a more starry-eyed view about Russia and Russia's past, the scales have now dropped from their eyes and they will have to focus very much more on the priorities established by people about their own security as a whole. As I said, deterrence is what matters. Lessons will be drawn.

The Budapest memorandum was an agreement that gave guarantees to Ukraine after it gave up the nuclear weapons that had been left from the Soviet days. These missiles had to go back, probably, anyway, but in return for giving up a huge nuclear arsenal the Ukrainians settled for their territorial integrity being protected. They were even protected under the Budapest memorandum from political interference in the country as a whole, and that guarantee turned out to be worthless. Deterrence is what matters, and looking at how you can build in NATO and, indeed, in our own country that degree of deterrence to make sure that people are safe in the future will be the priority.

Gavin Robinson: Thank you.

Q61 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Afternoon again, Lord Robertson. What role can NATO play in strengthening the resilience of member states?

Lord Robertson: NATO can only do a certain amount about resilience inside individual states. It can exhort people. NATO is an organisation that is essentially based on an overall military capability—a compatibility—between the individual countries and their methods of working together. National resilience is really a matter for individual countries as a whole. It is actually a very substantial part of the integrated review for our country and that has to be looked at and enhanced when it comes to looking at the integrated review in the future.

Last year, I was part of a special House of Lords Committee set up to look at risk assessment and risk management. I must say that even my eyes were opened to how vulnerable our country was and how little we have



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done over the years in terms of our own national resilience. Members of the Committee might like to look at the report of that House of Lords Committee to see what is necessary inside the United Kingdom to protect us and to protect our critical national infrastructure, our biosecurity and the rest of that. Those are the elements that are there. NATO can encourage countries to do internal resilience, but that is not what its primary role should be.

- Q62 **Mr Francois:** Lord Robertson, you spoke a few minutes ago about the velocity of change that we now need to grow accustomed to. I do not know whether you are aware, sir, but just in the time that you have been giving very good evidence to this Committee, if I may say so, there is breaking news that the Russians have launched a major amphibious assault on Odesa, the outcome of which is not yet clear. I only mention it to emphasise your point about how quickly things are happening and that we need to adjust to them. You talked about a shock to the system. Can you give us a quick idea before the Chair concludes of how big a shock this has been within the UK security establishment?

Lord Robertson: Well, it's not easy for me to say that. I think it's self-evident that there is a shock to the system. The intelligence suggested that the Russians were going to invade, but people thought that it was so much against their interests that it probably wasn't going to happen. Indeed, the Russian ambassador in London wrote to me basically suggesting that as well, and I'm not sure whether Xi Jinping, President of China, was informed by President Putin that he was actually going to do it, rather than threatening. There is a big shock to the system.

In terms of Odesa, which I visited while I was NATO Secretary-General, you can see why the Russians are wanting to cut off Ukraine from the sea and why they want that corridor from Donetsk and Luhansk right round through Crimea and into Odesa. They will clearly try to gain as much territory as they can before any negotiations over a peace deal take place. But I think we have got to remain absolutely resolute here. They have got the amphibious forces to do it, but they will do it at a cost—a very substantial cost, as well. And I'm not sure whether they have actually measured whether in military terms you can have your forces deployed against Kyiv in the north and Odesa in the south, and still manage to retain it.

What I am certain of is that there is no way that the Russian Federation can hold on to or occupy those parts of Ukraine that it has taken, so it's a very short-term objective that they have set themselves at the moment.

- Q63 **Chair:** Just to bring this together, the focus of our study today is UK, US and NATO relationships. How would you currently define the US-UK relationship? Do you think there is perhaps a requirement for us to upgrade the back-channels, the statecraft, the ability to concur with each other, to lean in and support? Is there space for that?

Lord Robertson: I think we should always be learning and we should always be building as many channels as are possible. Inevitably, given the



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American system, there are learning curves and despite the fact that President Biden is such a long-standing supporter of NATO and the alliance, and an expert at foreign policy, after the Afghanistan exit I think that even there the learning curve had to be adopted.

We need to be patient with America and its relationship with Europe, but I think the shock effect of Ukraine has welded the Americans now to the future of Europe in a way that we could not have possibly imagined six months ago. The lessons of Afghanistan and the exit from Afghanistan, combined with Ukraine, mean that we are now much more of a coherent security organisation.

I think Britain has got to play its part in that. We're not as useful as we were, when we were part of the European Union—not as useful to the United States as being a voice inside the European Union. But we need to establish connections and make sure that in other ways we are seen to be valuable and important to them in the context of the transatlantic alliance.

Q64 Chair: I think the transatlantic alliance is critical. As an asset, NATO is formidable; the question is how it is utilised. That then goes into the political dimension here, of making the political judgments to lean in into what is actually happening, taking greater risk. That then requires leadership. That is what I am getting at here. It is whether we need to see a greater strengthening of the relationship—the special relationship—between Washington and No. 10.

Lord Robertson: We need to do that—absolutely. I agree. We need to be on the same page, as much as we possibly can, in order to increase our own clout but also to make sure that America doesn't slide back towards their isolationism, as has been characterised in the future.

However, it also means that we cannot just pay lip service to the alliance and to NATO. Review after review says that NATO is the cornerstone of our security, but when it comes down to disseminating information about NATO in this country, we are actually pretty pathetic at doing it. Over the years, I have criticised the fact that we do not use the NATO information office material on a day-to-day basis. We do not have anything like the Atlantic Council of the United States, which is a dramatically good vehicle for making sure the transatlantic relationship stays alive.

For example, the material that has been produced by the NATO information office about dealing with the Russian lies and their disinformation about the history of the relationship with Russia should be given to every Member of Parliament and every Member of the House of Lords. It should be given to every newspaper in the country, but we have a tendency to say, "Well, it's on the website." That is the equivalent of saying it is off the record.

Q65 Chair: I am sure I speak for the Committee when I say we would all like to see Britain take on a leadership role to advance what we have done in the past, stepping forward and influencing beyond just the UK itself. The Defence Intelligence service has done a great job in outlining where



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things are with the information it has provided. You mentioned Kosovo; I remember that Jamie Shea gave a daily detailed report and kept the nations up to date with what was going on. It took people with them, and maybe we should be doing something similar, particularly if it is part of a bigger package.

That leads me on to my final question, if you like: what sits behind Russia? Have we entered a turning point in our history with this alliance developing between Russia and China? I do not believe for a second that Russia would have advanced any of this without President Putin first checking with President Xi that this was a direction of travel that got his approval.

Lord Robertson: I do not think President Xi can be very happy at all about what is happening, and I frankly do not think he was told that this was going to happen. China does not believe in breakaway provinces. China has never recognised the annexation of Crimea, South Ossetia or Abkhazia, which is quite remarkable when you consider it. It believes in the sovereignty of individual nation states, so it cannot be at all happy with the unilateralism that has been undertaken by President Putin.

Maybe they feel that at the present time, they have to go along with President Putin given the nature of the agreement they seem to have come to around the Winter Olympic games, but I can imagine that in Chinese circles, there is a really serious worry that China has been dragged into a conflict with the west, and maybe even a trade conflict with America and the European Union, that is not on Chinese terms but on Putin's terms. It may well have fractured that linkage between the two countries at the present moment.

It remains to be seen how things will work out in the end, but I think we have to be wary about the fact that the two big authoritarian regimes in the world have come so close together. Again, that changes the relationships that we will have to deal with after Ukraine. It may well mean that we have to be very specific about the way in which we handle that kind of relationship in the future.

Q66 **Chair:** That is where I was wanting the question to go, because Russia and China think in decades, whereas we think in much shorter-term periods—almost in election cycles. Russia and China have a mutual dislike for the west. They do not like the way that America dominates the international rules-based order, and there is a mutual relationship they can have: buying and selling each other's oil and gas, moving it to China. That is the bigger concern that NATO needs to start to address, isn't it?

Lord Robertson: Yes. We have to watch that very, very carefully indeed, but Ukraine may well have damaged that particular relationship. I just don't believe that this suits the Xi Jinping rulebook. I don't think that that was part and parcel of what he expected that future relationship to be. It is not exactly a relationship of equals in any event, and there are a number of voices in China that are going to be very sceptical about supporting this kind of unilateralism at the moment.



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In the last couple of days, we have seen a quasi-official article be published from China that basically said that the Government of China should abandon President Putin at the moment and force a peace deal to get away from what they consider to be a failed expedition into Ukraine. Again, it is part and parcel of the new world that we are embarking upon.

That is why, in a way, our foreign policy matters as well. Perhaps up to now we have tended to see China policy based on dealing with Xi Jinping and Russia policy based on dealing with President Putin, rather than with their people. I think we have to somehow reach across the heads of these particular authoritarians to get to the people themselves, and that requires a little bit of imagination. These authoritarians are not going to be there forever, but the people will be.

Chair: I understand that the advice to the Chinese in Ukraine when the invasion actually started was, "Put a Chinese flag in your window," because the briefing was that Ukraine would be liberated and, "As long as you have a Chinese flag there, you can stay put and nothing will happen to you." That advice was quickly superseded by, "Get out of the country. The invasion has not gone according to plan. This isn't any form of liberation." That prompts all sorts of questions about how even China interpreted how potential invasion would roll out. There are clearly huge questions for NATO in the longer term about Russia and China.

Lord Robertson, thank you very much indeed for your time this afternoon. This has been most informative, with your vast experience leading us in not only about what has happened in the past, but where we go in future. It has let us better understand the relationships between the UK, the US and NATO. We are grateful to you. I thank the Committee staff and my Committee members. That concludes today's hearing.