



International Relations and Defence Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Defence concepts and capabilities: from aspiration to reality

Wednesday 6 July 2022

11.45 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Lord Anderson of Swansea; Lord Campbell of Pittenweem; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Stirrup; Baroness Sugg; Lord Teverson; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 15

Heard in Public

Questions 106 - 112

Witnesses

[I](#): Georgina Wright, Senior Fellow and Director of the Europe Programme, Institut Montaigne; Professor Christoph Meyer, Professor of European and International Politics, King's College London.

Examination of witnesses

Georgina Wright and Professor Christoph Meyer.

Q106 **The Chair:** Good morning. I welcome to the second session of the International Relations and Defence Select Committee in the House of Lords today Georgina Wright, who is a senior fellow and director of the Europe programme at the Institut Montaigne; and Professor Christoph Meyer, professor of European and international politics at King's College London. Thank you very much indeed for joining us today to share your expertise as we continue with our inquiry on Defence Concepts and Capabilities: from Aspiration to Reality.

At this stage, I always remind our guest witnesses, and, of course, the Members, that we are broadcast. It is transcribed. We are on the record. When my colleagues ask any questions, if they have any relevant interest to declare, they should be so at that point.

Throughout the session today, I do anticipate that those colleagues who have allocated questions in a formal round of questions may well wish to ask a supplementary related to that. Again, time is always an enemy, but we like to get as much information from our witnesses and their expertise as we can.

I shall start with a very general question, and then I shall turn to my colleagues for more focused issues on which to ask questions. What is your assessment of the UK's defence and security relationships with France, Germany and perhaps any other of the major countries across Europe on which you would wish to make a comment today? What are their most robust features? From the UK's point of view, where is there room for improvement by us in those relationships? I will start with Georgina Wright.

Georgina Wright: Thank you very much, Lady Anelay, and thank you to the committee for the invitation. I am delighted to be with you, albeit remotely from Paris.

On your first question, the UK and France undeniably enjoy a very close security and defence partnership. It is built on the Lancaster House Treaties. Of course, it could be improved; there is always room for manoeuvre. In preparation for this committee, I spoke to a number of people who said they could see improvements in the areas of space co-operation, nuclear co-operation and protection of critical infrastructure, which are three areas where France and the UK could do much more together.

France and the UK share many of the same instincts. They do not always come to the same solutions, but they do share many of the same instincts. They co-operate on situational assessments and do joint training. That has continued even through the tumultuous time of Brexit negotiations. Tensions at the political level have at times been problematic and have dented the defence co-operation between the two countries, but the Ukraine war has really accentuated the necessity of

this bilateral relationship in not only thinking about the European security order, but also further afield. You have certainly seen a rapprochement of France and the UK working together to address the war in Ukraine and explore what more they could do together.

Professor Christoph Meyer: Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to this committee. The UK-German relationship in security and defence is sometimes called the “silent alliance” or “stille Allianz” because it is clearly less visible than the relationship the UK has in this area with other partners.

It captures two quite contradictory elements quite well. On the one hand, both countries have a lot in common in terms of threat perceptions, particularly regarding Russia, support for liberal values and a transatlantic outlook. They share membership of NATO. They have strong cultural links amongst the policy communities and experts. There is co-operation on the ground when it comes to multinational operations, Afghanistan being just one example. The Brits undersigned German security during the Cold War by 20,000 troops until the phased withdrawal from Germany began in 2010. That is part of that slightly less visible reality of the UK-German security and defence partnership.

That is contrasted with the less visible co-operation at the political level. It is certainly not very developed institutionally if you compare it with the Lancaster House Treaties, or indeed Germany’s Aachen Treaty with France. This reflects very substantial differences between the two countries in terms of strategic culture, the willingness to use force and the different geographical priorities. That is something that has become a little bit more fractured because of the Brexit decision of 2016, which weakened some of the institutional links between these two countries that came with membership of the European Union.

The UK has always been very clear that Germany is an important country. It was elevated to a first-tier country alongside the US and France with the SDSR in 2015, and the 2021 Integrated Review calls it a “key” or “essential ally”. The problem is that this language is not sufficiently reflected in the approach, the ambitions or the institutional structures of UK-German relations. If you look at the 2021 Joint Declaration, there is a lot of language about shared ambitions, but not really a lot of substance on actions and collaborations.

There is a lot of space for doing things. I would just recommend a study that was done by the King’s Policy Institute and the Hanns Seidel Foundation. Of course, I am from King’s. I was not involved in that study, but there are lots of concrete, specific recommendations about what Germany and the UK could do together on defence procurement, which is probably the most difficult; interoperability; military mobility; joint exercises and so forth¹.

¹ Please see <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/research-analysis/strengthening-uk-germany-defence-cooperation> for more details about the reports from this project.

We are at a very crucial moment when Russia's invasion of Ukraine has really created a new space for UK-German co-operation to enter a new phase and perhaps look at things that that were not possible before. However, as Georgina has already said, one should not underestimate the difficulty at the political level and the issue of trust because defence is not just something separate; it is embedded in the broader foreign policy and the broader relations of the two countries. It is fair to say, certainly with the coming to power of the traffic light coalition in Germany, that there is concern over the direction of British foreign policy, the degree to which it is norm-based, for instance, the issue of development aid being reduced and the FCO-DFID merger.

There are a number of areas in which there are real political obstacles to going further. Of course, one of them is the current UK approach to engagement with the European Union because, for the current German Government, the EU is very much the cornerstone of their foreign policy and security and defence policy.

The Chair: Thank you. That is a very helpful start to our session.

Q107 **Lord Stirrup:** In his 'Zeitenwende' speech of 27 February, Chancellor Scholz committed Germany to investing more than 2% of GDP in defence year after year. The Government also committed a €100 billion special fund to improve defence capabilities. Of course, it was immensely encouraging to hear the Chancellor talking the talk, but to what extent do you believe that, in the long term, Germany will walk the walk on this? Will the undertakings be met long term in substantive terms as opposed to purely presentational? Could you say how you would assess the current state of Germany's defence policy and capabilities, where the shortcomings are, the extent to which these will be addressed by the financial commitments that have been made and how long that process is likely to take?

Professor Christoph Meyer: Thank you for this question. I will try to give you both the optimistic and the more sceptical reasons on that. It is useful to frame this question in the context of a Suez moment for German foreign policy. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a shocking moment because it has questioned in quite fundamental ways not just Germany's perceptions of its relationship with Russia, but the whole approach to foreign policy that has been quite mercantilist and geopolitically myopic and has lacked strategic direction.

It is also obvious that major mistakes were made on energy policy and on funding the armed forces; this is a consensus that you can see covered in large parts of the German Parliament going back to the Munich Security Conference of 2014. There is a lot of support. The fact that you get support for change in the basic law and two-thirds majority in the Parliament and the Bundesrat is indicative of that broad parliamentary support for addressing some of these mistakes and the very substantial shortfalls in the Bundeswehr.

It is positive that Parliament resisted some of the attempts to water down the initial package, for instance, saying that meeting the 2% target was inclusive of the €100 billion rather than additional and that all sorts of other things were going to be packed into that budget rather than this being really devoted to the Bundeswehr. Both attempts were defeated. At least for the next two or three years, this is really in addition and really focused on addressing the shortfalls of the Bundeswehr.

The shortfalls are now quite visible. They have been embarrassing because they have meant that Germany has not been able to help Ukraine as much as it has wanted. I think €20 billion is needed alone for ammunition to bring it up to the NATO standard. There is a shortage of protective equipment for soldiers. There is a lack of helicopters and all sorts of vehicles that could be used; there has been a cannibalisation of vehicles to make them operational, partly because of the cost-saving measures brought in by the 2009 zu Guttenberg reforms. There are very clear capability shortfalls despite some good equipment and some rise in spending since 2014. We are really looking at a major inflection point for debates about German foreign policy and strategic culture. It is encouraging to see that there is quite broad support for making significant changes and improvements.

There are good reasons for also being a bit sceptical. There is clearly also a very significant proportion of the pacifist wings in the SPD, parts of the Greens, and, of course, Die Linke in Parliament who see spending on armed forces as form of militarism and would rather spend money elsewhere: perhaps in peacebuilding, structural conflict prevention and so forth. They have lost this battle at the moment, but they are going to come back and push that point. If public opinion shifts over time, perhaps because of developments in Ukraine, there may be a strengthening of those wings and a greater push to dilute those changes.

It is also true that there have been big problems in terms of defence procurement and translating all that money into real capability. The reforms of the Bundesbeschaffungamt, the defence procurement bureaucracy, have been stalled because of protectionism and concern over jobs. There is concern over the institutional structures. Germany does not have a national security council. Each ministry is occupied by one party that does its own thing, so it is not really a joined-up approach to government and foreign policy. With it, there is a bit of a lack of a strategic direction.

There are also questions over delivery. If you want to spend all that money, you might quickly get bottlenecks when industry tries to meet demands from different countries. If there is a lack of co-ordination with other partners, you may not get all the capabilities you want, and it may end up being very inefficient spending. A new national security strategy in Germany was meant to be agreed by the end of the year; it will be very interesting to see what comes out of that debate and that particular strategy because it is the first kind of such a strategy for Germany to agree.

Georgina Wright: I do not have much to add to what Dr Meyer has said other than that France is obviously watching very closely what Germany is doing. Germany is its most important ally, and Germany still considers France its most important ally as well. The German Government are working on this comprehensive national security strategy, which was launched on 18 March by Foreign Minister Baerbock. In France, the question really is how Germany is going to spend this money and where it is going to spend it. There are lots of talks between the two Governments. They are very close, including in the defence space. There is a lot of excitement, and perhaps a tiny bit of apprehension, in Paris, but we will see.

Q108 **Baroness Sugg:** I want to ask about last week's NATO summit in Madrid and the impact of the conclusions of that summit, including the new NATO Strategic Concept on German defence policy. With the new coalition, what is Germany's broader position on NATO and European security?

Professor Christoph Meyer: There is clearly a lot in that Strategic Concept that mirrors very closely what is also in the European Strategic Compass. Of course, Germany has been involved in drafting both of them. There is very strong language on Russia. It is a big change in language if you compare that with the 2010 Strategic Concept, or, indeed, even to the UK-German declaration on foreign policy from 2021.

The documents reflect a strong realisation in Germany that it really needs to step up when it comes to the security and defence of its central and eastern European neighbours and the Baltics and that Germany has failed in the past to always listen carefully enough to what its partners and allies have been saying about Russia.

This fits in with the *Zeitenwende* that Germany realises it needs to shoulder a larger responsibility for security. In the previous session, there was also a reference to putting together a larger military contingent to support security in the Baltics. There is also strong language in the Madrid Declaration, again mirroring what the EU Strategic Compass has said, on strengthening EU-NATO co-operation. It is quite strong and specific about making real progress on EU-NATO co-operation, which Germany will be happy with. In addition, there are some priorities that the Green Party's foreign policy agenda would support around NATO's contribution to conflict prevention, enhancing human security and the importance of co-operation with other international and regional organisations

The area of difficulty is over whether you would have permanently stationed troops in, for instance, some of the Baltic states. My understanding is that Germany resisted that demand, and was opting more for, "Yes, we are going to have higher readiness. Yes, we are going to have more of a contribution. But we don't want to have the permanent presence of the costs that go with it."

With that, perhaps there is now also a growing realisation that the stakes of conflict and the likelihood of a conflict have risen. You have seen some of that in the German reaction over the spat over Russian railway transports to Kaliningrad. Lithuania said it was just applying the EU's sanction package on exports, but Germany felt it was too risky to apply the export policy in this case. It was seen as a bit of a disappointment in the Baltics that Germany seemed to be giving in to Russian pressures on this point.

Apart from this case, Germany is very much on board with the strategic priorities set out in these documents and the bolstering of Europe's defence. It knows that it has to contribute more, but there are still some caveats and limits as to how far Germany is willing to go in terms of underwriting that security in terms of permanent troops in the Baltics.

Baroness Sugg: Just to follow up on that, this is something you mentioned earlier on the broader international relations with the UK. Obviously, our political and diplomatic relationships with both France and Germany have shifted since the UK left the European Union. I just wondered if you could explain how you have seen that impact on our defence relations.

Professor Christoph Meyer: It is one of these areas where there has been a lot of co-operation on the ground at the level of experts and the working level and a lot of appreciation of what each other can bring in terms of capabilities. It is also true that there were areas of divergence and conflict that came to the fore, particularly after 2016.

There are two elements to that divergence or conflict in the broader relationship. One is the sense that Brexit is a topic that evokes strong emotions, certainly for Germans who see the EU very much as part of their national foreign policy identity. There is an element of making sure that there does not seem to be a strong benefit attached to it in terms of the foreign policy domain. When we had that conflict over vaccines and AstraZeneca, there was quite a visceral reaction to some of those issues, which is indicative of fears among some that there may actually be a benefit to Brexit. That is not so easy in the political discourse and for some German elites to accept.

The other problem is more an issue of Brexit being politicised, and perhaps politicised more from the UK side. There is the question over the Northern Ireland protocol and the withdrawal agreement. There is the question of who is more appealing as a partner to the United States or India. There is an element of politicisation and competitiveness that has crept into the relationship that is unhelpful to building trust between the two partners. Ultimately, if you think about security and defence cooperation, it is about trust. You have to have a minimum amount of trust between partners to commit to mutually binding enterprises and co-operations. If you do not have that trust, maybe because of things outside of that policy area of defence, it can really limit co-operation.

Georgina Wright: At the start of Brexit talks, there was a real willingness in Paris to try to separate as much as possible this special, strong security and defence co-operation between the UK and France from Brexit negotiations. But the toxicity of talks, and particularly the tone, bled into the defence relationship. We have seen harsh words being exchanged on both sides of the Channel.

Paris finds the British Government's combative approach towards the EU unhelpful, particularly for a President who has made the EU a central pillar of his domestic and foreign policy. In London, there is annoyance that Paris constantly equates Europe with the EU. In reality, when France talks about Europe what it really means is the EU. Sometimes they are talking past each other.

Off the record briefings and the strong words that have been shared on Twitter have been counterproductive in trying to rebuild that trust. AUKUS also dented the relationship. As I said, it has improved since the war in Ukraine because of necessity; there is nothing like a geopolitical crisis to focus minds.

Both facts and tone have been counterproductive. France and the UK also have few opportunities to meet. Before, Ministers used to talk in the sidelines of EU meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg. There are fewer opportunities to meet and exchange what is going on; that really needs to be thought through on both sides, but really in the sense of, "How can we meet frequently? How can we talk about not only our strategic vision for the future of Europe and the rest of the world, but also our place in it and how the war in Ukraine has changed our own perception of what we can do, both by ourselves and together?"

Q109 **Lord Alton of Liverpool:** Thank you to our witnesses. Let us try to tease out, if we may, a little bit more of the detail about the differences in emphasis between Germany and France. Can I take you specifically to the speech that President Emmanuel Macron delivered on 13 June in which he called for a boost to defence spending, saying that France, and I quote directly, "has entered into a war economy"? He said he had told the defence and military chiefs to adjust a six-year framework defence spending plan—which is intended to run until 2025—again, in his words, to "match the means to the threats" of the radically altered geopolitical situation.

In reality, what can we expect from these promises? Will the rhetoric be matched by the deeds? Where is the French Government likely to allocate these new funds and what would you say their priorities are likely to be as well? Thank you.

Georgina Wright: Thank you for that excellent question. There are lots of different aspects that I will try to respond to and I would be happy to come back to.

The first thing to note is that France has been steadily increasing its defence spending since 2019; this came after 25 years of progressive cuts to defence spending. In July 2018, the Government passed a new

defence spending plan, which covers military and defence spending between 2019 and 2025. This Bill, which is called the Loi de Programmation Militaire, stipulates a couple of things. First is that defence spending will grow annually between 2019 and 2025 until it reaches €50 billion in 2025. That meets the 2% of GDP spent on defence. Spending is due to increase to €41 billion this year, so this is quite significant.

It also means a lot more jobs. In 2025, they expect 6,000 more jobs in the defence space: 1,500 in cybersecurity, 1,500 in intelligence, 750 in broad security, and then 400 in something they call “to accompany exports”, which I presume means export contracts, arms contracts and everything else.

By 2025, there will be a total of 274,936 people—so that is civilian and military—working in the French defence sector. That is a lot of people. When you look at the details of this defence plan, it was talking about more money for training and skills building and replenishing stocks. Of course, this was before the war in Ukraine.

When President Macron said on 13 June that France had entered a war economy—which he reiterated, by the way, at the NATO summit—as you said in your question. He has tasked the new Defence Minister and the army with reviewing that defence plan, looking at it in the current context and seeing what changes could be made. Two days ago, the new French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu gave an interview to *Les Echos*, which is a French newspaper, in which he talked about this war economy. He said that the war in Ukraine had put huge pressures on France’s military spending and that France needed to be able to produce weapons and arms more rapidly and have strategic reserves not only for France, but also for its allies.

Take the example of the Canon CAESAR, which is a self-propelled howitzer. It currently takes 18 to 24 months to build. France has already sent 18 of these to Ukraine, so to replenish that stock would take up to two years. There is the view from the President, but also the Government, that this is not okay and that they need to find new ways to streamline production. It is also not just about the war in Ukraine; Sahel is another priority. When you are asking about priority areas, the top two are very much Ukraine and, of course, the neighbourhood and the Sahel.

A review of this defence plan is under way. It is too early to say exactly what will come out of it, but, from conversations I have had, it has two main aims. One is to review, or at least leave the option open for, more and differentiated defence spending; that means more money on weapons, equipment and all the rest of it. It also means exploring new opportunities for investment not only in France, but across Europe. There is this real push by the French President for the EU to invest much more in the European defence industry.

Of course, another short-term aim of this review is to see how you can replenish stocks and potentially look into adopting a French equivalent of

the US Defense Priorities and Allocations System programme, which basically allows the United States Government to requisition defence or civilian materials to support rapid industrial production in times of national emergency. France is also looking at ways that it can do that. There are also tweaks about how you can repurpose some of the money that was in the defence plan to support Ukraine, but that is not the major focus of this review.

Those are the main bits that I wanted to say. I am quite interested in the process point that this review is conducted in partnership with the French Treasury and the arms industry, so they are very much involved in this review. It is not just being led centrally and then imposed; it is very much a top-down but also bottom-up approach. As I said, it is far too early to know exactly what will come out and whether it will lead to a significant increase in defence spending or new funding streams of investment.

I will end on this. President Macron has said that European sovereignty is very important to him. He held a summit in Versailles a couple of months ago during the French Presidency of the Council of the EU to look at how EU member states can collectively invest more in their defence industries and how they can work more collaboratively. I suspect this is something he and the Government of Élisabeth Borne will continue to over the next five years.

Lord Alton of Liverpool: In fact, it was Professor Meyer who, in a reply to an earlier question, talked about France and Germany wanting to be America's best friend. I was interested that, in that admirable reply that you just gave us, which was very comprehensive, the Indo-Pacific was not amongst the priorities. If you talked to anybody in Washington, they would say, "It's China, stupid". They would say, "It's the threat to Taiwan, stupid" or, "It's the genocide in Xinjiang. It's the destruction of democracy in Hong Kong". Where does that figure in French thinking?

Also, Trumpian Republicans may pose a threat to the future cohesion of NATO. Given that they say that you have, within the EU, a budget of €14.45 trillion, are there debates in France about whether France should be stepping up to the plate to pay more in order to ensure the cohesion of Atlanticism and the future of NATO?

Georgina Wright: Thank you for that question. Of course, the Indo-Pacific region is very important to France. It is reflected in numerous strategies and France considers itself an Indo-Pacific power given it has islands in the Pacific.

At the moment, the focus in the short to medium term is very much on supporting Ukraine, and, of course, the Sahel because there have been changes there about France's involvement. I understand that there will be a new Indo-Pacific strategy coming out and a realisation, as you said, that their resources are limited. We need French industry to be in a capacity to produce faster, high-level, good, smart equipment. The nature of the threat is becoming much more diverse, so you do not hear

about “cornering China”, but you do hear the EU language about China, which is that it is a competitor and systemic rival, but also a partner on certain things.

There is a view that the Indo-Pacific should be treated much more at the EU level. The EU published an Indo-Pacific strategy, but more synergies need to happen in terms of how that maps on to Germany, France and the Netherlands’ strategies towards the Indo-Pacific. There is a fear in France that they were able to mobilise the EU to think more about the Indo-Pacific, but the war in Ukraine has meant that some EU countries are now fully focused again on Russia and the immediate neighbourhood and will have fewer capacities and resources to think about the Indo-Pacific.

France recognises that it has a role not only because it is an Indo-Pacific power, but also because it is a big EU country. By the way, that also seems to me a natural area where the UK and France could do more together.

Q110 Baroness Blackstone: I wonder if you could tell the committee what you see as the impact of the AUKUS programme on France’s perception of its defence and security relationship with the UK. We know that they were initially pretty fed up, but I do not know how far that has lasted or whether there is a new approach now. In answering the question, could you also tell us whether the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties on Anglo-French co-operation in defence need renewing in any way or whether they are still as strong as they were when they were first introduced?

Georgina Wright: Thank you very much for that question. I would start off by saying that the bilateral security and defence partnership is very strong. It was dented by AUKUS, but it has been reinforced in light of the war in Ukraine. AUKUS was met with anger across France. It was not very fun being British in Paris at that time.

For the French Government, the UK’s decision to take part in AUKUS was motivated by two things. The first was the need to show to Washington that the UK can be trusted and should continue to be the US’s partner of choice, especially in tackling China’s growing assertion in the Indo-Pacific. The second reason was that it was an easy political win for Global Britain by, in reality, doing very little. At the time, it was not quite clear what role the UK was going to play.

I thought that the consequences would be more severe. What you saw was a souring of an already bad relationship marked by suspicion. There was growing evidence of distance and further distrust between the two neighbours, which is not ideal when you are trying to think about how jointly you can tackle global challenges. As I said before, that mistrust really did seep into defence co-operation because, at some point, if you want to do something together, you need political impetus. You need the top level to give you a green light, and that was a lot harder at the time of AUKUS.

Something that really struck me at the time was when the former French Defence Minister Florence Parly gave evidence to the Assemblée Nationale, the lower House of the French Parliament, around 5 October 2021. AUKUS had had an impact on the UK and France's joint future cruise and anti-ship weapon programme that they wanted to launch together. It was launched eventually on 18 February 2022, but, again, you can see how it can have a tangible impact on Franco-British defence co-operation.

On 18 February, MBDA announced that it was starting preparatory works for this future cruise anti-ship weapons programme because the UK and France—the French Direction Générale de l'Armement, the French MoD, and the Defence Equipment and Support—had signed an agreement saying that they could go ahead.

It has had tangible effects, but two things have changed since AUKUS. The first was the Australian Prime Minister's visit to Paris. You must have seen the full embrace and the decision to move beyond that and think not only about how Australia and France can co-operate together, but also how allies in the region and in the Indo-Pacific can work together. Again, Ukraine has brought both sides much closer together.

The Lancaster House Treaties are a good basis, but they were signed in 2010, so the strategic environment has changed. They could be built upon. Particularly in London, I have heard a willingness to organise a summit; I am not sure that willingness is shared in Paris yet. There is the belief that, if the UK and France were to organise a summit, you would need real, material things that you could put forward.

I could see scope for new strategic bilateral agreements on space, nuclear deterrence, countering nuclear proliferation, and safeguarding and protecting critical infrastructure. The main priority—and Professor Meyer talked about this—is making both armies interoperable. You heard about that being a priority in the NATO Strategic Concept. It came out in the Strategic Compass as well, and this is going to be the key if the UK and France will really not only do more together but can also think about investment in other areas, beyond the operational side to investment in their future armies that are needed to meet global challenges.

Baroness Blackstone: Thank you. Could you identify which areas the UK has most to learn from as far as French policies are concerned, and vice versa?

Georgina Wright: That is an excellent question and probably one I cannot do justice to—but I can certainly think about it and write in some written evidence—because this is a new French Government. They will bring out a number of papers on things that have happened, and that will really be the point at which we can compare and contrast. I am struck by the Integrated Review. I know that it sets out a vision and is less focused on operations and practical sides, but, as I said, France and the UK share many of the same instincts.

I wrote a piece with my colleague Bruno Tertrais, who is a French defence expert, at the time of the publication of the Integrated Review saying that this was a good thing for France and these are all the areas where they not only share the same vision but could learn from each other. I can pick that up and then look more closely at what has happened over the past six to eight months. I will submit that.

The Chair: Thank you. That will be very helpful if you are able to do so.

Q111 **Lord Teverson:** NATO has its strategic concept; the EU produced its Strategic Compass in March. It describes it as its first comprehensive threat analysis for the EU. I am interested to understand what its key features are from your point of view, but particularly from the perspective of Berlin, Paris and other European nations, and whether the UK fits into it anywhere at all.

Professor Christoph Meyer: Thank you very much for this question. On the one hand, if you look at the document, there is a lot of continuity when it comes to talking about, for instance, the threat of cyber and hybrid threats. There are 48 references to cyber in the whole document. There are 19 references to Russia. Russia is clearly an element that was already there in previous drafts but was bolstered after the invasion. It is also the area that sparked the most action.

There is a common threat analysis that is more detailed than what was in the European Union Global Strategy of 2016. It is also an improvement in terms of specificity because you now have a 10-year timeframe, a five-year revision clause and specific timelines for delivering on certain types of actions. That is an element of progress.

We have some new developments that we are taking together with the Strategic Compass that then feed into it around, for instance, the use of the European Peace Facility to buy off-EU-budget weapons for Ukraine. We have the intention of creating an EU rapid deployment capability, which is perhaps not revolutionary but is meant to be an upgrade on the battle groups that were never used. That looks to be quite interesting as progress.

On the downside, what is missing is a clearer prioritisation and linkage of particular threats to particular financial spending. That is not there yet, so there is an element of criticism around that. It is perhaps also not quite as clear what the role of the EU is when it comes to territorial defence and mutual assistance. There is a language in the document that talks about the mutual assistance clause and strengthening that article, which is a bit of an Article 5 of the EU and has not been noticed much, but which is becoming more important now.

In some ways, what is perhaps most significant about the Strategic Compass is not so much the document itself but the process and the underlying momentum behind it. This document was not drafted by a small group of people around the High Representative but was very much

drafted with a lot of input by member states. It is owned by member states in a way that previous documents were not.

You have seen these underlying changes with Sweden and Finland applying to join NATO. It is also often forgotten that the Danes have decided to join CSDP after 30 years of opting out; this also tells you something about the momentum behind European security and defence co-operation.

There is a lot of good movement there, and perhaps as much as you could have expected from a body like the EU with its diversity. From the perspective of Germany, it fits quite nicely with the traffic light coalition's emphasis on Europeanising security and defence. The coalition agreement is very much in favour of strengthening the EU, introducing qualified majority voting in foreign policy, transforming the High Representative to a proper foreign minister, strengthening joint command and control and bolstering civil military headquarters. From a German perspective, there is a lot that is very much in line with what the German Government would like to see.

It is also interesting that you only have one single mention in the document of strategic autonomy. The language just says that the Compass will enhance the new strategic autonomy and the ability to work with partners to safeguard values and interests. That is quite a distance from the original French conception, and Germany would be quite happy with a move away from that concept. It is mentioned once, but it is certainly not quite as prominent as perhaps France would like. There is also very strong language on EU-NATO co-operation, which again mirrors what is in the NATO Strategic Concept.

There is a realisation that European security cannot be compartmentalised. If you think about it, it does need both organisations to engage, work with each other and contribute what they have in their respective toolboxes. That is perhaps most obvious when it comes to hybrid. I want to mention that one of the elements that is not much commented upon is that, in the NATO Strategic Concept, there is a sentence that says that hybrid attacks and cyberattacks could reach the level of Article 5. They could trigger Article 5. What does that mean in practice if you think about it? What critical infrastructure would the cyberattacks be against? Does NATO have the tools of responding effectively to that? What is the role of the EU in protecting critical infrastructure and repelling cyberattacks?

There is a real agenda of making EU-NATO co-operation work. That is also the entry door for the UK, because the Strategic Compass only has a bland sentence that says that the EU would very much welcome closer co-operation with the UK. It does not have a strategy for how it could bring the UK into that because the UK has clearly so far expressed a reticence to really engage with the EU. By strengthening EU-NATO co-operation and bringing that co-operation to a new level, you can also bring in the UK in ways that would otherwise perhaps not be possible.

Georgina Wright: I will pick up quickly because I agree with everything that has just been said. On the Strategic Compass, it is quite interesting that an early draft that was leaked did not mention the UK at all in the list of partners; that definitely changed between the first version and the last. It is quite vague on what that means, and that partly, as Christoph said, is a reflection that the UK, or the Government at the moment, has ruled out a formalised security and foreign policy partnership with the EU. It is mirroring that, but the language, "will remain open to a broad and ambitious security and defence engagement with the UK", is as strong as it could be.

On NATO, I could not agree more. It was very important to a number of member states that that EU-NATO co-operation was there. It was also a reassurance to those non-EU countries in NATO and the United States that the EU was not looking to duplicate NATO's work. That is a fear. I know the UK and the US think about this, but also even some states inside the EU.

The Strategic Compass was really important for France because it is an acknowledgement that the EU is and can become a defence power. That was really important to it. The four pillars are also quite interesting. It talks about operations, cyber, investment and partnerships. I completely agree that there is not a hierarchy in priorities at the moment. That was the ambition at the beginning, but it is a problem when you have 27 countries around the table to try to get them to agree. Of course, the war in Ukraine then reshaped slightly the focus of the Strategic Compass.

The two main challenges that apply to the EU, but I would say to Europe as a whole, are interoperability and gaps in investment. On the latter, the EU wants to do a number of things. Of course, the next steps are going to be crucial because the Strategic Compass is the vision, and that is the easy part, if I can say that, but now comes the concrete action. We know that the Commission has issued a defence package, which is quite interesting.

There are short-term versus medium to long-term priorities. In the short term, they are replenishing stockpiles; replacing Soviet-era equipment, particularly in central and eastern Europe; and reinforcing missile defence systems. In the medium and long term, they are armoured vehicles, space defence and cyber. It will be very interesting to see what the EU does. Does it go and opt for a joint investment fund? Some member states are a little bit worried. They think they have already taken on significant debt with the Covid recovery package and do not want to take on more debt. Countries like France are really pushing for this and think it would be a very good idea to do that now and invest because it will pay off in the long term.

The Strategic Compass was originally a German idea, and that is important, but it was very important for France that it was adopted during its presidency of the EU Council, which of course has happened. Overall, it is quite an interesting document. The process was very interesting as well, but the key decisions come now. A number of things

need to be decided before the end of the year; we will need to look out for those to see whether they are. These are not road maps but concrete spending plans. I hope to see closer EU-NATO collaboration and clarity as to what that means.

Q112 **Lord Teverson:** Thank you very much indeed. I was interested in your quote, "quite an interesting document". If that were used in the House here, that would be completely damning of something, and I am sure that is not what you mean. Can I thank Dr Meyer for reminding us of the Danish referendum outcome, which was so significant?

Some years ago, I used to chair a House of Lords EU Defence Committee, and it was very clear there—this was some years ago—that the EU was not into territorial defence. That was completely a NATO role, and the EU CFSP very usefully did joint or hybrid civilian-military operations, training and all those sorts of things, particularly out of NATO area.

Looking forward to two years' time and the election in America, one of the commentaries that I read on the Strategic Compass, if I could quote it, says that, "The EU needs to get its act together before it becomes too dangerous not to be prepared". Is that also a real feeling within the European Union? In reality, is territorial defence going to become a pressing matter, or is that something that we can continue to rely on NATO for?

Professor Christoph Meyer: We are also talking here about an assessment of probabilities and how probable it is that we will have an Administration in the US that somehow withdraws from NATO, either informally or formally, and withdraws from Europe in terms of its commitments. That is not very likely. However, what we experienced under the Trump Administration was quite a shock, certainly from the perspective of German foreign policy elites. There were real fears of what would have happened to NATO if there had been a second Trump Presidency.

That fear is always in the background. There is an element of hedging not just against a scenario that we will see a populist President saying, "Look, you Europeans deal with the problems on your doorsteps yourselves", but also even from a Democratic President saying, "Sorry, we can't afford this anymore. Really, you need to step up. The best contribution to our security is that you take care of European security and free up our resources to concentrate on the Indo-Pacific".

Both of these arguments are drivers for a greater sense of, "We can't afford self-imposed weakness anymore as a way of keeping the US in. We need to step up and strengthen our toolbox for ensuring the safety of our citizens, the resilience of our societies and infrastructures and everything else."

The EU sometimes moves slowly, but you can also see in its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine that it can move pretty quickly in those windows of opportunity and that it does things by unanimity that you

would have thought were impossible under normal circumstances. We have that consensus now in Europe that time is running short and one needs to accelerate. That may include a degree of duplication of some resources such as military headquarters that the EU is now building up for its operations.

I would also agree that there is scope for a sensible division of labour with NATO. Clearly, NATO does territorial defence fantastically. That is what it can do best, but there is then a question of, "What is NATO's role on hybrid? What is NATO's role on climate change? What is NATO's role on terrorism, counterterrorism and pandemics?" There is a degree of unhelpful overlap NATO and the EU. If that cannot be sorted out, there is a question of, "Is this done better working together or is this a question of one organisation just saying, 'This is our domain and please specialise in something else'?"

Georgina Wright: Very quickly, for most member states, NATO continues to be the key military alliance in Europe. You hear more and more now, "How can we beef up the European pillar of NATO?" One of the reasons is if we have a less sympathetic US Administration, we need to make sure that NATO can still function, determine decisions, et cetera. It has started and will continue. Particularly countries in central and eastern Europe talk about NATO when they think about European defence first. They turn to EU defence after.

I agree completely that there can be a sensible division of labour and that discussions around the Strategic Compass can trigger or strengthen a collaborative approach to investment and intra-EU defence co-operation. At the moment, France still invests mostly in the French arms industry. Is there a way of collaborating and improving that, but also becoming much smarter and making our armies interoperable? If the EU can play a role, that is surely a good thing. It needs to start now because it can take 18 to 24 months to develop one arm or weapon. We need to be much more strategic and smarter about how we do this for each country individually, but also for their allies.

There is going to be a need, and EU member states realise that the EU can play a role, but it is all going to come to the nuts and bolts, which we will have to see in all these numerous decisions that need to be taken before the end of the year.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed for steering us not only diplomatically, but realistically too, through the importance of our defence and security relationship with our colleagues in France and Germany in particular, but also across the EU. Thank you for your contribution today. It has been very valuable. I formally close this public session of the meeting of the committee today.