



House of Commons
Defence Committee

Russia: Implications for UK defence and security

First Report of Session 2016–17



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security**

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*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 28 June 2016*

HC 107

Published on 5 July 2016
by authority of the House of Commons

The Defence Committee

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Summary

Since the end of the Cold War, UK policy has been built on the foundation of a stable Europe in which the threat to NATO members is low. Russia's annexation of Crimea and military intervention in eastern Ukraine represent the biggest challenge to this stability.

The fact that NATO and the UK were 'taken by surprise' raises two key questions:

- (1) Whether we fully understand the nature of Russian military policy, strategy and doctrine (including its use of multidimensional warfare techniques such as ambiguity, disinformation and plausible deniability);
- (2) Whether we underestimated President Putin's intentions, and his willingness to enforce and maintain a sphere of influence beyond Russia's own frontiers.

Whilst Ukraine is not a member of NATO, Russia's actions in that country sent shockwaves through NATO member states which border Russia, particularly the Baltic States. Article 5 of the NATO Treaty seeks to protect its members by promising that an attack on one member state will be considered an attack against all and that NATO will respond accordingly. To be an effective deterrent, this guarantee must be credible—and such credibility depends upon extending NATO membership only to countries in defence of which we can realistically threaten to use military force.

Russia has also exhibited threatening behaviour towards NATO members including the UK. Russian military aircraft have repeatedly flown close to British and NATO airspace, prompting RAF interception on a number of occasions. Trends have developed very quickly. It gives us no pleasure to report that Russia appears to be using many of the old Soviet tactics and approaches once again.

The UK and NATO need to have adequate military capability and the capacity to deter, and where necessary confront, aggressive Russian moves. The creation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) among NATO member states is a step in the right direction, as is the Enhanced Forward Presence on NATO's contested eastern flank. By demonstrating an ability to respond effectively, even to a surprise attack, both should contribute to a message of resolve and therefore deterrence.

However, the VJTF has only just been formed and we are not yet convinced that it can guarantee to deploy the necessary forces within the required time-frame. We were told that Russia could mobilise up to 13,000 troops within 48 hours and an additional 30,000 within the next two days. The Government must set out how the VJTF could counter this.

In response to the annexation of Crimea, the EU imposed sanctions on Russia. While these have had a negative impact on the Russian economy, they have not dissuaded further military intervention. We support the renewal of these sanctions in July. We also urge the Government to increase targeted sanctions against members of the Russian leadership.

Russia has demonstrated its determination to intervene, politically and militarily, in the conflict in Syria and shows little sign of ending its support for the Assad regime. This has the potential to reduce the impact of the coalition's efforts to remove DAESH. It is not possible to exclude Russia from the region. Therefore, means must be found to cooperate where there are shared political objectives and to put to the test Russia's claims

to contribute to the downfall of DAESH. It is perfectly possible to confront and constrain an adversary in a region where our interests clash, whilst cooperating with him, to some degree, in a region where they coincide.

Dialogue between the UK and Russia is currently extremely sparse. We were told that relations were at an 'all time low'. Our visit to Moscow in April demonstrated this at first hand with only limited engagement by the Russian Administration. This needs to change. While we cannot assume that Russia wishes to retain a stance of limited communication, the UK must demonstrate a willingness to engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue. We cannot hope for mutual understanding between ourselves and Russia if we do not have a meaningful dialogue, and under current conditions of mistrust we run the risk of a descent into conflict that may be preventable through better communication.

The UK must urgently boost its cadre of Russian specialists and ensure that it maintains a high level of expertise for the foreseeable future. Given the current climate, the Defence Attaché's office in Moscow must be properly staffed.

1 Introduction

The importance of Russia

1. Russia is one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, a member of the G-20 and G-8 and is consistently ranked in the top three producers and net exporters of both crude oil and natural gas.¹ As we heard on our visit to Moscow, Russia has the largest deployed nuclear arsenal worldwide, and is rapidly re-establishing itself as an increasingly capable and active military power. The West's policies towards Russia are therefore of strategic importance both to the United Kingdom and to its allies.

The demise of UK–Russia relations

2. The cooperation between the UK and the Soviet Union in the World War II defeat of Germany is remembered by many. And, since the early 1990s, Russia has even been regarded by the UK and NATO as a potential ally and strategic partner.² However, this expectation has been challenged by Russian military re-assertiveness under President Vladimir Putin, exemplified by the annexation of Crimea. UK-Russia relations are now at an 'all-time low': the most strained since the Cold War. Trust has eroded and dialogue, where it continues, is often at cross-purposes. In the words of the Russian Ambassador to the UK, "forums for discussion of mutual interests are frozen".³ This was evident during a recent visit to Moscow in which it proved difficult to secure official meetings. Russia is now considered by the UK to be a strategic competitor, rather than a strategic partner.⁴

3. Russian military actions present a strategic challenge to the UK and to our defence partners in NATO—and we cannot deal with this by crisis management.⁵ Instead we need to understand better the nature of current Russian military doctrine, and the values which underpin it. The Government's response to the previous Committee's report on this topic agreed that NATO must comprehend the challenges posed by Russia, and have the ability to respond to them.⁶ In the light of recent Russian actions, this statement is even more pertinent now.

Our inquiry

4. Our inquiry examines Russia's increasing military capability and its changing intent—made evident by its actions in Crimea, Ukraine and Syria. We focus on how the UK and NATO should respond in order to deter and counter aggression and navigate away from the precipitous escalation of current tensions. Of primary importance is the need for greater understanding as the basis for a more informed strategy, and for better communication and dialogue to avoid unintended escalation to open conflict.

1 International Energy Agency, *Key World Energy Statistics 2015*, 2015

2 NATO, *Deterrence and Defence Posture review*, 2012

3 'Britain has frozen us out, says Russian envoy', The Times, 26 October 2015

4 Ministry of Defence (RUS0006), para 4

5 Chris Donnelly, (RUS0018)

6 Defence Committee, Ninth Special Report of Session 2014-15, *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two—NATO*, HC 755

5. During the course of our inquiry we received written evidence from 18 individuals and organisations, and held four oral evidence sessions. We are grateful to all who have engaged with, and contributed to, our inquiry. In April 2016, we visited Moscow, where we met a diverse range of interlocutors including Russian parliamentarians, opposition politicians, human rights activists and retired military personnel. Despite continued requests for meetings with members of the Russian Government, their engagement with our visit was, at best, limited.

2 The Russian military today

Introduction

6. The ideological confrontation of today between Russia and the West does not manifest itself as capitalism versus communism, but rather as a “clash of values and beliefs in the 21st century”⁷; with a starkly different interpretation and implementation of the rules-based order and military adherence to the Law of Armed Conflict, including the protection of civilians.

7. This chapter examines the growth of Russian military capability, in its various forms, and the Russian mind-set that underpins it. We also consider the way in which Russia views the current post-Cold War international order, and its place within it.

The Russian mind-set

8. There is a sense within Russia of ill-treatment by the West following the demise of the Soviet Union. This perceived lack of respect by the West has led Russia to the conclusion that, if it cannot compete within the political arena, it must “fight for its interests by whatever means available”⁸, including a primary focus on the military sphere.⁹ James Sherr, Associate Fellow of Chatham House, said Russia had:

A very strong inclination and belief that defence, in the Darwinian world the Russians think they find themselves in, has to be proactive defence and therefore has to start well beyond even the territories we have been discussing.¹⁰

Dr Bobo Lo, an independent analyst and Associate Fellow of Chatham House, went further. He summarised the Russian political philosophy in the following terms:

President Putin and many in the Russian political elite take a very Hobbesian view of the world: the world is a harsh place—the strong prosper, the weak get crushed.¹¹

9. It should also be noted that the Russian perception of the world is one riven by instability and threats, many of which are uncomfortably close to its borders¹². A recurring feature of the Russian narrative is that of ‘spheres of influence’, and the desire to exercise control over neighbouring countries to create a buffer zone in order to ensure Russia’s own security in territory which is largely without natural barriers. However, this is in direct opposition to the Western notion of sovereignty. Keir Giles, Associate Fellow of Chatham House, explained:

There is a direct conflict between our notions that the states on Russia’s periphery should be sovereign, independent and able to decide their own

7 [Q80](#)

8 [Q42](#)

9 [Q41](#)

10 [Q6](#) [James Sherr]

11 [Q42](#)

12 Andrew Monaghan, ‘[Moscow will see the SDSR as a challenge](#)’, 9 December 2015

future, and the Russian notion that in order to ensure its own security, it needs to control and dominate substantial depth beyond its borders in order to protect it from approaches to them. That is a binary choice.¹³

10. In this context, Russia views NATO expansion not as a free choice by sovereign states but as a policy of ‘encirclement’ by the West. The 2015 Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation stated that a main external military risk was a “build-up of the power potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)” and the military infrastructure of NATO member states moving nearer to the borders of the Russian Federation.¹⁴ Furthermore, the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit had raised the possibility of future NATO membership of Georgia and Ukraine.¹⁵ Although this did not materialise, it has been used as a key factor to justify the expansion of the Russian military. Russia believes that any further enlargement of NATO would constitute a breach of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act. We were told in Moscow that the Russian leadership believed that NATO had committed to limit further enlargement to the East, and that any changes to the Act were a betrayal of it. NATO rejects this interpretation. No such wording exists within the text of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, but Russian officials claim that a verbal promise was made to this effect. Whether encirclement is a genuine belief within Russia is open to question, given its lack of stated concern about encirclement on its eastern border with China. However, it has become a mantra which has begun to drive policy, just as it did during the long years of the Cold War.

11. Speaking at a session of the Russian Parliament in March 2014, President Vladimir Putin made his views on this clear:

They [NATO] have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, and placed before us an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO’s expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders.¹⁶

12. According to Keir Giles, a current overriding policy for Russia is to ensure that it can prevail in any conflict with the West and that, in its perception, such a conflict “has already begun”.¹⁷ This view was reinforced by Peter Pomerantsev, Senior Fellow of the Legatum Institute, who argued:

Whether they [the Russian Administration] see NATO as a genuine threat almost doesn’t matter; they really want a fight, and they will have one. They want it on their own terms, too.¹⁸

Mobilisation of the Russian state

13. At a 2013 Moscow security conference, General Valeriy Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff and a leading military theorist, stated that by 2030 the level of “existing and potential threats will significantly increase”, and that, given such challenges,

13 [Q6](#) [Keir Giles]

14 [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation](#), December 2015

15 NATO, [Bucharest Summit Declaration](#), 3 April 2008

16 [‘Putin says Russia will protect the rights of Russians abroad’](#), The Washington Post, 18 March 2014

17 [Q5](#)

18 [Q76](#)

Russia's weaponry reserves constituted a "vital condition for the country's existence".¹⁹ This was reflected in Russia's latest national security strategy signed by President Putin on New Year's Eve 2015²⁰ which upgraded NATO to a military threat.²¹ Dr Andrew Monaghan, Senior Fellow of Chatham House, told us that Russia was mobilising the state in response to that perceived threat:

Russia often doesn't work very well; it is quite difficult to create power. This is why a certain sense of mobilisation is visible in Russian politics. By that, I mean emergency measures to prepare the state in case of international conflict, in case of a threat to Russia.²²

He concluded that the Russians were "actually in the midst of preparation for war".²³

14. Russian mobilisation incorporates many forms of non-traditional weaponry—amongst them, economics. In September 2014, a Russian business newspaper, *Vedemosti*, reported the creation of a 2015–17 'mobilisation budget' created by the Russian Ministry of Finance.²⁴ This demonstrated that, despite a worsening economic landscape within Russia, defence and security continued to be prioritised by the leadership.

15. In April 2016, Russia announced the creation of a large new military formation, the 'National Guard'. The National Guard will incorporate Special Forces and Interior Ministry troops into a single force of considerable size. Whilst exact assessments vary, when we were in Moscow we were told that it was expected to be in the 'hundreds of thousands'. Of real significance is the fact that the National Guard will be answerable directly to President Putin, placing key aspects of Russian defence and security machinery directly under Presidential control.

16. The implications of the National Guard for the future of Russian defence, governance and national security are striking. The Secretary of State for Defence, Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP, warned that it reflected a more aggressively militarised and more authoritarian Russian society:

Two things particularly worry us about the formation of the National Guard: one is that it comes under the direct control of the President, and not through a normal ministerial responsibility; and the other is that although it is there to help to combat terrorism and deal with organised crime, it also has a remit to control protests, which, I think, sends a rather chilling message to wider Russian society that the regime is no longer prepared to tolerate any kind of overt opposition.²⁵

19 *'Russia may be drawn into resource wars in future - army chief'* Russia Today, 14 February 2013; Dr Andrew Monaghan, *'Russian State Mobilization: Moving the Country on to a War Footing'*, 20 May 2016

20 *'Putin names NATO amongst threats in new Russian security strategy'*, The Financial Times, 2 January 2016

21 [Q7](#)

22 [Q87](#)

23 [Q96](#)

24 Dr Andrew Monaghan, *'Russia's World: Facing a century of instability'*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) Brief Issue, March 2016

25 [Q245](#)

17. Furthermore, as Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS)-designate Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach noted:

You also now have the prospect of many different types of armed groups in Russia, armed by the state. So it is a worrying development.²⁶

18. **Whilst Russia cites self-defence against NATO expansion as a reason for its increased military spending, its rapid militarisation can, alternatively, be viewed as mobilisation against not only external threats but also internal dissent. Recent Russian actions and statements by senior figures imply that Russia is reinforcing itself for the prospect of future conflict with the West. If the West does not respond appropriately to such actions, it will be poorly equipped to deter such a conflict or successfully resist if one breaks out. *The MoD must set out its plans, as part of its broader strategy towards Russia, to acknowledge the rapid militarisation of the Russian state and develop measures to counter it, including the fulfilment of its promise in the SDSR to lead a renewed focus in NATO on deterrence. The Warsaw Summit is the opportunity to do so.***

Russian military expansion

19. Alongside this mobilisation of the state, Russia has been engaged in a comprehensive programme of modernisation of its regular Armed Forces. This process began after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Keir Giles told us that the conflict demonstrated to the Russian leadership, the need for a severe overhaul of the military:

There has been total reorganisation and enormous amounts of money have been thrown at it. It is a fairly ruthless prosecution of their transformation aims.²⁷

20. Russia's modernisation programme has been facilitated by an increased allocation of resources. In contrast to the UK pledge to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence (reaffirmed at the 2014 NATO Summit²⁸ and in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review,²⁹) Russian defence spending has steadily increased as a percentage of GDP from 4.2% in 2013, to nearly 4.5% in 2014 and 5.4% in 2015. Because of a worsening economy, however, its actual expenditure has decreased from US\$88.4 billion to US\$66.4 billion during that period.³⁰

Russian conventional military capability

21. Dr Igor Sutyagin, of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), told us that Russia had the ability to raise up to 47,000 troops in 48 hours, deploy up to 60,000 combat troops within two to three weeks and sustain this for six to 12 months. By contrast, Dr Sutyagin estimated that the existing NATO Joint Readiness Task Force could deploy only "5,000 elements" within four days.³¹

26 [Q245](#)

27 [Q2](#)

28 [Wales Summit Declaration](#), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 5 September 2014

29 [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review \(SDSR\)](#), HM Government, November 2015

30 [SIPRI Military Expenditure Database](#), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2015

31 [Q33](#)

22. Dr Sutyagin also highlighted the quick deployability of the Russian high-readiness troops. Within 48 hours, Russia could mobilise and deploy between 11,000 and 13,000 light infantry and reconnaissance troops, consisting of approximately 12 battalion tactical groups and 14 to 18 battalions of special reconnaissance units—*Spetsnaz*. Within an additional 24 to 48 hours, this could be reinforced by 24 motorised rifle units and up to five tank battalions, offering up to 30,000 additional troops supported by 120 to 150 artillery pieces and up to 150 battle tanks.³²

23. Despite the fact that Russian forces include conscripts who serve just one year,³³ the Russian Armed Forces have shown impressive deployment abilities in Crimea and Ukraine, the effectiveness of which was enhanced by the use of integrated, unconventional warfare techniques.

24. Air Chief Marshal Peach noted other areas of Russian proficiency:

Russia has a long history of investment in air defence systems, which require us to respond in Alliance terms for security, as well as for defence in terms of electronic warfare. It also has a long history of investment in artillery systems; of course, we have our own artillery systems, but there is no doubt that the level of stockholding is significant.³⁴

The Secretary of State for Defence concluded:

Russia has invested recently in its armed forces and has modernised its armed forces. To that extent, the threat from Russia has increased.³⁵

25. The expansion of the Russian military machine and recent Russian military engagements have been well-documented. Such actions are likely to be motivated—at least in part—in pursuit of greater recognition and respect for Russia as a world power. NATO's response to Russia's military expansion must therefore be nuanced. A hesitant response will be perceived by Russia as weakness, while facing Russia down may exacerbate antagonism between the two. A robust, clearly communicated response is required by the UK and NATO.

Nuclear weapons: Russia's strategy

26. Russian nuclear doctrine has changed fundamentally since the end of the Cold War. In 1993, Russia revoked the Soviet commitment to 'no first use'.³⁶ This development was formalised in the 2000 Russian Military Doctrine, which made clear a willingness to use nuclear weapons in response to an adversary deploying conventional weapons "in situations critical to the national security of the Russian Federation."³⁷ Throughout the Cold War, its conventional superiority had enabled the then Soviet Union to proclaim a nuclear 'no first use' policy, whilst putting pressure on NATO to follow suit.

32 [Q33](#)

33 [Q38](#)

34 [Q199](#)

35 [Q164](#)

36 Alexei Arbatov, '*Russian Military Doctrine and Strategic Nuclear Forces to the Year 2000 and Beyond*', Russian Nuclear Doctrine and Policy, 1997

37 [Q147](#)

27. Prior to the publication of the 2010 military doctrine, former FSB head Nikolai Patrushev stated that Russia would:

Adjust the preconditions for using nuclear weapons to repulse aggression that employs conventional weapons, and this applies not only to large-scale wars, but also to regional and even local wars.³⁸

28. Despite the absence of such language in the 2010 military doctrine, these comments can be interpreted as indicative of Russian thinking—and represent a very serious lowering of the nuclear threshold. In Moscow, we were told that Russia retains the right to use nuclear weapons first because of NATO's military superiority. This appears to be a clear message that Russia will utilise its nuclear capability while hiding behind a claim of military threat from NATO. David Clark, of the Institute for Statecraft, told us:

Russia has been quite willing to issue in some cases very overt nuclear threats to make it clear that, were the West to intervene in any serious way, they would be prepared to escalate to the use of nuclear weapons to, as they would see it, deescalate—they would use tactical nuclear weapons to dissuade us from going any further.³⁹

These comments were echoed by James Sherr⁴⁰ and Dr Madeira,⁴¹ while Keir Giles pointed out that, unlike NATO, nuclear weapons were built into operational planning in the Russian military.⁴²

29. Peter Watkins, Director General Security Policy at the Ministry of Defence, agreed:

The language around nuclear weapons in [Russia's] Military Doctrine and published National Security Strategy is relatively limited, but there have been a number of statements that suggest they would use nuclear weapons or contemplate the use of nuclear weapons in circumstances that we certainly wouldn't.⁴³

30. A clear example of this approach can be seen in Russia's 'Zapad' exercise in 2009 which culminated with a 'simulated' nuclear strike on Warsaw—a clear example of this policy in action.⁴⁴ The notional result of this exercise was to terminate the conflict successfully by discouraging NATO escalation. However, it is far from certain that Russia would initiate escalation from conventional to nuclear warfare in reality, faced with the prospect of NATO retaliation in kind.

31. Unfortunately, at the time of drafting this Report, Parliament had still not held the long-promised debate on the future of the UK strategic nuclear deterrent. This can create uncertainty as to Britain's resolve and it would accordingly be desirable for the vote in Parliament to be held before the summer recess to confirm the desirability, cost-effectiveness and affordability of the Successor programme. Despite this, the Secretary of

38 [Q147](#)

39 [Q147](#)

40 [Q15](#)

41 [Q80](#)

42 [Q15](#)

43 [Q181](#)

44 [Q15](#); ['Russia 'simulates' nuclear attack on Poland'](#), The Telegraph, 1 November 2009

State for Defence emphasised the importance of Parliament approving “the principle of the nuclear deterrent and the four boats that are necessary to sustain it” and stated that the debate would be held before the end of 2016.⁴⁵

32. Russia’s strategy for its nuclear arsenal is an integrated component of its stated military doctrine. The UK and NATO must review their own nuclear doctrine, in the light of the Russian position, to ensure that it maintains the ability to deter Russian nuclear threats. We recommend that the UK Government set out its timetable for the parliamentary debate and decision on the Successor programme in response to this Report and without further delay.

Treaty obligations

33. The US–Russia 2010 *Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms* Treaty, or ‘New START’, can be seen as relatively successful: Russia appears to be meeting its commitments to limit numbers of warheads and delivery vehicles and is on-course to meet its Treaty obligations by 2018.⁴⁶ However, the longstanding *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces*, or INF treaty, signed by the Soviet Union and United States in 1987 is more contentious. In 2014, the US formally declared Russia in breach of the Treaty, which prohibits both the deployment of ground-based nuclear missiles with a range of between 500 and 550 kilometres and the testing of missiles from mobile launchers.⁴⁷

34. Russia denies violation of the Treaty, and has in turn claimed that US activation of a European missile defence shield in Romania is in violation of the Treaty.⁴⁸ It seems that Russia no longer believes that the terms of the Treaty fulfil its interests. This was highlighted by President Putin’s boycott of the 2016 nuclear summit in Washington. In oral evidence David Clark stated that:

Russian cooperation with the nuclear threat reduction programme has been halted—it was one of the casualties of the Ukraine crisis—so it is not cooperating on nuclear safety and dismantling in the way that it has been since the 1990s. Its attitude is a rejectionist one on arms control at the moment.⁴⁹

35. Ben Nimmo, Senior Fellow of the Institute for Statecraft and former NATO press officer, said that this approach may result from a fear in Russia that the US’s conventional technological edge would allow the Americans to “be able to achieve an equivalent to nuclear effect without going nuclear.”⁵⁰ According to James Sherr, the Russian nuclear doctrine is one of offensive deterrence and NATO must now develop strategies to counter and deter that threat.⁵¹

36. It is alarming if Russia is in breach of the terms of the 1987 INF Treaty which is crucial to Euro-Atlantic security and stability. The UK and US governments, in

45 [Q186](#)

46 [Q156](#)

47 [Q156](#)

48 ‘*Russia says US missile system breaches nuclear INF treaty*’, BBC News, 11 May 2016

49 [Q158](#)

50 [Q154](#)

51 [Q15](#)

conjunction with other NATO members at the Warsaw Summit, should determine a course of action either on how to repair the Treaty, or whether an alternative strategic settlement is required to maintain stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.

Russian unconventional capability

37. Unconventional—or multi-dimensional—warfare combines military might with deception and can include any of the following aspects: cyber; economic measures; espionage, subversion and surveillance; energy; language and culture; propaganda and disinformation; psychological operations; deception and organised crime.⁵²

38. The Russian practice of '*Maskirovka*'—military deception—is centuries old and has been present in Russian warfare doctrines from the strategic to the tactical levels since the 1920s.⁵³ What is new is the increased emphasis of this tool at the political and diplomatic levels, making it a prominent Russian method of warfare in the information age. Both the 2013 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and 2014 review of Russian military strategy confirmed strategic ambiguous warfare as a key doctrine of the Russian Armed Forces.⁵⁴ In oral evidence, James Sherr explained:

What we now call hybrid warfare, conventional war and nuclear war, for the Russians, are not discrete and separate components of conflict, but integrated instruments and dimensions in what should be a coherent and seamless web.⁵⁵

39. During the course of our inquiry we were told that the primary aim of Russian multi-dimensional warfare was to:

Destabilise other countries without necessarily putting troops in. Crimea was actually an exception. It had symbolic value—again, psychological value—but actually, the whole idea is how you destroy another country without ever touching it.⁵⁶

Disinformation

40. Media outlets such as the state-owned *Russia Today (RT)* and *Sputnik*—a Russian press agency operating in major foreign cities—have been used to spread propaganda.⁵⁷ We heard that Russia spent between US\$600 million to \$1 billion annually on official outlets like *RT*. John Lough, Associate Fellow of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House, told us that the policy of disinformation went wider than state-owned media:

Where I think the danger lies is not so much with RT, but with the efforts of, let's say, other agents of the Russian state who are looking to influence the opinion of security specialists, people in think-tanks, academics and maybe even some journalists about these broader issues.⁵⁸

52 Chris Donnelly, [\(RUS0018\)](#)

53 '*Disquiet in Baltics over Sympathies of Russian Speakers*', Reuters, 23 March 2014

54 General Valery Gerasimov, '*The Value of Science in Prediction*', 27 February 2013; [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation](#), December 2015;

55 [Q2](#)

56 [Q75](#)

57 '*Russia launches 'Sputnik' media offensive to counter US propaganda*', The Telegraph, 10 November 2014

58 [Q119](#)

41. Mark Laity, Chief of Strategic Communications, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), explained to us how Russia's policy worked:

The Russians use information from a covert stage through six phases of warfare to the re-establishment of victory. Information confrontation is conducted in every phase, including covertly, in peace and in war. Our doctrines do not allow us to do a lot of this stuff till the fighting basically starts.⁵⁹

One recent example of disinformation was public criticism by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that evidence to our inquiry was designed to intimidate the UK population about a mythical Russian threat and to dig up old Cold War enmities.⁶⁰ It was not explained that representatives of the Russian Government, both in London and in Moscow, had declined our invitations to give evidence to this inquiry.

42. As with its nuclear policy, Russia's policy on disinformation is a fully integrated element of its military and defence arsenal. Mr Laity further noted:

If you look at what they [Russia] did when they annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine, the information line of effort was fundamental, not just to give them a strategic narrative to try to justify what they did, but to use information to deceive, delay and disrupt, like a smokescreen.⁶¹

He added that in Crimea in 2014:

They just wanted to achieve an effect. President Putin lied about Crimea, and a year later he admitted that he had lied. Why did he do that? Because it didn't matter anymore. The operational aspect is overarching.⁶²

43. The way in which Russian disinformation has been employed to prepare the domestic environment in Russia for potential conflict is comprehensive and effective. Extended public exposure to disinformation campaigns—such as the depiction of NATO as a common enemy against which to unite the Russian public—has had the result of reducing public dissent in general and objection to military endeavours in particular. Peter Pomerantsev, Senior Fellow of the Legatum Institute, noted:

This is an imaginary enemy that they first want to conjure up [...] and then defeat them, because NATO is not going to do anything. It is a perfect duel. It is the great narrative of Russia fighting against imaginary enemies, which is how it is used in the information space.⁶³

59 [Q22](#)

60 [‘About the British Parliament report on ‘information war’](#)’, Maria Zakharova, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 6 April 2016

61 [Q20](#)

62 [Q28](#)

63 [Q76](#)

Cyber

44. Over the past 10 years, Russia has demonstrated a willingness to employ offensive cyber tactics against Western states including Estonia in 2007,⁶⁴ a German steel mill in 2014, the French television station TV5 Monde and the German Bundestag in 2015.⁶⁵ Dr Bobo Lo noted that this was less a demonstration of “fantastic Russian technology” but more a “demonstration of Western vulnerability and carelessness”.⁶⁶ Dr Sutyagin commented:

The Russian approach is very aggressive, but they are just probing. They are trying [out] their capabilities now and it seems that they are rapidly improving them.⁶⁷

45. The Russian ability to rapidly enhance cyber capabilities is well-supported:

[Russia] still retains the core Soviet strength in the STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and mathematics. They are producing an inordinate number of skilful engineers, technicians and mathematicians, and that feeds into the cyber-realm.⁶⁸

46. Russian legal requirements also provide the military integration of cyber with a notable advantage over Western methods. Dr Sutyagin testified that, according to Russian law, all companies—including Western ones—operating within Russia must “disclose their basic codes to Russian security services, which means, for instance, that Google Gmail codes, coding and encryption that are closed for the British Government are open for the Russian Government.”⁶⁹ Such data accessibility within cyberspace provides Russia with the potential for a straightforward but unique asymmetrical advantage.

47. There is a notable distinction between the psychology underpinning Russian cyber usage and Western methods. Mr Pomerantsev told the Committee that Russia divided its cyber operations into two: “information-technical—cyber-attacks and DDOS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks—and information-psychological, which is using cyber to subvert other societies.”⁷⁰

48. A recurring theme in Russian military strategy is the ability to combine various tools seamlessly, to give a fully integrated, comprehensive approach. The Russian attitude to cyber as a tool of warfare is no different, with a full-spectrum approach integral to the strategy of the Russian Government.

64 ‘Estonia hit by ‘Moscow cyber war’’, BBC News, 17 May 2007

65 ‘Russian hackers accused of attacks on Bundestag and French TV broadcaster’, The Telegraph, 11 June 2015

66 Q66

67 Q64

68 Q91

69 Q68

70 Q68

3 Russian military actions

Introduction

49. Following on from Russian expansion of military capability, this chapter examines Russian military actions in: Crimea and Eastern Ukraine; Syria; the Arctic; the Baltic States, Central Asia and within Europe. Keir Giles, from Chatham House set out five main objectives of Russian military actions:

- maintaining the current leadership under President Vladimir Putin;
- ensuring Russia's success in potential conflict with the West;
- reinstating Russia's status as a global power;
- maintaining Russia's perception of its own security—a remit of political and economic influence around its periphery; and
- challenging Western cohesion and resolve, to weaken and deter.⁷¹

Dr Sutyagin, of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), summarised these objectives as the ambition to restore Russia's "fair place at the high table of world politics".⁷²

Ukraine

Crimean Peninsula

50. In February 2014, 'pro-Russian' groups seized buildings in Simferopol, the capital of Crimea. These troops were described by Russia Today as "similarly dressed and equipped to the local ethnic Russian 'self-defence squads'," ⁷³ shortly before a Crimean referendum returned 97% in favour of joining Russia—a result condemned by West as a sham.⁷⁴ It is widely accepted that these groups were composed of Russian Federation *Spetsnaz* (Special Forces), many of whom are thought to have been stationed in Crimea.

51. On 18 March 2014, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation was formally confirmed by the Russian Parliament. Peter Watkins, of the Ministry of Defence, described the annexation as "an egregious breach of international law" stating that it was "the first time that anything like that had happened since 1945".⁷⁵ This contrasted with the views of our interlocutors in Russia who told us that Crimea was Russian, and that within Russia it was now illegal to refer to its annexation. President Putin has commented:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. [...] The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian Empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol—a legendary city with an outstanding

⁷¹ Chris Donnelly, [\(RUS0018\)](#)

⁷² [Q41](#)

⁷³ 'Conflict fears rise after pro-Russian gunmen seize Crimean parliament', The Guardian, 28 February 2014

⁷⁴ 'Ukraine crisis: Timeline', BBC News, 13 November 2014

⁷⁵ [Q196](#)

story, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of the Black Sea Fleet. [...] [It is] dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.⁷⁶

This conformed to James Sherr's assessment of the Russian perception of the Crimea:

The Russians understand the strategic importance of Crimea and the Black Sea region very accurately. [...] Russia makes no distinction between Crimea and any other part of its own territory.⁷⁷

52. John Lough, of Chatham House, told us that Russia wanted to establish “de-facto recognition”⁷⁸ of a buffer zone on the periphery of the Russian Federation in which Russian interests exert a status of privilege. When he gave evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, Dr Monaghan said that Russia's actions were also based on a fear that it could lose its military presence in Sevastopol:

The Ukrainian Government in Kiev was renting out the main base at Sevastopol to them [the Russians] at a very, very high fee. One of their main strategic concerns was that the price would be raised yet further or that the deal would be cut entirely, and not only that but then the Ukrainian government might say: “Well, we will have NATO ships”.⁷⁹

53. Following extensive denial of Russian involvement, in March 2014 President Putin admitted the presence of Russian troops in Crimea prior to its annexation⁸⁰ and, when challenged in April 2014 about the existence of ‘little green men’, Mr Putin further admitted:

In my conversations with foreign colleagues I did not hide the fact that our goal was to ensure proper conditions for the people of Crimea to be able to freely express their will. And so we had to take the necessary measures in order to prevent the situation in Crimea unfolding the way it is now unfolding in south-eastern Ukraine. We didn't want any tanks, any nationalist combat units or people with extreme views armed with automatic weapons. Of course, the Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defence forces. They acted in a civil but a decisive and professional manner.⁸¹

Eastern Ukraine

54. Russian military action in Ukraine is noted to have been exacerbated by the February 2014 Ukrainian move to ban Russian as the official second language in schools. Although this was subsequently overturned, it has been used by Russia as a reason to ‘protect’ ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine.⁸² Russia also objected to the prospect of Ukraine signing

76 *‘Crimea crisis: Russian President Putin’s speech annotated’*, BBC News, 18 March 2014

77 [Q10](#)

78 [Q131](#)

79 [Q19](#), Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday 3 May 2016, HC 661 [Dr Monaghan]

80 *‘Putin’s Confessions on Crimea Expose Kremlin Media’*, Time Magazine, 20 March 2015

81 *Direct line with Vladimir Putin*, Official internet Resources of the President of Russia, 17 April 2014

82 *‘Ukraine Crisis: Timeline’*, BBC News, 13 November 2014

an Association Agreement with the EU which it saw as a step towards EU membership. While negotiations for an Association Agreement with the EU began as early as 2007,⁸³ they were not finalised until June 2014.

55. Talks between Russia, Ukraine, the US and the EU in Geneva to de-escalate the military crisis in April 2014 were unsuccessful.⁸⁴ As a result, following referendums in eastern Ukraine, pro-Russian separatists declared independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. President Putin rejected accusations of Russia “being behind protests in eastern Ukraine”:

Nonsense. There are no Russian units in eastern Ukraine—no special services, no tactical advisors. All this is being done by the local residents. [...] So I told my Western partners, “They have nowhere to go, and they won’t leave. This is their land and you need to negotiate with them.”⁸⁵

However, in August 2014, the Ukrainian government released footage of captured Russian paratroopers as evidence formally identifying Russian involvement.⁸⁶

56. In September 2014 a peace agreement was signed in Minsk between the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), pro-Russian rebels, Ukraine and Russia. Following the Agreement, Russian troops were reported to have withdrawn from eastern Ukraine later that month.⁸⁷ Despite this, in November 2014, NATO commander General Philip Breedlove reported that Russian combat troops, and military equipment, had been observed entering Ukraine.⁸⁸

57. Talks then collapsed in January 2015 due to accusations by both the Ukrainian Government and the pro-Russian separatists of unreasonable ultimatums issued by each other,⁸⁹ only for the Minsk Agreement to be reinstated in February 2015 when Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France formalised a deal to end the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

58. The existence of Russian ‘military specialists’ in eastern Ukraine was finally acknowledged in December 2015.⁹⁰ Speaking at the Kremlin’s annual news conference, Mr Putin stated:

We’ve never said there are no people there [in Ukraine] who deal with certain matters, including in the military area, but this does not mean that regular Russian troops are present there. Feel the difference.⁹¹

59. Russian actions in Ukraine have created a deep instability within Europe of a type not witnessed since the end of the Cold War. This is a problem for Europe in general and for the NATO alliance in particular. While Ukraine is not a member of NATO and therefore not subject to Article 5 guarantees, it was guaranteed by the Budapest

83 [Q220](#)

84 [‘Ukraine crisis: Deal to de-escalate agreed in Geneva’](#), BBC News, 17 April 2014

85 [Direct line with Vladimir Putin](#), Official internet Resources of the President of Russia, 17 April 2014

86 [‘Russian soldiers’ capture in Ukraine threatens to cloud Putin-Poroshenko talks’](#), The Telegraph, 26 August 2014

87 [‘NATO Commander concerned by armoured convoys entering Ukraine from Russia’](#), Reuters, 11 November 2014

88 [‘NATO Commander concerned by armoured convoys entering Ukraine from Russia’](#), Reuters, 11 November 2014

89 [‘Ukraine crisis: Timeline of major events’](#), BBC News, 5 March 2015

90 [‘Putin admits Russian military presence in Ukraine for first time’](#), The Guardian, 17 December 2015

91 [‘Vladimir Putin’s Annual News Conference’](#), Internet resources of the President of Russia, 17 December 2015

Agreement. Russian military action there thus raises questions over the security of neighbouring countries which fall within Russia's military reach and which Russia would like to bring into its sphere of influence.

Implications of Crimea and Ukraine

60. The motivations for Russian military actions in Crimea and Ukraine stem from Russia's fear of an encroaching NATO; resentment at the Ukrainian Government's preference for European links; and a desire to assert control over what it regards as Russia's rightful sphere of influence. It is playing a game of geopolitics—one into which the West is being drawn. According to John Lough, Russia aims to:

Move the West away from the post-Cold War settlement and encourage us to believe that this set-up is no longer sustainable, and that some division of labour is needed in Europe to manage our overall security.⁹²

61. Several of our witnesses believed that the EU “sleepwalked”⁹³ into the conflict in Ukraine. However, Peter Watkins, Director General Security Policy at the MoD suggested that the UK did not “entirely miss it”.⁹⁴ Furthermore, whilst the war in Ukraine has been treated by the West as an unexpected, irregular and unconventional conflict, we were told this was simply not the case. Keir Giles argued that Ukraine represented:

A major cross-border invasion of regular, conventional troops which stabilised the frontline in the face of the Ukrainian Government offensive.⁹⁵

62. Regardless of the level of surprise, the Secretary of State told us that the Government would continue to take an “extremely firm line” on Crimea and Ukraine which he described as “trying to change international borders by force”.⁹⁶

63. In both cases, the deniable use of Russian Special Forces or *Spetsnaz* and unconventional warfare was paramount. The speed of their deployment was not anticipated by the West. Mr Watkins argued that for Russia:

Crimea was almost a perfect laboratory for the hybrid approach, which is why it seemed to work rather well and quite quickly.⁹⁷

64. Ukraine remains in a state of uncertainty, with progress on the Minsk Agreements seemingly stalled.⁹⁸ Despite stealing a march on the West, we were told that Russia has yet to realise its objectives in Ukraine, and that currently “it has not got Ukraine under its sphere of influence”.⁹⁹ Mr Lough emphasised this point:

Let us remember that [President] Putin has not finished in Ukraine. [...] I would say that what Russia is going to do next will probably focus on issues closer to home.¹⁰⁰

92 [Q131](#)

93 [Q47](#)

94 [Q195](#)

95 [Q13](#)

96 [Q231](#)

97 [Q195](#)

98 [Q236](#)

99 [Q139](#)

100 [Q134](#)

65. Robert Pszczel, Acting Director of the NATO Information Office in Moscow agreed:

There was a strong assumption, which the propaganda machine played for a long time: that Ukraine was going to disappear from the map and collapse. Nothing of the sort has happened. The Russians are counting on fatigue and the fact that at some point we just get slightly bored.¹⁰¹

66. One possible Russian goal might be to have a segregated Ukraine divided between East and West. Dr Bobo Lo said this would be a “frankly inevitable” consequence of any potential Ukrainian accession to NATO.¹⁰² Dr Lo also emphasised the importance of Ukraine to Russia:

I believe that President Putin is waiting for the Ukrainians to mess up some more, for the Europeans to lose interest and for the Americans to get distracted. Basically, he is waiting for the thing to fall into his hands.¹⁰³

67. **Russia’s actions in Ukraine demonstrated the ruthlessness with which it will assert its plans and its willingness to ignore international law, treaties and agreements. They also demonstrated the speed and agility with which Russia could mobilise its Armed Forces, as well as the effective Russian use of proxy forces, information warfare and plausible deniability. *To the extent that the West was taken by surprise, the forthcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw should reassess NATO’s doctrine and capability to respond to both the speed of Russian deployment, and the implications of Russia’s ability to keep the West in the dark until it is ready to initiate military action.***

Syria

68. The Russian intervention in Syria was the first major display of Russian military intervention outside of the post-Soviet states since the end of the Cold War.¹⁰⁴ With the Ukrainian conflict stalling and domestic deterioration continuing, Russia’s announcement in September 2015 of air strikes in Syria reignited domestic nationalism and interest in foreign engagements. It has been argued that it also distracted both the Russian public and the Western world from events in Ukraine.¹⁰⁵

69. As much as, if not more than the West, Russia has an interest in reducing Islamist extremism both in the Middle East and from the perspective of domestic security. Russia is also a major source of Islamist extremists travelling to fight in the Middle East. Alexander Bortnikov, Director of the FSB, said that there were 1,700 Russian nationals fighting with DAESH in 2014, a figure double that of the previous year.¹⁰⁶ In total it is estimated that there are now 5,000 Russians assisting DAESH, amounting to 20 percent of all foreigners working with DAESH.¹⁰⁷

101 [Q23](#)

102 [Q48](#)

103 [Q43](#)

104 ‘[Russia’s military action in Syria: Timeline](#)’, The Guardian, 14 March 2016

105 [Q127](#)

106 ‘[FSB Director Admits Russians Fighting for ISIS](#)’, The New American, 3 March 2015

107 ‘[Experts Downplay Trend of Russians Joining Islamic State](#)’, The Moscow Times, 17 June 2015

70. In oral evidence, Dr Bobo Lo said that Russia's objectives for action in Syria are to preserve and extend its influence in the region, to demonstrate that Russia is a global player, and to emphasise the desirability of Russia as a partner, rather than an enemy.¹⁰⁸ Dr Sutuyagin added that Russia wishes to ensure the preservation of the Assad regime, as it believes that this will best serve Russia's strategic interests in Syria.¹⁰⁹

71. Russia's Iranian allies have, accordingly, contributed Sukhoi Su-25 aircraft to Iraq for the purpose of fighting DAESH forces.¹¹⁰ Russia has signed a contract with the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi facilitating a contribution of BMR-3M mine-clearing vehicles to Iraq,¹¹¹ and a preferential agreement to expand cooperation in the area of military technology.¹¹² Russia has also proposed a "coalition of like-minded people" to fight DAESH in ground-based conflict.¹¹³

72. Russia holds key military strategic assets in the region. In September 2015, Russian troops were installed both at the Tartus naval base on the Syrian coast and the Khmeimim air base at Latakia. These included a Russian Black Sea Fleet Marines Brigade Battalion.¹¹⁴ It is notable that these reinforcements were active in Syrian regions in which DAESH was largely inactive. This would imply that Russian efforts were primarily in support of the Assad regime rather than against DAESH. In fact, until recently, the vast majority of Russian targets have been opposition groups unaffiliated with DAESH,¹¹⁵ although the extent to which such groups in Syria are, or are not Islamist remains a matter of contention.

73. However, the Russia-US brokered ceasefire between Assad and the non-DAESH opposition in February 2016 demonstrated the possibility of shared interests and actions, after Russian military support for the Syrian Armed Forces made possible the recapture of Palmyra from DAESH.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, it continues to be reported that Russian airstrikes are still targeting other opposition groups.¹¹⁷

74. In Moscow, we were told that the US had taken the lead in dialogue with the Russians about Syria. We were also advised that Russia was coordinating its air strikes with the US and engaged in daily video conferences with US representatives.

75. By contrast, in October 2015 the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the UK, Dr Alexander Yakovenko, reportedly met Sir Simon Gass, then Foreign and Commonwealth Office Director General Political, and said of the meeting:

I came with two questions: we would like to co-operate with the United Kingdom so we can pick the right targets with ISIS in Syria. I said: you criticise us for hitting the wrong targets in Syria, give us the right ones. He refused.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁸ Q50

¹⁰⁹ Q49

¹¹⁰ *'All Iranian SU-25 Frogfoot Attack Planes have just deployed to Iraq'*, The Aviationist, 1 July 2014

¹¹¹ *'Russia to Supply Iraqi Army with Mine Clearing Vehicles Under 'Secret' Deal'*, www.sputniknews.com, 9 July 2015

¹¹² *'Russia offers Military Aid to Iraq during PM Visit'*, Reuters, 21 May 2015

¹¹³ *'Russia unveils plan for anti-ISIS coalition at Doha meeting'*, Russia Beyond the Headlines, 4 August 2015

¹¹⁴ *'Russian Moves in Syria Widen Role in Mideast'*, The New York Times, 14 September 2015

¹¹⁵ Q231

¹¹⁶ *'Syrian army recaptures Palmyra from ISIS'*, Russia Today, 27 March 2016

¹¹⁷ *'Russian airstrikes in Syria'*, Institute for the Study of War, 3 June 2016

¹¹⁸ *'Britain has frozen us out, says Russian envoy'*, The Times, 26 October 2015

The Secretary of State, however, indicated that cooperation between the UK and Russia was ongoing and that the UK was working with Russia in seeking a political settlement in Syria.¹¹⁹

76. Russia's military intervention in Syria has reduced the likelihood of Assad being overthrown—long a Western objective—but increased the prospect of cooperation with Russia in combating Islamist terrorism. Such cooperation depends upon both the coalition and Russia deciding to make it a shared objective. *The UK should assess what it can realistically do to engage with Russia, to test the practicability of working together against DAESH and other extreme groups. In principle, it is perfectly possible to confront and constrain an adversary in a region where our interests clash, whilst cooperating with him, to some degree, in a region where they coincide.*

The Baltics

77. The Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia are EU and NATO members. Because of their shared history—half a century of Soviet occupation from 1940, never accepted by the UK—Russia would like to return them to within its sphere of influence. Russian speakers constitute approximately a quarter of the population in Latvia and Estonia, and Russia has caused alarm by announcing that “whole segments of the Russian world” may need Russia's protection.¹²⁰

78. According to the 2016 Military Balance, Russia could deploy both the S-400 long-range air defence system and the MiG-31BM combat aircraft to put pressure on the Baltic States.¹²¹ According to Dr John Chipman, Director-General of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Russia has military equipment with the potential to “impede access to, and constrain freedom of action in, the Baltic region.”¹²² Such deployment of equipment extends to Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave located between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea coast. In 2014, Russia deployed “nuclear-capable forces in Kaliningrad.”¹²³ Dr Chipman, reported that, during a snap exercise in early 2015, Moscow moved Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles into Kaliningrad which have a reported range of up to 500 kilometres.¹²⁴

79. The expansion of Russia's military capabilities in this region has given rise to serious concern among NATO members about the security of the Baltic States. For example, John Lough told us:

It is certainly an area where our resolve is being tested at the moment. The buzzing of the US destroyer in the Baltic Sea a few days ago [11–12 April 2016] is the latest evidence of that.¹²⁵

119 [Q184](#)

120 *'Disquiet in Baltics over Sympathies of Russian Speakers'*, Reuters, 23 March 2014

121 *2016 Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016

122 *'Deployment of Russia's armaments in Kaliningrad region limits NATO's capabilities—expert'*, TASS Russian News Agency, 9 February 2016

123 *'Imperial Ambitions: Russia's Military Buildup'*, World Affairs, May/ June 2015

124 *'Deployment of Russia's armaments in Kaliningrad region limits NATO's capabilities—expert'*, TASS Russian News Agency, 9 February 2016

125 [Q132](#)

80. Mr Lough noted that the response from NATO had been “fairly robust” and had sent a clear message that NATO would defend the Baltic States.¹²⁶ In evidence, the Secretary of State confirmed that the Baltic States were firmly covered by the guarantee of NATO’s Article 5:

We have seen a pattern of behaviour involving sudden and proactive military action, but an attack on a member of the Alliance, of course, would immediately trigger a response. Before it gets to that stage, we are taking measures to ensure that the Baltic States are properly protected.¹²⁷

81. A recent RAND Corporation study, however, indicated that if Russia were to enter one of the Baltic States, NATO would, at present, be unable to defend it.¹²⁸ Moreover, we were told that Russian tactics there might not be in the form of an armed attack:

They do not need to invade the Baltics. They do not need to discredit NATO by putting troops in; they just have to undermine the idea of NATO, through any variety of cyber, information or hybrid operations. They need to subvert the idea of Article 5, not actually take territory.¹²⁹

82. Russia’s military expansion has included extensive reinforcements in Kaliningrad. While Russia has stated that this was a defensive measure to counter the threat of NATO, the further militarisation of Kaliningrad—which lies between Poland and Lithuania—could equally be considered a threat to the Baltic States.

83. As members of NATO, the Baltic States are covered by Article 5, meaning that NATO would be compelled to respond to an armed attack. However, recent Russian activity demonstrates that it can threaten and destabilise countries without actually engaging in an explicit and open armed attack. *NATO must ensure it fully comprehends the nature and extent of threats designed not to trigger Article 5 and develops its strategies to counter multi-dimensional warfare in order to defend the Baltic States from such threats.*

The Arctic

84. It has been suggested by the Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy that Russia aims to harness the Arctic as its primary base for natural resources by 2020.¹³⁰ To that end, Russian military expansion in the region is of significant concern. Russia now has functioning Arctic military bases and two ice-breakers.¹³¹ In oral evidence, Dr Monaghan told us that Russia also had “a strategic [Russian] command established there.”¹³² Russian military expansion is anticipated to extend to nuclear submarines and the Northern fleet.¹³³

¹²⁶ [Q132](#)

¹²⁷ [Q170](#)

¹²⁸ *‘Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank’*, RAND Corporation, 2016

¹²⁹ [Q50](#)

¹³⁰ *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy, ‘Combined Effort’*, June 2015.

¹³¹ *‘Russia Unveils New Navy Icebreaker in Arctic Military Focus’*, Defense News, 11 June 2016

¹³² [Q87](#)

¹³³ *‘Russia’s Military Will Get Bigger and Better in 2015’*, The Moscow Times, 8 December 2014

85. The melting Arctic ice-cap may have significant defence and security implications for neighbouring states. The receding ice-cap offers significant mining and economic opportunities (the Arctic is rich in oil and gas) which are likely to incite widespread interest, notably from Russia.¹³⁴

86. Norway, with over 80% of its maritime territory north of the Arctic Circle, also considers this its primary region of strategic responsibility.¹³⁵ The Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy cites Russia as the “defining factor” of future Norwegian defence planning.¹³⁶ Norway’s concerns about Russian military action are echoed by Denmark, Sweden and Finland in the form of the recent Nordic military alliance.¹³⁷

87. **At present, the Arctic is not a militarised zone, but increasing tensions leave the future uncertain. Given the increasing Russian military presence in the Arctic, we shall return to this region in a separate inquiry later this year. We request that the Government provides us with its assessment of the implications for UK security of developments in the Arctic when responding to this Report.**

Central Asia

88. Russia has actively reinforced its presence in Central Asia over the last two years. In October 2013, Tajikistan confirmed a 30-year extension to house the 201st Motor-Rifle Division, Russia’s largest foreign deployment.¹³⁸ In January 2013, the Kazakh Parliament confirmed a Joint Air-Defence Agreement with Russia¹³⁹ alongside an increase in ground attack aircraft at the Kant Air Base in Kyrgyzstan from eight to twelve. By contrast, Kyrgyzstan refused the continuation of the United States Air Transit Center, which closed in June 2014, having supported US operations in Afghanistan for more than 12 years.¹⁴⁰ These countries not only occupy strategically important border space, but also possess significant natural resources.

89. Both President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan and President Karimov of Uzbekistan are currently in their 70s. John Lough said that any future political transition, especially a genuine pro-democracy movement, could raise tensions in the region.¹⁴¹ David Clark reinforced that view:

Watch Kazakhstan, particularly when President Nazarbayev goes. There are a lot of very hawkish Russian policy-makers at senior level who eye that quite jealously; that is a potential flashpoint.¹⁴²

90. While the transition of power will not necessarily provoke a Russian action of the type witnessed in Crimea, if succession is not a seamless process or is viewed as pro-Western in outlook, these regions may provoke Russian intervention of the type previously witnessed in Ukraine. Dr Bobo Lo noted:

134 ‘*The Melting North*’, The Economist, 16 June 2012

135 *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy, ‘Combined Effort’*, June 2015

136 *Expert Commission on Norwegian Security and Defence Policy, ‘Combined Effort’*, June 2015

137 ‘*Nordic countries extend military alliance in face of Russian aggression*’, The Guardian, 10 April 2015

138 *2016 Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2016]

139 ‘*Aiming high: Russia, Kazakh agree on joint air defence system*’, Russia Today, 30 January 2013

140 ‘*“Mission accomplished” for U.S. air base in pro-Moscow Kyrgyzstan*’, Reuters, 6 March 2014

141 134; 160

142 Q133

We think about the large Russian minority in Ukraine, but that so-called large Russian minority is only 17% of Ukraine's total population. The Russian minority in Kazakhstan—almost entirely in northern Kazakhstan—is 23% of the total population. So watch out for central Asia.¹⁴³

The United Kingdom and Europe

91. Russia's external military activity is also directed at the UK. Russian military aircraft have repeatedly flown close to British and NATO airspace, prompting RAF interception on a number of occasions.¹⁴⁴ Russian warships have been observed close to British waters and Russian submarines have attempted to record the 'acoustic signature' of *Vanguard class* submarines carrying Trident nuclear missiles.¹⁴⁵ The recent sighting of a suspected Russian submarine in UK waters required the engagement of maritime patrol aircraft from France, America and Canada¹⁴⁶ in the absence of UK aircraft of this type. Such displays of military potential imply not only an escalation of Russian hostility toward a NATO member state, but a warning to respect and take seriously the Russia of today.

92. Russian disregard of UK sovereignty was also demonstrated in the 2006 murder of Alexander Litvinenko, a British citizen, by the reckless use of polonium-210 on British soil. The public inquiry into this concluded that Mr Litvinenko was killed "probably" with the knowledge of President Vladimir Putin. Whilst not a military act, this should not be considered distinct from Russian willingness to perpetrate hostile acts in other countries.

93. More recently, in April 2016, two Su-24 Russian bombers flew extremely close to the *USS Donald Cook* which was stationed in international waters 70 miles off the westernmost coast of Kaliningrad.¹⁴⁷ The Russian ambassador claimed that the *Donald Cook's* presence was an attempt to put military pressure on Russia.¹⁴⁸ The incident has raised concerns about the likelihood of miscalculation and accidents with potentially significant consequences.¹⁴⁹

94. **Russia has increasingly demonstrated military aggressiveness in different regions, as well as the ability to create confusion, fear and doubt in others, including NATO member states. Because it perceives these methods as successful, and because they appear to Russia to be unchallenged, it is likely that Russia will continue to use military means and unconventional warfare as ways of reasserting what it believes to be its rightful role on the international stage. Many of the Russian actions outlined in this chapter directly challenge the rules-based international order. Lukewarm responses will not gain respect from Russia, will not improve our relationship with Russia, nor engineer a more palatable environment for European defence. The UK and NATO must employ robust and firm responses. Russia must be certain that Article 5 would be triggered should NATO consider that one of its member states has been the subject of an armed attack and effective countermeasures must be designed to deter potential Russian tactics tailored to circumvent the Article 5 guarantee.**

¹⁴³ [Q46](#)

¹⁴⁴ *'RAF Typhoons scramble to long-range Russian bombers'*, The Telegraph, 19 September 2014; *'RAF jets intercept Russian bombers near UK airspace'*, BBC News, 14 April 2015

¹⁴⁵ *'Close Encounters: Russian Military Intrusions into UK Air- and Sea Space Since 2005'*, Russia Studies Centre Policy Paper No. 7, The Henry Jackson Society, October 2015

¹⁴⁶ *'Britain forced to ask NATO to track 'Russian submarine' in Scottish waters'*, The Telegraph, 9 December 2014

¹⁴⁷ *'Russian attack jets buzz US warship in riskiest encounter in years'*, The Guardian, 13 April 2016

¹⁴⁸ *'Diplomat: USS Donald Cook's approach to Kaliningrad attempt to pressure Russia'*, TASS Russian News Agency, 21 April 2016

¹⁴⁹ [Q155](#)

4 UK/NATO policy and strategy towards Russia

95. In this chapter we examine how the UK and NATO have responded to the Russian military actions outlined in the previous chapter. We also consider whether the UK and NATO have the right tools to deter or counter Russian military actions.

The UK's strategy towards Russia

96. UK strategy towards Russia has four main objectives:

- to protect UK interests and those of our allies;
- to engage Russia in global security issues and other areas of shared interest;
- to promote our values including that of a rules-based international system; and
- to build stronger links between the British and Russian people.¹⁵⁰

97. The SDSR 2015 set out a firmer tone and referred to the need to “reassure our Allies against the threat from Russia”.¹⁵¹ In this respect, NATO plays a key role in UK policy towards Russia. SDSR 2015 highlighted the importance of NATO to national defence policy and, in written evidence, the MoD reaffirmed NATO as “the strongest and most effective military alliance in the world” which had “formed the bedrock of our national defence, and of stability in the Euro-Atlantic area, for almost 70 years.”¹⁵²

98. Furthermore, the SDSR was informed by NATO requirements and, in respect of Russia, these were reflected in the decisions taken:

The choices we have made to invest in our Special Forces, cyber, Maritime Patrol Aircraft, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance aircraft and BMD show our commitment to meeting NATO's highest priority requirements.¹⁵³

UK and EU Sanctions

99. In March 2014, in response to Russian actions in Crimea, the EU and the USA imposed asset freezes and travel bans on selected Russian and Ukrainian officials. These were consolidated with new and extended sanctions against Russia in July 2014.¹⁵⁴

100. Before the sanctions, Russia had become economically dependent on the West for imports, deciding “not to produce if it was possible to buy”.¹⁵⁵ Sanctions were therefore deemed a great ‘strategic surprise’ for the Kremlin¹⁵⁶. Dr Lo reinforced this point:

¹⁵⁰ Ministry of Defence, [\(RUS0006\)](#), para 4

¹⁵¹ [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), HM Government, para 5.27, page 51, November 2015

¹⁵² Ministry of Defence, [\(RUS0006\)](#), para 2

¹⁵³ Ministry of Defence, [\(RUS0006\)](#), para 41

¹⁵⁴ [‘Ukraine crisis: Timeline’](#), BBC News, 13 November 2014

¹⁵⁵ [Q54](#)

¹⁵⁶ [Q54](#)

There is no doubt that the extent and duration of sanctions have come as a great surprise to the Kremlin. I think they have massively underestimated the extent of European unity.¹⁵⁷

101. While sanctions may be having an economic impact on Russia, and on its leadership, the impact on Russia's military posture has been minimal. Dr Bobo Lo highlighted the fact that the conventional wisdom that "if you labour under economic constraints, you will modify your military and geopolitical ambitions",¹⁵⁸ had not materialised in Russia. He argued that, far from depleting Russian defence transformation, sanctions have made Russia more assertive and aggressive because that was where Russia believed it could "make a difference".¹⁵⁹ We heard during a visit to Moscow that defence-related expenditure had been unaffected,¹⁶⁰ and that the main impact of the sanctions was being felt by the Russian public.

102. The Secretary of State for Defence highlighted the importance of sanctions in responding to the conflict in Ukraine. He argued that sanctions were "making sure that Russia pays a price" and that they had resulted in a reduction in Russia's GDP and increased its inflation.¹⁶¹ In oral evidence he stated that:

One of the principal weapons the West has for the aggression we have seen in Ukraine is, of course, the sanctions that are due to be rolled over at the end of July. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind just how critical that decision [...] is.¹⁶²

The ability of the United Kingdom to push successfully for the continuation or intensification of sanctions against Russia will now be put to the test in the light of the Brexit decision, even though the two-year exit process is yet to commence.

103. Whilst sanctions brought against Russia have caused economic harm, their effects are felt most keenly by the Russian public and they have not reduced Russian military investment and expansion. Nor have sanctions yet led to compliance with the Minsk Agreements. We agree that the EU sanctions should be renewed in July. We also call on the Government to consider extending travel bans to a larger portion of the Russian leadership.

Dialogue and understanding

104. At present there is little, if any, meaningful dialogue between Russia and the UK and the SDSR 2015 is silent on how military relations could be improved. In a letter to The Times, Dr Yakovenko, the Russian Ambassador to the UK, stated that:

Practically all political contacts were abruptly broken off at Britain's initiative, political dialogue has gone at the top level, between the leaders. At the ministerial level there is also stagnation. This began with the Syria conflict, but we felt it especially after the Ukrainian crisis.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ [Q54](#)

¹⁵⁸ [Q54](#)

¹⁵⁹ [Q54](#)

¹⁶⁰ [Q11](#)

¹⁶¹ [Q219](#)

¹⁶² [Q192](#)

¹⁶³ ['Britain has frozen us out, says Russian envoy'](#), The Times, 26 October 2015

105. He also highlighted the fact that:

It was written in the manifesto of the Conservative party that Russia represents a threat for Great Britain, Russia is a menace, that word was used, and Russia was put on the same plate as ISIS.¹⁶⁴

106. The lack of dialogue between Russia and the UK is compounded by what many of our witnesses described as a lack of understanding of Russia, its capabilities and its intentions. Peter Pomerantsev said that to understand Russia better the UK and the West needed “a multidisciplinary team” including “people who understand Russian politics, Russian economics, Russian defence economics, and Russian military policy and strategy.”¹⁶⁵

107. Unfortunately, the UK does not appear to have sufficient expertise to hand and Dr Bobo Lo argued that there had been a “shocking neglect” of Russia since the end of the Cold War.¹⁶⁶ As an example, he highlighted the fact that while Japan had “about 200 Russia specialists in their Foreign Ministry”, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was “lucky if they have 10”.¹⁶⁷ Those sentiments were echoed by Dr Monaghan:

It seems [...] that we need to relearn with whom we are dealing. We have not thought about the Russians for 25 years or so. Suddenly, we have woken up with Crimea.¹⁶⁸

David Clark also believed that in the UK Government, there had been an erosion of intellectual, linguistic and analytical capabilities as they related to Russia.¹⁶⁹

108. This assessment of UK expertise was challenged by the UK Government. In written evidence, the FCO, which is responsible for coordinating Whitehall policy on Russia, asserted that it had established an Eastern Europe and Central Asia cadre of officials, which already numbered “400 members”.¹⁷⁰ In a similar vein, the Secretary of State for Defence told us that the number of Russia specialists within the MoD had increased, and that a “specific Russia multi-disciplinary intelligence team” had been established.¹⁷¹ He also said that the MoD had:

Some 40 full-time equivalent staff who are working directly on Russian issues. They are supported by other analysts across our defence and intelligence, and others helping on the technical side.¹⁷²

109. Whilst strengthening long-term Russia expertise in the FCO is a welcome and important innovation, it is notable that the Eastern Europe and Central Asia cadre was launched only in 2015, seven years after the Russian-Georgian conflict and one year after the annexation of Crimea. In addition, whilst there may be 400 individuals working on Russia-related areas, the number with in-depth country knowledge and Russian fluency is debatable. We would also welcome clarity as to how long they have worked on the Russian brief and accordingly, what is the level of institutional memory.

164 ‘*Britain has frozen us out, says Russian envoy*’, The Times, 26 October 2015

165 [Q122](#)

166 [Q55](#)

167 [Q55](#)

168 [Q102](#)

169 [Q122](#)

170 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, ([RUS0019](#)), para 3

171 [Q209](#)

172 [Q208](#)

110. Rebuilding Russian expertise in Government will take time. As Dr Bobo Lo told us:

We are at the beginning of a pretty long road, so the key is not just to have a bit of extra defence spending or more Russia expertise; the key is to consider this as a long-term strategic project of capacity-building.¹⁷³

111. Dr Monaghan further noted that part of this capacity-building was the need for better communication networks between Government institutions and Russian experts outside Whitehall.¹⁷⁴ Peter Watkins of the MoD, however, said that it did draw on such outside expertise:

We talk to a number of the people who have given evidence to you before. We have discussions with them; we have conversations with them; we learn from them. As you say, there is a wide range of Russian expertise in this country, and we draw upon that. We also draw on Russian expertise in other countries.¹⁷⁵

112. Despite the wider use of that expertise, the effectiveness of those ‘discussions’ and ‘conversations’ has been questioned. Dr Monaghan was concerned that expert information could stagnate within the Whitehall system due to a lack of realism regarding Russia’s true nature and intentions:

The substantive problem is that the expertise often briefs people on what is going to happen, but it hits a glass ceiling, because there is a great deal of mirror-imaging going on. We say, “Well, the Russians are like us, because they want to be democratic and they want to be an international partner working with us,” regardless of the fact that the Russians have said, “Well, we actually do not agree with you.”¹⁷⁶

113. Russia has not been a UK priority since the end of the Cold War and our expertise in this field has withered on the vine. There are comparatively few Russian experts within the Government. Whilst the MoD says that around 40 specialists work on Russia, it is not clear what their level of expertise is, nor whether these cover full-spectrum assessment of Russia, including security, economics, and intelligence remits. *The Government must set out how it will address this shortcoming in order to ensure a solid cadre of experts on Russia who can help to provide, over a sustained period, an effective response to the challenges now posed by Russia. We would also welcome clarity as to how long they have worked on the Russian brief and accordingly what is the level of institutional memory.*

114. It is clear to us that there is a large pool of expertise on Russia which exists externally to the Government, and we welcome the efforts by the Government to utilise this. However, a large number of Russia experts alone will not solve the problem. If expert advice is not effectively understood and utilised within the decision-making systems of Whitehall, expanding the pool of knowledge will not deliver the required results. *We recommend that the Government designate Russia as a high priority, and set out how the mechanisms within Whitehall will ensure that external advice is disseminated and acted upon at the highest levels.*

173 [Q55](#)

174 [Q106](#)

175 [Q215](#)

176 [Q103](#)

Defence Attachés

115. One avenue towards greater understanding of Russian military thinking is the work of the Defence Attaché's office in Moscow. Air Chief Marshal Peach, the CDS-designate, noted the importance of Defence Attachés' roles in negotiating with host nations and building valuable networks of contacts:

We are making sure host nation agreements are in place and are exercised. Our attachés make frequent use of them, so that we can move weapons, ammunition, people and equipment.¹⁷⁷

116. The size of the Defence Attaché's office in Moscow, however, has declined in recent years. Whilst the current establishment of Defence Section Moscow is four Attachés (plus two military support staff), at the time of our visit to Moscow, only one of the four Attaché posts was filled.¹⁷⁸ This chronic understaffing is due, in part, to visa restrictions imposed by the Russian Government in response to sanctions, but it is also a result of difficulties in identifying suitable individuals to fill the vacant posts.¹⁷⁹

117. The importance of the role of the Defence Attaché became apparent during our visit to Moscow. It offers the UK a window into Russian military thinking, and an invaluable avenue for dialogue and knowledge-sharing. We are concerned that the MoD has yet to identify sufficient individuals to fill several vacant posts in that office. This must be done as a matter of urgency, alongside a commitment to expand the Moscow Defence Section to a size commensurate with, and at ranks which reflect, the importance of its role.

The NATO-Russia Council

118. The NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was conceived in 2002 as a forum for discussion, cooperation, consensus-building and joint action.¹⁸⁰ According to NATO, following Russia's "illegal military intervention in Ukraine and its violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity", all practical NATO-Russia cooperation was halted. The NRC was intended as an avenue for dialogue on key issues. However, since an exacerbating feature of current relations remains Russia's assertion that NATO has violated the Founding Act by expanding eastwards, maintaining that dialogue has been difficult. However, we were told that NATO had:

Agreed to keep channels of communication open in the NRC and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council at the Ambassadorial level and above, to allow the exchange of views, first and foremost on this crisis.¹⁸¹

119. In April 2016—after a hiatus of nearly two years—it was agreed to reconvene the NRC. While this does represent an improvement, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

¹⁷⁷ [Q191](#)

¹⁷⁸ Ministry of Defence, [\(RUS0020\)](#).

¹⁷⁹ Ministry of Defence, [\(RUS0020\)](#)

¹⁸⁰ 'NATO-Russia Council', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 15 April 2016

¹⁸¹ [Q27](#)

warned that there would be “no return to business as usual until Russia again respects international law.”¹⁸² The NRC met in May 2016, but appears to have achieved little in terms of concrete outcomes.¹⁸³

120. Dr Monaghan commented that “during the Cold War [...] we did dialogue and deterrence, and they were done simultaneously. That was the core of NATO’s approach”.¹⁸⁴ However, John Lough believed that this was no longer the case:

We don’t have systems in place to communicate clearly and effectively with the Russians. You saw the problem that Russia and Turkey had on the Syrian border not so long ago. We have had the buzzing of this US ship recently, where things can very easily go wrong.¹⁸⁵

121. **Dialogue between NATO and Russia is essential to reduce the risk of military escalation and misunderstandings between them both. It is not incompatible with a more adversarial relationship, such as has recently developed. We therefore welcome the reconvening of the NATO-Russia Council, while limited in outcomes, as an important step to re-establishing dialogue between Russia and the West.**

NATO’s defence posture

122. Peter Pomerantsev told us that NATO’s conventional defence posture was in need of change if it was to meet the challenges presented by Russia:

It needs to get back into the business of forward defence, instead of defence in depth, because by the time we have defended in depth the battle will already be lost.¹⁸⁶

123. One area of concern was that of air defence. Air Chief Marshal Peach told us that Russia had invested “heavily in air defence systems over decades”¹⁸⁷ and therefore NATO needed to respond to that challenge “for security, as well as for defence in terms of electronic warfare.”¹⁸⁸

124. Russia’s use of unconventional warfare has presented NATO and the UK with an additional challenge. As Mr Laity noted, NATO was “behind the curve” in this respect, despite the lessons of the Russo-Georgian conflict and the seizure of Crimea. While he assured us that NATO was “on this 100%”, he warned that NATO was still “playing catch-up.”¹⁸⁹

125. Peter Watkins of the MoD gave us more detail on how this was being addressed:

I could mention a whole raft of things that NATO is doing at the moment to address, in particular, the concern about hybrid warfare. It is seeking to

182 [‘Statement by the Secretary General on the NATO-Russia Council meeting’](#), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 8 April 2016

183 [‘Statement by the Secretary General on the NATO-Russia Council meeting’](#), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 8 April 2016

184 [Q90](#)

185 [Q155](#)

186 [Q155](#)

187 [Q189](#)

188 [Q199](#)

189 [Q22](#)

strengthen the resilience of its states and to strengthen their cyber-security. There is a NATO centre of excellence, for example, around Strat Comms, which is seeking to deal with the propaganda and the soft end of hybrid.

126. Air Chief Marshal Peach also outlined the steps being taken by NATO, as part of its Readiness Action Plan, to reduce the risk of NATO being taken by surprise in the future:

NATO has modernised its command and control. It has a brand new, state-of-the-art command and control system in the Supreme Allied Headquarters in Mons in Belgium, and that is fit for purpose. That is precisely why NATO is modernising its indications and warning system—so that it can understand what is happening and react to it—and that is precisely why NATO is continuing to add to its joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, which I suspect will be a feature of future discussions within the Alliance.¹⁹⁰

127. Despite having heard extensively of NATO's surprise at Russian actions in Ukraine, Mr Watkins stated: "I'm not sure that we did entirely miss it"¹⁹¹ before conceding that it was "a surprise".¹⁹²

128. Dr Sutyagin believed that a key difference between Russia and NATO was the high level of integration in the Russian military across the full spectrum of capabilities: manoeuvre forces, electronic warfare, psychological operations and countering special operations.¹⁹³ Mr Pomerantsev agreed. He argued that NATO needed to "open up" the borders between defence, security and other capabilities at its disposal.¹⁹⁴

129. When we visited Washington DC in March, we discussed the importance of ensuring that our systems could work with those of our allies. This applied to a range of areas including command and information systems. We visited the site where the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, promised in the 2015 SDSR, were being built for both the UK and the USA. We were also told that, at times, the lack of a standardised system of communication across NATO could cause problems. As Air Chief Marshal Peach noted: "The key word is interoperability".¹⁹⁵ It will be essential for all of the Government's efforts, in conjunction with NATO's, to be fully integrated and deployable in unison in order to manoeuvre forces with speed and dexterity.

130. It is clear to us that Russia has harnessed a wide range of capabilities which can rapidly be deployed for use in conjunction with classic military power. NATO needs to respond in kind if it is to counter unconventional as well as conventional warfare. We therefore most strongly recommend that NATO, as part of its response to Russia, addresses its shortcomings in terms of the full range of unconventional warfare.

¹⁹⁰ [Q165](#)

¹⁹¹ [Q195](#)

¹⁹² [Q196](#)

¹⁹³ [Q55](#)

¹⁹⁴ [Q55](#)

¹⁹⁵ [Q180](#)

NATO's response to disinformation and propaganda

131. Earlier in our Report we set out Russia's use of disinformation in support of military actions. NATO's response, however, does not appear sufficient to meet that challenge. Mr Pszczel argued that NATO does not "respond to propaganda with propaganda" and that what was required was an enhanced "proactive rebuttal policy".¹⁹⁶

132. Mark Laity, Chief of Strategic Communications at SHAPE, explained that NATO was trying to engage with Russian speaking communities "who need to be influenced" in order to counter *Russia Today* or *Sputnik*, but that what was needed were "trusted intermediaries".¹⁹⁷ This was also an objective of the UK Government and the MoD highlighted to us its efforts in this regard:

The British Embassy in Russia uses social media extensively to deliver a mix of cultural and political content in Russian language. With a total reach of around 200,000 people per month, UK in Russia Facebook page "likes" have almost doubled in the past year (from 5,458 on 19 Jan 2015 to 10,276 on 19 Jan 2016). [...]. Since May 2015, the Embassy press team has increased efforts to reach Russian-speaking audiences by setting up a presence on home-grown Russian social media platform Vkontakte, currently with over 2,700 followers—reaching audiences of up to 30,000 per month. Visit Britain, UK Trade & Investment, and the British Council also manage their own active social media presence.¹⁹⁸

133. There are, however, obvious practical difficulties in engaging with the Russian-speaking world. Tight controls over media inside Russia and language barriers persist. According to Mr Laity, "practically, it is very hard to get into the Russian Federation, but we shouldn't abandon it. [...] The problem that we have outside the Russian Federation is to come up with feasible competition [to Russia]".¹⁹⁹

134. However, both Mr Pomerantsev and Dr Madeira thought that more could be done.²⁰⁰ Dr Madeira said that Western expenditure on disinformation was currently a fraction of that invested by Russia and that the resources the West had committed to this were "minuscule" to counter a Russian operation with an annual budget of between \$600 million and \$1 billion.²⁰¹

77 Brigade

135. The MoD is starting to address this shortcoming. In June 2016, we visited 77 Brigade in Newbury. 77 Brigade, established in September 2014, brought together the Military Stabilisation and Support Group, the Media Operations Group, 15 Psychological Operations Group and the Security Capacity Building team. In July 2015, the individual units were 'reshaped' into the following 'Columns':

¹⁹⁶ [Q21](#)

¹⁹⁷ [Q21](#)

¹⁹⁸ Ministry of Defence ([RUS0006](#)), para 31

¹⁹⁹ [Q28](#), [Q29](#)

²⁰⁰ [Q63](#)

²⁰¹ [Q100](#)

- No.1 Column—Plans support focusing on the behavioural analysis of actors, audiences and adversaries;
- No.2 Column—Provides the detailed synchronisation and delivery of effect;
- No.3 Column—Provides highly deployable specialists to other parts of the Armed Forces and other Government organisations;
- No.4 Column—Provides professional specialists in Security Capacity-Building in Defence;
- No.5 Column—Media Operations and Civil Affairs.

In October 2015, No.7 Column was added to provide the Engineer and Logistics Staff Corps—a powerful and influential specialist Army Reserve unit providing engineering, logistics and communication consultancy to both the MoD and across government agencies.²⁰²

136. Although it has yet to be fully developed, 77 Brigade draws in a significant number of specialist reservists with the aim to “challenge the difficulties of modern warfare using non-lethal engagement and legitimate non-military levers as a means to adapt behaviours of the opposing forces and adversaries”.²⁰³

137. We are concerned that the UK and NATO do not yet have a fully-developed strategy to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation effectively. We understand that efforts are underway in NATO to develop this. In that respect, the establishment of 77 Brigade by the MoD is a welcome step in the right direction. However, the budget available to Russia means that NATO must substantially increase the level of resources which member states commit to this work.

²⁰² There is no No.6 Column, for historical reasons.

²⁰³ <http://www.army.mod.uk/structure/39492.aspx>

5 NATO and the 2016 Warsaw Summit

138. Our Report has highlighted the many challenges we face, both as a country and as part of NATO, from a militarily resurgent Russia. It is clear that the UK has limited capabilities to meet those challenges alone. Therefore, its position as a leading member of NATO is of great importance. The forthcoming NATO summit in Warsaw offers the UK and its NATO allies a timely opportunity to review and rebuild their strategy towards Russia.

139. The scale of the challenge was thrown into stark relief by a 2016 Report published by the RAND Corporation on War Gaming in the Baltic States. The results of that exercise concluded that:

As currently postured, NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its most exposed members. Across multiple games using a wide range of expert participants in and out of uniform playing both sides, the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours. Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad.²⁰⁴

140. Whilst this scenario could be debated, it is clear that the Warsaw Summit will have to address how best to respond to increasing Russian military capability, and in particular how to strengthen the NATO deterrent on its north eastern flank—namely in the Baltics and Poland.

141. When he gave oral evidence, the Secretary of State told us that NATO was already addressing the vulnerabilities in this region:

NATO is already present on the eastern flank. We conduct exercises there and I think some 150 NATO and allied exercises are scheduled for this year. We in Britain will have around 4,000 service personnel on these exercises this year.²⁰⁵

142. The Secretary of State also told us that the UK had Typhoons stationed in the Baltic which were carrying out air policing missions,²⁰⁶ and that it had provided “forward integration units in each of the Baltic States as well as in Bulgaria, Romania and Poland.”²⁰⁷

143. In addition, the Summit will consider positioning an “Enhanced Forward Presence” of four Battalions of 4,000 troops on a rotational basis in the Baltic States and Poland. Peter Watkins said this force presence was “not permanent” and that while “you can argue about 'significant', [...] these are not very large forces”,²⁰⁸ designed to send a message of “resolve and deterrence.”²⁰⁹

204 ‘Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank: War Gaming in the Baltics’, David A Shlapak and Michael W Johnson, RAND Corporation, 2016

205 [Q172](#)

206 [Q325](#)

207 [Q170](#)

208 [Q232](#)

209 [Q234](#)

The Very High Readiness Task Force

144. At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, Member States agreed to the creation of the new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). The NATO VJTF will comprise a multinational brigade of approximately 5,000 troops in five battalions, with two additional brigades for rapid reinforcement in a major crisis.²¹⁰ It will be able to deploy troops within 48 hours of making the decision to do so.²¹¹ The UK takes leadership of the VJTF in 2017. The Secretary of State told us:

Once activated, that force will be ready to move immediately following the very first warnings and indications of potential threats. By “immediately”, I mean that the first elements will be able to deploy within hours and establish that crucial initial presence, with the full force following on, in order to do its best to deter the build-up of any tension and threat on the [NATO’s] eastern flank.²¹²

145. The Secretary of State said that the formation of the VJTF provided clear evidence of how the NATO Alliance was developing its strategy to meet any kind of threat in the future. Furthermore, Air Chief Marshal Peach noted that NATO had “a response force in addition to the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force” which was regularly exercised and trained.²¹³

146. Another concern is that Russia makes highly effective use of Electronic Warfare (EW) and of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). We were told that “the NATO very high readiness forces are not enough to cope with that”²¹⁴ and that the West was currently unprepared to deal with that environment.²¹⁵ Furthermore, it has been argued that while on paper NATO has more forces than Russia, they are widely dispersed across member states—and, in many cases, they have suffered from underinvestment.²¹⁶

147. As we point out earlier in this report, the size of the forces available to the Russian Government is significant. NATO must be certain that the VJTF, as currently constituted, is of sufficient size and readiness to counter any large-scale Russian deployment.

148. The NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) is a welcome addition to NATO’s capabilities. There is concern, however, over the ability of the VJTF to respond speedily and effectively in the event of need. *It will be essential to have agreements for the rapid movement of personnel, equipment and platforms across Europe between member states should the VJTF need to be deployed. We would welcome details of how far advanced such agreements are. We invite the Government to set out how the VJTF will match Russian capability and speed of engagement in regions on NATO’s periphery.*

210 [Q164](#)

211 Ministry of Defence, ([RUS0006](#)), para 5. At the Wales Summit in 2014, NATO Allies agreed to enhance the capabilities of the NATO Response Force (NRF) in order to respond to emerging security challenges posed by Russia as well as the risks emanating from the Middle East and North Africa. This force is now in transition as military staff work to phase in the concept of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) into the overall NRF structure.

212 [Q164](#)

213 [Q164](#)

214 [Q38](#)

215 [Q40](#)

216 [Q55](#)

Possible NATO enlargement

149. NATO has made clear that it has an 'open door policy' and that it “has been, and will always be”, based on the free choice of European democracies. This policy is underpinned by Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty which states that Allies “may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty.”²¹⁷

150. At present, NATO has 28 members. The 12 founding members were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. Since then the following member countries joined the Alliance: Greece and Turkey (1952), Germany (1955), Spain (1982), the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland (1999), Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia (2004), and Albania and Croatia (2009). According to NATO, aspirant nations include Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition, Finland and Sweden have undertaken an assessment of the pros and cons of joining NATO.²¹⁸

151. Earlier in this Report, we highlighted the fact that Russia considers any enlargement of NATO to the East as a betrayal of the Russia/NATO Founding Act. In oral evidence James Sherr explained that this extended beyond NATO membership for former Eastern Bloc states:

Even countries like Sweden and Finland, which are not inside NATO, are now viewed as being legitimate parts of the Russian defence perimeter. Whether they see this as defensive or not, it creates for others a very worrying capability and a very worrying set of intentions.²¹⁹

If correct, this indicates a worrying lack of analysis on the Russian side as to why these traditionally neutral countries could be considering a relationship with, or even membership of, NATO.

152. During our visit to Moscow, we were told by Mr Igor Neverov of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation that whilst Russia would not oppose moves by Finland or Sweden to join NATO, such developments would have implications—and that they would be negative. **However, in our view, we should be aware of the dangers of undermining the credibility of the Article 5 guarantee—and thus of the entire alliance—by offering NATO membership to states which a potential adversary would not believe we would go to war to defend. We should therefore make it clear that NATO would take Article 5 action in respect of any new member country before it was allowed to join the Alliance.**

153. Dr Madeira told us that it was important that Russia should not be allowed to determine which countries could become members of NATO:

The moment we allow Russia to dictate what NATO decides to do within its own member states, what is the point of having NATO? [...] Russia's view [...] is that anything that NATO does to ramp up its capabilities to respond to what Russia has done in Crimea and Ukraine is therefore a bad thing.²²⁰

²¹⁷ *'Russia's accusations - setting the record straight'*, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, April 2014

²¹⁸ *'Sweden and Finland upgrade NATO relations'*, euobserver, 23 June 2016

²¹⁹ [Q5](#)

²²⁰ [Q95](#)

154. This point was further emphasised by the Secretary of State for Defence in the context of the UK welcoming the proposed accession of Montenegro, which will attain ‘observer status’ at the 2016 Summit. Mr Fallon stated:

We cannot allow Russia to exercise any kind of veto over who should join either the NATO Alliance or the European Union. That is why we [...] emphasise that the NATO Alliance and the European Union remain open to new candidates.²²¹

155. Russia considers any enhanced military presence in the Baltic States as a threat to its borders. Therefore, we should expect any NATO military consolidation to be mirrored on the Russian side of the border. Further militarisation of the border in this way could increase the risk of misunderstandings, miscalculation or accidents. *The UK and NATO should be very clear in engaging Russia during the Warsaw Summit, and strive for transparency to explain the decisions that it takes. We recommend that the Government reports on how it has increased military dialogue with Russia, both before and during the Warsaw Summit, to reduce the potential for an unintended escalation of hostilities.*

NATO Article 5

156. When NATO was constructed, its primary role was to deal with a “binary peace or war scenario” in which actions that would trigger an Article 5 response to military aggression against one of its members were clear. However, since the end of the Cold War, that scenario has become more complicated. Mr Clark described that change in the following terms:

We’re not dealing with that any more. We’re dealing with so many different grades or shades of stages between war and peace that Russia is exploiting.²²²

Such shades include the numerous facets of Russian multi-dimensional warfare discussed earlier in our Report and such as cyber-attacks; information warfare; and destabilisation of countries using deniable forces.

157. In addition to the varying forms of potential aggression, Mr Clark argued that shortcomings in NATO meant that an effective response to an Article 5 attack was open to question.²²³ Furthermore, he highlighted the need for NATO to have the capability to identify and respond to unconventional warfare within a credible timeframe:

If it doesn’t do that, there’s a risk that NATO will get caught with its trousers down and [President] Putin will exploit its unpreparedness in dealing with scenarios that stop short of a full-scale conventional military attack.²²⁴

221 [Q221](#)

222 [Q142](#)

223 [Q142](#)

224 [Q142](#)

158. Keir Giles also noted Russia's ability to calibrate an act of military aggression which fell marginally short of an Article 5 breach.²²⁵ He warned that:

Nobody any longer believes that Article 5 automatically triggers a response. It triggers an automatic discussion of a response and then each nation decides what it wishes to do. Russia knows this very well.²²⁶

159. In response to these concerns, there has been a debate on the relative merits of revising the text of NATO Article 5 to incorporate acts of military aggression that may not instinctively be defined as an 'armed attack'.²²⁷ However, the Secretary of State for Defence cautioned against a detailed and prescriptive definition :

I think it is important for NATO not to try to define Article 5 too closely or to start listing a whole series of categories or thresholds in Article 5. That might make it easier for our adversaries to move up to the level just below the triggering of Article 5 itself.²²⁸

He argued that such a revision of Article 5 would be "counterproductive" as it might "weaken the article rather than strengthen it."²²⁹

160. *We agree with the Government's view that a redefinition of Article 5 could be counter-productive and that greater clarity on what does or does not constitute an Article 5 attack could play into the hands of Russia. Such a move would also run the risk of removing the ability of NATO to respond rapidly to an element of 'surprise'—a warfare tactic so prevalent in the new Russian doctrine. In that respect, the current ambiguity in Article 5 about what constitutes an armed attack should be considered as a strength not a weakness.*

Military cooperation with Russia

161. While there are current strains on relations between Russia and the West there have been periods of military cooperation between the two, not least in the latter part of the Second World War. More recently, as Lukasz Kulesa pointed out, there was cooperation between the two on practical issues, such as stability in Afghanistan.²³⁰ He emphasised that, despite the adversarial relationship between NATO and Russia and between the US and Russia, there was the potential for "co-operation on specific issues".²³¹ John Lough also noted that over the coming years co-operation with Russia was likely, with terrorism being a potential area.²³²

162. However, David Clark cautioned that, with any future collaboration with Russia in combating Islamist terrorism, an overlap of interest should not be mistaken for an exact correspondence of interest—Russian motivations might include an element of extraneous bargaining:

225 [Q13](#)

226 [Q13](#)

227 '[The North Atlantic Treaty \(1949\)](#)', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 1949

228 [Q172](#)

229 [Q176](#)

230 [Q7](#)

231 [Q8](#)

232 [Q162](#)

In particular, they might say, “We are co-operating on fighting Islamism in the Middle East, so why don’t you give us a little bit more in Ukraine? Why don’t you respect our sphere of influence? It would be so much easier for us to get along and to co-operate effectively in this area if you were giving us a little bit more in that area.”²³³

163. Despite this, the Secretary of State noted that, in the long term, the UK wanted a better relationship with Russia.²³⁴ He also saw the potential for cooperation within specific military arenas:

We continue to seek constructive engagement with Russia. We worked with them on the nuclear deal with Iran, and we are working with them today on seeking a political settlement in Syria. Most recently, we have been engaging with Russia on the future security and stability of Libya. We want a more constructive relationship with them.²³⁵

164. Military cooperation could be possible with Russia whilst maintaining a robust response to transgressions of international law. Differences in some areas of global politics do not necessarily exclude cooperation in areas of shared interest. It will be necessary, however, for the Government to be very clear about the extent to which military co-operation with Russia is possible, to set very clear limits and to engage with its eyes wide open.

²³³ [Q162](#)

²³⁴ [Q184](#)

²³⁵ [Q184](#)

6 Conclusion

165. In 2009, the last but one Defence Committee published a report on Russia.²³⁶ The subtitle, “A New Confrontation?” encapsulated the uncertain relations between the West and Russia at that time. The Report noted that Russia remained a major player on the world stage, and exerted significant influence upon international and European affairs via its military capability and a range of other levers.

166. In 2014, our predecessor Committee reported on NATO in the aftermath of Russian military actions in Ukraine, arguing that NATO was not well prepared for a Russian threat against a member state. In particular, it said that an unconventional attack, designed to slip below NATO’s response threshold, would be particularly difficult to counter. This posed a fundamental risk to NATO’s credibility.²³⁷

167. It is clear that these comments remain equally relevant today. Russia has become an increasingly active participant in conventional as well as multi-dimensional warfare. Russian cyber-attacks across Europe and territorial seizures in Georgia and Ukraine may not be isolated actions, but symptomatic of an ambition to stabilise domestic support, to reconstitute at least some of the former Soviet empire and to expand and restore Moscow’s global influence.

168. NATO remains the cornerstone of UK and Western defence, crucially dependent upon the deterrent power of United States membership and adherence to the Article 5 guarantee. To secure continued US participation whilst deterring Russian adventurism, the member states must play their part in ensuring that NATO can resist Russian military and unconventional warfare effectively.

169. We cannot hope to respond militarily to Russia without first understanding its way of thinking. This cannot be achieved without communication and dialogue, which the Government must aim to revive so that we do not suffer “another rude awakening.”²³⁸

170. At the same time, because Russia is a global player there remain opportunities for cooperation, if they can be grasped. We have identified cooperation in defeating DAESH and countering other manifestations of totalitarian Islamist extremism as one such possibility and we should like to see progress on this front. Yet, precisely because such cooperation would be based on common interests, it should not be dependent upon appeasing Russian ambitions to restore its dominance of countries which achieved independence after the downfall of Soviet communism. All those states which now enjoy the protection of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty must continue to defend each other, whilst recognising that this guarantee depends for its credibility upon not being stretched too thinly.

171. In the Cold War years, the West was usually careful not to give security guarantees which it could not fulfil: that sensible policy should not be abandoned if we wish to avoid returning to the perilous uncertainties of the pre-NATO era.

²³⁶ Defence Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2008–09, *Russia: a new confrontation?* HC 276

²³⁷ Defence Committee, Third Report of Session 2014–15, *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two—NATO*, HC 358

²³⁸ [Q102](#)

Conclusions and recommendations

The Russian military today

1. Whilst Russia cites self-defence against NATO expansion as a reason for its increased military spending, its rapid militarisation can, alternatively, be viewed as mobilisation against not only external threats but also internal dissent. Recent Russian actions and statements by senior figures imply that Russia is reinforcing itself for the prospect of future conflict with the West. If the West does not respond appropriately to such actions, it will be poorly equipped to deter such a conflict or successfully resist if one breaks out. *The MoD must set out its plans, as part of its broader strategy towards Russia, to acknowledge the rapid militarisation of the Russian state and develop measures to counter it, including the fulfilment of its promise in the SDSR to lead a renewed focus in NATO on deterrence. The Warsaw Summit is the opportunity to do so.* (Paragraph 18)
2. The expansion of the Russian military machine and recent Russian military engagements have been well-documented. Such actions are likely to be motivated—at least in part—in pursuit of greater recognition and respect for Russia as a world power. NATO's response to Russia's military expansion must therefore be nuanced. A hesitant response will be perceived by Russia as weakness, while facing Russia down may exacerbate antagonism between the two. A robust, clearly communicated response is required by the UK and NATO. (Paragraph 25)
3. Russia's strategy for its nuclear arsenal is an integrated component of its stated military doctrine. The UK and NATO must review their own nuclear doctrine, in the light of the Russian position, to ensure that it maintains the ability to deter Russian nuclear threats. *We recommend that the UK Government set out its timetable for the parliamentary debate and decision on the Successor programme in response to this Report and without further delay.* (Paragraph 32)
4. It is alarming if Russia is in breach of the terms of the 1987 INF Treaty which is crucial to Euro-Atlantic security and stability. *The UK and US governments, in conjunction with other NATO members at the Warsaw Summit, should determine a course of action either on how to repair the Treaty, or whether an alternative strategic settlement is required to maintain stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.* (Paragraph 36)
5. A recurring theme in Russian military strategy is the ability to combine various tools seamlessly, to give a fully integrated, comprehensive approach. The Russian attitude to cyber as a tool of warfare is no different, with a full-spectrum approach integral to the strategy of the Russian Government. (Paragraph 48)

Russian military actions

6. Russian actions in Ukraine have created a deep instability within Europe of a type not witnessed since the end of the Cold War. This is a problem for Europe in general and for the NATO alliance in particular. While Ukraine is not a member of NATO and therefore not subject to Article 5 guarantees, it was guaranteed by the Budapest

Agreement. Russian military action there thus raises questions over the security of neighbouring countries which fall within Russia's military reach and which Russia would like to bring into its sphere of influence. (Paragraph 59)

7. Russia's actions in Ukraine demonstrated the ruthlessness with which it will assert its plans and its willingness to ignore international law, treaties and agreements. They also demonstrated the speed and agility with which Russia could mobilise its Armed Forces, as well as the effective Russian use of proxy forces, information warfare and plausible deniability. *To the extent that the West was taken by surprise, the forthcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw should reassess NATO's doctrine and capability to respond to both the speed of Russian deployment, and the implications of Russia's ability to keep the West in the dark until it is ready to initiate military action.* (Paragraph 67)
8. Russia's military intervention in Syria has reduced the likelihood of Assad being overthrown—long a Western objective—but increased the prospect of cooperation with Russia in combating Islamist terrorism. Such cooperation depends upon both the coalition and Russia deciding to make it a shared objective. *The UK should assess what it can realistically do to engage with Russia, to test the practicability of working together against DAESH and other extreme groups. In principle, it is perfectly possible to confront and constrain an adversary in a region where our interests clash, whilst cooperating with him, to some degree, in a region where they coincide.* (Paragraph 76)
9. Russia's military expansion has included extensive reinforcements in Kaliningrad. While Russia has stated that this was a defensive measure to counter the threat of NATO, the further militarisation of Kaliningrad—which lies between Poland and Lithuania—could equally be considered a threat to the Baltic States. (Paragraph 82)
10. As members of NATO, the Baltic States are covered by Article 5, meaning that NATO would be compelled to respond to an armed attack. However, recent Russian activity demonstrates that it can threaten and destabilise countries without actually engaging in an explicit and open armed attack. *NATO must ensure it fully comprehends the nature and extent of threats designed not to trigger Article 5 and develops its strategies to counter multi-dimensional warfare in order to defend the Baltic States from such threats.* (Paragraph 83)
11. At present, the Arctic is not a militarised zone, but increasing tensions leave the future uncertain. Given the increasing Russian military presence in the Arctic, we shall return to this region in a separate inquiry later this year. *We request that the Government provides us with its assessment of the implications for UK security of developments in the Arctic when responding to this Report.* (Paragraph 87)
12. Russia has increasingly demonstrated military aggressiveness in different regions, as well as the ability to create confusion, fear and doubt in others, including NATO member states. Because it perceives these methods as successful, and because they appear to Russia to be unchallenged, it is likely that Russia will continue to use military means and unconventional warfare as ways of reasserting what it believes to be its rightful role on the international stage. Many of the Russian actions outlined in this chapter directly challenge the rules-based international order. Lukewarm responses will not gain respect from Russia, will not improve our relationship with

Russia, nor engineer a more palatable environment for European defence. The UK and NATO must employ robust and firm responses. Russia must be certain that Article 5 would be triggered should NATO consider that one of its member states has been the subject of an armed attack and effective countermeasures must be designed to deter potential Russian tactics tailored to circumvent the Article 5 guarantee. (Paragraph 94)

UK/NATO policy and strategy towards Russia

13. Whilst sanctions brought against Russia have caused economic harm, their effects are felt most keenly by the Russian public and they have not reduced Russian military investment and expansion. Nor have sanctions yet led to compliance with the Minsk Agreements. *We agree that the EU sanctions should be renewed in July. We also call on the Government to consider extending travel bans to a larger portion of the Russian leadership.* (Paragraph 103)
14. Russia has not been a UK priority since the end of the Cold War and our expertise in this field has withered on the vine. There are comparatively few Russian experts within the Government. Whilst the MoD says that around 40 specialists work on Russia, it is not clear what their level of expertise is, nor whether these cover full-spectrum assessment of Russia, including security, economics, and intelligence remits. *The Government must set out how it will address this shortcoming in order to ensure a solid cadre of experts on Russia who can help to provide, over a sustained period, an effective response to the challenges now posed by Russia. We would also welcome clarity as to how long they have worked on the Russian brief and accordingly what is the level of institutional memory.* (Paragraph 113)
15. It is clear to us that there is a large pool of expertise on Russia which exists externally to the Government, and we welcome the efforts by the Government to utilise this. However, a large number of Russia experts alone will not solve the problem. If expert advice is not effectively understood and utilised within the decision-making systems of Whitehall, expanding the pool of knowledge will not deliver the required results. *We recommend that the Government designate Russia as a high priority, and set out how the mechanisms within Whitehall will ensure that external advice is disseminated and acted upon at the highest levels.* (Paragraph 114)
16. The importance of the role of the Defence Attaché became apparent during our visit to Moscow. It offers the UK a window into Russian military thinking, and an invaluable avenue for dialogue and knowledge-sharing. *We are concerned that the MoD has yet to identify sufficient individuals to fill several vacant posts in that office. This must be done as a matter of urgency, alongside a commitment to expand the Moscow Defence Section to a size commensurate with, and at ranks which reflect, the importance of its role.* (Paragraph 117)
17. Dialogue between NATO and Russia is essential to reduce the risk of military escalation and misunderstandings between them both. It is not incompatible with a more adversarial relationship, such as has recently developed. We therefore welcome the reconvening of the NATO-Russia Council, while limited in outcomes, as an important step to re-establishing dialogue between Russia and the West. (Paragraph 121)

18. It is clear to us that Russia has harnessed a wide range of capabilities which can rapidly be deployed for use in conjunction with classic military power. NATO needs to respond in kind if it is to counter unconventional as well as conventional warfare. *We therefore most strongly recommend that NATO, as part of its response to Russia, addresses its shortcomings in terms of the full range of unconventional warfare.* (Paragraph 130)
19. We are concerned that the UK and NATO do not yet have a fully-developed strategy to counter Russian propaganda and disinformation effectively. We understand that efforts are underway in NATO to develop this. In that respect, the establishment of 77 Brigade by the MoD is a welcome step in the right direction. *However, the budget available to Russia means that NATO must substantially increase the level of resources which member states commit to this work.* (Paragraph 137)
20. The NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) is a welcome addition to NATO's capabilities. There is concern, however, over the ability of the VJTF to respond speedily and effectively in the event of need. *It will be essential to have agreements for the rapid movement of personnel, equipment and platforms across Europe between member states should the VJTF need to be deployed. We would welcome details of how far advanced such agreements are. We invite the Government to set out how the VJTF will match Russian capability and speed of engagement in regions on NATO's periphery.* (Paragraph 148)
21. However, in our view, we should be aware of the dangers of undermining the credibility of the Article 5 guarantee—and thus of the entire alliance—by offering NATO membership to states which a potential adversary would not believe we would go to war to defend. We should therefore make it clear that NATO would take Article 5 action in respect of any new member country before it was allowed to join the Alliance. (Paragraph 152)
22. Russia considers any enhanced military presence in the Baltic States as a threat to its borders. Therefore, we should expect any NATO military consolidation to be mirrored on the Russian side of the border. Further militarisation of the border in this way could increase the risk of misunderstandings, miscalculation or accidents. *The UK and NATO should be very clear in engaging Russia during the Warsaw Summit, and strive for transparency to explain the decisions that it takes. We recommend that the Government reports on how it has increased military dialogue with Russia, both before and during the Warsaw Summit, to reduce the potential for an unintended escalation of hostilities.* (Paragraph 155)
23. *We agree with the Government's view that a redefinition of Article 5 could be counter-productive and that greater clarity on what does or does not constitute an Article 5 attack could play into the hands of Russia. Such a move would also run the risk of removing the ability of NATO to respond rapidly to an element of 'surprise'—a warfare tactic so prevalent in the new Russian doctrine. In that respect, the current ambiguity in Article 5 about what constitutes an armed attack should be considered as a strength not a weakness.* (Paragraph 160)
24. Military cooperation could be possible with Russia whilst maintaining a robust response to transgressions of international law. Differences in some areas of global

politics do not necessarily exclude cooperation in areas of shared interest. It will be necessary, however, for the Government to be very clear about the extent to which military cooperation with Russia is possible, to set very clear limits and to engage with its eyes wide open. (Paragraph 164)

Appendix: Comparison between Russian, UK and US military hardware

	Russia	UK	US
ICBM (Launchers)	332	0	450
Bomber aircraft	139	0	157
Ballistic-missile nuclear-powered submarines	13	4	14
Armoured infantry fighting vehicles	7,572	400	4,559
Main battle tanks	2,950	227	2,831
Artillery	5,145	610	7,429
Attack/guided missile submarines	49	6	57
Aircraft carriers	1	0	10
Cruisers, destroyers and frigates	34	19	88
Principal amphibious ships	0	6	30
Tactical aircraft	1,084	194	3,130
Attack helicopters	271	50	902
Heavy/medium transport helicopters	368	106	2,793
Heavy/medium transport aircraft	190	38	699
Tanker and multi-role tanker/transport aircraft	15	12	532
Airborne early-warning and control aircraft	18	6	107
Heavy unmanned aerial vehicles	Unknown	10	540

Source: IISS, The Military Balance, 2016

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 28 June 2016

Members present:

Dr Julian Lewis, in the Chair

Richard Benyon	Jim Shannon
Douglas Chapman	Ruth Smeeth
James Gray	John Spellar
Mrs Madeleine Moon	Bob Stewart

Draft Report (*Russia: Implications for UK defence and security*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 171 read and agreed to.

Appendix agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 5 July 2016 at 10.45am]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 1 March 2016

Question number

James Sherr, Fellow and Former Head of the Chatham House Russia Programme, **Keir Giles**, Director of the Conflict Studies Research Centre, Eurasian Security, and **Łukasz Kulesa**, Director, Research, European Leadership Network

[Q1–18](#)

Mark Laity, Chief of Strategic Communications (StratCom), SHAPE, and **Robert Pszczel**, Acting Director, NATO Information Office in Moscow, Public Diplomacy Division, NATO HQ

[Q19–31](#)

Tuesday 8 March 2016

Dr Bobo Lo, Independent Analyst, **Peter Pomerantsev**, Senior Fellow, Legatum Institute, and **Dr Igor Sutyagin**, Senior Research Fellow, Royal United Services Institute

[Q32–76](#)

Dr Victor Madeira, Senior Fellow, the Institute for Statecraft, and **Dr Andrew Monaghan**, Senior Research Fellow of the Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House

[Q77–106](#)

Tuesday 19 April 2016

David Clark, Independent Consultant, **John Lough**, Vice President, Gabara Strategies Ltd, and **Ben Nimmo**, Senior Fellow, Institute for Statecraft

[Q107–162](#)

Tuesday 24 May 2016

Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP, Secretary of State for Defence, **Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach GBE, KCB, ADC, DL**, Chief of the Defence Staff Designate, and **Peter Watkins CBE**, Director General Security Policy, Ministry of Defence

[Q163–247](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

RUS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Ben Nimmo and Dr Jonathan Eyal ([RUS0016](#))
- 2 Christopher Donnelly ([RUS0018](#))
- 3 DefenceSynergia ([RUS0014](#))
- 4 Dr David Blagden ([RUS0015](#))
- 5 Dr Françoise Thom ([RUS0011](#))
- 6 Dr Lilia Shevtsova ([RUS0002](#))
- 7 Dr Nick Ritchie ([RUS0009](#))
- 8 Dr Sascha Dov Bachmann and Brigadier (Rtd) Anthony Paphiti ([RUS0001](#))
- 9 Dr Sue Robertson ([RUS0008](#))
- 10 Dr Victor Madeira ([RUS0017](#))
- 11 Dr Anna Matveeva and Professor Richard Sakwa ([RUS0003](#))
- 12 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([RUS0019](#))
- 13 Glen Grant ([RUS0013](#))
- 14 James Sherr ([RUS0012](#))
- 15 Ministry of Defence ([RUS0006](#))
- 16 Ministry of Defence ([RUS0020](#))
- 17 Oxford Research Group ([RUS0010](#))
- 18 Professor Brian George Hewitt ([RUS0004](#))
- 19 The Henry Jackson Society ([RUS0005](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

First Report	Flexible response? An SDSR checklist of potential threats and vulnerabilities	HC 493 (HC 794)
Second Report	Shifting the goalposts? Defence expenditure and the 2% pledge	HC 494 (HC 465)
Third Report	Beyond endurance? Military exercises and the duty of care	HC 598
Fourth Report	An acceptable risk? The use of Lariam for military personnel	HC 567
First Special Report	Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2013–14: Government response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 365
Second Special Report	Re-thinking defence to meet new threats: Government response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2014–15	HC 366
Third Special Report	Decision-making in Defence Policy: Government response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2014–15	HC 367
Fourth Special Report	Flexible Response? An SDSR checklist of potential threats and vulnerabilities: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16	HC 794