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IS ARMED CONFLICT WITH RUSSIA A REAL POSSIBILITY?

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PARTICIPANTS:

Featured Speaker:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to Brookings. Great to have you here. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy Program. I have a particular pleasure today to welcome General Sir Richard Shirreff, who is a British General recently retired from the British Armed Forces, who had been the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe until just recently upon his retirement.

He was born in Kenya. He has lived the life of a British General all over the world. He has served 37 years in his country's armed forces, and on assignments ranging from the Balkans to Ireland to Iraq, and of course, with the last 6 or 7 years of his career focused intensively on Europe, and specifically as time went on, increasingly on the Russia challenge.

As I think you all know, he has written a book, which we invite you if you are inclined to purchase, and in fact, with the holidays coming, you should purchase multiple copies, and he will be kind enough to sign a few, if you wish, afterwards as well. It is a book called "War with Russia."

It is a book as you will see and how you will hear is meant to dramatize the issues that face us today as an alliance, and in the case of our particular countries, the United States and the United Kingdom, but the entire NATO Alliance and the entire free world, if you will, in dealing with the challenge that Russia now poses to European order.

I have read a large fraction of it, and look forward to completing it. It is an extremely lively and enjoyable read, if this sort of thing can be enjoyable. You can allow one part of your brain to just have fun with the story, the other part to realize there are some pretty powerful messages and warnings that are meant to be taken fully seriously.

How we will proceed today is after I ask you in just a moment to join me in welcoming Sir Richard to Washington, he will give some opening remarks, summarizing as much of the book as he sees prudent as a guy who still wants you to buy the book and not know the whole plot before you have done so, but also, of course, to tee up some of the broader policy issues which will then to a large extent be where we go in the conversation.

I will begin with him up here, and then invite you to join in thereafter. Without further ado, please join me in welcoming Sir Richard to Brookings. (Applause)

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Michael, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much indeed. It is a particular honor, a real honor to be here at Brookings, such an impressive and prestigious institution as it hits its 100th anniversary.

It is also a pleasure to return to Washington.

The first thing that stopped me when I came into Brookings as I just came a little bit earlier was the impressive nature of the many books in the book shop as you come in. I hesitate, I feel somewhat diffident, I'm sure, that what is effectively a pretty trashy novel should be sitting alongside some very impressive academic terms.

As Michael said, there is a message in this. I think it's particularly relevant at the moment as you approach the event that is transfixing certainly Europe in three weeks' time, and tonight's debate as well, and raises a number of questions.

I guess I'll get straight in it, as it were, because since the formation of NATO in 1949, I don't think it will be overstating the case to say that the defense of Europe has depended on the total certainty, that whichever President from whichever party is occupying the White House, there will be absolutely no question of the United States' readiness and willingness to come to the aid of a NATO member if attacked.

So, raising questions about that, not only sends a shiver of fear

throughout Eastern Europe and the Baltic States, but it also raises real questions about the credibility of NATO's collective defense and its ability to deter aggression.

That in a sense also, rather chillingly, makes the scenario that I outlined in the book rather more, rather than less likely.

Let's look at the challenge that faces NATO and the western world at the moment from Russia, from resurgent Russia. If we consider President Putin's words and deeds, it is worth, I think, going back to the speech he made in the Kremlin on the 18th of March 2014, the day that the Premier was admitted into the Russian Federation.

He said a number of things, and I remember very well sitting in the comprehensive crisis operations management center the morning after that speech, and General Skip Davis, a very impressive American two star, gave us a transcript of the speech and briefed us. He said I think this just might be a paradigm shifting speech, and I think he was absolutely right.

Putin majored on the threat the west poses to Russia, and I quote, "Time and again, we were deceived. Time and again, the decisions were made behind our backs, and the same happened when they made their expansion to the east with the deployment of military structures on our borders."

He set this grievance in historical context to make it resonate more. "We have all the reasons to believe that the policy of containment of Russia that happened in the 18th, the 19th, and the 20th centuries, is still going on." He warns the west to expect push back from Russia, and If you press the spring, it will release at some point, something you should remember."

"As for the Ukraine, we are not neighbors, we are one nation. Kiev is the mother of Russian cities." What he described as the latest events in Ukraine were the product of terror, murders, and riots conducted by anti-Semites, Russophobes,

Nationalists, and neo-Nazis.

His vision for the future, uniting Russian speakers on Russia is the desire of the people, 95 percent, he says, of the Russian population think Russia should protect the interests of all Russians, even if it will worse our relations with some states. Of course, he is predictably reassuring on Russia's good intentions for the future of Ukraine and what he calls "other regions," by which we can infer, I think, that he means other countries with significant Russian speaking minorities.

Don't trust those who frighten you with Russia, those who say Crimea will be followed by other regions. We do not want to split Ukraine.

Two years on, and the situation is very different. The invasion of Crimea has been followed, predictably, of course, by the invasion of other regions. The Ukraine is split and thousands dead in the war in its eastern regions, and what is called a "cease fire," has effectively been no cease fire at all, with continuing bombing, shelling, shooting on either side of the front line that absolutely continues to this day.

Effectively by his actions, President Putin has ripped up the post-Cold War security settlement of Europe, a settlement based perhaps in retrospect somewhat naively on working with Russia as a strategic partner. Now, any partnership with Russia, thoughts of partnerships with Russia are long since gone, because Russia in Ambassador Sandy Vershbow's words "Is now de facto, a strategic adversary."

The threats continue to rise. I reflect on the time I wrote this book in 2015, and somehow since then, the ratchet of tension and the threat just continues to click up relentlessly and remorselessly. We see unprecedented levels of military activity on the borders and in the airspace of the Baltic States, Finland and Sweden, and they have been matched by a rapid build-up there of Russian military forces.

For example, in January alone, the Russians announced the formation of

three motor rifle divisions, right on the frontiers of the Baltic States. Now, a division, about 15,000 to 20,000 personnel. So, that is quite a significant military force.

Meanwhile, the Russians continue to threaten their neighbors and dominate with their so-called "snap exercises," a collage of up to 30,000 military personnel, formations. A recent snap exercise used the occupation and invasion of the Baltic States as a scenario.

One of the other factors that always appears to accompany those snap exercises is the final phase of the so-called, rather chillingly called "nuclear de-escalation." In other words, we seize what we want to achieve, we seize our objective, and if our opposition comes back at us, we threaten them with tactical nuclear weapons.

Of course, it's interesting that most recently, last week, we saw reports of the deployment of nuclear capable weapons to Kaliningrad, that little enclave between Lithuania and Poland.

Let's just go back to that speech for a moment, and consider things perhaps from the Russian perspective. Does he have a point? Is there a point about containment, provocation, the expansion of NATO?

Well, I declare myself absolutely 100 percent behind the expansion of NATO back in the 1990s and bringing in of the Baltic States into NATO in 2004. They absolutely more than meet the requirement for NATO membership. In terms of values, liberal democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law, they more than meet the requirement.

Frankly, having existed under the Soviet empire, and before that, the Tsarist empire, and only enjoyed nationhood for a brief period in the 1920s and 1930s, I think it is great that the Baltic States are now firmly part of the NATO alliance.

Having said that, I don't think it was clever for NATO to promise NATO

membership to Ukraine and Georgia back in 2008 at the Bucharest Summit, because a promise of NATO membership for a start, the potential member country has to meet certain very strict NATO criteria for membership, but also NATO has that promise of collective defense, that promise, that unconditional guarantee under Article 5 has got to be credible. I don't think from a military perspective, NATO could ever offer a credible guarantee of collective defense to Ukraine, and of course, Georgia has a significant proportion of its territory currently occupied by Russians as well.

So, I would draw a line there. I would also say that NATO has, of course, been acidulous in trying to build up that strategic partnership with Russia, and I was very much a part of that when I was in service, not the least because we felt that Russia faced very much the same sort of security challenges and threats the west did in terms particularly of Jihadist terrorism, and there was common ground to be had there.

Perhaps in retrospect, we returned too quickly to business as usual after the invasion of Georgia in 2008, an operation which I think held up a mirror to NATO, which could have been beneficial to NATO had NATO wanted to look in the mirror.

For whatever the tactical inadequacies that operation exposed with the Russians, the use of mobile phones by commanders because radios weren't working and the like, actually, Russia demonstrated an ability, number one, to make ruthless decisions very quickly at a time when the world's attention was focused on the Beijing Olympics, and secondly, from a military perspective, Russia was able to deploy significant military force, two to three divisions or thereabouts, which frankly I think any NATO nation, even the United States, would be pressed to do that at the sort of readiness the Russians were able to do it.

I think part of that by collectively returning to business as usual after that, we sent a signal to Putin that the use of aggression in his narrow broad was okay, and

we would turn a blind eye.

What do we think he was wanting to achieve? Here, don't forget, is the man who described the breakup of the Soviet Union as the greatest geostrategic catastrophe of the 20th century. That is quite a big thing to say when you consider two world wars and a holocaust. He's quite serious about this.

I don't think he's looking to reestablish the Soviet Union. I do think he wants to see Russia as a great power again. I do think he wants to see Russian domination of its immediate neighborhood, its narrow broad, as much as anything, because that is what the defense of Russia is about.

There is nevertheless almost a sort of 19th century imperialist view here that says you achieve your security by trampling and dominating your neighbors.

I think the point about reuniting Russian speakers under the banner of mother Russia remains an enduring theme. Again, a sort of linguistic imperialism. Imagine if the United Kingdom decided our right was to protect English speakers across the world. I leave that with you.

I think he would like nothing more than to see the destruction of NATO or the neutering of NATO as an alliance, and I think he would like nothing more than to see America decoupled from European security.

The reality, I think, is that Putin has put Russia or has started a dynamic which could put Russia on a collision course with NATO over the Baltic States, all of which are NATO members, and of course, all of which are subject to the Article 5 guarantee of collective defense.

If he did, and I say "if" advisedly here, if he had a go at the Baltic States because he thought that the opportunity was right to achieve a strategic objective in terms of the destruction of NATO, for example, that means war. Every NATO member is

bound to fight for them, and it means nuclear war on the basis that Russia incorporates or brings nuclear thinking into every aspect of their defense or military doctrine.

Now, from a rational point of view, it is one heck of a stretch from invasion of Crimea, invasion of Ukraine, to invasion of the Baltic States and a potential nuclear war. From a rational point of view, it would be almost impossible to conceive of a circumstance where any rational decision maker would risk nuclear conflagration for that.

My response to that would be that all too often in history, history has demonstrated that strategy is more and more above all about the human dimension, and humans are not necessarily rational, and indeed, certainly we need to think and be prepared for the worse case.

This is all about thinking the worst case and ensuring that the risks of the worst case are as managed, as mitigated, as reduced as possible, because the reality is nearly a quarter of a century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I think the west faces a greater threat of war in Western Europe than at any stage since even perhaps the darkest days of the Cold War, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, possibly.

Listen to Dmitry Kiselyov. I know he is the Kremlin's chief propagandist, and this may well be as much about domestic consumption as about the international audience, but he's the man who boasted on TV that only Russia has the capability to reduce America to radioactive dust, and that even a decision about the use of nuclear weapons would be taken personally by Mr. Putin who has the undoubted support of the Russian people.

Is this a return to the Cold War? I think it's more dangerous than that. I think the Cold War for all the balance of weaponry and military personnel on either side of the Iron Curtain, there was a degree of balance, and a degree of stability, and above all, there were means of communication for reducing misunderstandings.

We don't have those means of communication now. Perhaps we should look at the way communication was done in the Cold War to reduce the risk of things boiling over. Particularly, I look at Western Europe and I see weak, politically weak, militarily weak, not necessarily economically weak, western democracies facing an autocrat who has changed the boundaries of Europe by force, got away with it, and who has spent significant and continues to spend significant amounts of money on building up his armed forces.

Coming closer to where we are now today, these events, of course, matter on this side of the Atlantic. What happens in these far away countries of which we know little, to paraphrase Mr. Chamberlain's unfortunate comment from 1938 in the Czech/Slovak crisis, really matter, because for number one, if Russia puts one soldier across the borders of the Baltic States, that means America is at war, and of course, as I said earlier, potentially nuclear war as well.

Arguably, Russia thinks of itself at war with America already. In the 21st century, the hacking of democratic party e-mails, in order to destabilize, undermine the integrity of an election in a potentially target state, that could be construed, I think, as an act of 21st century warfare, and certainly its other piece with the Russian approach to asymmetric hybrid wall that we saw deployed so effectively in Crimea two years ago.

The undermining of the integrity of your target, below the level at which in a NATO context could trigger an Article 5 response through the use of special forces, the manipulation of minorities, the use of clever, sophisticated, entertaining Kremlin TV, and of course, the use of cyber.

Perhaps the WikiLeaks' saga of leaking of Mrs. Clinton's e-mails is all part of that piece as well.

Certainly in the words of Dmitri Trenin who heads up the Carnegie

Moscow Center, a respected think tank, and a man with very close contacts with the regime, the Kremlin has been at war since 2014.

What to do about it? The clock may be ticking close to midnight, but I would argue that it is not too late. The maintenance of the Transatlantic peace we have enjoyed for 70 years depends on effective deterrence, and instilling a genuine belief by the Russians that we will defend ourselves.

As I said earlier, the bar of risk must be raised so high or high enough at least so that Russian thinkers, planners, decision makers in Moscow decide it is just not worth going that far.

In defense terms, NATO needs number one to think through what is collective defense? What does Article 5 actually mean in the 21st century? For somebody of my generation, young officer at the end of the Cold War, there is a tendency to think of Article 5 through Cold War spectacles, massive Soviet tank divisions on the other side of the inner German border, based around Magdeburg, ready to pour across.

Well, it's not like that now. How do we react to the sort of asymmetric approach that we have seen the Russians deploy frankly pretty effectively? I think this requires thinking. It requires training. It requires scenario testing. It requires the North Atlantic Council to really discuss against different scenarios how they might react, and I would also suggest it needs our political leadership to think how they might react.

I remember as a young officer in the military defense during the Cold War, many of you might remember the WINTEX series of exercises that took place on an annual basis or biannual basis, when NATO did practice precisely these things, how it would react during the Cold War.

I can remember that on one of these exercises Mrs. Thatcher decided she would take part. Her officials did not particularly like the fact that she was taking part,

but on the other hand, she said I might have to make some tough decisions, so I'm going to take part.

It is thinking and developing muscle memory. It is about a presence forward in the Baltic States that is militarily credible. Yes, the NATO Alliance agreed in the Warsaw Summit in July to preposition four battalions. I note it is now towards the end of October, and we have yet to see anybody on the ground in the Baltic States.

I would also suggest that four battalions on their own is not a joined up military capability, because presence in the Baltic States -- we have to be able to demonstrate, NATO has to be able to demonstrate that it has a credible defense plan that would survive the test of combat by land, by sea, by air, a joint air-land concept, an army group concept, that is integrated fully with the forces of the three Baltic States and of course, that also takes into account of the need to bring in effective NATO reserves.

I would suggest that a very high readiness joint task force of about 5,000, which is all the NATO Alliance -- the sharp end of the spear, 14 different nations, many of whom have not trained together, have not worked together, may have to drive from Albania or from western parts to get there, is that a credible reserve? I wonder.

I would suggest going back to look at something like the old ACE mobile force that NATO fabricated from the Cold War, which trained and practiced with a permanent command system on an annual basis, Northern Norway, Southern Turkey, the flanks of NATO, and which brought all the members of NATO in. It is about the capability of reserves. It is also about putting our money where our mouth is, on our side of the Atlantic, particularly.

I think it was a pretty limp excuse or limp comment by the NATO Summit in 2014, the Wales Summit, that we will promise to try and raise our defense spending to 2 percent of GDP within 10 years. That isn't going to fool anybody, frankly.

If we are to rebuilt the lost capabilities that are required for high end warfighting that have been lost by the Alliance, we're talking in the margin much, much more than just 2 percent, and let's not forget, there are only four nations anyway in the Alliance which spends more than 2 percent of GDP, and one of them is yours, of course.

If you would just look at the increasingly dependence by the Alliance on America to pick up the bills. If you look back 25 years and split NATO defense spending 50/50, it was pretty much a 50/50 split between the U.S., Europe and Canada. Now, it's more like a 75 percent U.S., 25 percent U.S. and Canada, which is not good enough.

How do we change that? I think the only way that is going to be changed is if the European populations are sufficiently frightened by the threat, and recognize the nature of the threat. I have to say I do not see any sign of that happening at all.

In a word, it's all about sending that message, the strongest possible message, that thus far perhaps but absolutely no further, and we will protect NATO territory, so don't even think about it.

To those who say isn't this being provocative, I would reply by saying Russia respects strength. Of course, it was Stalin when told of the power of the Catholic Church said how many divisions is the Pope? I think that thinking continues. Russia respects strength and despises weakness, and will continue to probe weakness.

The message must have substance. It means diplomacy, backed up by sanctions, of course, but it also, I think, means we have to find the means of dialogue. Russia is a great nation, and we want to and need to be able to live with Russia on peaceful terms, without the sort of shadow that is hanging over the relationship at the moment, because the last thing we want to do is stumble into something as catastrophic as a war.

The challenge is to open up those lines of communication, and the

challenge, I think, is to find some means of negotiating and understanding. It must start, of course, with an absolute red line about NATO territory, NATO airspace, hence, the importance of deterrence and strong deterrence, but perhaps other things might need to be in the mix in order to find a way of living alongside Russia.

If I could just come back to the book, it is written as a wakeup call. It's written to get people thinking. It's written not for an audience for whom defense and defense policy is their bread and butter. It is aimed very much at the general reader to get these things in what is hopefully a reasonably approachable way.

It is about the Baltic States, yes, first and foremost, and you will see from the dedication it is that, because I think what they have achieved in their last 20 years has been most impressive, and we need to look after them.

It is about the danger of the dynamic that Putin has started with his invasion of Crimea. It is about the imperative of effective deterrents, the reality as well, that the NATO emperor is wearing some frankly pretty skimpy clothes and spin over substance in that respect.

From a U.K. perspective, and I'm afraid unashamedly, I have a go at the U.K. government for the evisceration of U.K. defense, and I say that essentially as a NATO officer. I was not a British officer. I was a NATO officer. I saw ourselves as others saw us. In a sense, to hold the mirror up again.

Finally, and I think most important, it is about the critical importance of American leadership of NATO.

Thank you very much for listening to me. (Applause)

MR. O'HANLON: Sir Richard, that was brilliant, extraordinarily erudite, very engaging, and a tremendous presentation. Again, I want to assure everyone the book is just as good.

I also would like to make a plea that you not give up on that idea of reunifying the English speaking peoples under British rule, prior to an election date, because depending on the outcome, I may be rooting for that. (Laughter) That is my own editorial comment.

Just a few questions, and then as you can see, there is quite a turn out you generated, and we will want to bring in the audience.

I was struck by your discussion of comparing today to the Cold War. I want to just put a proposition before you and see how you react to this. You said today may be even more dangerous. I was thinking maybe today is sort of like that early Cold War period which encompassed the Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis, when seemingly smallest stakes nonetheless became seen as symbols of potentially a larger process, and therefore, we came to the verge of conflict with the Soviets over one city or part of one city twice, and then over a small Caribbean Island another time, is that a good analogy with where we are today?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I think it is, yes. It was through those experiences that the Cold War in a sense became almost institutionalized, and the means of communication were established. The obvious one, I suppose, is the hotline between Moscow and Washington after Cuba.

I think there is another point here which is missing, which makes it more dangerous, which is in the 1950s and early 1960s, memories were still very, very fresh of the consequences and the costs in Russia and the Soviet Union of the great patriotic war. Of course, that has now been lost.

Also perhaps, and I defer to those who know the governance of the Soviet Union much better than me, but my sense is that there was a degree of collective leadership which meant a single individual perhaps did not have the same degree of hold

on the levers of power that I think exists at the moment, which also is another factor.

MR. O'HANLON: I wanted to try to do something which none of us can do very well but peer into Vladimir Putin's brain, if not his soul, at least his brain and thinking, and try to figure out what he might have in mind.

You are obviously worried that he could have new things in mind, or at least that if he senses an opportunity, he may try for more land grabs in Ukraine or even the Baltic States.

Do you think he has a grand plan or do you think he's opportunistic fundamentally, and therefore, do you think he is sort of feeling his way as he goes and as he watches what we do?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I think he's a very canny strategic operator. I do think he has a goal. I think it is the presence of Russia as a global player, as a great power, and I think in order to achieve that, he will seize opportunities as they present themselves, in all of the same ways that he seized the opportunity after the collapse of the Yanukovych regime to get Crimea back.

Along the way, he seized an opportunity to intervene in Syria at a time and place of his choosing to achieve maximum public relations, personal ratings, benefit.

I would not rule out other opportunities being presented. I think also what he does, what Russia does, we tend to think in stovepipes between Europe or the Middle East, but I don't think Russia thinks about that.

I think Russia and President Putin will see a strategic linkage between what happens in Europe and what happens in Syria, and that is understandable because of course, Russia operates as a European power, as a Central Asian power, and as a Far Eastern power. It has to think strategically in a way certainly that we in Europe tend not to.

MR. O'HANLON: One more thing about looking at Putin and trying to understand where he's coming from, and you have helped me think this through just today in our discussions and in reading your book, if we think back to the evolution of Putin's thinking and actions, he came into power early in the century trying to rescue his country from, as he saw it, the weakness and embarrassment of NATO triumphalism, and then I think the NATO Summit of 2002 offered membership to the Baltics, and then the formal joining was in 2004, and that is also, as you reminded me, the year when Russia paid off its foreign debt.

Then there were a couple of years there before Putin got particularly nasty when he already knew we had the Baltics in NATO, but in 2008 is the year we had a big conversation within NATO about offering membership someday to Ukraine and Georgia.

Do you think that was a defining moment for Putin or do you think maybe he already had this kind of belligerence in mind, which he first exemplified in Georgia in 2008, it was maybe already in mind even in earlier years, but it just took him a while to wait for the right opportunity?

I realize we are just trying to guess what makes this guy tick, and it's pretty hard. Just in terms of looking at the history as a guide to the future policy making environment.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I think potentially it has always been there, although as we discussed earlier, actually in that immediate period in the 1990s, Russia/NATO cooperation, particularly over the implementation of the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia, was exceptionally close. There was almost a de facto Russian Deputy Segur, a senior four-star officer, who was the liaison officer to NATO.

You see a flash of this in 1999 before the foreign debt is paid off, and this

is the beginning, I think, of an indication that where there are opportunities to flex muscles, they will take them.

I think in 2008, that promise of at some stage in the dim and distant future, but it was nevertheless a promise, and this is something NATO has to confront at some stage, of membership to Ukraine and Georgia, is the trigger, and what a surprise it is that shortly after that, during the Olympics, the invasion of Georgia happens.

Interestingly enough, I remember being in Georgia in 2013, and the Georgians being very concerned that something would be happening around Tbilisi. Of course, they were right. It wasn't in Georgia, it was in Crimea.

MR. O'HANLON: I just have two more questions. One is about your thoughts on policy towards Ukraine today. I'd just like to give you the opportunity to give any guidance you think might be appropriate for NATO in general but also specifically for the United States, about the degree of bilateral or alliance, Ukraine security cooperation, that we should be aspiring to.

Here at Brookings, as I mentioned earlier, we have had pretty vigorous debate including in public about whether we should be arming the Ukrainians. The U.S. Congress and most of President Obama's Administration feel the answer should be yes. President Obama himself seems to feel the answer is no, so we have not done so on his watch, but he's only going to be in the White House for three more months to this day, I guess.

Therefore, that raises the question of how forward leaning we should be in stepping up our support for the Ukrainian armed forces. You may or may not want to go there on this issue, but if you have any guidance or any broad thoughts, I'd be curious to hear them and I'm sure others would, too.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I think from a NATO perspective, NATO has got

to operate at the speed of the slowest ship in the convoy, and the most important and the one thing NATO has got to do is maintain alliance cohesion. The danger or the concern that I would have of a challenge of a proactive NATO effort to support the Ukraine is you begin to eat away at alliance cohesion. That is really going to be critical to maintain the strength of Article 5. I would come down more in favor of the bilateral support that you have described.

As far as the provision of lethal support, I think it is a very tough one. I can see how the argument can sway both ways. I think there are legal issues. I think there are governance issues. There are corruption issues. These all need to be addressed.

I think as a general principle what the west should be trying to do with Ukraine is to demonstrate the benefits, there are benefits in looking to the west in terms of financial support, governance support, anti-corruption, support with civic society.

I think that is about as far as I would go at the moment.

MR. O'HANLON: I should have said three months from today is President Obama's last full day in office, being October 19. We certainly are near the transition.

My last question, and you started to get at this general subject in your last response. When we try to understand the relative importance of economic deterrents and military deterrents, I think I hear you saying let's do both, let's not just assume that economic deterrents alone will be enough to convince Putin to behave, but you want to have a military deterrent as well.

In your mind, do you have sort of a pecking order or hierarchy of which of these is more important? In other words, if Putin were to try to invade more of Ukraine or a swatch of the Baltics where Russian speakers reside today, one option would be -- the

best option would be to deter him in the first place with a forward defense, another option would be to militarily push him back with all the risks associated with that and the difficulties, and a third option would be to essentially establish a new line in the sand, saying you shall go no further, and we will now slap on economic sanctions, Cold War style, until you learn this is a crazy thing to do.

Obviously, that last option isn't very good because then Russia is sitting on part of Baltic territory for an indefinite period of time.

I still have this question in my mind and I'm sure you thought about it, to what extent does the possibility of tougher sanctions on Russia dissuade Putin already, and to what extent is the military deterrent therefore sort of a supplement as opposed to the lead instrument of western policy?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: The red line is absolutely for me anyway NATO, it is NATO territory, it is NATO airspace, and NATO sea space. There could be no equivocation over that.

The business of the balance of military, economic, and diplomacy must be looked at. The purpose of the book in a sense is to highlight the inadequacies of military deterrents, as I'm speaking as an ex-military man. I think we have to have that in place. Unless you have that, unless you speak from a position of strength, particularly diplomacy is tougher, but don't underestimate.

As far as economic deterrents are concerned, that is the sharp point of the spear at the moment, and that is the thing that is having the effect, and yes, of course, sanctions are double edged, but the impact on the Russian economy has been significant.

Of course, let's not also forget the potential actions that could be taken on closing down money supplies, for example, which would really frighten, I think,

particularly given the wealth that sits in Moscow.

It's all part of a whole.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. There is only one ground rule, don't give away the whole plot if you have already read the book. You can dance around it and allude to the issues that are raised therein. We will start here on the front row. Please wait for the microphone and identify yourself before asking your question.

MS. FEINBERG: Victoria Feinberg. I'm a former Soviet citizen, now I'm an American citizen. (Inaudible) Nobody seems to pay attention. When the Russian plane flew over Turkey, Turkey shot it down. Was that the right response by Turkey? Is that a good model?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Interesting question. When Russian planes fly over the Baltics, they are politely escorted out of Baltic airspace by the Baltic air policing mission. I think you are absolutely right, this happens on a fairly regular basis, and it is indeed conducted in a very -- these Russian incursions are a form of intimidation as well as a form of testing and probing and analyzing the way NATO responds.

If NATO should apply the Erdogan response to shooting down is a question, I think, I'm going to duck. All I would observe is that having shot down that Russian aircraft in November last year, Erdogan and Putin now seem to have built a remarkable rapport despite it.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

MR. BORGER: Julian Borger from The Guardian. You concentrate on Europe, obviously, but what should the new Administration do about the Russian dominant presence in Syria? Should there be an attempt to push that back?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: That's a really tough question for policymakers and diplomats. Going back a bit, pre-2014, I think it was an absolute given, and again

from discussions in Moscow, there was recognition that the only way the international community was going to be able to come to any sensible approach over Syria was if Russia was part of the equation.

I think the reality is we are now too far for that because of what's been happening over the bombing of Aleppo, the humanitarian, the impact of that, and the words that have been exchanged between senior politicians, accusations of war crimes, and the like.

Really difficult to answer that, but all I would say is I think we have to find ways of talking to Russia in order, as I said earlier, to build a working relationship and live alongside them. To do that over Syria is a really difficult challenge.

I think the loose talk, for example, of no fly zones, potentially, if we go down that route, we have to go down the route eyes wide open with the understanding that imposing a no fly zone over Syria is an act of war. It is a military operation, and could well involve a coalition shooting down Russian aircraft, which puts us in a different place altogether.

I think you asked a really difficult question, and I'm afraid I couldn't begin to answer it as comprehensively as you would like me to.

QUESTIONER: General, thank you very much for a very good presentation. I was a graduate student in economics and studied a lot about the Soviet economy. The Soviet economy is in terrible condition, especially with oil prices being low and with the Russian population being in difficulty, Tuberculosis and other things going on.

How do you think that affects what we have talked about?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: This is obviously a very important point because as you say, the Russian economy is in a really difficult place, and dependent on oil prices

out of whatever it is, $100 a barrel, the budget preset on that, and they are getting nothing like that. They are not likely to in the near future.

Two things. I think long term, it means that the sort of levels of defense spending are probably unsustainable, and that, I think, creates immediate short term dangers because President Putin will know it is not sustainable long term. He will know the pressure on the Russian population is going to increase. Teachers are not being paid their salaries on a regular basis.

That is all going to impact on his popularity ratings, although he will, of course, count on the fact that the Russians are famous and take pride in really being able to take pressure, and they are inured to hardship over history.

The concern, I think, is here is a man who is dependent on maintaining high popularity ratings, and he turns to the traditional remedy of any autocrat facing trouble at home, which is foreign adventures, in order to boost his popularity ratings.

You saw what happened after the invasion of Crimea. His popularity ratings were sky high. The same over the intervention into Syria.

I think it raises real short term dangers.

MS. ANERA: Hello. My name is Avio Anera. I am a student at Johns Hopkins University. I actually have a little bit of a different type of question, kind of going along with living alongside Russia, as you mentioned a few times.

Given your experience and your interest in pursuing a more constructive relationship in the future with Russia, how would you ideally envision their place in terms of their geopolitical position? They have been considered as the other for a very long time and haven't really been recognized as an equal power to Europe. How would you envision that ideal position for them?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I would like to see, in an ideal world, a strategic

partnership, where Russia, NATO, and combined with the west could focus on some of the other really major challenges of the age, particularly what is going on in the Middle East and the instability and fragility, one of the great strategic challenges of the age is to build stability in fragile failing states so that they don't become fertile ground for extremism and terrorism, as we have seen in the last decade or so.

Wouldn't it be great if Russia could work alongside the west in addressing some of those challenges?

QUESTIONER: General, I'd love to ask you a bit more at length about your take on Vladislav Surkov, but I'll try to keep this brief.

A great number of Putin's internal moves, such as appointing Zolotov as head of the new National Guard, and panic maneuvers regarding the military industrial complex have been interpreted by some as preparation for war, but other analysts have suggested it is preparation for the possibility of fighting a coup organized by ultra-national Kremlin members and possibly even Vladislav Surkov, the so-called "Gray Cardinal."

What I am wondering is how should the U.S. react to an attempt by ultra-nationals to seize power in Russia in light of the increase in size and capability of the Russian military, and can the U.S. and other western powers remain credible but still back a more moderate leader in the Kremlin against more dangerous and radical anti-western Russian war hawks?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I don't think there is much anybody could do if there was a coup and the government of Russia changed. That is a matter of Russia and the Russians, and interfering in the leadership of other states is not really in the cards.

I think this comes back to -- it still comes back to deterrence, whoever is in the Kremlin. It is about ensuring deterrence so we can build relationships and build a constructive relationship with whoever is occupying the seat of power in the Kremlin.

There is a sort of other implication in what you say, which is what we are seeing now, is this Putin dependent, is it institutional, and would it be any different with somebody else. I think the answer to that is probably not much different.

I was mentioning earlier talking to friends and colleagues. You may remember last year when Mr. Putin went very quiet, and there were all sorts of Kremlin watches asking questions about what had happened to him. It was we should take no comfort because whoever might replace Mr. Putin could be even more of a hard line nationalist.

MR. RABINOWITZ: Thank you. I'm Dave Rabinowitz. I was wondering if there is any credible scenario for a role with Russia that does not involve nuclear weapons?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I don't think there is because of the extent to which Russia integrates nuclear weapons into every aspect of military thinking. I work on the basis of worst case, which you will find most soldiers will tend to think on the basis of worst case, and hope for something perhaps not quite as bad.

I think that is why it is so potentially disastrous, and I think the way Russia has invested in modernizing its nuclear arsenal, the extent to which it remains absolutely core and central, even during the dark days of the 1990s when Russia was on its knees militarily with its conventional forces, the maintenance of effective, strong nuclear forces is absolutely core and central to its DNA.

Look at the reaction to the deployment of the missile shield, all that was all about protection and extent to which that would or would not render the nuclear capability null and void.

I think we have to assume the worst case. We have to assume nuclear is always going to be part of this particular mix.

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible) I am from Estonia originally. My question to you is Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, who is the Commander of U.S. Army in Europe, said not long ago that it would take Russia about 36 hours to capture the three Baltic capitals, and NATO wouldn't get there in time.

The people in Estonia certainly share that fear, and while there are rational people and they hope Putin wouldn't invade, what if.

My question is what more can NATO do given resource constraints, you were talking about reserves, but is there a way for NATO to help improve the air capabilities especially of those countries, and number two, should these countries rely solely on NATO, and they don't have any money and they may have had a couple of planes and that is about it? Should they somehow try to build their defense capabilities and defense industry?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Well, I share that fear. I am in and out of Estonia fairly regularly, and I completely understand that. I think Ben is right. He is not alone in saying that. The Rand Corporation came to similar conclusions, and indeed, the chairman of the military committee came to similar conclusions, and you will see in the book, so do I.

What more can be done? Number one, absolutely NATO is the core of the defense of the Baltic States, the foundation of the Baltic States' defense, as it is for every other NATO member. NATO can do a great deal more. Here, I think we should look back again at the way defense would have been conducted in Western Europe, in West Germany.

For example, in the later stages of the Cold War, and the very sophisticated army group land/air concept of battle that was put together integrated with the in-place forces, the deployment of significant U.S. reserves, from Ft. Hood, Texas, et

cetera, the regular practicing of that reinforcement through the exercises, and the message that sent of capability that was credible, and that raised the ante and made the bar high enough, the risk bar high enough.

So, an effective forward presence. I would say, as I mentioned earlier, a proper combined arms, multinational combined arms brigade, not forcing of battalions, because as any military individual will know, they can just be bitten off piecemeal.

An integrated defense plan by land, sea, and air that integrates the forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, brings in and integrates with NATO, in-place NATO forces, the right command and control set-up, the right logistics set-up, and the ability to bring in and flow in very quickly reserves.

All that, it starts at the top with agile decision-making by the North Atlantic Council, delegation of adequate responsibility direct to SACEUR. I would note, for example, that during the Cold War, SACEUR could call out the ACE mobile force. He didn't depend on the North Atlantic Council and endless deliberations around the table by 28 different NATO ambassadors. He could just do it.

It depends on the right command and control all the way down the line from SACEUR in SHAPE, joint force commands, and forward into the Baltic States as well. All that can be done. There is no question about it.

It is just about doing it and making it happen, instead of talking about it and pretending it is being done, which is what is happening at the moment, which is I wrote the wretched book. Forgive me. (Laughter)

It's not rocket science. We owe it to the North Atlantic Council. We owe it to the people in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and we owe to peace and stability for our children and our grandchildren.

MR. O'HANLON: In fact, along these lines, let me ask one question, and

then we will work from the back forward.

You put forward a relatively modest proposal for what NATO's capabilities should be in the Baltics, one brigade, joint brigade plugged in with air and land, air and sea, of course, and with the Baltic States themselves.

Still, we know the Rand Corporation put out a report suggesting a more robust forward defense with maybe up to seven brigades.

What is the argument -- are you actually trying to propose a militarily sound forward defense or should I think of what you are proposing as more sort of a robust trip wire that has a chance of buying enough time to let the reserves flow in, but is really just meant to send an unambiguous message of NATO commitment more than to represent an actual forward defense capability, per se?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I think both, for me sort of recognizing political realities, perhaps, and saying listen, seven brigades, yes, that is the answer you get in the Rand Corporation or a staff college paper, and I read that, with interest.

Actually, that is simply not realistic, but is realistic is a properly constituted brigade together with all the other stuff that I've just described. I think also just take into account the political -- there is an issue here, NATO/Russia, the basing of significant forces ruled out the basing of significant forces. I would argue brigade doesn't come under the "significant." Certain brigades are two divisions. That is pretty significant. I think there is a bit of a balance here.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I see two hands in the back row, and then we will work up from those. Let me take two questions at a time.

QUESTIONER: I'm a reporter (Inaudible). Twenty minutes ago, Reuters came out with a report quoting a senior NATO official that Russia has started moving the entire northern fleet and much of the Baltic fleet to the Mediterranean in order to reinforce

the bombing of Aleppo, and that senior NATO diplomat quoted western intelligence and said in about two weeks, we are going to see an increase in the bombing runs on Aleppo.

My question would be how do you assess that? Can you give us an idea of how big these Russian fleet movements are? How important that is? Do you think this is just about Syria and Aleppo or do you share the view that Russia wants to establish a more significant presence in the Mediterranean, maybe meddling in Libya or in Egypt?

MR. O'HANLON: We will take another question, but I will actually add one more ground rule, which is even though I appreciate the question, we can't ambush a guest with intelligence he hasn't yet seen himself. You said it was 20 minutes ago. I'm going to buy a little bit of time for him to do as he wishes on that. Smart question, nonetheless.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. (Inaudible) Voice of America News. Please correct me if I'm wrong, I believe you said we don't see European nations particularly threatened by Russia. Do you think it is because they have some misconceptions about Russian threats? Thank you.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Did I say I don't see European nations threatened by Russia? I don't think I did.

QUESTIONER: Don't feel threatened. If I'm wrong, please correct me, with the exception of Baltic countries, of course.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Yes, the Baltic clearly are threatened by Russia. I would not preclude Eastern Poland from that. I remember very well talking to and interviewing Anne Applebaum for a BBC program in 2014, and her response to my question of what was the view in Poland, was I think the Baltic States are next, then it will be Poland's turn.

I think there is a general threat from a resurgent Russia, and of course,

the point is that if one nation of NATO is threatened, all nations of NATO are threatened, and my message loud and clear would be that the defense certainly in the U.K., the defense of the U.K. does not start on the white cliffs of Dover, it starts in the forests of Lithuania or Estonia or Latvia. I would also suggest the same applies to the United States, too.

Just coming back to your emerging intelligence report, there was a report in the papers in the U.K. last week saying that the Russian northern fleet was on the move through the North Sea and the channel, and that was beginning to get people's attention. Whether this is all part of the same, I don't know.

What does it suggest? Well, it suggests that the strategic parity right now for President Putin is the Middle East. I think he takes the view that if Assad is a loser, he's a loser, because he has backed quite significantly Assad all the time, and indeed, that is why he stepped in at the time he did, when Assad was looking very concerned.

If he is moving stuff now, it seems to be this is all part of reinforcing the regime, the Assad regime's attempt to retake Aleppo.

Long term interests? Well, Tartus, Russian port in the Mediterranean, Latakia, Russian airfield in Syria. Russia has interests in the Mediterranean, has always had interests in the Mediterranean, and of course, Tartus is the only port that remains from pre-Soviet Union days outside the Soviet Union.

I think it is that, but it is all part of a strategic piece, about being a global player, about being a great power.

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks.

MR. SCHMITT: Eric Schmitt, New York Times, General. You mentioned it would be a heck of a stretch for actual Russian troops to go into the Baltics. What in

your mind would be more realistic in terms of what kind of active measures the Russians are already doing in the Baltics, how effectively they have been so far, and what should NATO be doing to try to counter those things that fall just under the full force of troops going in? Thank you.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: My Latin friends tell me, and I dare say it may be the same in Estonia and Lithuania as well, that the sort of asymmetric -- Well, Estonia was subjected to it and knows all about cyber-attacks from Russia, so this is happening now, and particularly the propaganda, the Kremlin TV, sophisticated, well put together programs, beamed into Russian speakers' homes in those three countries, it is all a part of a piece of sending a message about the benefits of being citizens of Czar Putin rather than being citizens of the European Union.

What should NATO do about it? Well, NATO needs to be able to match -- deterrence is all about matching an adversary's capability at every level. I've talked about conventional. I think nuclear is part of this as well, of course. What about below the threshold of conventional? What about the asymmetric? What about addressing those issues?

I think there is stuff that needs to be done. I'm not going to give you an immediate list now because I think it is all part of that thinking about how to address this challenge.

I would say this is not about purely military. Military may be part of it. Ultimately, it is about the application of soft power in conjunction and coordinated with military deterrence as well.

Here, I think firstly it is about supporting the three Baltic States in this area. It's about helping them counter the information operation. The EU has certainly a part to play here in conjunction with NATO, and I note, for example, the EU development

funding continues to spend significant amounts of money in places like Narva, right on the border with Russia, and a city which really does need a bit of economic support.

It is all about that aspect as well. I think this is coming back perhaps a bit to the other question of strategic interests, the relationship between NATO and the EU in order to build European defense and security.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much. Two small questions. First of all, we are going to watch elections and debates again, so the two candidates here in the U.S. have different positions on Russia. Do you believe Williams changes the agenda about Russia? Mr. Trump, he truly believes in communication or not?

You mentioned a peaceful relationship with Russians, and how do you imagine this is possible? Thank you.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Well, I think to your first question, the answer is yes, on the face of it. It will matter a great deal who is elected in three weeks' time because of what has been said already particularly by Mr. Trump, his comments -- as I said at the beginning -- the question he raised about America's readiness to come to the support of a NATO member if attacked, I think, would throw real question marks on the credibility of NATO's doctrine of collective defense. So, I think it matters massively.

Now, it might all be part of a way of frightening European members to spend more money on defense. We will wait to see if that has any impact.

To your second question, yes, I do. I really do think we have to find ways of living with Russia in a way which removes this tension and the threat which we perceive, which I think is perceived also in Russia as well, because Russia is a great nation, and we need to find ways of living together.

This requires diplomacy. It requires negotiation. It requires

understanding, and it requires hard work on both sides. It has to be done from a basis of respect for law, for international law, respect for the rights of the countries living alongside Russia to live without feeling Russia is breathing down their neck, overflying their airspace, and intimidating them. It takes two to tango, but I think it can be done. Thank you for asking the question.

MR. O'HANLON: Let's stay in the back and we will come forward, and start to wrap up here in a few minutes. A lot of great questions and excellent, concise answers. We are getting through a lot of material.

MR. HAHN: Hello. I'm Jeff Hahn. I'm a graduate student at American University. You mentioned Russia's use of asymmetric warfare multiple times. I'm curious about your thoughts on Russia's asymmetric efforts in Europe, specifically the funding and providing air time to political parties such as formerly UKIP, National Front, Alternative for Deutschland, some of whom the narrative of NATO is that it is an obsolete imperious American institution which has outlived its usefulness. Their words, not mine.

Do you feel that the growing popularity of these political parties poses a threat to the Alliance?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Good issue, good issue to think about. The answer is this is all part of divide and rule. What better way to begin to undermine the integrity of the Alliance as a whole, and not only that, but by undermining the integrity of the countries that make up the Alliance by undermining the integrity of institutions like the European Union by supporting Nigel Farage in UKIP by putting money into the National Front, as you said, and others.

This is all part -- interestingly enough, you may or may not have seen, there was a report recently in the U.K. that Russia had got involved in trying to discredit the referendum process in Scotland in 2014, because of course, it would suit Russia

hugely if the U.K. was to break up. They would be absolutely delighted.

I think it is all part of it, but I think also whether this undermines the integrity of the Alliance, yes, it might, but we also have to take account of the forces of populism at work here, and that is a separate issue altogether, I think, when this is more about -- you know well, because it has been played out on the TV screens as you go through your election, and we saw it loud and clear in the run up to Brexit and the consequences of Brexit.

MR. O'HANLON: Why don't we go here in about the sixth or seventh row.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. I'm from the Danish Institute for International Studies. I have a question about the link between alliance cohesion and sort of the level of fear or the European realization there is something to be afraid of. I agree with you that a certain level of fear here is important to rebuild alliance cohesion, but I wonder if NATO and the European countries as well as the U.S. has been good enough in explaining to their populations exactly what it is we need to fear.

If alliance cohesion is built only on fear of Russia and not on an element of fear of ourselves, of unbound state power, state sovereignty, isn't it something that we need to re-explain to ourselves?

We had the comparison to the Cold War period, and talked about how that was perhaps a more stable and less dangerous period. Wasn't that because we all then had a world war in the back of our minds and a sense that we needed to commit ourselves to institutions as such, because we needed to bound power?

Have we forgotten that in the west, and is it part of the solution not just to rebuild NATO militarily but to sort of reiterate that to western publics?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: I think it is, absolutely. I think in Western

Europe, we have got ourselves into a position neither by design or default, where higher defense spending at the expense of social welfare spending and the like is unacceptable to politicians, because it is unacceptable to electorates. The electorates aren't interested in that.

How do we get people interested? Well, I think we have to explain, we have to educate, and I don't think we need to -- you are going to accuse me of being an alarmist with the book -- it is pretty provocative and in your face, and I accept that, but it is also by getting people to realize that we're not that safe actually. I think people think we are safe. I think they think NATO is strong, and I think they think that our nations are stronger, armed forces are strong, what are we spending our taxes for.

There is also an assumption that somehow war is something to which we send our professional soldiers a long way away. That is what they joined for. They go to Iraq, they go to Afghanistan. That is what they joined for.

War is something that isn't going to impact on us in the west, because we have enjoyed peace for 70 years, and we will go on enjoying peace. Therefore, it is important, I think, a reminder, that peace is not necessarily the default setting in international affairs, that all too often warfare has been, and we need to be prepared to pay the price in order to protect peace, and that requires strategic thinking from our leadership. It requires telling the message straight from our leadership.

I fear that too often we hear -- I can't speak for other countries, but I think we hear all too often glib statements from our political leadership that it is all fine and dandy in defense. How often have I heard in a British context that the British defense budget has yet again been reduced, that capabilities have been disbanded, and yet somehow we have agile forces.

It's spin. It's nonsense. Actually, we should be truthful.

MR. O'HANLON: Let's go over here to this side. Both of you, let's see if we can take your questions together.

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible) Defense Weekly. Last week, the Defense Minister said the Russians planned to open bases in Venezuela, in Vietnam (Inaudible). Granted, these statements are made annually almost.

What do you think about that statement, about Russia trying to become a global power once again or remain a global power if Russia is trying to open up bases abroad (Inaudible) to go to Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa? Thank you.

QUESTIONER: Hi. (Inaudible) Thank you very much for an interesting presentation. My question is if you could kind of just make the general case for NATO, there are a lot of people, probably a lot of them Russian, that think NATO should have been dissolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union, myself included, maybe for some kind of different European defense structure, which is more conducive to peaceful relations between the United States and Russia.

I'm just wondering if you could explain why you think NATO is necessary, and instead, if we could have some kind of global security, collective security, under the United Nations, or something like that? Thank you.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: The first one, it is fascinating. This is almost a rerun, isn't it? It's just like Cold War days of reestablishing places, presences in places like Cuba, Venezuela, and around the world. This is all part, this is all about global influence, and it is also about destabilizing and tweaking tales, perhaps.

This may be a time to reinvoke the Monroe Doctrine, getting the old world out of the new world's premises.

To the second question, NATO remains the most successful alliance the world has seen because pooling the resources and building an alliance of 28 nations

makes all the nations, even the richest and strongest of those nations, politically and militarily more secure.

NATO, I think, has many weaknesses. Of course, it has, and I've highlighted a number of them in the book. At its core, NATO remains a successful alliance because it is an alliance based on principles, individual liberty, democracy, the rule of law.

It has built up a culture, a command structure, over the years that works, a military doctrine that works, and most NATO nations use NATO's doctrine as their own. I have to say I think it is remarkable that 28 nations can still come together and work alongside each other like that, and moreover, bring in partners from across the world as well, as we saw, for example, with the Afghanistan operation.

So, I do not think NATO is obsolete. I think to disband NATO and try to build another international organization would be a lost cause and would achieve frankly nothing.

What I think we must be doing is building on the strength of NATO, building on the opportunities that NATO gives us, addressing the weaknesses and challenges of NATO, and reinforcing what I think has been up to now a success.

MR. O'HANLON: Yes, please.

QUESTIONER: Hi. You have already talked about --

MR. O'HANLON: Please identify yourself.

MS. FREEMAN: I'm Susan Freeman, I work at CSIS. You have already talked a little bit about putting brigades in the Baltic States, but you have also talked about a breakdown in communication between the United States and Russia.

Do you think that sort of a higher brigade presence has the opportunity to be perceived not just as the times, but as an offensive action, sort of triggering a worse

relationship?

Additionally, in this sort of Baltic scenario, what do you see as the advantages and the disadvantages of the Russian military and the European theater?

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Would a brigade be provocative? It would be part of deterrence, and I think it goes to the provocation question. There would be a lot of complaints about it, yes.

Actually, it would also be seen as effective deterrence, and part of the equation of building the sort of credible defense capability, particularly in the Baltic States that I outlined earlier.

Was the ACE mobile force seen as provocative during the Cold War? No, because Russia understood what it was for. Because it is coming back to the channels of communication, were exercises in West Germany seen as provocation?

Were similar exercises in East Germany during the group of Soviet forces in Germany days seen as provocative? No, because of the means of communication, the fact that the allies maintained military missions in East Germany during the Cold War, the Soviets maintained a military mission in West Germany during the Cold War.

Those military missions were part of a channel of communication, and could send the message back, this isn't provocation. This is actually a routine exercise.

I didn't quite get your last question about Russia in Europe. Can you just repeat that?

MS. FREEMAN: Sure. I guess what I was asking you, in the European theater, what do you see as the advantages and disadvantages sort of the Russian military?

Additionally, with my previous question, I was specifically trying to get out

the fact that today, those lines of communications are much more closed than they were during the Soviet period, which presents a problem.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: Exactly, that's the point. In fact, I would say not closed, they don't exist. They are closed and they don't exist. For example, on the military line, senior NATO military, we were in and out of Moscow on a regular basis. The Russians would come and see us on a regular basis. We had joint seminars together. We could talk to them. We could build relationships with them.

All that stopped after March 2014. I think it is exactly the sort of thing that could be a good area to rebuild because it is a channel of communication.

Going back to the Russian military, I guess I would say that size has a capability, a quality of all its own, of course. The Russians have got the ability to mass presence and capability really close up to the Baltic region, for example.

Of course, NATO matches and outnumbers Russia, 3.5 million men and women, but it is all about having the right capabilities in the right place, the right readiness, or the right response times, which NATO does not have.

I would say individual for individual, unit for unit, American, and of course, I would say British, would more than outmatch Russia, but that is not the point. It is about being able to be in the right place at the right time, and at the moment, NATO can't, Russia can.

MR. O'HANLON: I think what we will do is take two final questions together. I want to make sure we allow enough time to get some book purchases going for those of you who have a 3:30 deadline but still want to leave with a book in hand. We will do two more, and then we will give Sir Richard one final wrap up.

QUESTIONER: Good afternoon. (Inaudible) I'm an exchange graduate student at (Inaudible). I am kind of interested in what do you think is the role of the

European Union in the current state of European security? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: And then here.

MR. GLEASON: Thank you very much. Bill Gleason, Director of Ukrainian Studies at the Foreign Service Department. Let me get back to Ukraine for just a moment. Give us your assessment of the quality and nature of the Ukrainian military now, and how prepared they might be to fight in the event of another Russian push.

GENERAL SHIRREFF: The EU is really important for European security. I would also pick up the point we were discussing earlier about European defense, because in the defense piece, what the EU can do is apply significant soft power to compliment NATO hard power to address the asymmetric, building up of civic society, and to provide support particularly in terms of countering information, operations, and propaganda, and the like.

As far as security is concerned, I don't see how Europe can begin to grapple with the security challenges it faces as far as Jihadist terrorism, and as you will know more than anybody being French, the impact on your country has been massive. On top of that, the migrant crisis that we see as well.

I think the European Union is the one solution, because I can't see how individual nations can begin to do it themselves in terms of both the cooperation, the sharing of intelligence, the support on frontier security, and the like.

I've seen the impact and why the Balkans, by and large, the Western Balkans by and large, are out of the headlines at the moment, because of the European Union, because the European Union magnet, the desire to join the European Union is what forced Serbia and Kosovo to sign a comprehensive normalization agreement backed up by a bit of diplomatic clout, by the joint forces of Hilary Clinton and Cathy Ashton.

The European Union casts sort of a security blanket by casting a stability and prosperity blanket as well. I think the European Union is really important to that, and from what I say, you probably infer which way my vote went on the 23rd of June. I really worry as a result of that, what might happen.

Ukraine. You are a much greater expert on the Ukraine and armed forces than I am. I have not been to Ukraine since 2012. Things have obviously changed a great deal. I think, I hope, that as a result of the bilateral support in terms of training and other areas, that the Ukrainian armed forces are much better placed to deal with the challenges they face, and of their desire, of their readiness to fight, of that I have absolutely no doubt.

What I think has happened as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is Ukrainians who might have at one stage have looked towards Russia are now 100 percent Ukrainian and prepared to fight and die for their country.

One caveat, one final point. The one thing that does worry me a bit is when I read about some of the slightly dodgy militias and other sort of non-state forces that seem to be fighting in the Ukraine, and that to me, coming back to your point at the start, Michael, plays into the do we support with lethal weaponry or not.

I think you have to be very careful about supporting organizations which might be non-state, and then you will play into the language about, what did I say, Russophobes, neo-Nazis, nationalists, and anti-Semites, that absolutely plays into the Russian propaganda piece about NATO being the foreign legion that is supporting the Ukraine.

MR. O'HANLON: I think we can see from all the attendants and the questions and the enthusiasm that even if we have our regrets or you may have your regrets, and I do, too, about Britain leaving the EU, the special relationship is alive and

well, as is the commitment to NATO.

We really want to thank you for your service and for the book.

(Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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