

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: The UK contribution to European security, HC 520

Tuesday 1 April 2025

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Members present: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Chair); Mr Calvin Bailey; Alex Baker; Lincoln Jopp; Emma Lewell; Mike Martin; Jesse Norman; Ian Roome; Michelle Scrogam; and Fred Thomas.

Questions 76 to 114

Witnesses

I: Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman KCMG CBE PC FBA, Emeritus Professor of War Studies, King's College London; Dr Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer, Acting President, German Marshall Fund of the US.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman and Dr Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer.

Chair: I call to order today's Defence Committee evidence session on the UK's contribution to European security. I am delighted that we have with us two eminently qualified individuals to give evidence. Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman is the emeritus professor of war studies at King's College London. Welcome back, professor. You have given evidence on previous occasions, so I am delighted to have you back. We also have, joining us virtually, Dr Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer, who is the acting president of the German Marshall Fund of the United States. A very warm welcome, Dr de Hoop Scheffer. Without further ado, let us get straight into our questions for this hearing.

Q76 **Lincoln Jopp:** Professor, good morning and thank you for coming this morning. You were required reading at various courses that I did throughout my military career, so it is a great pleasure to see you in person. Could we set the context for our discussion and invite you to give us your assessment of where we are currently at in Ukraine, with the conflict there? I invite you, in answering that question, to maybe take a look back and a slight look forward as well.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: It is an honour to be here. I am delighted to be able to, hopefully, answer your questions. There is a puzzle with Ukraine. If you look at much of the commentary, it takes for granted that the Russians have the initiative and are moving on. If you actually look at what has happened since the latest Russian offensive started, which I would put as late 2023, Russia has gained very little. The situation on the front is a bit different. The Russians have taken a few towns, but as a percentage of Ukrainian territory it is quite small.

It has been quite frustrating. It has been frustrating for the Russians because, if you look back about a year ago, when the American aid would have been suspended because Congress would not pass a supplemental Bill, there was a big expectation that the Ukrainians would be struggling. That could be seen in Putin's remarks and so on. I think that that also reflects the position he took in June 2024, when the current Russian negotiating position was set out, but they have achieved very little since then.

Secondly, we are coming to the end of the latest winter, with their attempts to knock Ukrainians out through attacks on their critical infrastructure, all of which have done damage. None of what I am saying underestimates the pain and difficulty the Ukrainians have suffered, but, again, the Ukrainians are coming through that period. The best description of where we are at the moment is not much further along than we were a year ago, or even a year and a half ago.



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There are a couple of things going on. First, there is a question about whether the balance in armament is shifting, at least temporarily, a bit more in favour of Ukraine, or at least the Russian advantage is being decreased. There is some evidence of that. Ukraine has made a few gains, not massively significant but in eastern Ukraine, in Donetsk, where a lot of the fighting is going on at the moment. It has been pushed out of Kursk, which was always likely and has been, again, quite painful and difficult, although not the slaughter that Putin had talked about and Trump apparently picked up. They are largely out of Kursk, which limits some of the Ukrainian bargaining options there. They are pushing a little bit in Belgorod, which is another Russian province.

There is nothing dramatic going on. The Russians are throwing everything they can at Ukrainian cities and towns. There is a lot of not even really pretending, in many cases, that they are after military-related targets. They may be preparing for a big offensive any time now. That has to be assumed, but I would take it that they are really not in a position to achieve militarily the political objectives that Putin set out.

They cannot get all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. They have most of Luhansk, but they are falling short in the other provinces. To take Zaporizhzhia and Kherson is probably beyond them militarily. They may go in other directions, but they have to cross rivers and so on. At least for the next six months or so it is hard to see a lot of change, but there could be some more fighting.

Over time, of course, if the Ukrainians are not getting the same sort of support from the United States, it becomes more difficult. One should not underplay that. Again, I do not want to underplay just how tough this has been for the Ukrainians, as well as for the Russians. It has been a very hard slog on both sides.

Finally, to talk a little on the diplomacy, I have been reasonably sceptical of this all the way through. President Trump has focused very strongly on an immediate ceasefire, with which Ukraine, I think, could cope. It would not want a frozen conflict because that would mean the Russians de facto had got 20% of Ukrainian territory, but it could use the respite.

The Russians have always been adamantly against a ceasefire without a political settlement. It is worth saying why, because this divergence between what Trump says the Russians are interested in and what the Russians say they are interested in is really quite sharp. The Russians' position is that they want these four provinces. They are now part of the Russian constitution. They formally annexed them.

Secondly, they want a subjugated and disarmed Ukraine. Again, that is part of their formal position. They want it to be neutralised and not part of NATO or the EU. Now they are stressing a different Government and a change of regime in Ukraine. That has always been around. This is not what the Trump Administration are talking about, and even if they were they cannot deliver it. The Ukrainians can keep on going.



Neither of the two areas where we thought we might get partial ceasefires seems to be sticking. That is the attacks on energy infrastructure and Black Sea shipping. On the former, there is no written formal agreement. There is no agreement on targets. The Russians said it came into effect almost as soon as Putin had his phone call with Trump, with nothing particularly agreed. Then they started attacking energy infrastructure anyway.

On the Black Sea, they have set down conditions that essentially mean the removal of sanctions and the Europeans will not agree to that, even if the Americans were tempted. President Trump has now said that he is cross and angry with the Russians, so maybe he will do something about that. My prognosis, I am afraid, is that we carry on as before, at least for the coming months. Then we start to see whether there is a shift as a result of changes in American policy.

Q77 Lincoln Jopp: I can see that Dr Alexandra is desperate to get in, but I want to ask one more supplementary question. Have you made any form of assessment of the impact of the North Korean contribution to the Russian forces?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: First it was confined to Kursk. I do not think that the Russians wanted to have the issue of the North Koreans fighting inside what is internationally believed to be Ukrainian territory. They are helping Russia defend itself against the Ukrainians. It made a difference, at a high cost to the North Koreans. Initially the North Koreans struggled. Eventually, as armies do, they adapted, so it made a difference.

It is part of a wider support for the war, which extends to ammunition and some kit, which has also been important. On the Russian side you see rumbles about quality, language difficulties and so on. In the end, the Russians pushed the Ukrainians out and the North Koreans were part of that. Whether they will have any much impact now I tend to doubt, in terms of troops, except maybe in these little slivers of Kursk and Belgorod that the Ukrainians have.

Q78 Lincoln Jopp: Dr de Hoop Scheffer, is there anything you would like to add?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: It is a pleasure to be with you. I had the pleasure of following Lawrence Freedman's lectures when I was a student at King's College London a long time ago, so it is always a pleasure to listen to you. I wanted to make three very quick points and wrap this into the new transatlantic environment in which we are all operating.

One is that there needs to be a shift in Europe's strategic mindset. I have been working in this field of European defence and transatlantic relationship for over 20 years and it has always been the same debate. It is the same old boring debate about burden sharing, how Europeans can step up and, basically, how Europeans can do not without the United



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States, but with less America. That is the shift in the mindset that you are seeing these past couple of weeks with the European summits taking place between Paris and London. I will get back to the role of the UK and the French-UK co-leadership, but that is number one.

You have mentioned the Trump Administration. Today in Washington you are seeing what I see as an acceleration. The trends that we are seeing are not new. They go way back in history, I would say to day one of NATO being created back in 1949, but the trends are accelerating. We are now beyond the burden sharing debate and now in the burden shifting debate. The message coming from Washington to Europeans is very clear. It is, "You need to take care of your own security and defence, and therefore you need to step up". In these past couple of weeks you have seen an acceleration within the European debate. I purposely say "European" and not "EU", because the UK plays a critical role. That is number one.

What does it entail? It entails a huge shift in terms of how Europeans think about their own strategic interest and deterrence and security. Why? Europeans must learn to think of their own defence and security not as a function of US strategy in Europe, but as a function of European strategic interests. To a big extent, the most delicate thing to do is to unlearn the old reflexes in thinking about European security.

When you look at NATO, as a command structure and a cultural structure, it has been built, and is still built today, around the idea that the United States is here and will always be there. Now things are shifting. It is less about building a so-called European pillar. It is more ambitious than that. We need to be more ambitious. It is about thinking of responsibility sharing, and that is a much more interesting debate than the American-European pillar, burden shifting or burden sharing. It is about Europeans and Americans getting together and having a strategic conversation about rebalancing the conversation on European security and defence, and rebalancing how we do it. That is more interesting.

The second point I wanted to make is that, when you look at the dynamics within Europe today, it is really interesting, and I applaud that, to see Paris and London co-authoring the leadership of these conversations. That is exactly right. I also see a lot of Weimar+ plus-plus conversations, including Poland, Germany and sometimes Italy.

It strikes me, reading the last 12 March joint declaration of Ministers of Defence of these five countries I have just mentioned, that the conclusion was exactly the right framework within which we should be holding this conversation. It was about maintaining a strong transatlantic link, while significantly increasing the EU capabilities for its own deterrence and defence. That is the notion of rebalancing that I was mentioning.

The last point I wanted to make is really important. I am seeing our political leaders and our society still being caught in the so-called guns or butter debate, fuelled by the rise of the far right across all EU member



countries. It is a responsibility of political leaders today to better explain to their citizens why it is important to preserve the security of the European continent, to make sure that there is a deal that will, hopefully, make Ukraine and the eastern flank a more stable region for Europe, and to spend in defence. That is why I regret that continuously we put the money before the why. I would like to see that conversation being reversed. Let us talk about the why, the strategy, the vision and then let us discuss budget and the percentage of GDP in terms of defence spending.

What you read in the press and hear in these NATO or EU conversations is too much focused on the numbers and the percentage, and less focused on the why. Then you have these divergences of views between political leaders that are difficult to overcome. That to me would be very helpful to convince citizens why it is important to have strategy first, then explain why it is important to invest, that, by the way, there will be a return on investment for their own European industrial base and that it is also about investing in technological innovation and energy transition. This is a way of showing that hard power is not just about military but also about our democratic resilience.

I will end by saying that what is tricky today for Europe is that there is a timing issue. There is the short term, the intermediate term and the longer term. In the short term, it is very difficult not to rely on the United States and the US defence industry. Then there is the middle to longer term that Europeans need to work on and prepare now, so that, in five years from now, they are able to defend their own security and defence with less America.

Lincoln Jopp: Those were two amazing opening remarks. Given the frantic rewriting of questions all around me, I am very glad I went first.

Chair: My request to the panel is that there is a quite a lot of ground to cover among the Committee members, so please keep remarks as succinct as possible, in order that we can then get more questions in.

Q79 **Ian Roome:** Thank you to both panellists for giving evidence today. Professor, you have noted that Ukrainians stress that they will continue to fight under all circumstances. In your view, could Ukraine continue to fight without US support?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: Yes, but with difficulty. At the moment, Ukrainians produce about 55% of what they fight with themselves. This is an important shift.

We have two separate conversations. One is about the state of Ukraine and the other is the wider European role. If the Europeans want to work hard on Ukraine in the short term, which it seems to me is absolutely critical in terms of the long term for European security as well, supporting Ukrainian defence industries is a pretty good way to start. About 25% of what Ukraine fights with comes from Europe, including the UK and



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others, and about 20% from the US. The US provides the higher-end stuff, such as HIMARS. Without that, you have increasing problems.

I do not personally think that, at the moment anyway, you will have an abrupt break, but we had something that looked like it a few weeks ago when President Trump was cross with President Zelensky. You will note that one of the major things that caused the Ukrainians a problem then was intelligence support. We now know some of the things where there is a dependence on the US. If we are going to move to a situation where the Europeans are doing more, we need to look at that quite carefully. I think it is one of the things currently being discussed.

Following on from what Dr de Hoop Scheffer was saying, there are some short-term problems that are difficult, but we have notice now of what they are. If we can keep the Americans engaged for as long as possible, we have time to manage the transition a bit better.

Q80 Ian Roome: Could you elaborate on how likely the prospect is that the Ukrainians will have to go it alone without the US?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: It is very difficult to say. I would take it as a starting point for almost all our discussions that the American footprint in Europe will shrink. Whatever happens, that is where they are and what they are planning for. How far it shrinks is still up for debate, because I think that there will be resistance in the Senate if it shrinks too much. Dr de Hoop Scheffer mentioned the commands. I really do not think that the Senate would like to see the Americans give up major commands in Europe, but that requires a certain level of commitment, so we do not know.

At the moment, the negotiations are a blame game, with both sides trying to demonstrate that the other is responsible for their failure. At the moment, I would say the Russians are responsible for their failure because they cannot give President Trump what he wants, in which case maybe he will put some more pressure on them. President Zelensky is doing his best to stay close to the Trump Administration. The fly in the ointment there is the minerals deal, which is very unequal and vaguely extortionate. Like a lot of things that this Administration propose, the link with reality and what actually will happen if it is ever enacted is unclear. That is probably the major difficulty that the Ukrainians face at the moment.

I am not sure that they are going to be cut off completely. There is a risk of that. It is, however, unlikely that you are going to get another big supplemental Bill such as we had last April, and from which the Ukrainians are still benefiting. Again, you have to assume declining American support. As with a lot of these discussions, it is a question of whether it is a steady, manageable decline or a cliff edge.

Q81 Ian Roome: Dr Alexandra, would you like to come in on that question?



Dr de Hoop Scheffer: I totally agree with Lawrence Freedman. I think that there is no scenario where the United States will decide to fully withdraw its support from Ukraine or from European security and defence, mainly because it is a source of revenue for the United States. Think of the amount of military equipment that it has sold to Europe since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. That is number one.

There is no scenario of the US withdrawing its support from Ukraine also because the stakes are so high for the US credibility in the world. Around President Trump, there are a few advisers who are fully supportive of this idea that, if a bad deal is signed on Ukraine, this will have global ramifications when it comes to US credibility.

The very last thing is that, yes, Europeans will be able to step up. As Lawrence Freedman was just saying, there are critical capabilities that the US has and that Europe will continue to need. I believe that there should be a transatlantic conversation where we agree on a responsibility sharing and not a division of labour where the US negotiates and the Europeans implement the ceasefire or preserve it. Instead of being in a division of labour scenario, which is the scenario we are in, we should be discussing together how we make this happen and end this war in the most constructive, positive, sustainable way for the future of European security and defence.

Q82 **Mike Martin:** Dr Alexandra, I will pick up on something you said there about American credibility. You do not think that there will be a total drawdown of American support to Ukraine because of that American credibility. That is exactly what we saw when Trump negotiated a deal in Afghanistan. That was not a deal; it was a capitulation—an abandonment of an ally of 20 years. It was done without the Europeans. There are quite stark parallels between what happened in Afghanistan and Ukraine. You can make the argument that the chaotic American withdrawal from Afghanistan contributed to Putin's thinking in 2022 when he was thinking about whether to invade Ukraine. I wonder whether you could explore that tension there.

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: There is an understanding today that—and that is a motto you are hearing a lot in the Washington bubble political circles—Ukraine should not become the current Administration's Afghanistan. The parallel is obvious. You are absolutely right. There is an awareness that Ukraine should not be Trump's Afghanistan. That is number one.

Number two is what Lawrence Freedman was saying a couple of minutes ago. A scenario that Europeans are not anticipating enough, but that you might see unravelling in the days or weeks to come, is an American Administration losing patience with Putin's strategy of trying to gain time, and deciding to escalate not only on sanctions, but potentially escalating on the military assistance to Ukraine.

Within that escalation scenario, to then de-escalate Europeans will be required to follow and support that escalation. It has been quite a while



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that I have been thinking about this scenario. It is not a de-escalation or a withdrawal, but, on the contrary, a decision made by the US Administration to go full speed because Putin is not being co-operative. There, you would have to have a conversation among Europeans and Americans on how to manage this escalation together.

Q83 Mike Martin: That is really interesting and quite heartening, although “escalate to de-escalate” is a reflection of Russian doctrine, is it not? Taking that all into account, there are various pathways here, Dr Alexandra. Is there a chance of a ceasefire then a peace deal, or a peace deal then a ceasefire? Do you think that, with the current players in the ring and the current positions of those players, that is a likely scenario in, say, the next 18 months?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: What is really important today, and what the UK and France have been actively doing these past couple of weeks in tandem, is to avoid a deal that is being discussed bilaterally between the US Administration and Putin, and then having the plan delivered and putting Europeans in front of a fait accompli. That would be the worst scenario. It is up to Europeans to be very active in the conversation and make sure that what is being discussed will not undermine Ukraine and the future of European security and defence.

How the Europeans do that, and that is where Europeans need to accelerate, is by showing to Washington that they are able to deliver from operational and money investment perspectives, and are taking that seriously. That will send a message to the United States that we are serious, we understand this is serious, but we also want to be part of the conversation.

Today, I am seeing Ukraine and the Ukraine negotiations reflecting a broader trend in geopolitics. Having the Russian-US or Ukraine-US conversations taking place in Saudi Arabia is an indicator of how things are shifting. You will probably have China as part of the conversations, and Turkey, the Gulf states and Qatar, which has been very active as a mediating power, as well. In the shifting alliances that have accelerated with the war in Ukraine and the way the American Administration are handling the negotiations, it is going to be very challenging, but absolutely critical, for Europeans to find a place at the table. This is the only way to ensure that European security and defence will be preserved in a sustainable way.

That is why the Macron and Starmer engagement strategy non-stop with the American Administration is exactly what should be done, while trying to rally European partners into the conversation. Let us stop discussing; let us start delivering concrete actions and numbers, and present them to the American Administration. It is also a question of European credibility, if I can say that.

Q84 Mike Martin: Professor Freedman, it seems that the demands of Russia and the demands of Ukraine and Europe are mutually exclusive and have



not really changed much. Just quickly, what would you say is the likelihood of a ceasefire then peace, or peace then ceasefire?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: Putin wants a peace and then a ceasefire. Ukraine wants a ceasefire and then a peace, as I think does Trump. I do not think that Putin is ready to do a deal at the moment, but he is under pressure and I suspect that we have months ahead. Say the Russians keep on failing to make a lot of progress in their main objectives. Their economy is in some difficulty, because they have 21% interest rates and 10% or 11% inflation, and these are not going down at the moment. Having had boom years because of a war economy, it is now turning and their economy will have lower growth. We all have these issues, but oil prices are, again, something to watch.

You could get to a situation where the Russians also feel that they need a ceasefire. I do not think that they feel that at the moment. Ukrainians probably, by the end of the year, need a ceasefire at some point. You have all these pressures coming up.

We have moved beyond the point where we feared, a few weeks ago, that this would just be a deal done by the US and Russians. It is pretty apparent now that the US cannot and does not particularly want to deliver what the Russians want, so we have a much more complex diplomacy. We have to remember that the Europeans were leading on Ukraine diplomacy all the way from 2014 to 2022—if there was going to be a diplomatic deal, we were looking to France and Germany to do it. Putin always wanted to do a deal with the Americans rather than them, but that is what we were looking at. There is nothing particularly unique about the idea that Europeans will come into the process.

If we are going to think about where this is all leading, it is not just a question of boosting our defence role. It could well be a question of boosting the diplomatic role. I do not think that we have quite got our heads around what that would mean, because at the moment I think we find it difficult to imagine being the ones who are talking to Putin.

Q85 **Mike Martin:** Have the interventions of Donald Trump over the last few months shifted the dial at all on the prospects for peace in Ukraine?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: Yes, because there was not a process at all; I think Scholz had one conversation with Putin last year and that was about it. Then you had a variety of emissaries going when the Saudis tried that, in 2023 probably. There has not been very much going. Now you have a process, which we did not have before, and that is clarifying the interests and opening up possibilities. The Ukrainian view was that you needed small things, maybe prisoner exchanges, which we have had, as a way of building confidence, and you could build up from that.

Always on these occasions, if you are setting yourself up as in charge of the process, you have to work out whether you are a mediator, somehow



trying to find some common ground between the two parties, which is very difficult in this case, because they are pretty incompatible, or you come in with your own plan, which I think is what Trump wants to do. If that is happening, you get to the scenario that Dr de Hoop Scheffer raised of, "If the Russians are not playing ball, are you prepared to play? Are you going to raise the stakes?" That is the point that we are at, at the moment. I am less sure that they will.

To conclude, a problem with the Administration is that the Administration is divided. A chunk of advisers to Trump are pretty hostile to Ukraine and would like to have good relations with Russia. The two key players—the Secretary of State and the National Security Adviser—are much more sceptical of Russia and ready to support Ukraine. You can see that being played out in Administration deliberations.

Q86 Emma Lewell: Morning, both. Professor, I wonder whether you could first share your thoughts with us on how realistic a European peacekeeping force with a US backstop is and what on earth that would look like, because I am not clear.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: It is probably unwise to call it a peacekeeping force. Peacekeeping has a very particular connotation: UN blue hats, lightly armed, interposing themselves between the two parties to see whether there is compliance. We had that in 2022, not from the UN but from the OSCE, and it did not do any good at all. You could imagine circumstances in which there is a peacekeeping force, but it would not be from Europe. The Russians have spoken a bit about that possibility.

What the Europeans have been talking about with the Ukrainians—and this started from a point where there was a real worry that a Russian-US deal would be pushed on to Ukraine without any security guarantees at all—is what you do instead of that. That was the starting point. The difficulty is that you have to give the Ukrainians confidence that the same thing will not happen again and they are not just going to be pushed back to the state they were in in 2022, except battered and bruised as a result of the last three years.

You cannot have NATO. Even if the US was supportive of the NATO idea, which it is not, we know that Hungary and others could form obstacles. If you cannot have that, what do you do instead? The idea that was developed was of a deterrent force. That is the best way to think of it. That would go behind Ukrainian lines and mean that you would bolster the Ukrainians. Then, if the Russians were making progress, they would have to contemplate fighting European countries, which is a big step. It would be a big step for us to take. This is not a trivial commitment to be making.

Three things have happened since this idea began to be tabled. First, there has been a lot more work being done. We have had mention of the conversations in Paris and London on this. Lots of countries are saying,



"We are prepared to support" and so on. What does that support actually mean? What can they contribute?

Secondly, we are clearly not going to have a deal very quickly, or not of the sort that would reduce this as a first-order question. Therefore, we have a bit more time to talk about it. The negotiations themselves are more about how you actually get through the first stages than how you mark the last stage, which is what this would be.

Also, the thinking in all this has moved slightly away from a land force to more of a focus on air and maritime. That also brings risk but it seems less than actually putting our forces behind Ukrainian lines. One problem is that, to make a difference, you need a lot of forces, just to conclude on this point. Let us say you wanted a force of 20,000 troops. You need about 60,000 to have it present. You need about 20,000 training, 20,000 there and 20,000 recovering as you rotate the forces. That is going to be quite a thing to put together. The air and the maritime are less difficult and probably, in some ways, more useful. Even if you had a ground force there, you would want an air component as well, so you see more conversations moving to that, rather than just simply a land force.

Q87 Emma Lewell: In terms of this deterrence force that you have referred to, do you think that Europe, without the US, has the kit and personnel to provide that? I struggle with the numbers and the actual cold hard reality of whether we have that.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: With all these conversations, you look at Europe and think, "Why not?" The numbers are there. You could find the troops. There is the so-called Libyan precedent going back to 2011, when the UK and France decided that they were going to help the rebels, who looked like they were about to be slaughtered by Gaddafi's troops, and announced this air campaign. They could not do it without the Americans.

At the moment, you would need at least American support to get it in place and to help sustain it. Over time, you ought to be able to manage it without a large American role. One reason why there is a bit of anxiety at the moment is that, with all the logistical and intelligence support, we would struggle.

This is just a microcosm of the larger problem. To be able to play the more autonomous role Europeans might like to play, they need more time to work on it. You would hope that, if Trump had this sort of deal and the key thing was making sure that the Ukrainians had some reassurance, he would see the advantages of supporting the Europeans in providing it. It would be the most dire scenario where some deal was imposed and then the Americans completely walked away.

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: I completely agree. A US enabling role would be absolutely indispensable. That is, by the way, what the French President and the British Prime Minister have been trying to convey to President



Trump. As Lawrence Freedman says, there are critical areas where Europeans are still hyper-dependent on the United States. That is intel, satellites, transportation of troops and air-to-air refuelling. I believe that these capability gaps should be filled very quickly. In three years from now, I truly do not understand why Europeans would not be able to fill some of these critical gaps.

Absolutely, Europeans need now to invest in the credibility of their future military power. Again, there is the underlying tempo issue. There is the very short term, where Europeans are still hyper-dependent and will need this US enabling role. That should be part of the negotiation between Washington and the European capitals, while Europeans invest now to build up and fill some of these capability gaps for the three to five years to come.

Chair: We have just over an hour and there is still quite a lot of ground to cover, so my request again to the panel would be to keep the responses as succinct as possible. We now want to move the focus of the conversation from Ukraine on to European security and, in particular, the current US Administration's approach to that.

Q88 **Fred Thomas:** Good morning to both of you. Dr de Hoop Scheffer, we have talked a lot about the shifting landscape. You have described it as a need to move away from our habit, when thinking about NATO security in Europe, of immediately thinking about what the American strategy is to thinking more now about what our European strategy is. Can we do that in the context of nuclear and nuclear weapons?

Since the new American Administration, we have seen many European countries expressing an interest in some kind of collective nuclear deterrence that does not rely on US guarantees. The UK and France have nuclear capabilities. What can we do together to provide some reassurance to European partners that they would benefit from a collective European nuclear deterrence, imagining for a second—I do not think we will get there; I hope we do not—that there was no American support?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: That is a critical question. It is a debate that has been taking much more scope and place in the strategic conversations taking place within Europe. I have been part of these conversations as well. De facto, the French nuclear deterrent is a deterrent for the whole of Europe, and the UK as well. It is not random that France and the UK today are leading the overall deterrence security guarantee conversations, because these are the two European nuclear powers. That is number one.

As you know, nuclear deterrence is a national responsibility, but this should not be an obstacle to having a European conversation. By the way, I am seeing that Nordic, Baltic, central and eastern European countries, but also southern European countries, are all looking in particular at France, as an EU and NATO member state, and asking



France to be more explicit on the coverage of the French nuclear deterrent.

I would say, "Let us not be attached to any taboo". We should have these conversations together. We also need to be very realistic that the US nuclear umbrella—and the fact that we use the term "umbrella" is very telling—cannot be replaced by either the British or French nuclear deterrence. It is not the same dimension, but we should be having this conversation among Europeans. By the way, this conversation has already started.

- Q89 **Fred Thomas:** Professor Freedman, that answer, quite appropriately, was very much based on nuclear deterrence at strategic level. To talk, as we have to, about tactical nuclear weapons, we have seen the Polish making noises in that direction. They would like to have that capability. We have seen, fairly recently, Prime Minister Tusk saying that they needed to have "the most modern capabilities also related to nuclear weapons and modern unconventional weapons".

We know that France has a small arsenal of air-launched, non-strategic nuclear weapons. We in the UK do not. We have only strategic weapons with our Trident missiles in the submarines. What is your assessment, in the light of the shifting landscapes in the last few weeks, of the European, not necessarily British, necessity to have that kind of capability?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: It is a tricky one. The starting point is that the Russians have put a lot of emphasis on short-range systems. They have lots of them. Even in the American debate, there is a question of whether they need more as a way of countering that particular Russian capability.

There is a problem, because we talk about tactical nuclear weapons as if this is almost just another munition, but use of any nuclear weapon would be a pretty strategic act. We have seen this in the debate, going back to Ukraine, about whether the Russians would use these sorts of weapons in the Ukrainian context, and they do not. They have not. Because it is strategic, in the end, it would be a pretty big deal.

You would therefore have to ask, "What is the advantage of using a short-range system?" Is it to change what is going on on the battlefield? Possibly. Would it make a massive difference? You would have to use quite a lot of them to do so, and then you have irradiated a large part of the territory you are supposedly trying to capture. You have issues of fallout and so on. It is not a simple calculation from a Russian side.

My view of this is that it is actually quite a difficult capability for us to match, certainly not in the same numbers. Using these weapons on the assumption you would not be escalating to longer-range and larger systems is probably, or possibly, unrealistic. You would have to assume that anyway. There are other things you can do to retaliate, as we



discussed with Ukraine. Most of the planning for the use of a Russian tactical nuke in the context of Ukraine did not envisage a nuclear response by the allies. There are lots of ways of hurting countries without actually having to use nuclear weapons yourself, so I would not personally put the same stress on this. It would be a very difficult capability to develop.

There is the question of dual-capable systems, where the Americans have a number, and a number of European countries would get access to American weapons in the event of a crisis. There is one issue about whether the UK could also do this with its F-35s—it would have to get different F-35s—given that the Americans also have a base at Lakenheath. It could fit in with that. There are ways in which you could increase it, but personally I would not make it my strongest priority, because it is a very difficult standard to meet.

Q90 Fred Thomas: Can I ask you now about EU spending? We have seen a lot of news recently about the SAFE initiative, a €150 billion defence financing piece. We know that Britain wants to be involved, but to do so we will be required to sign a security and defence partnership with the EU. We have also seen that there have been some challenges to signing that. There are some other issues not related to defence but related more to fishing, et cetera, that are required to be negotiated. Dr de Hoop Scheffer, do you expect that the UK and the EU will sign in May at the EU summit?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: I hope so. It is about time that such an agreement is signed between the UK and the EU. We can totally overcome some of these remaining obstacles that you just mentioned. In the era in which we are living, with Ukraine and many other challenges within and at the periphery of Europe from a security defence perspective, it is absolutely critical that the UK and the EU sign such an agreement.

Chair: I believe that Jesse Norman wanted to come in on this point.

Q91 Jesse Norman: Professor Freedman, the statements coming out of the White House have been profoundly disturbing in relation to the nuclear deterrent, Five Eyes and other capabilities. It is evident that they are also highly disturbing to American security agencies and departments. Could you give us your read on what that domestic impact is, so far as you have been able to pick it up, within the Department of Defense, the Department of State, NSA, CIA and other agencies?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: As with every bit of the federal Government, there is a bit of turmoil at the moment. The consensus view is that Europe needs to do more, should be doing more and we need to work with them to do more.

The point about the declining American footprint and so on is pretty universal; I do not think that there is controversy about that. The issue is how far you should go. You have the Vance view, which is clearly



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expressed in the Signal leak, that Europeans should basically be left to get on with it, and the Secretary of Defense appeared to be sympathetic to that. In practice, the services would be horrified at the idea of a complete withdrawal from Europe. That might be true of many Republicans in the Senate as well.

At the moment, we are waiting to see what the Pentagon's plans are. The Secretary of Defence has asked for substantial changes to the European commitment. That will happen. When they look at it, they will find that some of the things they have been thinking about are very expensive. The idea to move from Ramstein to Hungary has been floated. That will not survive much scrutiny. The fact that these debates are going on is a different situation. Sometimes you need to go through these debates to end up where you started. That may not be a bad thing.

There is a difficulty with the US nuclear guarantee, which is what a lot of this comes down to. I can give you statements from the late 1950s that give you every reason to doubt that, if push came to shove, the Americans would do anything at all. It is a big deal. One of the reasons why the French have the nuclear doctrine they do is that de Gaulle came to the conclusion that nuclear alliances were not really tenable. The US would not sacrifice Chicago for Paris.

That has always been there. There is nothing new in that, but we have learned to live with it. We have decided that, in the end, even if it is difficult to believe, the alternatives to not believing are too expensive and difficult. We are still in that position, except it is becoming harder to believe.

Q92 **Jesse Norman:** The European response is in the early stages of becoming a lot more serious.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: Yes.

Q93 **Jesse Norman:** What three things would suggest to you that it was actually serious?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: The first would be the conversations that are going on. It was notable that the next German Chancellor, Merz, raised this issue almost as he was elected. Tusk has been mentioned. It is on the minds of a lot of countries, so it has been talked about.

The French are clearly trying to work out some language that indicates that they see the force de frappe as having some value for all of Europe, but it is still controversial in France. Le Pen, who now has other things to worry about, was not supportive of a general French guarantee. The UK has always committed its forces to NATO, but we have never really had a strong national debate about what that means.

We have always had this idea, which was a French idea initially, about having a second centre of decision making. If the Russians mistakenly



discounted the Americans, they would have to take account of the Brits and the French as well. We have not really thought about the idea of being the first centre of decision making.

We are in the early stages. These debates are going to be awkward because the UK and France have traditionally thought of these as national deterrents. They are what you have that gives you extra insurance if the Americans are not there. We have not really discussed them as openly as we should have done in terms of extended deterrence to our European partners.

- Q94 **Jesse Norman:** Could I put the question to Dr de Hoop Scheffer? Again, are there two or three things that you would consider signs of real seriousness? Those might be financial commitments, commitments of strategic posture, public debates being initiated and had, or commitments being made domestically and internationally. What does seriousness look like for you?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: First, Lawrence Freedman just mentioned the U-turn in the German debate. That is an earthquake for German strategic political culture. That is number one.

The second one is the shift in the strategic conversations in France. It is not new, but it has accelerated over these past couple of months. There has been a lot of engagement from the French Government with a lot of our European partners on how France's nuclear forces can complement broader defence strategies. There has been an acceleration in the strategic dialogues. That might not seem a watershed change, but it is. Again, it goes back to the shift in the strategic culture of these countries.

- Q95 **Jesse Norman:** Can I just push back on that? It looks as though Germany is preparing to consider, once again, Nord Stream 2. As a strategic move, that is extraordinarily damaging to central Europe and Ukraine in particular. How can that possibly be on the agenda of the Chancellor if he is taking the serious-minded approach to Russia that you are suggesting he is?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: I totally agree. For me, it is not compatible. It is absolutely not compatible. We all know that, if Putin is able to sustain his war effort in Ukraine, it is first and foremost because Europeans are still massively buying Russian energy, whether directly or indirectly. By the way, Trump's threat to sanction the oil industry of Russia is exactly the right approach. If that does not stop, Russia's war effort will continue.

I completely agree with your statement. It would be completely contradictory to the other positions that the future German Chancellor has been taking.

Jesse Norman: That is helpful. Thank you very much.

- Q96 **Mr Bailey:** Professor Freedman, you spoke about intermediate nuclear forces. You were quite dismissive of them in the discussion about how



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Europe should reprioritise its defence posture. I just wanted to push back on that and expand the discussion. Your inference was that the strategic culture that the UK and France developed post Suez drove us down two entirely different roads.

Force de frappe is about a layering approach and the ability to prevent the escalation of conflict through a recognisable escalation. That is why the INF process brought to a close the Cold War. I would challenge you and say that intermediate nuclear forces are the most important nuclear forces because they are the first ones on the ladder.

The UK entered into the Polaris agreement, which is something we still hold today. We like to think of it as Trident, but through the Polaris agreement the UK committed, in the 1967 Healey defence paper, its intercontinental forces to NATO. As a result, they have never really been ours. That was what you were alluding to in that discussion. We would like to believe they are ours, but we have committed them to NATO; they are part of our NATO force offering. It is inseparable. The one exception is exceptional national circumstances. That is the one case in which we could use it.

Moving forward on that basis, should the UK seek to align its strategic culture with France in a more European approach or are we comfortable with the two cultures that exist at the moment?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: First, the “tactical” weapons—that is not a term I like—are not INF. Intermediate nuclear forces are still long-range systems.

Q97 **Mr Bailey:** They are on subs. They are not intercontinental. They have a separable signature that prevents escalation.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: I am a bit sceptical about these distinctions. We have a “sub-strategic” capability with Trident. You can target it against a military formation. It is just a very expensive and rather brutal way of doing it. The problem with very short-range systems, of which the Russians have an abundance, is that it would take us an awful lot of time, effort and energy to build them up at a time when our nuclear capacity is stretched anyway. That is slightly separate.

You are correct on the separate ways the French and the British went after Suez. We went for interdependence; the French went for independence. Trident can still be used independently. We do not have to get American permission to use it. They could not stop us using it.

Over time, if the Americans did not want us to have a nuclear deterrent, they could make it difficult. Again, it would take a lot of expense to get over that. We are not there yet. You mentioned the clause that Macmillan put into the Polaris sales agreement on extreme national interest. Try to think of a time when nuclear weapons were about to be used that would not be a moment of extreme national interest. It is a big deal.



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The doctrines are different, but they are not that far apart in practice. There has been, for some time now, a lot of conversations between the British and French about how to maximise joint capability. We have difficulties not because of the Polaris agreement but because of the 1958 agreement with the United States.

Mr Bailey: Its effect was the Polaris agreement.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: It was about sharing secrets. We get a lot of secrets from the Americans, which we cannot share with the French. That has inhibited quite a lot of co-operation in the past on things such as synchronising patrols so you have the maximum number of boats out at any time and discussing common problems. All these things can be done.

You do not have to go much beyond that. If we look at the two forces together, we should not just say, "Gosh, both of these are a lot smaller than the American force". They still pack a substantial punch. John Healey made that point the other day. There is a tendency to forget just what a single Trident warhead can do. Together, they have quite a significant force. We are moving into a situation where we are having to have more open conversations not only with each other but with our European colleagues about this.

Q98 **Mr Bailey:** In that regard, what do you expect to see in the strategic defence review? Will we have that discussion about strategic culture? It is quite important for us to note that there is a very discernible difference in strategic culture between us and the French on the things that we have just been discussing.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: I do not know, but I hope the strategic defence review will talk more openly about the capacity. John Healey was alluding to this the other day. We have tended to talk about our national nuclear force as an awkward necessity and played it down, whereas the French always played their force up. We have talked about a minimum deterrent and so on. In these circumstances, you have to be prepared to draw more attention to it. In that sense, again, I can see us being closer to the French position.

Q99 **Mr Bailey:** It is a material change of culture. Dr de Hoop Scheffer, do you want to comment?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: As the UK and other European countries are drafting their own national security strategies or White Papers, it would be interesting—I know this has happened in the past—to invite the French, the Germans and others involved in the work on some of these White Papers. The French have done it. The Germans have done it. I would like to see much more of this collaboration as these reviews are being written.

To your question on the strategic culture, that would be a very helpful exercise. This community approach should be enlarged to the think-tank



world as well in order to have all of the perspectives from outside specialists and experts. There is a refresh to be done in terms of how these reviews are conducted. I was engaged on some of these processes. Working together with the French and the Germans would be a very helpful exercise.

Yes, the British and the French strategic cultures are different, but I would tend to agree with what Lawrence Freedman said. There is a lot of convergence as well in terms of the mindset and how our military forces have been operating on the ground. Again, it is not a surprise to see the French and the British today leading the conversations on the so-called security guarantees with European partners.

I also see what I would call a strategic complementarity between the French and the British strategic cultures. We are not twins, but we have some points in common. It is extremely interesting to see how the French and British tandem is working. As asset of the strengthening of French and British co-operation is the ability to rally different groups of European partners into the conversation. That is how I would frame these differences, but I see many more convergences than differences to bridge.

Mr Bailey: It is important for us to remember that the genesis of the discussion and the point of the diversion was a direct threat on London and Paris in the absence of a US response. People talk about us being in exceptional times. We are not. We are not approaching the worst of the threats that we have faced as a nation since the formation of NATO, or the establishment or the writing of any of these agreements, which is what Professor Freedman was pointing to earlier. That is why there is a discussion about whether we continue on those trajectories or we draw into a convergence. I hope we come to a European one.

Q100 Alex Baker: Thank you, Professor Freedman and Dr de Hoop Scheffer for sharing your expertise with us. There have been reports that allies are hesitant to maintain their current reliance on the US defence industry. The rumours that there might be an F-35 kill-switch are leading to much soul-searching and a rapid reassessment of reliance on the US defence sector. Will this result in a boost for sovereign defence industries in the UK?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: Yes, I hope so. It should do. American defence contractors are aware of this issue and the damage that was done with the cut-off of support, albeit brief, to Ukraine. They know that having a reputation for providing kit that then cannot be used is not going to be good for future orders. That debate is still going on.

There are trade-offs, which have dogged this issue for decades, between getting off-the-shelf stuff from the Americans, which is affordable, and developing your own, which often produces excellent kit in very small quantities. This is something that we need to sort out. That is a general problem of European defence procurement, which we are aware has been



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problematic in the UK. I know the Government have all sorts of initiatives to improve that, but a lot needs to be done.

If we are going to get a serious boost to defence spending, there are going to be areas where we have to work more. We always focus on the high-ticket items, such as big warships, new aircraft and so on. A lot of what we really need at the moment is quite basic stuff. We need mass. We need lots of drones. I have been talking to Ukrainians quite a lot about this. The Ukrainians are now big innovators in a lot of the very relevant defence technologies. They also have a lot of spare capacity. They need resources to go into them. The UK is very well placed to work with the Ukrainians. That is a new factor in the equation that I would encourage us to follow.

I would stress how important it is to fill basic stocks at the moment. We have seen from Ukraine just how much gets used in single days. We could not fight that sort of war at the moment.

Q101 Alex Baker: What are the main barriers within the UK defence sector that are going to stop us from seizing this opportunity?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: The industry needs confidence that it will get the orders. Unfortunately, we have got into a culture where industry does not come up with the ideas; it waits. We need a culture where industry comes up with more of its own ideas, looks for support and is more proactive.

Everybody says this, but we need a much more streamlined process of our own. We need to discourage continual fiddling with requirements, gold-plating and all the things that everybody says they know are bad but keeps on doing.

This is a cultural thing. In a sense, we need to get—I do not like the term, but it is relevant—on to a war footing. I did the official history of the Falklands and I did the Iraq inquiry. In both cases you can see that, when you are in a sense of emergency, a lot of things happen quite quickly that otherwise would take months or even years.

We need to get ourselves into that frame of mind where we accept there is an emergency. We can then start to circumvent the endless pages of information that have to be provided and committees that have to be gone through. It is a mindset, but it can be done. We have seen it done in past campaigns.

Q102 Alex Baker: Dr de Hoop Scheffer, what could it mean in terms of improving capacity and capabilities in Europe?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: Number one is overcoming European fragmentation. If Europe does not have even the beginning of a defence industrial base today, it is because of its fragmentation. Europe produces more types of tank than the entire rest of the world. It is just not working. It is not a question of money; it is a question of strategy—of



how Europeans can do this together. This is where I see the EU institutions and the European Commission as a facilitating platform or a platform to incentivise EU member states to invest collectively in innovation and joint industrial projects.

Secondly, there is a speed issue, as we all know. It is 2030, 2040 or 2050. What we need is now and in the next three to five years. How do Europeans speed up their production processes and the speed at which they produce military equipment? I agree with Lawrence Freedman: there are very basic things that Europeans should be doing together at a faster speed.

The third point is deeply political. If we have fragmentation among our industries, it is because the politics of industrial dynamics is dominating and undermining our co-operation strategies. It is all about politics at the end of the day. Again, it relies on the political leaders of countries with strong defence industries selling to their citizens the importance of pooling and sharing capabilities, money, funding and investment with other countries in order to make a stronger European defence industrial base. The EU institutions need to play this incentivising and facilitating role, but, at the end of the day, it is all about politics.

Q103 Michelle Scrogam: We have talked about what is happening in the here and now, but I would like to look at some of the longer-term implications. Specifically, what are your predictions on the long-term implications of the new US Administration and their approach to relations between the US and the UK, and the US and Europe, in particular?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: This is one of the least predictable Administrations that I have known. We struggle from day to day.

I would say a couple of things. First, I assume that in the long term they will do less in Europe and more in the Indo-Pacific. That has been the policy since President Obama. They keep on getting drawn back into Europe and the Middle East because of one crisis or another. We have an issue with Iran coming up.

The point about that Signal chat was that they were talking about taking on the Houthis and did take on the Houthis, which was a continuation of Biden's policy. Although they talk in these terms, you cannot assume that crises will not keep on pulling them back. The European situation is still tense because of what is going on in Ukraine. If Ukraine is sorted, which I have made clear I am not confident about in the near term, you will see an acceleration of the American move away. I still find it hard to imagine that they would move away completely.

You also have other issues. The financial one is going to get quite serious. There are big issues with American debt. American debt is more than the Pentagon's budget. It is not going down—indeed, it may be going up quite sharply at the moment. We should keep in mind that we could face a major financial crisis this year or next. That will have enormous



implications for all of these debates. We still talk about the knock-on effects of the 2008-09 financial crisis. We could have another one. It is not a prediction, but these are possibilities that will affect how these things develop.

Lastly, a lot depends on what goes on with China. China seems to be the main beneficiary of almost everything that is going on at the moment. They are making their own mistakes, but the Chinese are watching what is going on. The western alliance is in trouble. It is not in a good place. We are trying to work out our policies. Europe does not have a united view on China. The US is debating whether China is a useful partner or a really big adversary. That debate is going to be quite important for how the other debates develop.

I cannot predict, but you can see the issues that are going to be coming up. Some of these are coming up quite fast. The Iranian issue is one that has to be sorted by the summer. All the restraints on the Iranian nuclear programme will soon be off.

Q104 Michelle Scrogam: Dr de Hoop Scheffer, do you have any particular thoughts on the relationship between the US and the UK versus the US and Europe?

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: One thing to keep in mind is that, when looking into the future, we need to look at these deeper trends that are reshaping US domestic politics and shifting US foreign policy priorities. Because foreign policy and domestic politics are completely intertwined, it is going to be very difficult for any ally to influence the trajectory of these policies.

One of the most striking trends we need to keep in mind is the growing intersection between national security and trade, which is merged into the notion of economic security. It is all about economic security. That spans the three priorities of the Trump Administration but even post that: China, immigration and trade. That is number one. Let us look at the deep trends. The UK and European partners need to prepare now for what comes after the next four years.

Secondly, the strength of the transatlantic relationship will depend much less on Washington than on the UK and Europe. The initiatives will have to come from the other side of the Atlantic because they will not come from the United States. Again, it is about boosting European credibility and European capabilities to remain part of the conversation and to remain a credible ally in responding to current and future challenges.

Thirdly, we need to be very pragmatic in a British kind of way. The future of the transatlantic relationship has already become and will become even more compartmentalised. We will have opportunities to co-operate with the United States where our interests are aligned, but there will also be an increasing amount of issues where we will not be aligned. Therefore, Europe and the UK will need to continue to work on the



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climate agenda, Ukraine and the future of European security with less of the United States and sometimes without the United States, if the United States decides to take a different trajectory.

Very lastly, because we are looking forward, this is a time for the UK and Europe to be creative. We have this uncertainty within Europe, in the United States and all around us in the world. It is a time to be innovative. We cannot go back to old formulas or old diplomatic solutions.

By that, I mean thinking about diversifying our partnerships and alliances with other countries and partners. I have been seeing and experiencing this live over these past couple of weeks. What I am seeing concretely is Indo-Pacific allies, such as South Korea, Japan and Australia, reaching out actively to European allies and saying, "We want to deepen our strategic relationship with you". The south-east Asian countries are seeing the same trends.

Let us be creative. Let us rethink our own alliance system at a time where these alliances are shifting as well. It is not just doom and gloom. It is also about identifying some of the opportunities that are out there through these global and domestic shifts. How do you transform these shifts into an opportunity? I see an opportunity for the UK and the EU to strengthen their co-operation. It is not a luxury. It is not an option. It truly is a necessity. There is no choice but to grow closer together.

Q105 Alex Baker: Based on everything you have both said, one of the fundamental things that we need to sort out if we are going to make progress is how we finance our defence capabilities and how Europe does this. There has been a lot of talk about this in recent months. My colleague Luke Charters MP and I are leading a campaign looking at how the financing works in the UK.

One of the ideas on the table is the concept of a multilateral defence, security and resilience bank. Could such an institution could solve some of the concerns around European defence capability?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: In principle, yes. I am not going to claim I know enough about it or have looked hard enough at it to give you a very detailed answer.

As far as I am concerned, the main need is speed. We need less red tape and we need clarity on what we are trying to do. However you are financing things, if there is a muddle about your strategic concepts or your operational plans, they are still not going to be solved. A source of finance that is easily accessible but still has the normal safeguards would be a good thing. Beyond that, I do not claim to have a great deal to add.

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: What you have seen with the EIB and the other initiatives that are taking place at EU level shows the shift in the European cultural mindset that I was talking about. This is a good move. At EU level, we should be using all the tools that the EU already has. That is an example of how, instead of creating new mechanisms, tools and



acronyms, we can use the institutions and structures that the EU already has in a much more strategic and geopolitical way.

The decision on the EIB was exactly aligned with that approach, in addition to ReArm Europe and so on. This is the right direction, but there is a need to accelerate. There is a need to use these EU tools, frameworks and mechanisms to incentivise European countries to fund joint industrial projects collectively. If that does not happen, the money will just go elsewhere.

I was talking about the shifting alliances. I was struck by how other countries are stepping into the European defence portfolio. I am thinking of South Korea, which just signed with Poland a \$13 billion-plus armament and equipment agreement. This is also telling you that, because Europe is not able to get its act together now, other countries will propose themselves as alternatives to some of the US industrial products that Europeans have been importing. It is interesting to see the dynamics.

I would like to see the Europeans getting together with the UK. The European countries should identify three big industrial projects where there are known critical capability gaps, invest together and speed up the timeline so those capabilities are not delivered in 30, 40 or 50 years from now. I am absolutely convinced that it is doable. It is just a question of politics at the end of the day.

Chair: Dr de Hoop Scheffer, I know you have to leave at this point. Thank you very much for giving evidence today. My very best wishes to you.

Dr de Hoop Scheffer: Thank you very much for having me. It was a pleasure.

Chair: We will continue with Professor Freedman, if we can.

Q106 **Fred Thomas:** I have a couple of quick-fire questions, if I may. We have had a really fruitful discussion. We have not talked much about Brexit. The United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union in 2016 and left a couple of years after. In the round, has leaving the European Union made this country less secure?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: I voted against it, so I have to say I do not think it was a good idea.

A lot of it was about issues with internal security on the police side as well as internationally. The defence side was not a big Brexit issue, other than ideas about having a European army imposed on us if we stayed, which was never going to happen. It did not make vast amounts of difference to the defence and security side.

Q107 **Fred Thomas:** Looking back, we could probably all agree that the security implications of leaving the Union were not much discussed during



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the Brexit discussions, whichever side of it you were on.

That leads me on to my next quick-fire question, which is about intelligence sharing. We have spoken a lot about spending money together with other European countries or trying to. We have spoken about the nuclear shield. In terms of the intelligence sharing, earlier you alluded to, as did my colleague Calvin Bailey, some of those quite old agreements—they are almost 70 years old—with America that have led to our very close intelligence sharing arrangements. That led to Five Eyes and the position that we are in now. In terms of intelligence, we are much closer to the US and Five Eyes than we really can be to Europe.

What is the scope to change that? In an ideal world, we would not want to rescind anything that we have with America or Five Eyes, noting some of the Signal messaging app incidents, but we might want and maybe require a much closer intelligence-sharing relationship with our European partners. Who can we trust? It would be quite a new thing for us. It would be a very big departure from recent policy.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: You used the word “trust”, which is absolutely central to intelligence sharing. Where trust is lost, intelligence sharing becomes more difficult, including with America.

We can see it both ways. We have big issues with Five Eyes at the moment. New Zealand became more marginal some time ago. The Americans threatened to take Canada out of Five Eyes. I tend to doubt how serious that was, but the point was made. The head of intelligence in the US regularly retweets odd conspiracy theories.

It is not a comfortable situation. We are relying on the intensity of co-operation between the National Security Agency and GCHQ, for example, or between CIA, MI6 and their equivalents in Canada and Australia, continuing because it is almost impossible to imagine how you would disentangle it. At the working level, all the impetus is to continue with that.

It is hard to separate yourself completely from what is going on at the political level. This is going to be challenging. If we see major breaches of intelligence, it will become more problematic.

Q108 **Fred Thomas:** Professor, let me bring you on to the European side. Who can we trust? Who can we share intelligence with?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: I cannot give you a scorecard about who to trust. We have had a lot to do with the Germans in the past, and it has been a variable relationship, as with the French.

The major players in most things are going to be the major players in intelligence as well. You do not have the institutionalised structure that you have with Five Eyes. The Five Eyes meet regularly as a group. They know each other. You do not have that sort of linkage. We lost some of



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the institutions that we did have because of Brexit. There would be a certain amount of work, you could imagine, to recreate a lot of that.

For a lot of the security challenges that we face, you have to look at people who have spy satellites and listening centres, which is not a lot of European countries.

Q109 Fred Thomas: I have one last quick-fire question. We have all been very proud to see the British Prime Minister managing to walk a tightrope between our closest allies in the US and Europe. He is managing to do that with remarkable aplomb. We saw some of those very intense White House visits. We felt our Prime Minister came out of that very well and managed to maintain our good relationship with America and his own personal relationship with President Trump.

Recently, over the weekend, we have seen another European leader, President Alexander Stubb of Finland, golfing at Mar-a-Lago. I do not speak for the Committee, but on a Committee visit to Finland we had a private meeting with President Stubb. He was very charming and very frank with us about some of the challenges that Europe faced. He told us that his wife is American and he has a relationship with America. It was no great surprise to see him managing to take that message to President Trump.

The very next day, President Trump in the press came out and said he would be very angry with Putin if Putin did not adhere to the ceasefire and keep going with those negotiations, which seems from the outside like a very positive output from that meeting. What is your reflection on that? Is that now how world events are going to be shaped, with golfing trips and one-on-one meetings?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: The late Prime Minister Abe of Japan decided that golfing was the way to get through to President Trump. I am not sure whether Prime Minister Starmer is a golfer.

Fred Thomas: He is a footballer.

Ian Roome: His wife is English, by the way, not American.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: Generally, people have underestimated the importance of Finland joining the alliance. The same goes for Sweden, but Finland joining was particularly important because it brings a history of resilience. It has fought Russia. That was a positive impact. Hopefully, Trump was moving in that direction anyway. It should be apparent to him, as it is to the rest of us, that Putin is dragging his feet.

It is an indicator that we are in a period where personal relationships, difficult choices and whims of the moment can have long-term consequences.

Q110 Chair: Professor Freedman, in the last few minutes that we have let me



ask you a few questions, if I may. First, there has been a suggestion that the US may give up its role of SACEUR—Supreme Allied Commander Europe. I mention that because just last month NBC reported that the Trump Administration were considering that. I know there has been pushback from the Republican chairmen of the House Armed Services Committee and the Senate Committee on Armed Services.

In your opinion, how credible is the suggestion that the US may give up the role of SACEUR or try to combine SACEUR with the role of Africa command?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: There are a number of things going on here. First, they are taking a probably sensible look at the various regional commands and whether they make sense or whether they could be rationalised in some way.

Secondly, there is a push within the Pentagon to hand over stuff to Europeans. At the last Ramstein meeting, which is about donating to Ukraine, the American Secretary of Defence handed the chairmanship to John Healey. Do we imagine that happening on a bigger scale?

It would be a tremendous shift for the Americans to hand over command. At some point, if you are cutting your forces below a certain point, it would be very hard to explain why you are holding on to the command. These things are bound up together. You will see tremendous pushback in the Senate and certainly in the army. Armies do not like giving up command posts. The UK does not because it is part of how you manage the careers of your best people. You do not want to be excluded.

So long as the Americans are involved in European security, they will want what influence they have over it. If this happened, it would be an enormous shift. How the integrated command would be handled in those circumstances would require massive adjustments. I do not preclude it at some point in the future. We have some way to go before we are there.

Q111 **Chair:** You do not think it is imminent.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: I hope it is not imminent.

Q112 **Chair:** As you rightly note, armies may not want to give up their posts, but ultimately it will come down to the US President.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: It is a question of overall force posture in Europe. At the moment, the level of American commitment makes it absolutely right that they have the senior command posts. That could change.

Q113 **Chair:** When I studied at the Royal College of Defence Studies, we explored great power competition. At present only the US and China would be considered by experts as great powers because in order to be a great power one needs a great military and a great economy.

While what is going on at the moment might involve short-term pain for



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European nations, if there is a reduced American presence within Europe and the European nations do ramp up, could Europe potentially be the third great power within a few years?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: The Europeans do not have the unity to think in those terms yet. We have a very clear model of what a great power is and the role that it plays, going back to the UK's role in the 19th century and the start of this 20th century, and then the role of the United States.

There is no particular evidence that China sees itself in that way. It has a different idea of what it is to be a major power, which is largely looking after its own interests in its own region and then being quite mercantilist elsewhere.

There used to be talk about the EU as a civil power, using what we now call soft power. It would not be so militaristic and so on. It is not just the EU. It is important to keep in mind that, when Keir Starmer was hosting, on that important weekend, a load of leaders, five non-EU countries were there: Canada, the UK, Ukraine obviously, Turkey and Norway. It is not just an EU question. All those countries make different sorts of contributions.

Britain, France, Germany and Spain were the great powers of the past. We have much more complex political configurations now.

Chair: Agreed.

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: European countries have to do more on their own continent. Whether there will be great powers, in terms of playing roles far away from the European continent, is a different question.

Q114 **Chair:** In essence, divisions among European nations will prohibit them from attaining that great power status, as can be seen at the moment in the fact that some of them are not even meeting the 2% NATO defence target.

Lastly, if I may, it is widely considered that the UK-EU security pact may well be signed very soon. In the event that it is not signed because of the strong-arming going on with regard to fishing or a whole host of other things being brought in, as has been reported by the French Government and others, what would happen? If that UK-EU security pact was not signed, do you envisage that the UK's contribution to European security, whether in the short or medium term, would begin to wane as political schisms appear or would it carry on unabated?

Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman: Europe is our continent and European security is our interest. That will not change. It would be very disappointing if we were unable to move forward with the pact. When you put the fisheries issue against what is at stake on the security side, it would be tragic if one was allowed to influence the other. I would



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concentrate on keeping this as a separate issue. I am all in favour of looking at all these other questions, but they are of a different scale.

The UK's role in European security is not going to change substantially. We work a lot with the northern tier. Not all of them are members of the EU. It would be much better if we could use this to reinforce our relationships with so many of the key players in Europe that are members of the EU.

Chair: Certainly, professor—I definitely agree with you on that point. At a time of such crisis for our continent's defence and security, solidarity should be the order of the day rather than political posturing and short-term gains on fisheries and so on.

With that, time has defeated us. Professor Freedman, it has been an absolute pleasure to have you here. I am sure that your expert knowledge has significantly enhanced our inquiry into the UK's contribution to European security. Thank you. With that, I bring today's hearing to a close.