

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: The UK contribution to European Security HC 520

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Members present: Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Chair); Mr Calvin Bailey; Alex Baker; Lincoln Jopp; Jesse Norman; Ian Roome; Michelle Scrogg; Derek Twigg.

Questions 115-173

Witnesses

[I](#): Dr Rowan Allport, Deputy Director, Human Security Centre, and William Freer, Research Fellow in National Security, Council on Geostrategy.

[II](#): Professor Peter Roberts, Associate Fellow, Centre for Public Understanding of Defence and Security, University of Exeter.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Rowan Allport, Deputy Director, Human Security Centre, and William Freer, Research Fellow in National Security, Council on Geostrategy.

Chair: Welcome to today's Defence Committee evidence session on the UK's contribution to European security. I am delighted that we have with us the two witnesses on our first panel, which will run for an hour before we begin our second panel, with Professor Roberts. A very warm welcome to Dr Rowan Allport, a deputy director at the Human Security Centre, and to William Freer, a research fellow in national security at the Council on Geostrategy. Without any further delay, I will ask my colleague Calvin Bailey to start the questions.

Q115 **Mr Bailey:** Thank you both for joining us today. The first part of the discussion will be to try to understand what our contribution to NATO looks like, but I am also keen to understand the differences between our contribution to NATO and NATO's part in European security. NATO's remit is greater than Europe, and we might see it focused particularly in the Indo-Pacific, because the edges of Canada and the United States are over there. Should it be thus focused, an amount of resource and attention will need to be left behind in Europe to ensure that European security remains paramount even if NATO is focused elsewhere. I really enjoyed your piece, Dr Allport, about the 1966, 1967 and 1968 defence reviews and the change of our focus. Could you talk about what you think our contribution to NATO should look like, noting that at times NATO might leave Europe alone and leave a gap that we would perhaps have to fill?

Dr Allport: Our contribution to NATO is conventional/unconventional. It is not quite full-spectrum; there are gaps, which we can address if you wish. As a broad rundown, you have the nuclear deterrent, of course, declared to the defence of NATO, which is chiefly a political component. Then you have the special forces, the conventional forces, cyber and what have you, intelligence gathering and diplomacy. Then you have the lesser-known non-military components—the economic and industrial—and the geographical and infrastructural. We may talk about the vulnerability of the UK to missile strikes and things like that, as although we are geographically blessed in that we are not close to potential launch points, or at least not to land launch points, we do have some maritime vulnerability.

Q116 **Mr Bailey:** Across those capabilities, how and where would you focus and increase, and why?

Dr Allport: I would definitely focus and increase on the conventional element, chiefly because NATO is pivoting toward a strategy of denial in the defence of Eastern Europe. Previously, although it was not discussed much publicly, the model was broadly a concept of a tripwire force, of which the British component in Estonia was part. The idea was that we would probably lose elements of Eastern European territory and after a period go back and liberate them. The Kuwait model during the Gulf war is



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an example of that. Now it is more of a forward defence approach to avoid losses. We have seen what happens to the territory in Ukraine that Russia takes over—there is complete devastation in various parts that were taken and then liberated by Ukrainian forces—so we are very incentivised to avoid any initial losses. That would be where I would focus investment.

Q117 Mr Bailey: So an increase in European conventional capability.

Dr Allport: Yes.

Mr Bailey: Would that be under NATO, or under a European vehicle such as the JEF or other constructs?

Dr Allport: Under a NATO vehicle, chiefly. It is important to understand that although a lot of what the US has been saying in the last couple of months has not been presented particularly pleasantly or smoothly, there is a great deal of logical thought behind it. The US is desperately trying to convince us, or to persuade us, that they cannot ride to the rescue because they have China to deal with. The plausible worst-case scenario for NATO right now is the potential for the US to be at war with China, or at least heavily engaged in a crisis with China, and Russia comes in and tries to take advantage of that situation.

Q118 Mr Bailey: If that were the case—this is the position I was trying to set out—NATO could ultimately have its attention facing elsewhere, so it would need to make sure of the sanctity of the responses that might be needed to deliver tactical actions somewhere else, mainly in Europe. Do you think NATO could do that concurrently with being occupied in the East? Or is that the place where the JEF and the like should step in?

Dr Allport: Even in the event of two simultaneous crises, the US would be overwhelmingly in the lead in terms of continental defence. NATO would potentially provide some sort of supporting role, but it would be very much a backseat in terms of providing defensive capabilities to the continental United States and Canada. In the event of a crisis, Europe would be NATO's absolute priority and the US would take the lead in the national tasking in the Pacific.

Q119 Mr Bailey: William, is that your view? Could a crisis in INDOPACOM that draws away certain parts of US capability be dealt with tactically by NATO?

William Freer: In the last 20 years NATO has had a track record of looking in its more general 360° view, focusing especially on out-of-area operations, but in recent times it has very much been refocusing on the deterrence and defence aspect of its job in Europe. That is not to say that European security stops at the European borders—it has security interests that extend beyond that—but any operation in the Indo-Pacific, given NATO's laser focus on the Russia threat, is unlikely to be NATO-led, as previous out-of-area operations have been.

Q120 Mr Bailey: But NATO is inseparable from its membership, and the Americans and Canadians are members of NATO. If they were fixed on INDOPACOM, they would want to maintain the integrity of a collective response, so perhaps another organisation would have to look at



something below a collective response. That is the question: does NATO have the capacity? If not, how would we backfill that capacity, and in which areas? Dr Allport pointed to conventional forces; I am wondering whether there is any other view.

William Freer: The question essentially is: where would there be gaps if the US were to withdraw assets from the NATO area of operations? The answer is highly dependent on what kind of withdrawal would happen and what that looks like. The main question for the European powers is which assets are most likely to be withdrawn and which of the capability gaps are the most important to fill.

The US has a broad range of capabilities present in Europe at the moment. On paper, it does not look like a massive amount of Europe's forces—something like five of 140 combat brigades and about 10% of the combat air forces in Europe are American—but the general contribution is a lot bigger than that. Some of that is things that cannot be moved in the event of a crisis in the Indo-Pacific, such as the leadership positions the US has, such as SACEUR and the C2 that they can provide, but a lot of the assets that are most useful to Europe—things like American air and naval power—are the most likely to be withdrawn towards the Indo-Pacific in the event of a crisis.

One thing we really need to bear in mind is that the Americans have long said they want to refocus towards the Indo-Pacific and, although there has not been much movement in that direction, that is no reason to think they will not enact it. The most dangerous point that could happen is when European countries say, "Well, the Americans have been saying this, and yet their presence in Europe has actually grown: 2013 was the low point of US personnel in Europe and it has since gone up because of the events in Ukraine." If a crisis occurred, America might suddenly, overnight, withdraw a lot of conventional forces from the European area, at which point the Russians might seek to make the most of that opportunity.

Q121 **Lincoln Jopp:** You have highlighted the areas where Europe is most reliant on the US—air and maritime. Can we look at the less obvious and potentially less sexy end of the question: sustainability, ammunition and satellites? To what extent is Europe totally reliant on the US in those areas, and do they fall under, "Well, they can't be moved"? It sounds to me as though they could be moved very quickly.

Dr Allport: There are some capabilities where we have marginal ability and some we are completely lacking. We do not have satellites that can detect the launch plumes from missiles, but they cannot be moved and the US has a global capability for that, so there would be no benefit in removing that capability from Europe.

A big issue that does not get enough discussion is our reliance on the US as a sort of storage bin for munitions whenever we need them; during the Falklands, we requested things such as later-model Sidewinder missiles and Stinger missiles, and they were delivered quickly, because we did not have them in sufficient quantities immediately to hand. I suspect that is



still similar. For example, the British Army is currently building up its MLRS force. There are a lot of launchers—I forget the exact number, but I think the plan is eventually for 72 or something like that¹—but they consume ammunition at a vast rate, and I severely doubt that the UK has plans in place, even with the plans to expand munitions stockpiles, to have enough ammunition on hand for a particularly prolonged period of intense usage.

William Freer: The US enablers are vital. NATO is essentially built on the bedrock of the American way of fighting, and the enablers include things such as intelligence collection. Some of that is space-based, so there is not necessarily any reason why that cannot be delivered, although at the end of the day it is a political choice, as we have seen in Ukraine. On logistics, airlift and sealift, the American contribution is huge. It is a gap that they have to fill in the Indo-Pacific as well, so the extent to which that could see a reduction is also something to bear in mind. In the air, one of the key capabilities is airborne tankers; about 20% of the airborne tankers in Europe at the moment are American.

Potentially another aspect to consider is that NATO has often worked on the assumption that, if some kind of conflict were to kick off in Europe, American reinforcements would come across the Atlantic. Although in the air and naval space that is less likely to happen, because of how much those assets will be needed in any contingency involving the Chinese, the US army is a lot less needed in the Indo-Pacific, so we might still see those reinforcements coming across. They still have, I think, two divisions-worth of stockpiles waiting in Europe for personnel to come across to pick up if needed.

Q122 **Lincoln Jopp:** So they are the pinch points. Let's say that this is not the day of the races; this is now Europe growing its capability over a longer period to fulfil those potential gaps. Where do you think Britain should be looking to European allies and partners to play their part in growing into that space? As the corollary of that, where would we seek to leverage our natural advantage, experience or specialisation into us providing that capability in the absence of American support?

William Freer: We should definitely be looking at not duplicating what allies are doing but designing our forces to be complementary. A lot of our allies are not well-placed to replace those US assets; the European defence sector is quite fragmented, although that is a problem that they are aware of and working to fix. We essentially have a lot of smallish and medium-sized European powers with miniature pocket armies that are very similar, but lack the high-level enablers; they are totally reliant on UK-US maritime power to cover the flanks and the reinforcements, particularly suppression and destruction of enemy air defences.

Although some European countries have those capabilities to an extent—a combination of the munitions you need, the training you go through and

¹ The witness later clarified that "The UK has placed an order for 61 M270 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems upgraded to the A2 standard for the British Army, with an order for a further 15 being considered, for a total of 76."



the command and control in the air that is needed to direct operations—without the Americans providing the bulk of the SEAD/DEAD capabilities, European countries would be in a poor position to enact that kind of campaign. That is vital to achieving air superiority, which NATO land forces work on the assumption we will achieve. There are definitely conversations that need to be had on further specialisation. Understandably, you can only go so far. In a utopian world, you might completely silo countries and say, “You just focus on intelligence aircraft. You just focus on armoured divisions,” but even if we move in that direction, we will never go the full way, so it is about finding the right balance.

Dr Allport: I agree with all that. There is already some degree of specialisation—for example, Estonia is particularly strong in cyber. In terms of generalisations, the UK needs countries like Poland and Finland to provide land force mass. There is no point in us trying to recreate the British Army of the Rhine. The concept that Britain and France each come with a strategic reserve corps for NATO—I think the UK is probably looking at trying to put together two divisions in some form—is probably the right balance between the complete abdication of not doing land forces and making a substantial contribution.

Beyond that, it is important to understand that all this is reasonable when you consider everything that the Ukrainians have accomplished without a lot of the technology and the enablers that we are talking about today. It is not a counsel of despair; there is a way to meet these demands without necessarily reaching US levels of capabilities but still coming up with what is adequate for what is presently needed.

Q123 Lincoln Jopp: Would it be fair to say that we should be looking at what we contribute second most after America—whether that is SEAD or whatever—and pushing hard on those things to form the basis of a credible Europe-only capability?

William Freer: The UK in particular is very well-placed to fill any potential US capability gaps given, first, our very close working relationship with the Americans. One of the particularly big gaps is intelligence collection, but as we are a member of Five Eyes and hold assets like the Rivet Joint, we are already in an okay position to replace some of those capabilities. It is just about building them out depending on the extent to which American assets might be withdrawn. The fact that we have a strong history of conducting operations at scale, compared with any other European country, is one of the unique selling points that we can provide to European countries. However, you still need to have a decent measure of conventional mass behind it to make the claim that you have the right to a leadership position within certain formations.

Q124 Mr Bailey: I want to pull on a thread that you exposed there, William. You talked about some of the conventional deficiencies that we have, most notably strategic airlift and most critically AAR. AAR is a deficiency within NATO and the US, and something that is easily moved from one theatre to another. Noting that NATO has a shortage of AAR, is that something that you would expect to see us address within the strategic defence review?



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William Freer: Yes, you would certainly expect it to be addressed. We have a decent air-to-air refuelling fleet already, although it is a lot smaller than it used to be. We had 16 VC10s and nine TriStar tankers back in the late 2000s. We are now down to just nine A330 tankers. One of the problems that our current tanker fleet has is that they are not equipped with boom refuelling. That is crucial to refuelling a large number of the variants of aircraft used in NATO, including some of the larger ones and the F35a, which, although we don't have it, a lot of our allies that we will be supporting have acquired. We currently have only the probe-and-drogue air-to-air refuelling capability on the A330s. Hopefully, adding in the boom capability is being looked at.

Mr Bailey: Just as a point of clarity, it is nine plus four, because there are also the four aeroplanes that we lease out. There are also potentially 22 A400s that could do probe-and-drogue.

Dr Allport: I would point out that, with the Americanisation—well, there has always been a heavy American part—of the fleet, we have an ever-increasing number of aircraft that we cannot refuel in flight. We cannot refuel C-17s or the P-8s and, at the moment, we will not be able to refuel the Wedgetail aircraft when they come into service. We would be dependent on allied capability for that.²

Q125 **Derek Twigg:** Rowan, to pick up something from your earlier conversation with Calvin Bailey, a lot of the focus at the moment in terms of why Europe needs to step up—and we need to step up—is on what the President and the Administration have said and done, but you were saying that it is actually more than that, which has not been highlighted enough in this debate. We just said that a conflict blowing up between China and the US, or on the border between North and South Korea, could have major implications not just in terms of the United States keeping their assets and people here, but of being able to draw in other people in times of crisis and whether Russia would take advantage of that situation—peace deal or no peace deal. Has enough serious thinking been given to that?

Dr Allport: In the UK?

Derek Twigg: Yes.

Dr Allport: It is difficult to tell.

Derek Twigg: That may answer the question.

Dr Allport: Well, yes—it is a bit difficult to tell. I have mainly been looking at the US angle for the last couple of years. There has been a growing realisation in the US for going on 30 years now—since the '90s, they have steadily had this realisation of the Pacific issue. They believed that China would potentially be the issue and it developed further from there.

² The witness later explained that "The Poseidon MRA1 (P-8A), Globemaster (C-17), RC-135W Rivet Joint and Wedgetail AEW Mk1 aircraft types all require the use of the boom in-flight refuelling system which the RAF's Voyager tankers currently lack."



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The one core takeaway that needs to be emphasised, and that I don't think is understood, is that China represents a far greater challenge to the US than Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan or the Soviet Union. It is a true peer. The US is not saying that Europe needs to step up to be difficult, because of MAGA or anything like that, but because it could not do a war on two fronts. This is not 1941. It could not repeat that kind of performance it did back then.

Q126 Derek Twigg: That is very helpful. I will follow on from Lincoln Jopp's questions on the capability gaps if the US pulled out or reduced its commitment here. You touched on this—we have talked about refuelling aircraft, logistics and intelligence. There are already major logistics and capability shortfalls in NATO—it is not just us and the US, which has its own capability shortfalls. William, you stated that the UK could step up, but given that we are losing 300 people a month from our armed forces and the Army needs 100% recapitalisation—we have already talked about the capability gaps—how are we going to do that? Most serious commentators say that 2.5% of GDP is nowhere near enough. Are we talking theory here, or are we talking what could practically be done over six months, a year or two years, for instance?

Dr Allport: I will start with the end bit first. It is important to identify the timeframe, in terms of how long it would take Russia to reconstitute from the current conflict. I think the most pessimistic estimate I have seen is two years. I think the UK's assessment is five years to get back to where they were in February 2022, and 10 years to do what they want to do in terms of force expansion. I don't want to sound complacent, but they will not immediately pivot to a conflict with NATO as and when Ukraine finishes. For example, I don't think there is a particular problem with the Highmast deployment going on right now.

To get to your main point, there are issues like recruitment problems that have been going on for more than a decade. I remember I was in a session, I think in 2013, when there were people who were trying to apply to the Armed Forces standing up in the audience and saying, "My application has been delayed," or it had been rejected for some incredibly trivial reason. Beyond that, it is money, terms and conditions of service, and all sorts of things like that.

I would probably prioritise looking after things like the Royal Fleet Auxiliary first. That is a small force, but it is completely haemorrhaging human resources at the moment. It desperately needs resourcing and upgrading in terms of the terms and conditions. I would start on the narrow specialisms, and then move out from there.

Q127 Derek Twigg: Based on where we are today, would we struggle to replace those capabilities if the US stepped back?

Dr Allport: Yes. Where we are today, it would be very difficult. I think it is important that we have a conversation with the US about a steady transfer of responsibility. It needs to be controlled. For example, one thing the US may do in the next couple of years is potentially stop rotating the largely

army units that they have been rotating through Europe since 2014, which they stepped up again in 2022. We probably need to arrange a hand-off for that, about who takes over responsibility for those units in terms of training and their availability to defend Europe.

Q128 Derek Twigg: We have touched on intelligence, and obviously we are pretty pre-eminent in Europe, but it took reliance on Starlink and American systems and so on. Are we anywhere near being able to stand on our own in Europe on that? I think I know the answer, but I would be interested in your view.

Dr Allport: The alternatives are not as dynamic, flexible and high-bandwidth as Starlink. They do exist, but they all come with their own constraints.

Q129 Derek Twigg: So we would struggle?

Dr Allport: We would struggle. Sometimes the technology comes along at exactly the right moment, and that is what happened in Ukraine with Starlink. Amazon has just started launching its equivalent. I think the first major batch went up a few hours ago, actually. That will probably provide a degree of redundancy in a couple of years from now, but for the moment, you have capabilities that we owned for a period—I forget—with OneWeb, and that was sold on, but they are more limited than Starlink.³

Q130 Derek Twigg: William, do you want to add anything?

William Freer: I think the ultimate question is, would a US withdrawal be a walk away from NATO or just redeploying assets to where they think they need them the most? If it is a complete walk away, which I think is incredibly unlikely, but not something you could ever completely rule out, then you are talking much greater increases in defence spending to replace some of the capabilities that the US support NATO with, but that might not necessarily be removed if they are repositioning certain forces to the Indo-Pacific.

This is something that NATO has always had to think about. You could go back to Eisenhower, who said in the 1950s that if in 10 years' time there were still US troops in Europe, then NATO would have failed, and yet there are still US troops present. The big change was in 2010 and 2011, when under the Obama Administration the Americans talked about their pivot to Asia. European countries, ourselves included, were quite slow to react to that, and spent 10 years not really acting on those things that the Americans had said.

Now that the process is accelerating, a lot of positive steps have already been taken in NATO's defence planning process. They have already said that by the end of the decade they will have significantly reduced the overall share of targets borne by the US. Clearly, there are already some conversations going on around whether, if the US is going to draw down,

³ The witness later confirmed that "The UK holds a stake in the ownership of Eutelsat Group following Eutelsat's merger with OneWeb."

we have a timetable that we can work to and how it will impact what we need to invest in and what timeframe we are working to.

On some of the other points you have made, people and munitions, especially in the short term, are absolutely vital to get a hold of those problems. There is no point in investing in fancy new platforms if you have not got the people to use them and the weapons to fire. I think that has very much been at the forefront of support for Ukraine, and those lessons have really hit home—that a conflict might not necessarily be a short, sharp affair, and we have to be able to sustain the fight.

On the people front, it is true that the Armed Forces have really struggled, but recently there have been some positive changes. Radakin pointed out that, in the next couple of years, they expect the numbers to start going up. The Navy, which has long struggled with recruitment and retention, is already starting to see an increase, which is really positive to see, and things like the medical requirements and waiting times are known problems that have been acted on. There is another thing that I would like to throw out there, but it comes up anecdotally so I cannot provide any numbers or any solutions: speaking with junior officers about the retention side of things, career management is often cited by those thinking of leaving.

Q131 Lincoln Jopp: Dr Allport, you said that we are not in a sort of Second World War situation, but one parallel does strike me. I seem to remember from my reading of the Alanbrooke war diaries that much of his challenge, as the then CDS effectively, was to convince our American allies that a Europe First strategy was essential. Do you think the revelation that 155 members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army have been found fighting on the Russian side in Ukraine in any way changes the American calculus?

Dr Allport: I don't think so. We would need to look into the circumstances behind those people joining the Russian forces. They could be intelligence operatives, or they could be sort of mercenaries or anything like that, so we would need that kind of information. I don't think it would fundamentally change the balance, because the US knows that China has a narrow path to walk in terms of its support for Russia in the conflict. Basically, China is not keen to overly antagonise Europe because, in the event of conflict, they would not want Europe to go in wholesale with the US, so I think they have an incentive to not directly support Russia in this context. But again, it largely depends on what those people were doing there.

Q132 Lincoln Jopp: Mr Freer, have you got a view?

William Freer: Yes, I think that there are definitely close links between security in the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific, and that is something that a lot of countries have been keen to stress—the Japanese are very keen to have stronger ties with NATO; the Australians have been providing impressive levels of support for Ukraine; and South Korea provided a lot of ammunition in lieu by giving it to the Americans to free up ammunition to



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go to Ukraine—so it is definitely something that weighs on their minds. And General Cavoli, SACEUR, was in front of the Senate a couple of weeks ago talking about the potential for multi-theatre crises happening at the same time, so it is clearly something that the US military is planning on.

I just think that the balance of military power in the western Pacific has got to such a point that the US is incredibly nervous about what the result of a potential conflict in the region might be, and that they very much want to focus on that theatre first. This was also a tension in the Second World War. I don't know whether you know much about Admiral King, the then head of the American navy, but he was very opposed to the Europe First approach, so this is a tension that we have long had to manage. In fact, in the Cold War, during the Vietnam War, there was a lot of concern in Europe that America was being drawn into the Asia-Pacific, and that is one of the reasons why they started the Reforger—return of forces to Germany—exercises, which happened every year.

So, there are definitely links between the two, and the Americans are keen to try to do what they can in both; it is just that the western Pacific is the absolute priority for them.

Q133 Chair: Thank you. You may be aware that our Committee has launched an inquiry into AUKUS, and we have made a public call for evidence.

I want to go on to what the Defence Secretary and Foreign Secretary stated. As soon as they took office, they jointly wrote an article saying that it should be a "NATO First" approach, and that "European security will be our foreign and defence priority", but within the same article they also noted that they are fully committed to AUKUS. In your opinion, Dr Allport, can both be achieved?

Dr Allport: I think they can. I think that a lot of the "NATO First" stuff is sort of rhetorical to separate them from the previous Government. One area that does potentially raise issues is the commitment to stage forward stations. On an Astute from Australia, I think "as soon as" was the language used—2027. There are ultimately supposed to be seven delivered. One out of seven does not sound much, but when you account for those that are in refit and maintenance, it suddenly becomes a significant part of the fleet. That is doubly significant because one current major advantage that the US have over China, which they will maintain for a few years yet, is in nuclear-powered attack submarines. They will be keen to reallocate as many of those as they can from the Atlantic to the Pacific, certainly in peacetime and absolutely in a time of conflict.

To pull at that thread a bit further, it raises the question of how distant we could remain from a conflict in the western Pacific if one emerged. Australia would be a major operating base for the US, and if we had one of our single most capable conventional assets there, would that pressure us to get involved? Would we leave to come back to Europe—would that be politically possible? Would we send reinforcements? It sort of gives us a degree of commitment to the Pacific that was not previously there,

particularly given our political and cultural relationship with Australia that already exists.

Q134 Chair: Mr Freer, do you think that we can achieve both—AUKUS as well as the priority of European security?

William Freer: I think they absolutely have to co-exist. It is not necessarily a question of either/or; it is about the balance between resources in the Indo-Pacific and the Euro-Atlantic. Specifically on AUKUS, one of the most overlooked aspects of the agreement is the benefits to security in the Euro-Atlantic. The plan is, in the long term, for the Australians to acquire a number of SSN-AUKUS submarines, which is the British design. I think the plan is for potentially up to five of those, which will significantly drive down unit costs for nuclear-powered attack submarines for the British. That means that, in theory, we should be able to acquire more, given that they are such an important asset, and that will boost numbers in the Euro-Atlantic. On Pillar 2, sharing technology capability and working together with the Americans and Australians will have great benefits for Euro-Atlantic security. The US has already worked to remove ITAR barriers for British firms working to and from America.

I think Dr Rowan Allport is correct to identify the Astute rotation as the greatest risk. The Astute availability has been something of a concern in recent years, but the reasons for that were a couple of blockages in the infrastructure, and slight delays in improving and upgrading infrastructure to transition from the Trafalgar class to the Astute class. There were also some problems in Faslane, which meant that Vanguard class submarines were given priority for maintenance as the nuclear deterrent, causing a backlog. Some of those problems have been overcome, and there is a seventh Astute still to enter the water. By 2027, the situation will have been much improved, but it is just a question of how quickly that backlog of maintenance delays is cleared.

Q135 Chair: Okay, but what impact will the current conflict in Ukraine and the reduced American presence have on AUKUS in particular?

William Freer: I think the situation in Ukraine will have minimal impact on AUKUS. The Americans have their own debate on AUKUS, so they are divided, much as in Australia there is quite a powerful debate as to whether they should continue with it. The main sticking point for the Americans, similar to our Astute rotational deployment, would be the transfer of Virginia class submarines in the 2030s. When Admiral Paparo was in front of the Senate recently, he said that he is very keen on AUKUS and it will confer “generational advantage” to the members of the agreement. It is one of those things that fits perfectly with the NATO First policy.

Q136 Chair: Dr Allport, in your opinion, what impact will the conflict in Ukraine and the reduced American presence have on AUKUS?

Dr Allport: I will just repeat what my colleagues have said—minimal impact. There is a weak link in terms of how long the conflict goes on, how long it will take Russia to reconstitute its forces in order to become a

threat to NATO again and how long it would be before we would have to deploy a force in Europe, potentially in combat, to deal with that. I don't think it makes a fundamental difference. The net gains are far greater than the potential risks.

Chair: To carry on the AUKUS theme, I call Michelle Scrogam.

Q137 Michelle Scrogam: You have mentioned the rotation of AUKUS out to Australia as early as 2027, I believe. What do you feel are the implications for the UK's maritime presence in the Euro-Atlantic on the back of that?

Dr Allport: A lot depends on force availability that we don't have, as William said. The infrastructural problems are being worked through, so although the availability of Astutes has recently been quite dire, that should improve somewhat as the new floating dry docks that they are looking at come online. It will potentially have a significant effect on the small force we have. Seven is not that many, as I said, when you have to account for maintenance and refits.

There are ways to compensate for that, though. You could, for example, buy more P-8s. That would provide you with an alternative avenue for maritime situational awareness. We are also looking at underwater sensors and uncrewed underwater vessels that can also provide you with sensor platforms that can to some extent compensate for the reduced presence of nuclear attack submarines.

Q138 Michelle Scrogam: In your evidence, William, it says: "The nuclear deterrent is by far the most significant contribution the UK makes to NATO collective deterrence. Given uncertainty over American strategic priorities, ensuring unbroken CASD patrols, providing adequate protection for CASD patrols, and accelerating the construction of the Dreadnought class, should be the absolute priorities of UK defence policy." How do you see that actually happening? You spoke about the issues that we have bringing them into service. How do you see that coming forward quicker?

William Freer: One of the main roles of the Astutes is to provide protection for the ballistic missile submarines as they go out on patrol to make sure that the Russians are not following them. But it is not just the nuclear-powered attack submarines that are involved in that—you have towed array patrol frigates, you have maritime patrol aircraft, and the Navy is working on its "Bastion Atlantic" concept, which involves a lot of autonomous sensors patrolling the waters between Greenland, Iceland and Scotland, which will give us a lot more situational awareness to protect the ballistic missile submarines.

The main thing with the rotational deployment to Australia is that if the situation does get worse, the submarine can always be brought home if absolutely needed. There are other means by which we can conduct maritime operations in the North Atlantic, but one of those Astute submarines is absolutely vital to providing protection.

There was a point about, I think, two years ago when open-source intelligence knew where most of the submarines were, and we saw one of

the ballistic missile submarines go out on patrol, quickly followed by an American nuclear-powered attack submarine, so it is useful to be able to lean on allies when you have problems but, at the end of the day, if you can provide that protection yourself it is even better.

Q139 Michelle Scrogham: Dr Allport, how would you see that developing if we could increase the speed at which we could deliver those things? Where would you see that?

Dr Allport: I am not a defence industrial specialist, but my understanding of the situation is that it would be difficult to speed up the delivery. There is a sequence in terms of the Astutes, Dreadnoughts and the new generation of SSNs. I am not sure how you could speed that up in terms of workforce recruitment and overall capacity.

Q140 Chair: My colleague Michelle Scrogham has highlighted the implications for the UK. Let us try to get into the Russian psyche. If there were AUKUS submarines operating in the Indo-Pacific, in your opinion, Dr Allport, would Russia see that as a threat to Russia's far East? Do you think that could then have an implication on which way Russia faces? By that I mean, given that it will perceive a threat to its far East, it may well then deploy more resources in that direction, rather than towards Ukraine and the rest of Europe. Do you think that is the case?

Dr Allport: This is interesting. That was actually an argument made during the Cold War by the US Pacific Command for not deploying their assets to the Atlantic in wartime, because they could sort of distract the Russians by pinning them down in the East. I don't think it would make a huge practical difference. The Russians know that the AUKUS submarines will be primarily directed at deterring China. Obviously, they consider the Pacific to be a very important venue and area of operations, but they are aware of the wider situation and that they are not chiefly the target.

Q141 Chair: Mr Freer, do you think that this strategic ambiguity will actually help our European security, as Russia concentrates more on its perceived threat to Russia's far East, or do you think that will not be the case?

William Freer: Given that the AUKUS submarines will be based in West Australia and primarily patrolling the Indian ocean, potentially with a view to the South China sea, I think that their ability to keep Russian assets—Russia has some significant naval assets deployed in the far East, which is often overlooked—would have a limited impact on keeping the Russians in that region. They are much more focused on Alaska and the US forces deployed up there. Where it could make a significant impact is in pinning the Chinese navy in position in the Indo-Pacific. With the Chinese navy's expansion in both size and capability, including auxiliaries that can keep ships at sea, there is reason to expect that we will see far more Chinese naval presence outside the Indo-Pacific in the future, especially with climate change opening up the Northern sea routes. I don't think we should be surprised in the long term to see Chinese naval forces co-operating with the Russians in the Arctic, and AUKUS would be a very effective way of keeping the Chinese focused on the balance of military power in their home region.

Chair: Thank you. Let's move on now to nuclear deterrence with my colleague Ian Roome.

Q142 **Ian Roome:** We have heard the worrying comments from the US about withdrawing its nuclear umbrella from NATO. Do you think that is likely? If so, what role could the UK play?

Dr Allport: I think the US Defence Secretary, when he was doing in his speech in February, emphasised that Europe needed to take the lead in the conventional defence of Europe, so I would not be particularly alarmed about the withdrawal of the nuclear umbrella. Even if the US was less minded, in private, to use nuclear weapons or to threaten their use in the event of that being required in Europe, it would not be in its interest to vocalise it. It would just be a thing lingering in the background. To be honest, there has always been doubt about the extended deterrence commitments of the US. It is a major thing to say, "We will use nuclear weapons on behalf of someone else," regardless of whether you are in an alliance.

William Freer: I agree. In theory, it is possible; it cannot be ruled out and never could be, hence why we were so keen to acquire our own nuclear weapons. If you read any of the books about Bevin, the main reason he wanted it was not necessarily to deter the Russians but to put a Union Jack on the top of it. It is definitely something to be mindful of, but I think it is extremely unlikely for the Americans to do that. I suppose what is more important is whether the Russians believe that the umbrella is there. The problem with extended deterrence is that ultimately, despite what statements are made about participation in nuclear sharing arrangements—the US "Nuclear Posture Review" is published every few years and always says pretty similar things about their extended deterrence—until it is tested, you will never know if it is actually there.

Q143 **Ian Roome:** Dr Rowan Allport, your evidence on behalf of the Human Security Centre concluded that the UK's lack of an airborne component to its nuclear force meant that it was not able to provide sub-strategic nuclear options. If the UK was looking at developing and investing in that area, where would you consider to be the best investment?

Dr Allport: I think I said that we have a theoretical sub-strategic capability through Trident with a reduced-yield warhead. Sources differ on whether that is still a going concern—I have heard different credible people say different things. In terms of acquiring a dedicated sub-strategic force, I am very sceptical, unless there was a huge increase in the resource allocation. There is just a massive list of things, such as shortfalls in conventional forces, that need to be invested in before you get to the point where you can add on something like a sub-strategic deterrent.

Obviously, there are issues like the deterrent ladder, and we went through debates like this in the '80s on whether we wanted to replace the Vulcan bombers that provided the intermediate range—or theatre-long range, whatever you want to call it—nuclear force until they were retired. Do we want to replace them? I think the answer is: do we really think that our



possession of a dedicated sub-strategic deterrent, rather than an ad hoc one in the form of Trident, would alter Russian calculations of their actions meaningfully? I think that would be a tough case to make.

William Freer: I think the sub-strategic or tactical nuclear weapon question is a huge one, which we are very quickly having to grapple with. It is a massive grey area, and there are a lot of theoretical views on these systems, with some making the case that this is not really such a thing and any use of a nuclear weapon is strategic. In theory, a sub-strategic weapon conveys demonstration of resolve or a warning, whereas a tactical nuclear weapon is about battlefield effect. There is a lot of crossover between those two below a strategic exchange. Russia is clearly not afraid of using nuclear threats to pursue its goals if it believed that there were doubts about the US, which provides the only tactical or sub-strategic nuclear weapons for the NATO sharing arrangements. The French have their own tactical nuclear weapons, but they are not a part of the nuclear sharing arrangement. So we have to factor in the fact that the Russians have these systems.

Some people will suggest that there are other means of deterring Russia from using tactical nuclear weapons. The most common thing that is pointed to is the sort of devastation that a large-scale conventional precision strike salvo of missiles could achieve. But one of the problems with that is that we have just identified suppression of enemy air defences as one of the major gaps in the event of a conflict in the Indo-Pacific, which would draw those US assets away. And I don't think we should underestimate the psychological impact of the use or threat of nuclear weapons and what that would factor in on Russian calculations.

We have the capacity to use Trident as a sub-strategic nuclear weapon. In fact, previously we have explicitly stated that we intend to use it in that way. The 1998 strategic defence review was explicit on that. There are a number of problems with using Trident as your sub-strategic option. The first is that by using it you would reveal the location of your ballistic missile submarine. There might not be a Russian asset close enough that could get to it, but the Russians put a lot of energy into trying to find these submarines, as we have seen in recent reports of all the monitoring systems washing up on beaches. I do not think we should try to make their life any easier for them.

The other problem is that there is a limited number of tubes to carry Trident missiles on the submarines. Vanguard currently has 16. If you had one or two of those dedicated to sub-strategic use, that would probably mean only having one warhead on those, which limits the size of your strategic salvo. The Dreadnoughts will have 12 tubes, so even less. Most importantly, I think the greatest risk is the potential for miscalculation. If the Russians detected a Trident missile going up into space, they might not wait around to see if it was a sub-strategic or a strategic one. One would assume that if we have gotten to this point tensions are already running incredibly high and Russia might have moved to a launch on



response or launch on detection posture.⁴ So there are a number of reasons why that is not necessarily workable.

Critics will also say that the use of a sub-strategic weapon makes a strategic exchange more likely. It would very quickly escalate. In a way, that is the point. If the adversary believes that if they use theirs and you use yours and it quickly escalates, they are less likely to want to use theirs, whereas if they have an asymmetry of advantage they might seek to exploit it. Most interestingly of all, to bring it back to Admiral Paparo, the US Navy in the Indo-Pacific is going through this debate at the minute. They are looking to reacquire nuclear-tipped cruise missiles for their submarines as a tactical or sub-strategic option. He put it very bluntly and said that the choice is either suicide or surrender when we have to default straight to strategic weapons. I think there is definitely a case to be made for Britain reacquiring, because we used to have them, tactical or sub-strategic nuclear weapons. Again, there is a slight difference between the two.

The huge problem that has been identified is opportunity cost. Every pound invested in this system would be less for conventional forces. There are ways of mitigating this. You could explore a British-led nuclear sharing programme. Interestingly, a few years ago the Bundestag scientific service in Germany concluded that legally Germany would be able to part-fund allied nuclear weapons programmes. There are definitely areas to explore in mitigating the costs. It is something we should absolutely be looking into given Russia's known record of nuclear sabre-rattling and doctrine on tactical nuclear weapons, on top of the fact that there are questions about the US commitment to NATO security.

Q144 Ian Roome: On the French aspect and the nuclear component, obviously France is not committed to NATO in the same way as the US and the UK are. Given the present situation, what would it take for France to bring its nuclear deterrent within NATO?

William Freer: I don't think they would. It is such a big thing for the French historically. Macron recently came out and made some statements saying that they were considering ways to extend their deterrence to allied countries. They are very clear that it is strictly limited to extreme circumstances of self-defence. During the Cold War, given how close they were to the frontline, the assumption was that they would likely be used if the Soviets started rolling into West Germany.

In theory, although the French make a big thing about it not being an extended deterrence, article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union is worded far more strongly than NATO's article 5 as a security guarantee—it says that countries must use "all the means in their power" to help someone else in the treaty who is under attack. In theory, that extends the French deterrence, but they are so clear that it doesn't that lots of

⁴ The witness later clarified that he was correcting himself rather than setting out a different posture—therefore within the sentence he was referring only to 'launch on detection posture'.

other European countries do not have faith in the French extended deterrence. While Sweden and Finland were waiting to join NATO, although they were technically covered by article 42.7, they were very keen to get security guarantees from us to cover them in the interim because they didn't believe in the French deterrence covering them. The French are considering changing it, but because it is such a big thing it is unlikely to happen.

There has been one noticeable deployment recently. The French air force recently did an exercise called Pégase 25, and at least one of the Rafale fighters involved was from the air wing dedicated to their tactical nuclear weapons, which was an interesting thing to see, but there was no wider statement around that. It is one to watch but, given France's strategic culture, I don't think it is likely to happen.

Dr Allport: I completely agree with that, although there is obviously massive overlap between France's vital national interests and NATO's core interests, in terms of defending the alliance. Beyond that, we need to keep in mind that French nuclear weapons would probably only be deployed, in the European context, in response to a Russian use of nuclear weapons. We are not looking at a first-strike situation, as we might have done during the Cold War. The conventional balance is not as lopsided as it was during the Cold War and we are not looking at the prospect of Europe being overrun by Russian—or, back then, Soviet—forces, so the dynamic is somewhat different.

Chair: I am immensely grateful to Dr Rowan Allport and Mr William Freer. Thank you for taking the time out to give evidence to our inquiry into the UK's contribution to European security.

Examination of Witness

Witness: Professor Peter Roberts, Associate Fellow, Centre for Public Understanding of Defence and Security, University of Exeter.

Chair: We now proceed with the second panel of the Committee's inquiry into the UK's contribution to European security. I am pleased to welcome Professor Peter Roberts, who is an associate fellow at the centre for the public understanding of defence and security at the University of Exeter. As I just mentioned, Professor Roberts has had an illustrious career of 23 years with the Royal Navy before going on to RUSI. Thank you very much for giving evidence.

Q145 **Alex Baker:** We will start by focusing on the integrated air and missile defence piece. I have a starter to kick us off. What exactly is integrated air and missile defence?

Professor Roberts: That is a great question. It is all things to all men. There is a theory that says it is like a bubble that wraps over an area, providing it with the ability to deter, mitigate, defeat or attrit any threats coming from air and space towards it. That is a great theory. We have



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seen recent examples of it, particularly in Israel with Iron Dome and David's Sling, and you have heard President Trump talk about an American "golden dome" over them. In each of those circumstances, there is a historical feeling to things such as the dome or the shield. It goes back over a long history that we have with archers and slingers, and the ability to provide some kind of protection. The UK also has a great history of it. During the Battle of Britain, the UK was attacked by drones, cruise missiles and fixed-wing aircraft at a huge rate per day.

In all those examples, including what we have seen in Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine and Syria, it is not foolproof, and does not provide the perfect solution that some people think it does. The integrated air and missile defence system aims to attrit or mitigate the loss, but you will still take incoming hits, and have debris, death and destruction at the end.

But it has become certainly more important. As a theory, it knits together international collaboration and diplomacy. The critical parts of it are: the sensing of the threat; the detecting and tracking of the threat; the command and control about shooting it down, getting rid of it or attriting it; and the effector—the missile, direct-energy weapon or whatever it is—that then takes out the missile at the end, or whatever it is that is coming toward you.

A final point here worth noting is that within an integrated air and missile defence system—this idea of a sort of ecosystem or biology of capabilities to negate these threats—offence and deterrence play a really important part. A third of what you need is investment in the credibility of your deterrence and the ability to strike out. If you are being hit by something from a Soviet enclave somewhere, do you have the will and capability to go back and hit it? Those are the big questions, because they play a huge part in how the UK thinks that it currently addresses the threat coming towards it. It is a catch-all term, but it can get very technical very quickly about: which sensors you want; who will make the command and control decisions; and how you will shoot down whatever it is that is coming towards you.

Q146 Alex Baker: Following on from that, to be clear, what is the scope of the current threat that these sorts of systems address? How has that threat changed in recent years?

Professor Roberts: The threat is huge and has proliferated enormously. It ranges from small drones with real-time video targeting, all the way through to cruise missiles, hyper ballistic missiles, fighter aircraft, bomber aircraft, long-range hypersonic missiles, ballistic missiles, exoatmospheric targeting and skipping missiles, which skip on the edge of the atmosphere. But these are all things that have existed for a long time. We can go back to the Battle of Britain and the 1940s. We have seen this over a long period of time. We know what it has done. There are a lot more continuities to the threat than you would think from some of the rhetoric and hyperbole about what is new.



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The new stuff is really about speed, scale and mass, and about how we are being targeted and who is using it. "Speed" is slightly deceptive when you think that the missiles that we had during the Cold War were capable of going over Mach 5, Mach 12, Mach 15. So we are talking about things that travel 3, 4, 5 miles a second. They could make it here from Portsmouth—I got on the train this morning and it took me the best part of two hours. It would be 12 seconds for a missile flying and coming towards us. So the speed with which we are dealing in this is really significant. The scale we are dealing with in this is phenomenal. In Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, we were seeing the occasional ballistic missile being fired. We have seen, against Ukraine, Russia using the highest number of air and missile attacks in any one day that we have ever seen. It is enormous.

The other things that we are seeing about who is using the weapons are about the proliferation of the threat. Five years ago, we Western military analysts thought that sophisticated missiles and drones were the capabilities of first-world states only, and certainly state actors. We might have seen Iran or North Korea—the hermit kingdom—develop ballistic missiles that were scary, that should scare us, but these things are now being proliferated to insurgent groups, to proxies. It is not just Hamas and Hezbollah. The Houthis have been executing, for about six years, something that the UK would be hard pushed to do as a military—a sophisticated time on target, through a dense air defence environment, to hit critical national infrastructure in Saudi Arabia. This was using six different capabilities to hit it, with a relatively short and accurate time on target. There are not many militaries in the world that could achieve that, but it was something done by the Houthis six years ago. We have seen a difference in how they use it.

One of the continuities that we seem to forget, and perhaps should try to remember, is the fact of what we often have expected in our Western doctrine, how we think about air and missile defence. Militaries like to think about it as how they are going to be attacked as a military. That is not how adversaries are attacking us. In nuclear theory, there is something called counterforce, which is about how you attack the force that is attacking you, to destroy their capability to attack you, and there is countervalue, which is about attacking things that you value as a society—the ability for society to think and act as they wish. Those things, which distract politicians, distract leadership and distract national security, are things that enable society to continue to survive.

We saw that yesterday in Spain, where electricity grids were hit. We have seen it in Ukraine, where water infrastructure has been targeted. You could equally go after sewerage systems. You could go after logistics and resupply. You could go after major ports, power plants—whatever. The ability to undermine the will to fight, the core thing that enables you to deliver, is something that missiles and air platforms are now being targeted against. They are not being targeted to hit Portsmouth dockyard. They are being targeted to hit the electricity that supplies London—the power plants that would supply us—the banking sector and the natural gas



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port through which all our seven-day supply of gas comes. All these things are the targets. These countervalue targets are what our adversaries are after, but this is what the military have never been tasked to look at since 1940—protecting critical national infrastructure or the population. The military do not feel that that is their role, but it is where the threat really exists and is proliferating. This is what it is going after: the political will and freedom to act—society's demands on politicians. What air and missile defence is being designed to do in smart countries is to protect more of that.

Q147 Alex Baker: Lockheed Martin, in its written evidence to this Committee, wrote: "European and NATO Allies currently lack the capability and mass for Ground Based Air Defence...effectors, particularly ballistic missiles and counter-hypersonics. Whilst some Eastern European countries are making a substantial effort to enhance" these "capabilities with the assistance of the U.S., the UK and other allies have not been able to rapidly pull through capability to address these capability gaps." Do you agree with that?

Professor Roberts: Yes, I think it's largely true. There was a great belief in this idea of air superiority, and that for Russia to launch an attack on the UK it would have to get through 600 F-35 platforms to put a hit. It is a sort of ridiculous feature of our history that we have believed in the safety of geography: the UK occupies this wonderful position, we are a long way from Russia, we have some water separating us, we have several sovereign states, there is lots of air defence out there—actually, it's a myth. A couple of years ago in their national security review, Australia recognised that the stopping power of water, and the geography of isolation, no longer protected them. We are a lot closer than they are to the threat, and it bears significant re-examination.

Romania and Poland have made huge leaps in protecting the rest of Europe, frankly, by having the Aegis Ashore systems that they have, and by investing in Patriots, both manufacturing, fielding and weapons stocks. That will do much and give them a hugely credible IAMD capability against the Russians. The UK by comparison has next to nothing. There are elements of investment that are happening in Germany, Norway, Sweden, Spain and Italy, among others, who are growing their capabilities in recognising the threat. 2014 was the start of it, and in 2022 there was obviously a massive recognition that they needed to get into that space. They have been building infrastructure capability and forward purchasing limited numbers of effectors to grow their own protection bubbles around critical national infrastructure. There is nothing that will provide a shield for Europe, but the Lockheed Martin evidence is pretty spot-on. If it was not for the forward investment and forward thinking of the former Eastern bloc states, Poland and Romania in particular, we would be a lot worse off as a continent than we are right now.

Q148 Alex Baker: We will go on to talk about how we sort this out, but I would like to finish by asking why you think we have not managed to get our act together on this. There has been more of a recognition over the past decade about those sorts of threats, but what has stopped us getting ourselves into a better place?



Professor Roberts: I think we have been dishonest with the public and with politicians like yourselves. There has been no political will to make the difficult decisions, or to be honest with the public and say, "We're not going to stop missiles coming and hitting you. A set of you are going to die, hospitals are going to go under, and you will be without food, water, sewers and electricity." We have not been brave enough to tell the public that what happens in Israel every day is a realistic scenario for London, Manchester, Edinburgh or Inverness tomorrow. The enemy has the capability and the intent to do that, and is actively considering it. Yet we somehow have deceived ourselves, but more importantly the public, with the fact of "Don't worry about it; everything will be fine."

Q149 **Derek Twigg:** Following on from that, I have been raising this issue for a couple of years now, and I questioned the two previous Defence Secretaries, Ben Wallace and Grant Shapps. After my last question back in May 2024 to Grant Shapps, he said—this is part of his reply, so I am paraphrasing—"We are working with our European friends and allies on a European sky shield to do something along the lines of what he has described." I referred to page 89 of Command Paper "Refresh", and he said that "It should be understood, however, that there are considerations regardless of which direction we take, because, again, the money can only be spent once". I thought I would draw you to the issue of whether the Government have been serious about developing an integrated missile defence. If that is not given priority within the SDR, does that suggest that it has not been given priority?

Professor Roberts: I do not know whether or not it has been given priority in the current SDR.

Q150 **Derek Twigg:** I am talking about the new one. If it is not in the new SDR as a priority, would that suggest it is not a real commitment to deliver that?

Professor Roberts: Absolutely.

Q151 **Derek Twigg:** It has to be as part of that?

Professor Roberts: It has to be. It was one of those specified tasks that the SDR was supposed to look at. Of course, the SDR is sort of an independent paper, so where the Government respond to the SDR is really what is important for how we are doing. There has obviously been some collaboration and rewrites of the SDR itself. The problem is that most of the conversation around some kind of missile-defence shield, an IAMDS, is based around the effectors—the missiles or the direct energy weapons—that will shoot down whatever is coming towards you. Actually, a critical part of this is the sensors that you are going to use to detect it, because otherwise you can have all the missiles that you want in the world, but nothing is going to help. So the systems that will detect it, the command and control systems that will put that together and all that infrastructure will take just as long as it will take for missiles to arrive if you ordered them tomorrow. It is going to take just as long to put that infrastructure together.

Q152 **Derek Twigg:** Do you have any idea of the timescale that would take? Just a ballpark?

Professor Roberts: There are apocryphal figures. They are probably not quite right, but if you wanted to order an Aster missile now and put money down today, you would get it from MBDA in two years' time. That is really fortunate, because if you are trying to get a Patriot or a THAAD capability, you are talking late 2020s to early 2030s. It will take you that long to buy, build and put in your sensors, develop the infrastructure that gives you the links to the command and control networks, to network in those systems with the European-wide area picture and some of the capabilities that the US might offer, and deliver that so that you do get a system.

Realistically, if you announce it tomorrow, depending on the capability you want, you will not have anything basic within two years. You are more likely looking at possibly 10 years before you have a mature system. We often delay projects such as Project LEWIS, the ballistic missile radar. I cannot remember when it was announced, but it last had a review in 2019, and it will not start building until 2029. Successive Governments have been able to defer decisions; do we hope it will be different in the SDR?

Q153 **Derek Twigg:** Just to pursue that in terms of the integrated review, would it not have to be a Europe-wide system, rather than just a UK system? You are talking about a layered system as well, because it is not just missiles fired from the ground, but obviously aircraft and everything else. We have seen what happened, for instance, in Israel, so it is really about integrating it in the European context, is it not?

Professor Roberts: Yes. Exactly as I talked about, part of that infrastructure is the multinational connectivity: the feeds that you would get, whether they are from Norway, Sweden, Poland in particular, Romania and maybe Germany. You would federate all of those feeds and feed them into your own system. In the same way, the UK would be required to contribute its wide-area picture back in.

Q154 **Derek Twigg:** Would it be a case of us actually transferring and placing—I am being simplistic here—some of our system in other European countries, and not basing it all in the UK?

Professor Roberts: It could be. It depends how you share it, what the legal arrangements are and whether you are happy with the risk. Are you happy that Poland's Aegis Ashore system defends part of the UK from that vector that they are facing? Are you content that Kongsberg Maritime in Norway is able to provide you with some of the protection to the North and mitigate or attrit some of that threat coming to you? Does it have to be British up there? Can it be a mutually beneficial agreement between the two? What part does the UK play in that? How does it look North, or to the threat axis, before you are finally attritting attacks that would come in, or shorter-range attacks that would come in from, for example, the West?

Q155 **Derek Twigg:** Basically, you are explaining the complications: it is about saying not just, "Let's have an air-missile defence system," but "What will



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that be? Where will it be placed?" There is little likelihood that you can have an umbrella across the whole of the UK. Even Israel cannot guarantee that. Is it about moving things closer to where missiles might be fired from? What I think you are saying is that we actually do not yet have a picture of what we mean by this.

Professor Roberts: I think that is half the problem. It does not take long to articulate what you actually need, what you are prepared to pay for and how that would work. That is not difficult. We have done the physics for a long time. We have had the ability to shoot down a hypersonic missile in space since the 1980s. This is something flying at Mach 2, hundreds of miles from the Earth, and we can shoot it down with another missile fired from Earth. The physics problem of that is phenomenal; the problems we are facing now are relatively simple.

This is not really a physics problem; it is about co-operation, it is about political agreement, it is about alignment, and it is about weapons stocks and all that other stuff that comes with it. Those are the important parts to get done. It is not a difficult problem; it is just that no one has felt the need to do it or placed it as a priority thus far.

Derek Twigg: And specified exactly what we want.

Professor Roberts: Exactly.

Q156 **Derek Twigg:** I am probably putting you in an impossible position here, but in cost terms, what are we talking? Is it in the billions or the hundreds of millions?

Professor Roberts: It is a really difficult thing. The greatest mind in IAMD systems is a guy called Tom Karako, PhD, who works at CSIS in Washington. I asked him this very question: "If you were starting from scratch and were facing the Russian threat—pretty much in the UK's position—what would you expect this to cost?" He would not give me an answer. It is certainly in the billions—I think we are in the realm of £20 billion—but it is not a one-off cost; it is a recurring and evolving one. You cannot simply ignore it and hope it goes away, and you cannot just field your systems for now, because it is dynamic. The adversary develops new systems, increases the stealth capability of some of the missiles, and uses manoeuvring that might defeat your current system, so it is a constant evolution. Then, you are hoping that in 10 or 15 years, direct energy and lasers will help mitigate some of that threat and reduce the overall cost. But if we were talking around £20 billion, probably over a five to 10-year period, we would not be too far off, depending on what you want.

Q157 **Ian Roome:** Thank you, Professor Roberts, for coming to the Committee from the west country. I am the MP for North Devon, so I am in Exeter quite a lot.

The Committee recently visited Finland and Estonia, and we were really impressed by the societal resistance from the communities. They had plans in place for what to do if they came under attack—in this case from Russia. There was that whole movement within the communities; it was

like everybody had a role, across all ages, and they were really in that domain of being prepared for conflict. In your view, does societal resistance play a role in the integrated air and missile defence arena?

Professor Roberts: Yes. I said earlier that we have been dishonest with the public, such that, at the moment, they seem to believe there is no threat to them from an aerial missile attack. I think that is dishonest. In the Baltics, central Europe—Poland, Romania, Slovakia—and the Scandinavian countries you visited, there is more honesty with the population, and more honesty from the Government. They say, “We can’t protect you entirely. We’re not wrapping you in bubble wrap. We’re going to attrit the figures, but there’s going to be some real difficulty coming up, and therefore your resilience to these attacks and strikes is really important.”

They have a different societal culture—a different make-up—than we do. I am not going to call it a nanny state here, but there is a requirement for them, as members of the public, to be able to respond and react to things that happen. They have been given instructions for years, and have grown up with instructions, about ready bags for themselves and their pets, about keeping medications and a seven-day supply of wood, about the ability to have their own generator—all these things that give you the resilience, which then give politicians the freedom to continue to act and react in strategic ways, rather than reacting to individual domestic pressures.

That is what these systems are designed to do—to provide us with the continuing freedom to act. The UK is a thorn in Russia’s side because it has this almost unique political voice in Europe, which gives Europe backbone in many ways. If you remove that—the voice and the political freedom to operate—because you are focused on domestic pressures, because there is no civil resilience, then President Putin gets a much freer hand in Europe and with the UK. Civil resilience provides an absolutely fundamental part of not just an integrated air and missile defence system, but the whole of defence and the political will of the country—it is our will to fight more than anything else. It really needs to be developed somewhat more than it has.

Q158 **Ian Roome:** What is your current assessment of UK societal resilience?

Professor Roberts: Pretty negligible. Everything that we have built in infrastructure terms is not based on resilience. For example, and this came out in the pandemic, we build our NHS hospitals to 100% efficiency capacity, so when they run, they run during the day, every day, every week, normal month, normal year, at 100% capacity. The French, for example, build their hospitals at 125% to 150% capacity, so they automatically have additional capacity. That is inefficient, but it is resilient.

If you look anywhere where you have efficiencies—one of those things that you are desperate for—you will find that you lack resilience. Efficiency and resilience are often mutually exclusive, particularly in infrastructure terms. The idea is that we are working on a just-enough or just-in-time supply

chain, with minimal strategic reserves and just enough banking to get us through the day. Those are the things that will unpick our strategic resilience. It is in our national culture. Unpicking it is not an easy task for you as leaders of the country.

Q159 Ian Roome: Where would you start in order to increase societal resilience here in the UK?

Professor Roberts: There are two things. One is a conversation with the public, which has to be honest—less of this strong at home, strong abroad stuff. Being more honest with people is saying: “There are significant threats to the UK. We need not get overexcited about them because, frankly, we have been dealing with terrorism for years and we are pretty good at it, but we need you to start being prepared. This is what the threat looks like and this is what the implications are.” This is not something that the British public are going to get incredibly excited over, but if it is explained to them, I think that you would find that they will acknowledge the problem and take their own small measures. I think that would go a long way.

The other side of it is looking at the drive for efficiencies. The more you drive efficiencies in critical national infrastructure, the less resilience you have. Governments and the Committees that advise them really have to take a role and start saying, “Efficiencies are all very well, but we’re not running a business; we’re maintaining, looking after and growing a prosperous society.” To do that, you need to build resilience into national infrastructure—build to 125% capacity, or even to build to 105% capacity would help—such that when you cancel a train, something does not happen, or when a part of the national grid gets knocked out, you do not lose everything that society relies on, including hospital supplies for periods of days. Those are the key things that would really help to start to build it up.

Q160 Mr Bailey: I am grateful that you brought up some of those issues, because these are things that we struggle to land. We struggle to communicate the need for excess capacity, which is fundamentally a military thing, right? That is what the military does—it is your reserve. That capacity that you are talking about, in hospitals in particular, could be something that you harbour in military hospitals in the way that we used to, because that removes the tendency to use all the capacity available were you to attribute that to the NHS. It would be very difficult to withhold 25% of your requirement when you need to surge. Could I have your view on harbouring that capacity in dedicated military hospitals that could be offered to NATO, as well as a tier 4 or tier 3-type capability?

Professor Roberts: Military hospitals are one of those things that every military commander loves and wants whenever they go on a mission, whether it is a UN mission, a peacekeeping mission, a large-scale military deployment or an exercise. Everyone loves a military hospital. It is like the Romanian bath and shower unit, which is one of the most demanded military capabilities anywhere in NATO, all around the world, because no one else has one. Military hospitals are great. The problem is that when

you draw military hospitals from NHS staff, you are at 100% capacity, so you need additional doctors and additional nurses.

Q161 Mr Bailey: The point I am making is that, pre-1990s, we need not deployable but fixed infrastructure that acts as national resilience, which we can surge into through either national resilience or military use if we have an attack in society. Covid would have surged into the military hospitals, or you could offer it as a NATO capability, which NATO can then surge into should there be a war on continental Europe. It would not be a deployable capability or overlapping the NHS; it would be an entirely separate offering.

Professor Roberts: That would be a very prudent use of money and assets. The problem is attracting the additional doctors, nurses and support staff who go with it. You could follow the model in the US, in terms of the medical services for the military, the veteran community and their families. When I was deployed to America with my family, we were looked after by the American military medical facility there, and it was amazing. It is a huge part of the offer that the American Government can make to their people: "You come and work for us in the military, and you get medical treatment that is second to none." It also provides that additional capability, whether it is for veterans who suffer specific issues with PTSD or physical welfare, or providing the additional bumper capacity that you need in things like global pandemics. It is a win-win.

Q162 Mr Bailey: Before we leave this line of questioning, in terms of the understanding of the threat we are facing, you said we have not been honest enough with society, and I particularly liked your stuff about resilience. The lessons from the V-2, Houthis versus Saudi Arabia and Ukraine show us that most of these systems reach over Warden's first ring, which is fielded military forces. In that discussion, we have to say that the way warfare will manifest itself will be reaching over that ring straight to population, infrastructure, key production and system essentials. If we are going to defend against that pan Europe, what should our fielded forces look like? Do you think there is an adequate understanding of the lessons, all the way back to the V-2, that show us what our integrated defence system should look like?

Professor Roberts: There are three parts to that, and it is a great question. The first part is, will it reach over? Yes. The second part is, what should our military forces look like? The counter value proposition is that the enemy is attacking us and the things we care about—our vital interests, our will to fight and our ability for society to function—but what they care about is not the same thing. They do not value their population. The ability to go and knock tower blocks down in Moscow just has not worked for Ukraine, because the leadership do not care about it. That is not a counter value proposition. What they care about are their forces, so our forces need to be designed to attack their forces, exactly as they have been doing, but in a way that meets a modern style of warfare.

At the same time, we have to build this ability to defend ourselves, to be resilient and to withstand their attacks on us. We are fighting in very



different ways, and it does not allow us to surge one to do the other, in many ways; they are mutually exclusive capabilities and forces. That is the difficulty we have in dealing with this stuff. What we have underfunded since the 1990s is a small, professional, deployable force that can go and fight other militaries around the world. That is absolutely fine, because that is mostly what our adversaries value. What we have not done is defend ourselves against how adversaries are fighting us, and that is where we mismatch the arguments.

The Ministry of Defence in particular—but this is true right across the national security community—has had real problems with weighing these things together, which is why you see Keir Giles and Mark Galeotti making waves with this stuff. It is not new. We have understood it for years, but I think we are finally getting to understand that the military do not do a lot of this defence of the homeland stuff. That is up to someone else.

Q163 Jesse Norman: I am greatly enjoying your testimony—thank you so much. Can I summarise what I think you are saying about the question of integrated air and missile defence, so that I understand it? You are saying that we are expecting this to be an activity that is simultaneously defensive in the pure sense and offensive in the sense of having a deterrent capability, so what we are contemplating is quite ambitious in scope. There is enormous ambiguity as to whether it would be based in any particular place and what its scope of coverage would be: is it a periphery-only defence system, or is it, as it were, based throughout Europe, in order to cover all eventualities? The area is obviously potentially enormous—Norway down to Turkey.

You are saying that there is nothing that could really fill any gaps that we might determine in scale for five to 10 years. You are saying that some enormously valuable technologies may render some of these capabilities irrelevant, or supplement them. It seems to me that what you are really saying, therefore, is that we do not have any kind of strategy about this, and we do not have the beginnings of an understanding of what we are trying to do at the moment. Is that a fair description?

Professor Roberts: No. If I have presented that, I am really sorry.

Jesse Norman: I am just being a bit provocative, to get a sense of exactly where we are going.

Professor Roberts: You paint a very accurate picture. In deterrence and defence, the offence part—the ability to go out and strike the archer and take his fingers—is really important. This sort of societal resilience stuff is really important.

The ambiguity is about what we want to protect, and that is a political discussion. It is a set of political priorities. If you go to the military, they will say, “Protect my dockyard and protect my bases, and if you give me a third thing, protect my family patch”—quite rightly, because that is in their interests. They will not say, “Protect London.” They might say to protect Faslane, which is very important, but they will not say to protect Edinburgh or the Houses of Parliament.

Jesse Norman: I don't think Hereford would be included.

Professor Roberts: Maybe. Would they talk about the national infrastructure for gas? A mature understanding of what you actually want to protect is really important.

Then there is the how. If you go to the NATO BMD centre, they have a really accurate way of putting it on the map, and there are individuals, almost, in the Ministry of Defence who could draw you a plan very quickly about how you would put this online and bring it to maturity.

I am not saying that technology will make conventional systems obsolete at all. I have zero hope that technology and direct energy weapons will provide a solution to this in 30 years. They will provide one element of one small part of the problem in the threat matrix. They will not provide anything like full-spectrum capability. What we need is policy, then we need a plan and then we need some contracts.

Q164 **Jesse Norman:** Where does the UK have specific capabilities, experience and expertise that would fit into a sensible plan of that kind?

Professor Roberts: The interesting thing is that the UK, like most countries, is not starting from a baseline of zero. You have RAF Fylingdales, the joint US-UK radar capability, and another set of small elements of ground-based air defence that provide you with some skill and understanding of what it takes to defend an area against a modern set of threats. You have a very vibrant R&D base that is developing things like DragonFire and laser-directed energy. You have a very good understanding of the electromagnetic spectrum and the area—the geography—of the country where radars are and the ability to defend it. You have a set of systems integrator companies that could pull together all the raw radar from around the country and provide you with a really good composite picture of composite air. You have the skills in some of our companies that provide to overseas clients in air and missile defence—those that deal with Poland, Sweden and France, and sell back to the US. You have some expertise in this that is great.

Do we have anything that is unique to us? Probably not. Do we start from a good place? Yes, we do. Do we have a huge number of partners who would be more than willing—in fact, delighted—to help us out? Absolutely. More importantly, we are not going to be fast failers at this. We are not going to be throwing money down into some experimental hole that might deliver us with nothing. We know what works.

We have so many countries around the world—Australia, Japan, South Korea—that are vibrant in these areas and would provide us with a huge amount of expertise and an opportunity to be fast and clever adopters. We do not need to go through their experimentation and failures, because we know what works and what does not. The ability for us to get value for money based on their experience is huge.

Q165 **Jesse Norman:** In the context of Europe and NATO, as the plan develops in some proposed way, we would be focusing on certain areas of strength



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and offering them to other allies, and we would not be delivering or developing certain areas in reliance on what they would be doing, for fear of duplication and all the regular stuff. First, are there risks associated with not developing certain areas that others might be? Secondly, where are the principal areas of weakness where we might be reliant on other partners across NATO and Europe?

Professor Roberts: I do not want to forget the second part of that question, so let's do that first. What are we reliant on others in NATO for? Right now, we are very much reliant on NATO to do almost everything with regard to our protection, which includes fielding a credible military force.

Q166 **Jesse Norman:** But particularly on air and missile?

Professor Roberts: This is where the interesting part comes in. We gain huge benefit from the layered protection we get from the Polish Aegis Ashore, German Patriots, Italian SAMP/T and all the myriad systems that mean that something fired from Russia to us has to get through the 600 F-35s—that sort of argument. That is great, but what if a civilian freighter off the south-west approaches fires a bunch of cruise missiles—which are containerised and available pretty much off the shelf—at the west country and our strategically important gas offloading port? That would just bypass all of that lovely—

Q167 **Jesse Norman:** A Maginot line scenario, right? We are pointing in the wrong direction.

Professor Roberts: Completely. The risks are that if you just rely on the European physical capability, you ignore the fact that as guardians of the western Atlantic, to the west and the north, for all of NATO and Europe, we have a responsibility that we have neglected, because we did not think it was possible to put a missile on a ship and fire it at the homeland. These are key capabilities that we need to be investing in and be able to do. Yes, we can rely on our allies to do so much, but we have a duty and responsibility to do the rest of it.

There is another responsibility that I will mention because I think it is really important. We talk about an integrated air and missile defence for the UK, but what about our overseas territories? There is a huge, soft underbelly to UK interest—

Jesse Norman: To which we have a defence commitment.

Professor Roberts: To which we have an obligation and legal commitments. And yet have we thought about how we defend server farms and hospitals in Gibraltar, critical national infrastructure in Cyprus or the Falkland Islanders and their vitally important port? Has that even featured in any discussions? Frankly, it has not. We are just relying on hope and optimism bias that nothing will manifest itself in that way.

That is not the way that Moscow look at it. For them, an attack on Cyprus, Gibraltar or the Falklands would undermine UK credibility and, as such, a couple of missiles or drones that fly into power plants in Stanley work

equally well as an attack on Edinburgh. The idea that we can think about it in geographic terms is slightly problematic when we think about the threat actors and what they are playing against us.

Q168 **Jesse Norman:** So our soft targets are essentially everywhere that British history extends in terms of its current obligations, because of the feedback effect on sentiment, public opinion and democratic values?

Professor Roberts: If you are doing your threat mapping, it is how you define your vital interests.

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

Q169 **Mr Bailey:** Professor Roberts, before we leave this point, Jesse was highlighting our unique capabilities and the idea that we could amplify these to meet our greatest challenges. The greatest challenge is funding, and one of our unique capabilities is our banking sector. Some of the work that Alex Baker and Luke Charters have been doing to highlight the importance of a Defence, Security and Resilience Bank is critical to addressing that greatest challenge. Is that something that you have a view on?

Professor Roberts: I absolutely echo that. The Defence, Security and Resilience Bank for Europe is an absolutely fundamental part of putting us in a position that allows us to react to the threat as it exists. It is slightly disappointing that the Government took so long to get on board with the initiative—it was talked about more than a year ago, and we could have been further down the line now.

The fact that the bank has broad-based support now is really important and it is a huge opportunity that we should be grasping with both hands. Whether we are directing that towards a Joint Expeditionary Force mini-alliance in the north or NATO-wide, the most important thing the bank gives us is the ability to do larger co-operative buys, and to signal to industry with contracts—not words—that, “Here is a multi-year buy for whatever missile or sensors we want, and we want you to sustain, maintain and deliver it for us. This is a contract that you can bank, and you can now build additional capacity on.”

Industry plays a huge part in this and without that, it has been sat there hearing promises from Governments since the 1990s about how we will buy and invest, and none of it has delivered to the extent that industry has been prepared to invest. Why should it be different now? Why should industry believe what is being said?

The bank gives us that ability to suddenly say that it is not just additional little bits of money from the UK, but it is little bits of money from the UK, Norway, Sweden and Canada. When we put that together in an amalgamated buy, suddenly that looks like a second, third or fourth production line for effectors. It could be growing 100 new sensor operators or the ability for us to free up additional money and gain the efficiencies to have a new military field hospital in Birmingham or Bradford or wherever.

Those are really important things that they can give us, and the bank is an important stepping stone.

Q170 Chair: Professor Roberts, during the Cold War there was a surface-to-air missile barrier that extended from Norway to Turkey. I believe that was then decommissioned post Second World War. Since then, there has been a lot of talk about an integrated air and missile defence system for Europe, but despite there being a NATO IAMD, and despite all that talk, there has still not been enough collaboration to deliver a comprehensive solution. In your opinion, what has been the greatest challenge to an effective European integrated air and missile defence system?

Professor Roberts: National political will in each country. It is something you are familiar with—you have your demands, Poland has its demands and Finland has its demands, and they differ slightly. Then there is the sovereignty problem. You want to invest £3 billion over three years in missile defence, but you would like some jobs and some tax revenue out of that—you are not entirely happy to pass it over to a builder in Italy or France and see nothing for it. Each country, quite rightly, has a demand from the taxpayer to see some return, rather than just protection. Each Government nationally has those demands. No one has said, “We are just doing this for the good of humanity and for the good of Europeans.” There is a trade-off and something that you want from it. That is one of the problems.

Has there been co-operation? Is it possible to co-operate, collaborate and put this together? Absolutely. Is it difficult? Not particularly. Are there legal things that stand in the way? There are a few, but they are not insurmountable if the political will is put behind it. There has been a certain amount of political will commensurate with the threat.

For example, the NATO BMD initiative, which is a brilliant capability developed since the 1980s, networks together a huge amount of data, capabilities and some effectors—I go back to Poland’s Aegis Ashore, Romania and the US Navy ships in Rota. These give you a capability. Is it wide enough for Europe? No. If you look at the European Sky Shield initiative, again, a select number of countries have gone through this because perceptions of the threat are very different.

Q171 Chair: You mentioned national interest. It was assumed that the EU was going to take the lead on the European air defence shield—in fact, it stated that it wanted to take the lead on that initiative. However, that was not acknowledged in the EU’s white paper on defence. It has been acknowledged that there are huge capability gaps in air missile defence. Can the EU or somebody within Europe finally coalesce and agree on this, or will it not see the light of day?

Professor Roberts: If we wait for the EU and for everyone to get on board, we will be operating at the pace of the slowest member that is most resistant to this. You might think, for example, “Portugal has no real interest in air and missile defence—why would it get involved?” But it has a veto over this. How do you develop it? That is why initiatives such as

Sky Shield, NATO BMD and national programmes take priority. Your ability to network those together is the most effective way of delivering short-term defence capability.

This is not dissimilar to what Ukraine found. It had to put together modern military systems that were given to it by Norway and Kongsberg. It had to put through modern air traffic radars that were gifted to it by Slovenia and Slovakia. It had to pull together ex-Russian equipment that it had in storage that was gifted to it by Poland and that was capable of air defence. It had to plug all this stuff together into a sort of ad hoc capability, integrate all the data, put out the firing solutions, set the command and control network together and operate it in a way that was pretty complex. It managed that really, really fast because it had to. This is not impossible—it is about plugging it together.

If we wait for an institutional, multinational programme, there will be significant inertia behind it. That does not mean that EU money cannot be put into stovepipes that deliver some of this for some clients, but waiting for an EU, EC or NATO-dedicated capability will involve delays that the threat does not give us time for.

Q172 **Chair:** In your opinion, should the UK be involved in, and at the heart of, any European air defence system or the European Sky Shield system?

Professor Roberts: The UK would be foolish not to be deeply involved. If I were a partner looking in at the UK, and the UK said, "We'd like to be at the heart of it," I would wonder why you deserve that, and think, "You've done very little to enable these initiatives. You haven't bought into the programmes. You don't own any of this stuff. You're learning from scratch on the systems that we're buying. Yes, come and be a member—put this at the heart of your defence capability if you wish—but don't think that you're taking the leading role because, frankly, you haven't stumped up thus far."

Q173 **Chair:** What about the US? Should it play a leading role, or some role, in European integrated air and missile defence? If so, what?

Professor Roberts: The US has bigger problems to deal with right now than European integrated air and missile defence capability. Your previous panel talked about China. The US spent hundreds of billions of pounds putting together its ground-based interceptors to a threat from the hermit kingdom, North Korea, potentially firing a missile against the US homeland at some stage in the future. The US investment was against a threat that did not exist at the time but which it thought could develop, so it finds it hard to have patience with Europe developing something against a known threat from an adversary with known intent right on its doorstep. The US has bigger problems.

I think the US would be only too happy to help, and to facilitate some of that capability. Europeans have received support from the United States with not only foreign military sales but from industry with Patriot, THAAD, SPY radars, Aegis Ashore, SM-3, SM-6—you name it. The capabilities that



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the US provides are second to none and they are unique, including some things that Europe cannot currently build by itself.

The US would be only too happy for Europe to be able to continue to operate those and would, I think, be happy to continue to sell them. Just do not expect to be at the top of the priority list on the production line when the US has China, North Korea, Iran and a variety of problems around the world that it is trying to build the capacity to act and defend itself against. The US will look at America first.

Chair: Given the current geopolitical shifts, you may well be right, but it was my job to ask the question to make sure that we have things on record for our inquiry. Professor Roberts, thank you very much for giving evidence. I am sure that it will feature in our inquiry report.