HOUSE OF COMMONS

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: US, NATO and UK Defence Relations, HC 1187

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Mr Tobias Ellwood (Chair); Stuart Anderson; Martin Docherty-Hughes; Richard Drax; Mark Francois; Mr Kevan Jones; Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck; John Spellar; and Derek Twigg.

Questions 1 to 39

Witnesses

I: Lord Darroch KCMG, former UK Ambassador to Washington (2016-2019) and National Security Adviser (2012-15); Dr Charles Kupchan, Senior Fellow, Council of Foreign Relations and Former Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (2014-2017) and Director for European Affairs, US National Security Council (1993-1994); Ambassador Douglas Lute, Former US Permanent Representative (2013-17) at NATO; and Sir Adam Thomson KCMG, Director of the European Leadership Network and former UK Permanent Representative to NATO (2014-2016).

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Darroch, Dr Kupchan, Ambassador Lute and Sir Adam Thomson.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to this Defence Select Committee hearing where we are focusing on NATO, the US and UK defence relations. I am delighted to have a formidable line-up today. We have Lord Darroch, former UK Ambassador to Washington and former National Security Adviser; Dr Charles Kupchan, senior fellow of the Council of Foreign Relations and former Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, from 2014 to 2017 under the Obama Administration; Sir Adam Thomson, director of the European Leadership Network and former UK Permanent Representative to NATO; and General Douglas Lute, who was the US Ambassador to NATO under the Obama Administration. Sirs, thank you for your time this afternoon. It is a real pleasure to have you.

As I have touched on, the purpose of this session is to explore the challenges and opportunities for strengthening NATO, the US and UK defence relations within the context of the new US Administration and the UK's departure from the European Union. I will invite each one of you to say a few opening remarks. Sir Adam, we will kick off with you. Thank you very much indeed for your time.

Sir Adam Thomson: Thank you very much for the opportunity to be with you this afternoon. I would like to offer three very brief observations. One is that alarm about NATO, the transatlantic relationship or the UK, although fashionable, is overdone. NATO isn't breaking up, the UK still carries real weight in the alliance, and transatlantic security relations are not in terminal decline.

My second point is that, although collective defence will remain at NATO's core, it will have to be pursued in some non-traditional ways. I think that includes fewer American capabilities in Europe and more European ones; not just hard defence, but more diplomacy, resilience and risk reduction; and less pure-NATO and more close collaboration with the European Union and other international partners.

Finally, seen from my vantage point as the director of a pan-European network of leaders dedicated to a safer Europe, it would be in the interests of the UK, NATO and, I think, transatlantic relations if the United Kingdom led for Europe on much of the agenda for the next few years. In particular, I believe that HMG needs to lead a long-term drive in NATO to build European military capabilities and defence industry, so that Europe and European allies become far better military and political partners for the United States.

Q2 **Chair:** Sir Adam, thank you very much indeed. Lord Darroch, let's turn to you next—let's do the Brits first.

Lord Darroch: Thank you, Chairman, for the invitation to this session and for the opportunity to make a few introductory remarks. I will try to stick to your two minutes, but apologies in advance if I go a minute over.

I want to make four quick points, all of them about the bigger picture of UK-US relations. The first point, I confess, is prompted by a report on UK-US relations that was published a day ago by Policy Exchange. The report says that the UK is suffering with a severe—I quote—"elite opinion crisis" in the US, "from the floor of Congress to the pages of the New York Times". It says, in particular, that Democrats see British influence as "in Brexit-induced decline and protracted crisis"—I quote again.

It largely lays the blame for this at the door of the British embassy in Washington, arguing that with a better communications strategy, perceptions of the UK would be and would have been transformed, and, in particular, that the Democrats would have a much more positive view of the UK's position and condition and of Brexit. I think that all of this is excessively gloomy and hand-wringing, but I do think that there is some truth in the assertion that there is an elite opinion crisis about the UK—not just in Washington, but worldwide.

I have been out of action on all this for quite a long time, but I do respectfully question whether this is all down to the embassy, whether in my time or under my successor. I resigned in July 2019, while Theresa May was Prime Minister. Over the preceding three years, a Prime Minister, a Foreign Secretary and two Brexit Ministers had resigned; the Government had lost four meaningful votes on its Brexit deal, some of them by huge margins; Parliament and the country were deeply and bitterly divided; and there was a particular issue over the risks of Brexit requiring a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland—an issue that the Democrats were watching very closely. A few weeks after I left, Theresa May resigned as well, so we lost a second Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, to give you a picture of the time, we were getting almost daily communications advice from London on what we should be saying, mostly centred on the line that, "Brexit means Brexit", and, "Tell them that we will win the next meaningful vote." I and the embassy tried—I promise—exceptionally hard to present as positive a picture as possible, but against this background, it was, to understate matters, an uphill task. I think the idea that a different communications strategy would have turned this around and made the UK look great is, frankly, a bit of a fantasy.

My second point is on what we should be doing to change these perceptions, to the extent that they exist. The Policy Exchange report has lots of ideas. Some of them are actually rather creative and good. Some of them, I think, are not so good. They mostly involve creating new think-tanks, some in the UK and some in Washington, more resources for institutions like Chatham House and RUSI, new specialist sectoral ambassadors—a finance ambassador in New York, an ambassador to Congress and DC, and an ambassador to Silicon Valley and San Francisco,

which, by the way, already exists—a new exchange programme with the US, and a lot more resources for the embassy in Washington.

I think it is great, and possibly a first, that Policy Exchange is proposing substantial new resources for the diplomatic service. It is a fact that British embassies worldwide were hollowed out during the years of austerity, but here's the thing: I do not believe that it is going to happen. While the British economy recovers from the ravages of the pandemic, resources are going to be even scarcer than usual. I do not think that they are going to be thrown at the diplomatic service.

That leads me to my third point. I do not actually believe that repairing what reputational damage exists is primarily about reinforcing embassies worldwide. Diplomacy can make a difference, but it is the final 5% to 10%. What counts most of all is how Governments are performing and, above all, how the economy is performing. If we can emerge strongly from the pandemic and can achieve better growth rates than France, Italy and Germany, I guarantee that that will do far more for our standing in Washington—indeed, worldwide—than some shiny new comms strategy.

We already have a couple of positives on which to build. The AstraZeneca vaccine, which is likely to be the one most deployed worldwide, is a British invention, and we have the best vaccination programme, I think, in the world.

Finally—I promise to finish soon—in the same context we have two great opportunities in UK-US relations. As chance would have it, we are hosting two big international events this year: the G7 summit in Cornwall and COP26, the big environmental conference in Glasgow in November. Both of these really matter, I believe, to the new US Administration. The G7 can chart the way for the global economy to recover from the pandemic, and COP26 will be both a celebration of the US rejoining the Paris deal and a moment for a collective commitment to substantially greater efforts to tackle climate change.

I think we need to work closely with the Biden team on the preparation for both of those events. If we can deliver transformational outcomes out of them, alongside achieving a strong relaunch of our economy, I would be confident that our reputation, not just in America but worldwide, will recover strongly. Even if our diplomatic service remains starved of resources, it will give our diplomats something to work with. I will finish there. Thank you for your indulgence.

Q3 **Chair:** Thanks very much indeed, Sir Kim. Let's go across the Atlantic to Dr Kupchan. Sir, the floor is yours.

Dr Kupchan: It is a pleasure for me to join you today. I think that we can expect there to be a significant rebound in the transatlantic relationship that builds from 20 January forward. You have in President Biden someone who has Atlanticism in his bloodstream. He has been committed to NATO and to European security as much as any major American politician. When I worked in the White House, I went to Ukraine with him I think six times.

He was in the Balkans. You are pushing on an open door when it comes to a President who believes firmly in the importance of the Atlantic relationship.

Secondly, he is well aware of how much damage Donald Trump has done. There was a poll recently that came out of the European Council on Foreign Relations that said that 51% of Europeans question whether Biden can repair the political divide and be a reliable ally. I think that Biden and his colleagues will work hard to reverse that impression and rebuild trust.

Thirdly, I think he is aware that this has been a very difficult time for liberal democracy, particularly in the United States, and there is no better place to look to for help to rebuild the foundations of liberal democracy than Europe. You probably are all well aware that he has talked about a summit for democracy, or some kind of gathering that will really focus on revitalising the foundations of our way of life, so you will have in the White House an individual who is as good a partner as you have had in a very long time.

I would add—Sir Adam Thomson mentioned this—that the Atlantic alliance, NATO, took a beating over the past four years, and it is in pretty good shape. It weathered the storm reasonably well. NATO kept its head down and just kept walking forward. That gives us all reason to believe that it is in reasonably good shape moving forward.

There are three qualifications or caveats that I would like to put out, as we begin our discussion. First, Joe Biden will be a domestic President, at least for the first year. That is because we all, who live in this country, have been shocked and horrified by what has happened here, in particular the siege of the US Capitol, which took place not far from where I live. As a consequence, there is a sense that we do not need to turn our back on the Trump era; we need to learn lessons. I think you will see a Government that is heavily focused on taming the pandemic, investing in infrastructure, dealing with healthcare, investing in green technology and a whole host of other expensive and ambitious domestic initiatives. That will not necessarily mean he does not have time or energy for foreign policy—he will—but the priorities of the American President will be focused on the domestic front in a way that we have not seen for quite some time. It is important for America's allies to keep that in mind.

My second qualification would be that the US-UK relationship will remain special. It is not based on conditions today; it has deep roots that stem back to the late 19th century. We are bound together through culture, through history, through language and through common interest. That having been said, I do think that Britain's decision to leave the European Union means that both sides—both the United States and the UK—will need to look for ways to make sure that the UK remains as relevant to American diplomacy as it has for the past 100-plus years. I do think that given the economies of scale that we have today, when it comes to dealing with China and with Russia, and when it comes to global trade and the big issues that we all face, Britain, by taking itself out of the EU, has, to some extent, lost the level of influence that it had in Washington before that

decision. As a consequence, I would argue that London should take clear steps to compensate for that move.

My final point would be to echo what both Sir Adam Thomson and Lord Kim Darroch said: there are low-hanging fruit when it comes to that task. One is G7 and COP, both of which are seen as key events forthcoming for the Biden Administration. I think the US and the UK should take advantage of those events, to breathe life into and to showcase the US-UK special relationship.

Finally, I think Biden, like Trump and like Obama before Mr Trump, will be highly sensitive to the assets, the willingness, the fervour and the activism that allies bring to the table. For my mind, we have spent too much time talking about 2% and who is spending what on defence, and not enough time talking about who is going to do what. Who is going to lift and carry burdens? So I would encourage the United Kingdom to work with its European partners to think about where the US is stepping back and where the UK plus the EU can work together to pick up the slack left by an America that, yes, will stay put in Europe and stay put in Asia, but it will likely continue the retrenchment from the broader Middle East. I think there are tasks, whether in Libya, Syria, the eastern Mediterranean or Nagorno-Karabakh, where the United Kingdom can help lead efforts to step into new roles in the security realm. I would encourage the UK to stay as lashed up to the EU as possible when it comes to European security.

Q4 **Chair:** Dr Charles, thank you very much. Finally, Doug Lute, over to you.

Ambassador Lute: Thanks very much; it is good to be with you today. Two years ago this month, Ambassador Nick Burns and I published at the Munich Security Conference a report from the Belfer Center at the Harvard Kennedy School. It was entitled "NATO at 70: an alliance in crisis"—NATO was 70 years old in 2019.

We listed 10 challenges faced by the alliance. The first and most significant at that time, in 2019, was the absence of reliable and committed US presidential leadership in NATO. An additional nine crises followed that. We have addressed that first one, thankfully, with Joe Biden: reliable, committed and dedicated leadership of the alliance, again. That is probably the most important, because it enables NATO's response to all the other challenges that it faces.

I am reminded of the Biden campaign slogan: "Build back better". The building part, and coming back, will be demonstrated from the top. The President has already engaged key alliance leaders, likewise his Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, who have been busy on the phones to demonstrate that they are back.

But to be better, there are two challenges that the Biden veterans from the Obama Administration did not face in 2016: Covid, obviously—the impact of Covid on the economy—and social justice issues, which were present in 2016 but are much more front-of-mind now. All these take a domestic setting that is paralleled on the international front.

Two macro-trends will characterise Washington in the next four years, and most especially in the next two years—during the first two years of the Biden Administration. The first macro-trend will be Covid, the economy and social justice issues. Those combine to indicate that the Administration will be inwardly focused, and domestically focused. To some extent, it will—I believe—be self-absorbed with these challenges inside the United States. That is distinctly different from the recent past.

The second macro-trend will be the competition with China. There is an important and sometimes missed role here for the transatlantic relationship. Key leaders in the Biden Administration believe, like me, that the best way to compete with China is to polish, reinvigorate and reinvest in our alliance structures, starting with the alliance structure in NATO, but also including American alliances in the Pacific: Japan, South Korea, Australia and so forth. With those alliances reinvigorated, the United States can compete on that basis with China and, to a lesser extent, with Russia. Neither of those competitors—China or Russia—has anything to compare with our alliance structures. From a macro or grand strategy perspective, alliances will be a major foreign policy theme of the Biden Administration. I will stop there and look forward to any questions.

Chair: General, thank you. There is an awful lot to unpick there. We can say that the international to-do list is huge in some areas, but there is an energy for both countries to want to work together; the question we now want to explore is how. Before we can even do that, though, we have to take stock of what happened over the last four years. Derek, can I hand over to you to help us do that?

Q5 **Derek Twigg:** Lord Darroch, what impact do you think the Trump presidency had on US-UK relationships?

Lord Darroch: I can only speak for the first two and a half years of the Trump presidency, because I left in the middle of July 2019. We started well: we got the first visit of any international leader to the White House only a week after inauguration. Frankly, it then did not prosper. The personal relationship between President Trump and Theresa May was at best strained and had its acrimonious moments.

A defining feature of the Trump Administration was that it did not really do consultation. One thing about being in an alliance, although of course all of us bring less to the table in NATO than the Americans do, is that you would expect to have some consultation or discussion before major decisions that affect your national security are taken. That did not happen at all: consultation before decisions were announced just did not happen, at least in my time in Washington.

For example, when the US withdrew from the Paris climate change deal, we heard about it in advance because it was leaked to the press, so we tried to get in and talk to people before it was actually announced. But between the leak to the press and the announcement, usually just in 24 hours, they withdrew from the deal rather suddenly. They withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal suddenly while the then Foreign Secretary, now

Prime Minister, was more or less in the air to Washington to try and persuade them not to.

To have that kind of hazard of non-consultative process in decision making, together with a strained relationship at the top between the President and the Prime Minister, makes it quite difficult to achieve the things that you would want to achieve out of this relationship.

Q6 **Derek Twigg:** Do you think the concerns about the reliability of the US as an international partner will continue with the new Administration? Are you more hopeful?

Lord Darroch: Even during the Trump era, the bedrock of the relationship—defence, security and intelligence—was as strong, if not stronger, than ever. That carried on, and the respective institutions on both sides of the Atlantic built and developed their links and did new things to draw them closer together. That aspect of the relationship continued to prosper even while things were difficult at a senior political level, and it is a very good foundation on which to build what I expect to be a rather more normal and constructive relationship with the new Administration.

Moreover, the fact that we are bound to be talking to them in quite a lot of detail about what they want to achieve from the G7 and from COP26 in Glasgow means that—not that there would be any reluctance—we have to do this. We have to work together on achieving outcomes from these meetings. All of that means that the channels between Washington and London are bound to be pretty active over the next 12 months.

Derek Twigg: My last question is to Dr Charles Kupchan, but I think he has gone for the moment, Chair.

Chair: We will come back to him, Derek. Let's move on to Martin Docherty-Hughes.

Q7 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** How do the witnesses expect the new Administration in Washington to go about repairing its relationships with allies, as President Biden has promised to? Importantly, what partnerships will the President prioritise? I will come to you first, Kim.

Lord Darroch: Doug will have a more informed answer to this than I do, but I would expect the President to find ways—whether it is going to Brussels for a NATO summit or some other mechanism—to reaffirm the US commitment to NATO, and in particular to do the thing that President Trump famously avoided doing on his first trip to NATO headquarters, which is to reaffirm total US commitment to article 5: the principle that an attack on one is an attack on all. That is fundamental.

I would be surprised if President Biden did not continue, in a more diplomatic way, to press allies to spend 2%. I know that Charlie Kupchan said that that will be less of a central point, but nevertheless it is a reality that a large number of NATO allies—far too many—do not pull their weight in defence spending. You can do it politely or you can do it more harshly,

as President Trump did, but they need to be encouraged to do more, so I do not think that that will stop.

US commitment to NATO is not just about saying that it supports article 5; it is about the resources that it puts into NATO. I think that that will be restored to the levels that we are used to. There will not be talk any more about withdrawing US troops from Europe—taking resources away from NATO headquarters and that kind of thing.

Also, we were not the only ones who noted that consultation was abandoned in the Trump era. It is as important for the French, the Germans and others as it is for us, and I am confident that President Biden's Administration, which has some very experienced hands in it—many of whom were part of the Obama Administration—will conduct their diplomacy, again, more normally and more conventionally, and will consult allies before big decisions that affect European security are taken.

Q8 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Doug, do you want to come in on the types of partnerships that the President will prioritise?

Ambassador Lute: Sure. I think, through the NATO lens, that the US will look to the UK for close partnerships in niche capabilities. Let me outline several of those, which are traditionally US-UK capabilities that reflect the special partnership. The first is on the intelligence sharing side. The US and the UK are really the cornerstone states of the Five Eyes—*[Inaudible.]*

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Doug has frozen for a second, Chair. I do not know whether Adam or Charles want to come in.

Q9 **Chair:** Charles, do you want to continue while we get the comms sorted out?

Dr Kupchan: Happy to. Doug was talking about the importance of filling niche capabilities. I would reinforce the degree to which both Doug and I have focused on the domestic imperatives that the Biden Administration faces, and as a consequence the degree to which the Biden Administration will look particularly to traditional allies in Europe to bring more to the table.

I find it reassuring that the British Government have announced a significant increase in defence spending. As I think Lord Darroch said, we need to continue the peer pressure on European allies to do more, but, as I said, I think that the UK should work with its partners in Europe to focus on specific tasks that can be fulfilled, and—

Q10 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Sorry to interrupt; I know that other Members will want to get in. In terms of those European allies, not just those in NATO, is it possible to touch on the Hiberno-American special relationship and to reflect on how organised Ireland is—not just on Capitol Hill, but in the state capitals—and how important that relationship will be for Europe?

Dr Kupchan: The relationship between Ireland and the United States?

Q11 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** And the new President.

Dr Kupchan: It depends on what you mean. If you mean in terms of geopolitical engagement, I am not sure I see where you are leading with that question. I think that the Biden Administration was concerned about the implications of Brexit for the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland. Those issues seem to have been resolved, at least for now, but when it comes to the broader issue of the strategic relationship across the Atlantic, I am not sure I see what role Ireland will play in that respect. But I will defer to Doug here, and others who have more of a focus on NATO.

Q12 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Doug, I think we have lost the picture but have the sound still. Do you have anything to add on the repairing of the relationships?

Ambassador Lute: Can you hear me now? Sorry—*[Inaudible.]*

Chair: I think we are struggling with that a bit. Can I move on to Richard Drax, please?

Q13 **Richard Drax:** Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to have such distinguished witnesses—welcome. To Dr Kupchan first, then Ambassador Lute: what do the President's appointments tell us about the likely future direction of the Administration?

Dr Kupchan: I think that the team that President Biden has put together is a group of seasoned professionals, unlike the folks who occupied the prime positions during the Trump Administration. I think you will see a group of people who will essentially move away from "America First" and return, in a couple of different respects, to two key traditions that have been with the United States since Pearl Harbour, and actually before.

One is being a team player. I think you can expect a Washington that leans into teamwork. That is why I think the conversation that we are having today is so important. We have already seen the Biden Administration come back to the Paris climate agreement and the World Health Organisation. The Administration are ready to talk to Iran about restoring some kind of agreement. We do not know the outlines of that, but the United States will again be a country that is multilateralist and, as one of my colleagues said a few minutes ago, that sees its alliances as perhaps its most critical asset.

It looks like China will be the largest economy in the world by the end of this decade. What is it that gives the United States a leg up and superiority over the long run? The fact that the US has allies in many quadrants of the world and China has one: North Korea. I think this is a team that understands that coalition building and maintenance are one of the great assets of American diplomacy.

The other issue is that I think you will see a country that again returns to the traditions of liberal democracy, and that believes that America's closest allies are Canada, the UK, Germany and France. On the affinity that the previous President showed for Mr Putin, Mr el-Sisi and Mr

Erdoğan, those days are over. I would like to see the United States and the United Kingdom stand together to reassert their voice when it comes to standing behind the values that we, together, have been pushing out to the world for a very long time. I would put that on the list of issues where I think the US-UK partnership is key.

The final point I would add is that Tony Blinken, Jake Sullivan, Bill Burns and Joe Biden himself are internationalist. They are outward focused. They are liberal internationalists; they believe in the importance of grounding the international system on liberal democracy. However, I would reinforce the point that both Doug Lute and I made: we have serious problems here at home that need to be fixed.

I think Europe in some ways faces the same challenges because of the pandemic, because of unemployment and because of deindustrialisation. This too should be part of our conversation. What can the Atlantic democracies do together to make sure that we pass through in fine fashion this wobbly era in the institutions that we have long looked to for stable governance?

Q14 **Richard Drax:** Ambassador Lute, do you have anything to add to that? Just to recall, the question is about the President's appointments. What do they tell us about the likely future direction of the Administration?

Ambassador Lute: I apologise to everyone. I am in rural America, where bandwidth is challenged, maybe as a major metaphor for the bandwidth of this new Administration having to deal with European affairs. In any case, I dropped.

First, as Charlie has already described, you have a brand new set of players who combined experience and deep-seated respect for European partners. Those are irreplaceable qualities to begin resetting the relationship with Europe. Let me just test to make sure I am still on.

Chair: Yes, you are, all good.

Ambassador Lute: Okay. I believe I dropped earlier. To the earlier question having to do with capabilities and so forth, let me just review, if I may, that I think there are several military capabilities that make the special relationship special. I will just tick these high-end niche capabilities off. First, intelligence sharing; the US and the UK are cornerstones of the Five Eyes intelligence community and the US depends on that relationship. Secondly, special operations capabilities, so special operations forces; the US and the UK are world leaders in this realm and the US looks to British SOF as the most reliable partners. Thirdly, cyber, both cyber-offensive and cyber-defensive capabilities; the US-UK partnership there is irreplaceable. Fourthly, in terms of military capabilities and the like, is the UK military's capability to deploy; most prominently here you have ongoing operations in Afghanistan, but the UK lead in the NATO enhanced forward presence in the case of the UK in Estonia is a deployable capability that few other allies have. Those are the niche military capabilities that we ought to appreciate and invest in.

Let me finally just echo Charlie's point about values. Another, very important dimension of the US-UK relationship is this centring on democratic values. If you look across the NATO alliance today, even among allies, you have allies who are backsliding from the founding democratic values of NATO.

The second sentence of the NATO treaty highlights "democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law." I think it is very important that NATO addresses these qualities through the lens of what is going on in Turkey, Hungary and Poland today. If the Committee were to review the most recent Freedom House data, you would see a steady, more-than-a-decade-long decline in the standards of democracy across NATO allies. This is another area, this question of reinforcing and re-emphasising values, where the US-UK relationship can play an important role.

Q15 **Richard Drax:** Ambassador, one last point. You mention the capabilities, and of course, no one would disagree, but to use the capability you need to have politicians to have the courage when it is needed to deploy them. Does the present team, in your view, have that backbone to lead on behalf of the free western world when it needs to?

Ambassador Lute: I think so, without question. This springs from their experience, so I don't have any question about this. I have known each of them for more than 20 years. For example, Lloyd Austin, the Secretary of Defense, was a West Point classmate of mine and has been a close friend for 50 years. There is no lack of backbone there.

Richard Drax: Thank you very much.

Q16 **Chair:** Can I just quickly pursue that, General Lute? You list the things that we are close on, but would you also agree that on both sides of the Atlantic we have become too risk-averse? We have allowed events, complicated challenges, to advance unchecked; and if there is anything to show more resolution on, it is to be able to work more collectively together to stand up to some of those challenges that we face.

Ambassador Lute: I think that's right, but I also believe that part of the reason why we have been more reserved or more cautious on the international scene is the rise of domestic challenges. Domestic challenges will always—sorry—trump those from overseas.

This is why in my opening comments, I, like several of my colleagues, emphasised that for the next year or so the Biden Administration will be increasingly absorbed in or internally focused on the challenges internal to the United States. So you might see more of this reservation about being active on the international front—not because there is a reticence to lead on the international front, but because of the dominance of domestic challenges.

Chair: That is an important point. I think Derek Twigg has to depart. Derek, do you have a final question to ask?

Q17 **Derek Twigg:** Yes—thanks, Chair. Dr Kupchan, do you think that the

Trump isolationist foreign policy was an aberration, and how do you think that the current Administration's foreign policy and defence policy will be different from President Obama's?

Dr Kupchan: As Doug and I have been saying, an inward turn has been taking place in the United States, and it has been reinforced by the pandemic. As you may have picked up, I am not a big fan of Donald Trump, but I do believe that Trump sensed in the American electorate, among Democrats and Republicans alike, that a majority of Americans looked out at policy and said, "You know what? I think there's too much world here and not enough America. There are too many wars, too much free trade, too many pacts and international commitments. Let's ease off on the gas."

Trump, even though I think he did correctly perceive that sentiment, dramatically overcorrected and made a hash of responding to the sentiment, and that led to "America First". Instead of adjusting and pulling back in a modest way, he, to some extent, took a wrecking ball to the world that America made.

I see Biden's task as, to some extent, correcting for Trump's overcorrection, so I do expect him to be somewhat more circumspect, somewhat more modest, particularly in the Middle East, where Democrats and Republicans agree that the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya have not gone particularly well. What I would expect to see is a kind of meat-and-potatoes, if you will, foreign policy, in which the United States focuses more on its core strategic missions in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific region and less on the Middle East.

I don't think that engagement in the Middle East is going to end—that can't happen—but I do think you will continue to see a downsizing of the military footprint and the avoidance of wars of choice, in favour of standoff-weapons diplomacy. I think that the direction will not be isolationist; the term that I tend to use to describe where I think Biden will head is "judicious retrenchment".

Q18 **Chair:** Thank you for that. I want to move on to Russia and China, and Kevan Jones and Stuart Anderson will lead us forward. I am just touched by something you said about the relationship between Theresa May and Donald Trump. We speak about the special relationship, which absolutely is about intelligence, the military and so on. It also must involve the two very senior principal characters at the very top.

Look at JFK and Macmillan, Blair and Bush, and so on. If Donald Trump were to pick up the phone and call a Brit, was it Piers Morgan or Nigel Farage? Would you agree with that? Why did we let it happen that our Foreign Secretary was on the plane going over to the United States, unable to convince Donald Trump? Do we need to get back to the place where the first call that a wavering United States president makes is to a UK premier? Can I put that to Doug Lute?

Ambassador Lute: That would be the ideal place for, I think, both of our Governments to sit, but it is so dependent on the personalities involved

that it is really not something that we can prescribe. I think that there have been occasions in the post-world war two period where the US and the UK have been so close that that sort of relationship just seemed natural. It was anything but that for the last four years, and how it develops in the future will largely depend on the personalities involved.

Charlie and I, and our colleagues, have all made the point today that the good news is that we have reliable, experienced personalities on the US side now, with whom their UK counterparts can relate with mutual respect. That alone is a great place to start the kind of person-to-person relationships that are required—not only at the Head of State, Head of Government level, but between the lead diplomats, between the lead Defence Ministers, and ideally in the military-to-military and intelligence-to-intelligence contacts. All that begins at the top. I think what we can be assured of now is a refreshing of those personal relationships, and we will just see have to see how they go. A lot will depend on how they relate person-to-person.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. Kim, you may like to answer that later, but let's make some progress for now.

Q19 **Stuart Anderson:** Hello, everyone. I listened quite intently to your comments about how the first year of the Biden Administration will probably be very domestically focused and very much looking internally, and I understand the global threats. The Committee would be interested in what approach the Biden Administration will take to countering our likely adversaries, such as Russia and China. Dr Kupchan, you touched on this before, so would you start off, please?

Dr Kupchan: Thank you for the question. Of all the issues that I see on the transatlantic agenda, and there are many, the one that I think will be near the top and that will be difficult to manage will be China. I think that the Biden Administration is sincere in saying, both before taking office and since, that it will seek to forge a democratic united front; it will work with its European allies and its allies in East Asia to stand up to China on trade, human rights and geopolitics. That is as it should be because, as I said earlier, the strength of the US when it comes to China is the breadth and depth of its partnerships. I think you can expect a very early conversation on this issue.

I do not think that it is going to be a cakewalk. I believe that there will be success and that there will be considerable overlap of approach, but there will be good days and there will be bad days. The fact that the European Union moved ahead with its investment treaty on the eve of Biden's move into the Oval Office is an indicator that the size of the Chinese economy and the allure of investment will, especially amid the pandemic and lagging employment and wages on both sides of the Atlantic, be a factor in the ability to forge a united front. I would encourage the UK and the US, along with the EU, to begin early with consultations on the China issue, and to do them often.

On Russia, I think that the US and the UK are as closely aligned as are any two countries. That was my experience when dealing with Russia during the Obama presidency. I will throw this out as a question for my colleagues to also opine on: is the sanctions regime firm? Where will Europe be in the post-Merkel era? I think that the Biden team will be much tougher on Russia than was the Trump team, and there will be a consistent line to stand up to Russia on human rights and on Ukraine.

But given China's ongoing rise, I think there will be a certain pragmatism, particularly in the light of the potential to draw Russia westward. The US and the UK should work with their European partners on the possibility of some kind of move towards a better relationship with Russia, but for that to happen we need to see significant movement on Ukraine in particular, and on cyber issues as well. I just don't know whether Putin is in a position to play ball, given that he has based his brand of governance so heavily on being the spoiler and on being the Eurasian nationalist that stands up to the west.

Q20 **Stuart Anderson:** Thank you. I want to drill deeper into something you said about America being more hardline on Russia, on human rights. Is the same true for China, on human rights there? You mentioned the allure of the economic situation with China, but obviously there must be concerns around human rights issues in China. Would they be as keen to push and take a hard line on that as well?

Dr Kupchan: You know what? That's a great question. It is an issue on which we should all stay tuned. Going back to a previous question, on the one hand, the individuals—the appointees—of Joe Biden tend to be quite firm on values. I would include Tony Blinken and Victoria Nuland, who has been nominated for the third position in the State Department, and Jake Sullivan in that. They are people who firmly believe in the importance of standing firmly behind liberal democracy, freedom, freedom of association.

On the other hand, looking at the top priorities of the Biden Administration—climate change, taming the pandemic, improving the global economy, dealing with cyber-security, taming Iran and North Korea—many of those tasks are going to require us to reach across ideological dividing lines, in particular with China. I will be interested to see how Biden navigates that tension between, on the one hand being tough on human rights, on Hong Kong, on Xinjiang, on Navalny, and on the other hand, wanting to try to do what is necessary to deal with big global issues that can be addressed only through teamwork. For me, that is one of the greater tensions on which we should all be focussed in the weeks and months ahead.

Q21 **Stuart Anderson:** I look forward to seeing how that moves forward. Before I move on to the next question, did you want to add anything, General?

Ambassador Lute: Quickly on your last point, having to do with values, it is really values that glue together our alliance structures. The element of common interest and so forth is really represented by those values, so I

think you will see the Biden Administration re-emphasising values as a way of cohering our alliances.

We spoke earlier of the geo-strategic importance of those alliances.

With regard to Russia, I think that in the first weeks of the Biden Administration, you see a neat example of how it will try to push back against Russia but at the same time look for areas in which it can co-operate. That example is the dichotomy between arms control and the early days of reaching out in the Biden-Putin initial conversation, and agreeing in principle to extend by five years the New START agreement.

There is an element of co-operation, but at the same time the Biden Administration in its first days is having to contend with the impact of this major cyber-attack—the SolarWinds cyber-attack—so on the one hand there is co-operation, and on the other hand it is pushing back and containing the disruptive instincts of Vladimir Putin. That set of challenges—both co-operation and, if you will, containment—will serve as an early example of what is awaiting us in the first four years of the Biden Administration. It will be a blend of the two.

Q22 **Stuart Anderson:** Thank you, General. Moving on from that, Lord Darroch, it would be great if you could let us know, from what you have just heard, whether you think the UK will continue to align with Washington on our approach to Russia and China.

Lord Darroch: I think that Charlie has set out the dilemma extremely well. We need to challenge China on its activities and illegal claims in the South China Sea and its potential obstruction of international waters. We need to challenge it on its trade practices, its theft of other countries' intellectual property and all the barriers in the Chinese system to fair participation of foreign companies in the Chinese markets. We need to challenge it on human rights.

On all those things, we need to be working with the US to try to bring about changes in China's behaviour, but—and it is a big "but"—we are not going to be able to tackle climate change effectively without China committing to doing more and doing better. That is a case where Chinese co-operation is crucial. It is also crucial to the future of the planet. We need to balance our need to challenge China on its trade practices, its military activities in the South China Sea and its human rights record, and wanting it as a partner on climate change. Getting those two working together is going to be a huge challenge.

On Russia, Charlie is absolutely right that we are going to be the closest of the Europeans to the kinds of policies that I expect President Biden will follow in respect of Russia, which I think are going to be tougher and more challenging than the policies of the Trump Administration. But when we were part of the European Union, there was always a tension, as long as I was in the foreign service, with the US over European policy on Russia, because the further east you went in the European Union, the more those countries were looking to Russia not just for trade but as a big, powerful

neighbour with which they wanted constructive relations, and the more difficulty you had inside the European Union about negotiating sanctions policies or other measures that were equivalent to the ones that the Americans were taking.

Now that we are out of the EU, that isn't going to be a problem for us. I imagine it will be straightforward for us to align with US policies in the future on Russia, but that tension with mainland Europe, and in particular with Germany—it has been there with Germany ever since Willy Brandt and Ostpolitik back in the '70s—can re-emerge.

Basically, there is divergence between what the UK is doing on Russia and what the rest of Europe is doing, and I think it will need some very astute diplomacy out of Washington to get the EU to where they want them to be on policy towards Russia. There is always a temptation for the Europeans to edge to a more equidistant position between the US and Russia.

Q23 **Stuart Anderson:** Would it be fair to say that, now that we are out of the EU, we are going to be closer aligned on policies with the US than we would have been if we had stayed in the EU, with that continual pull from the eastern side of the EU, as you explained? You don't see any divergence between us and the US on those policies?

Lord Darroch: To be honest, I think that would be a reasonable expectation, but when I was sitting around the EU table, we were always arguing for the EU position on measures against Russia, sanctions or whatever to be as close to the US position as possible. Sometimes we won the arguments 100%, sometimes 80%. We are not around the EU table now, so the main voice arguing for this alignment with US policy is gone. Maybe others will pick up that baton—I don't know—but I think the picture you present is possible.

Stuart Anderson: Thank you very much.

Chair: Thank you, Stuart. In a similar vein, can I turn to Kevan Jones?

Q24 **Mr Jones:** Thank you, Chair. What do you see as the biggest challenge to UK-US relations going forward? You mentioned the issues around our no longer being part of the EU. How will the UK-US relationship be affected through the prism of bilateral relationships or multilateral partnerships? Can we go to Adam first for his views on Europe?

Sir Adam Thomson: In terms of UK-US relations, I think that what Kim has set out is the most likely scenario and that the UK will find it easier to operate more closely alongside the United States. The challenge will be the UK-Europe relationship in that transatlantic context. Kim has set a bit of the scene. Without the UK at the EU table, there may be temptations for the EU to take slightly different approaches than would otherwise have been the case on Russia and China, for example, or, for that matter, on the slogans of European sovereignty or European strategic autonomy.

There is a real challenge for London—we are already in it and it may grow more acute—in terms of operating a NATO policy that helps keep Europe an effective ally for the United States. We spoke earlier of the UK

providing niche capabilities and that that was valued—I am sure it is—but in big picture terms, it is not going to be enough for just the UK to help deliver militarily for the United State on Europe's collective defence. And it is not actually going to be okay, I would suggest—but Charlie and Doug will want to comment—for Europe to go on simply providing niche capabilities.

Is the UK going to work closely with its European allies to build a stronger European capability to look after Europe's own defence, so that the United States does not always have to be looking over its shoulder at Europe when it is dealing with crisis with China, or is the UK simply going to be working alongside the US without the capability to move opinion in Europe because it is so close to Washington?

Chair: Kevan, are you still there?

Stuart Anderson: I think we have lost Kevan.

Lord Darroch: Shall I say something? I think Adam summarised it very well. There is not much I want to add. I would just say that I spent quite a lot of the second half of my career working on EU issues, whether in No. 10 or twice in Brussels.

It was a constant feature of life—as in every week; sometimes almost every day—when we were negotiating issues in the European Union for there to be an American angle, an American dialogue going on. We would hear, whether from the embassy in Washington or the US embassy in London, or directly across a transatlantic telephone line, that the US hoped we would be able to achieve a certain outcome from whatever it was we were negotiating.

Sometimes it was something like EU sanctions on Russia, or measures against China or something like that. Sometimes it was a piece of single market legislation that had implications for US exporters, or something like that. I remember all the stuff about the directive on films and TV, which had a big impact, potentially, on Hollywood. That was quite a big issue at the time.

Now that we are out of the EU, it is just a reality that that element of the transatlantic dialogue—of the UK-US dialogue—is no longer there. Charlie Kupchan alluded to that in his introduction. That is just the reality. As he said, we will need to find other elements in which we can contribute to make up for that loss.

Having us as a voice around the EU table was a critical way of the US influencing what the EU was doing. It will now find other partners around that table to carry that particular torch, and it will not be us. That is a loss to the bilateral relationship. It is not the end of the world, and it does not mean that we cannot replace it by being even more valuable in other areas, but it is a loss and it has an impact on all the breadth of the bilateral relationship.

Q25 **Chair:** We are still waiting for Kevan Jones to catch up with us. May I ask

about the need for the US, the UK and the EU to somehow form their own caucus, to speak as one on these international issues? From a military perspective, we have a sizeable military presence—we are the second largest contributor to NATO, and the largest in Europe—and therefore when it comes to defence and security matters, which were not included in the Brexit deal, there is still a missing apparatus, if you like, or forum for us to come together on major strategic policy decisions, the best example being those on China. Dr Charles, do you think that we now need to advance and craft something that allows the voices to be heard around the table?

Dr Kupchan: I agree with the spirit of the question and have always been concerned that, given our institutional landscape, some of the most important issues may fall through the cracks. Especially now that the UK does not have a seat at the table in Brussels, you have to ask where we would go to talk about climate change in a transatlantic context. Where are we going to forge a united front on China? Where are we going to talk about cyber-security?

Sometimes you can do it in NATO, but NATO has a clear mandate and a set of rules. Sometimes it will be at a US-EU summit, but the UK is not going to be at those anymore. I think it would be useful for all of us to put on our thinking caps and ask whether there is a need for some kind of US-UK-EU steering group, or a US-UK contact group—whatever you want to call it—where we have an ongoing discussion about all these issues, because many of them, as I said, do not fall neatly into the institutional remit of an existing body.

It is a good question, and I think it is something that we should continue our conversation on. I believe that that kind of forum is needed and is currently missing.

Chair: I see that Kevan Jones is back with us now. Kevan, do you have anything further to add?

Mr Jones: Sorry about that; the internet is playing up, Tobias. No, that is fine.

Chair: Okay. You're not using the same company as General Lute, are you, by any chance?

Mr Jones: No. I think it is us both being in rural areas.

Q26 **Chair:** I saw Sir Adam nodding there. You don't have to add anything, but is there anything further you want to add on that triumvirate of EU, US and UK having some form of forum?

Sir Adam Thomson: Yes, I would like to very much, because I share your concern about this, Mr Chairman, and I think that Charlie Kupchan has just illuminated very well the difficulties that we can encounter if we don't have a mechanism or mechanisms that can bring the UK together with the United States and the EU on security and defence policy.

I just want to recall that, in times gone by but increasingly episodically, there was a format that brought Washington, Paris, Berlin and London

together at very senior levels, with great regularity, to deal with these kinds of issues. I think it is regrettable that it lapsed to a large degree under the Obama Administration, and I think its resuscitation now would meet a real need, possibly—I realise this might not be popular with everyone—with the occasional inclusion of the European Commission, because they are increasingly involved in defence industrial matters that are going to be among the most difficult issues transatlantically.

Q27 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Kim is waving.

Lord Darroch: Very briefly, Adam took the words out of my mouth, because I am of a similar generation to him and I remember those meetings in that format—discreet, private meetings—of four countries, and for a while they were extremely useful, I think.

Where it went wrong, in my memory, was that we once had one of those, when Tony Blair was Prime Minister, at Head of Government level, which immediately enraged the other European member states. You may remember that some of them turned up uninvited to dinner at No.10 and sort of burst in. Of course, they were all invited in and given dinner. However, once you raised that little forum to senior level—Foreign Secretary, Foreign Minister or Prime Minister—and it became high-profile and people said things to the press afterwards, it became unusable because the Europeans not invited simply objected too much to it.

I don't know whether it can be discreetly revived at senior official level, but the lack of some sort of forum, as Charlie has identified, is a real problem. At the moment, I think that quite a lot of stuff goes on bilaterally—London to Paris, London to Berlin, and then all three of us individually to Washington—but that is quite a cumbersome and inefficient way of doing things. So, something like that needs to be created, but there are all sorts of political sensitivities around who gets invited and who doesn't.

Chair: Well, the only people who benefit if we don't do it, of course, are our adversaries, and we need to remain focused on that. Let us move away from the Europe piece and go to the bilateral. Over to you, Martin Docherty-Hughes.

Q28 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Thank you, Chair, although you may be disappointed if I swing it back to the European issue. I take on board some of the evidence in relation to other bodies. I think that one that has been missing from this discussion is the Arctic Council and the way in which it allows our northern European allies, as well as Canada, to engage with the Russian Federation.

Adam, maybe I can come to you. What role does the US expect the UK to play in Brussels—or in Europe, I should say—in a post-Brexit world?

Sir Adam Thomson: Thank you for the question. I can't do justice to the Arctic Council part, I am afraid.

However, your mention of it underlines that there are many fora and formats in which countries can concert beyond just the ones we have been

talking about. I think it is really for Charlie and Doug to say what the United States expects of the UK, but if I were an American policy maker, looking at a post-Brexit United Kingdom, and reckoning that I would need to do most of my European security business now with Paris and Berlin, I would be looking to the United Kingdom to see whether it can make itself useful on the big European security issues.

Although we have talked about Russia and China, I think there is a third really critical issue for the transatlantic relationship, and that is a European ambition hugely fuelled by President Trump, but existing well before his presidency, to be able to act with greater capacity, shall we say—I am avoiding the word "autonomy"—on matters of foreign and security policy concerned to Europe.

I do not believe that this is something that President Biden can really turn around. He can make it work better or he can make it go worse, but the ambition in continental Europe to build European capabilities, to have a capacity to resist the coercion of American secondary sanctions over strongly held European foreign policy, is something that I think will grow and develop. If I were in Washington, I would be looking to London to help make that large European movement a transatlantic-friendly one and not one that was adversarial towards Washington.

I have mentioned the defence industry and I think there is a critical area where the United Kingdom can swing things in one way or another. Is this transatlantic defence relationship going to be open, competitive and collaborative? Or is it going to be autarkic, with US industry in one camp and European in another? That is one example. There are many others, where the UK providing leadership on helping—not just pressuring—our European allies to grow their military capabilities and to build much greater European capacity to look after its own security, ought to be very welcome to Washington.

I will close with a topical observation, which is Afghanistan. Tiny numbers of European and American forces are still in Afghanistan. Europeans want to stay there and they cannot do it unless they have specific US enablers. Maybe the Biden Administration wants to stay in Afghanistan, but it is really ludicrous for European allies in NATO to be unable to conduct that modest-scale operation without US support. Here is an area where I think the UK could play a real role.

Q29 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** To take that further, briefly, I know that Doug has maybe fallen off the call, but my fellow Committee members are usually a bit sick of me talking about article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, which clearly took over from the Western European Union. Most scholars take it to be more demanding of the signatories than NATO's article 5. Is there any consideration about the lacuna left by the withdrawal of the UK from European Union security co-operation? Do you, Kim or Charles have any thoughts on that?

Sir Adam Thomson: I will be brief, to let others speak, but the UK's departure leaves a huge hole in EU military capabilities—somewhere

around 20% to 25%, to give it impressionistically—and the EU has to be very careful not to overreach. In the short term, if we are expecting President Biden to recommit to article 5, it is not unreasonable to look to Paris, for example, to confirm that article 42.7 is not in competition with article 5, at the very least.

Q30 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** I wonder whether any of the other witnesses have anything to say on that.

Lord Darroch: Very briefly, I agree with Adam on this. Two unfortunate trends have happened simultaneously: one is, in terms of its impact on EU defence capability, our withdrawal, which as he says reduces it by some 25%, and the other is that the "America first—we don't do consultation" features of the Trump Administration gave Paris the opportunity to argue that America was not just an unreliable ally at that time, but was likely to be an unreliable ally into the future, and therefore it was incumbent on Europe to go further in developing an independent, separate European defence capability.

That French argument—which is still out there, notwithstanding President Biden's election victory—is precisely the wrong conclusion to draw, but it is also where the French have long been. The combination of those two events is quite dangerous, and I agree with Adam's prescription on what needs to happen now.

The French, who are a serious country in terms of defence and military capabilities, need to see reality and recognise that, especially with us outside the EU now, NATO has to be the cornerstone of everyone's defence and must be reaffirmed publicly as that.

Dr Kupchan: Could I just add that in many respects, I see this issue of strategic autonomy versus transatlantic unity as a false choice? To me, the issue is whether Europe will invest in and develop a more capable military apparatus. Will it acquire more geopolitical heft? The answer to that depends in part on the UK's participation, in part because the UK is one of the more activist and capable European countries. In my mind, that process should go forward and, if it does, the transatlantic bond will grow stronger. The stronger Europe is, the more seriously we will see Europe as a partner, including the United Kingdom.

Can I assure you that the Trump era is behind us, and that American politics is not going to lead to another unknown unknown? The bottom line is that we have been oscillating, from Clinton to George W. Bush to Obama to Trump to Biden. I cannot tell you what comes next, but the bottom line is that the more able Europe is to act, the more the United States will cleave to it—and if, in some circumstances, on a rainy day, Europe needs to act on its own, it should be prepared to do so.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Thank you, Chair.

Q31 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I will direct my question to Sir Adam Thomson, please. President Biden has already committed that NATO will be the first alliance that his Administration will seek to rebuild. Do you anticipate any

challenges that his Administration may face in doing so, and what might those challenges be?

Sir Adam Thomson: I said as my first point in my opening remarks that we should not overdo the anxieties about the health of the alliance or the transatlantic relationship—but we should not be complacent, either. There are some very significant challenges, and President Biden needs to provide the familiar US leadership in addressing them.

I would single out, for NATO specifically, two or three things. One is what we have just been talking about: military capabilities. In my time at NATO, there were 21 identified military capability shortfalls, and every single one of them was European. Some of those shortfalls could be made up with US capabilities, but the US chose not to. If NATO is going to cohere politically—I am not even talking about its defence capability, just its political cohesion—Europeans have to be a whole lot better than they are. As Charlie Kupchan has underlined, this is of geostrategic importance for the transatlantic relationship.

As Charlie has said, the more able Europe is to act militarily the more the United States will cleave to it, so what is President Biden going to do to help that along? He should certainly maintain some of the Trumpian pressure for 2% defence spending, but it has to be an awful lot more sophisticated than that.

I come back again and again to the defence industrial relationship, where Europeans are feeling battered and vulnerable to a much stronger US single defence market and very large US defence business. The European defence industry is very fractured. Are we going to be able to build under President Biden a more co-operative, collaborative transatlantic relationship that actually enables European industry to compete for US business? Kim may want to comment on that.

Other aspects of this are whether Washington will react neuralgically or constructively to French sloganeering about European sovereignty or strategic autonomy. I could go on. A second challenge that is going to be difficult and absolutely requires President Biden's leadership is the NATO strategic concept. The last one was produced in 2010. It is accepted in the alliance that a new one now needs to be drafted. This is the guiding core document that spells out in grand strategic terms what the alliance is all about. Clearly, collective defence will be at its heart, but if it is a 21st-century approach it is going to need to explain how NATO relates to Russia. At the moment, NATO really has no strategy towards Russia beyond pure deterrence.

It is going to need to talk about some of the things that Charlie and Doug have alluded to: on the one hand, a Biden approach that looks at reducing risk in the West-Russia relationship and that, at the same time, tackles Russia's crimes and misdemeanours; and, on the other, resilience in our own domestic politics.

I positively welcome, for the sake of NATO, the focus that Charlie and Doug say that President Biden will place on fixing US domestic politics. That is, for every country, its security centre of gravity, and it is crucial for the alliance that we are all more confident about our politics. Then—Doug is more eloquent than I on this—there are many other aspects of domestic resilience that need to be part of NATO's 21st-century plan. Again, a US lead will be enormously helpful.

Lord Darroch: May I chip in on one point that Adam made with which I strongly agree, with an anecdote? It is a quick one, I promise. In my time in Washington, an extremely successful and effective British defence company—a missile manufacturer—had a unique product, which was a small missile with a quite extraordinary level of accuracy: it could take out one car in a convoy while leaving the rest of the convoy untouched.

The US military—I lost count of how many US military officers I talked to—said, since there was no direct American equivalent of this, that they really wanted this piece of equipment. It was blocked somewhere in the Department of Defense. They asked whether we could get it unblocked, because they really needed it. We got to the point of signing a bilateral agreement—a memorandum of understanding—negotiated between the two defence ministries, which promised that the American market would be open to this sort of product, yet it was not possible to get the blockages removed in my time in Washington. I believe that is still the case.

Adam's point about a genuinely open US defence market is a strong one. As far as I know, it still doesn't exist.

Q32 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Ambassador Lute, are you back with us?

Ambassador Lute: Yes, sorry; it is not a lack of attention on my part, just bad bandwidth.

I have a few thoughts on the last couple of comments. First, on Adam's point about the prominence of resilience, I think this will be front and centre for NATO and the US in the course of the next several years. I agree with Adam that the alliance is likely to undertake the revision of its strategic concept. After all, the 2010 version, which is in effect right now, still refers to Russia as a "strategic partner". That is obviously out of date. The key to resilience is that it will be an important topic for the UK to continue—*[Inaudible.]*

Chair: I think we have lost him, sadly, Emma.

Q33 **Mrs Lewell-Buck:** Okay, thanks, Chair. I just have one final follow up for Sir Adam Thomson. How can the US and the UK work together to bolster the effectiveness and resilience of NATO? What is it in particular that we need to do?

Sir Adam Thomson: Resilience comes in an awful lot of forms, so my answer can only be partial. I have made the point about domestic political resilience; that is for each of us to fix in our domestic politics. On NATO, there is a catchphrase, "We are only as strong as the weakest link". That

applies to cyber-vulnerabilities—for example, to Russian disinformation and ability to manipulate our own public opinion, and to the various forms of asymmetric and hybrid challenge below the article 5 threshold, where NATO needs to get much better at attributing responsibility to a particular adversary, identifying where the threat is coming from and finding suitable responses to it.

To do some of that, I would say, you cannot find the answers solely inside NATO. A really important bit of UK-US co-operation is ensuring that NATO works with the European Union to produce a combined bi-institutional approach to resilience. The EU has so many of the tools that are relevant to a less than military definition of resilience.

Finally—we have been labouring the point—NATO, militarily, needs a higher degree of resilience than it has at the moment. It particularly needs to be less dependent on some critical US enablers, in case they are engaged elsewhere in the world or transatlantic supply lines are, for one reason or another, blocked.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Thank you. I will leave it there.

Q34 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Can I just check whether General Lute has come back on the line yet? General, give us a shout if you are there. If not, we will press on.

I want to turn to the integrated review—or the absence of it, if I can put it that way. I want to ask both groups on either side of the Atlantic how important it is. We have two former national security advisors here, and those who worked in NATO as well. Is the integrated review watched by other countries? Is it seen as an important statement of intent, or is it not as important as perhaps the Defence Committee likes to believe? Let's start with Kim Darroch—you have probably done a couple of these, haven't you?

Lord Darroch: I was national security advisor for the first half of the last review. It was not completed in my time, but it was completed under my successor, Mark Lyall Grant. If I can be frank about the integrated review, I would say three things about it. First, personally, I feel that it has come too soon after the last one, and we are falling into the trap of spending all our time pulling up the whole defence and security machinery, examining the roots and replanting. Then, before it has a chance to get its roots down and start to grow, and before we can implement the lessons of that review, we pull it up again and rethink it all. I can understand why the Government did it, but personally I would have left it longer.

Secondly, I look at what the integrated review is trying to do. I don't like to be frivolous, but it reminds me a bit of the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything, which is put to the Deep Thought computer in "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy". The answer comes out as 42. Every aspect that potentially impacts on defence policy is going to be examined here. I can tell you that I am glad I am not the national security advisor overseeing all this, because it is such a vast operation and so many different things are being looked at from a very fundamental start.

But I think the risk is that they have bitten off too much and will produce rather underwhelming results.

The third point I would make is that I know from continuing friendships inside the Ministry of Defence that there is a lot of frustration at working—indeed, at quite a senior level—at the constant postponement of the product of this exercise. People are waiting for their marching orders—they are waiting, waiting, waiting—and there is a lot of disappointment every time the thing gets postponed.

My final point is that it is important—I would say it is essential—to consult our major allies as part of this process and see what thoughts or input they have. But I don't think you can usefully do that until we have got some way more down the track towards having some conclusions. At the moment, it feels to me that there are a lot of big questions out there. If you put them to the sort of people I used to talk to when I was in Washington or when I was national security advisor, they would say, "Well, can you tell me how your thinking is developing? Then I will tell you whether we think that is right or not."

We need to get further down the track, but when we have done that and we have got some provisional or preliminary conclusions or thoughts, then of course we should be going to Washington—not necessarily to Washington, but Washington is the subject of this discussion—and saying, "What do you think about this?" On the assumption you would get some thoughtful and insightful comments back, as I am sure you would, you would take them into account in the final product.

Sir Adam Thomson: I am tempted to sum up Kim's description of the integrated review as too soon, too much and too late, but he makes some quite valid points. You asked whether these things are watched. In my experience, yes, they are. I was at NATO when the 2015 review was delivered, and it was quite widely admired. It did good things for the UK's reputation in the alliance.

Is it seen as a statement of intent? I am less sure about that. People tend to look for what they want to find in a document of this sort; sometimes they find it and sometimes they don't. If we are talking specifically about NATO, one of the things that allies will be interested to see is whether the UK is prepared to commit a larger percentage of its total military capabilities to alliance tasks or not. At the moment, HMG commits something of the order of 70% of UK military capability to NATO and some allies would like to see us offer more.

I would say it is probably not quite as important as Brits imagine it to be, but it is not unimportant either. It is very important, as Kim says, to make sure that allies are consulted. I don't know whether it is being done with the integrated review, but in previous reviews allies have been embedded in the process. They have had their own offices, helping to develop the reviews' findings and conclusions. That is one good way of signalling commitment to a transparent and constructive alliance approach to this kind of exercise.

Q35 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Can I ask Dr Charles and General Doug Lute, what do you think is the biggest geostrategic, long-term threat that the United States, the UK and the west faces over the next decade?

Dr Kupchan: The issue most front and centre in my own mind is the revitalisation of the western democracies. Having lived in Washington for the last four years, it has been a very unsettling experience. We see that the division of the country is not going to disappear overnight; we hear of extremist threats. President Biden is right to try to reach out across the aisle, but let's be honest, it's not going to be easy.

In many respects, the issue that I think I would put at the top of my list is the domestic agenda that we all face: the future of work in the digital era. What are we going to do to make sure that our own citizens are earning a living wage? What are we going to do to repair domestic political polarisation? My takeaway from the last four years is that we cannot take our liberal democratic way of life for granted and we all need to work hard to make sure that it is here to stay, particularly given the threat that we face externally.

The second and more traditional threat is China. We know from history that when the global balance of power changes, usually there is considerable international instability and turmoil. I do not think that this coming transition in the global balance of power will be any different.

I do think that we will not go back to the bipolarity of the cold war era—the world is too interdependent and we have too many shared challenges. I do, however, worry that, especially coming off the last four years, the United States and China are on a downward trajectory. China does not seem ready to give ground, and there are the domestic issues that trouble us on trade and geopolitics but, coming back to the discussion that we had earlier, we need to find a way to be tough on China and to stand up to it while at the same time figuring out how to work pragmatically to address global challenges. Those would be at the top of my list—revitalising ourselves, our domestic democratic way of life and looking at China and how to manage its rise.

Q36 **Chair:** Two very complementary aspects there. General Lute, would you agree with that summation? Would you concur? You are on mute, General. Frustrating—we would love to hear what you have to say on this. We will come back to you in a second. Kim, do you have any quick observations, because I have a couple of questions to follow up? Would you agree with that assessment?

Lord Darroch: I thought that Charlie articulated the main challenges so well that it is very difficult to add anything.

Q37 **Chair:** I will ask you another question then. With that in mind, if there is the challenge of Western risk averseness, if you like, or as the Munich Security Conference discussed, the growth of "Westlessness"—the absence of cohesion on what the West stands for and the geopolitical long-term threat of China—this takes us to the integrated review.

We in our Committee did a study to say what an integrated review should look like—to help the Government along—and we came up with three main themes: first, to define our ambitions in the world, what our place is and our role is; secondly, to confirm the threats that are coming over the horizon, and who our friends are; and, finally, to craft the defence posture to fit around that. That is a pretty simple process to do.

Yes, some money has been thrown at the MoD budget, which is very welcome, but from the equipment plan we are seeing a shortfall, and there is now talk of cutting our Armed Forces by 10,000 personnel. That would mean that the whole of our Army is less than the size of the US special forces.

We do not know where that is going, but were any Minister in the MoD, the FCO or No. 10 listening, would you recommend that our Armed Forces are not cut by such large numbers, if at all?

Lord Darroch: The short answer, Chair, is yes, I would.

I have a couple of quick comments. First, I have read what I suspect was a summary of your Committee's conclusions on the integrated review. I was doing a bit of homework and learning a bit more about this bewilderingly broad exercise. I have to say, as a former NSA, when I read what you were recommending in your three points—not wishing to flatter you—I thought, "This is something I could get my arms around—to understand what the questions were and where we were going with this." So, whether the Government have taken your advice or not, I think they should.

Secondly, I would be really worried about reducing further the size of the British Army. I say that in part on the basis of my experience in Washington. I would go into the Department of Defense and occasionally to see General Mattis myself or to take people in to see him and his predecessor under the Obama Administration. One of the things that both would say consistently is, "You are already too small—in terms of your Army. I mean, 80,000 just isn't good enough. You need to be above 100,000. It is a big mistake to reduce to the level you are at. For goodness' sake, do not go down any further and expect to retain your current level of credibility in Washington."

So, if that is where we are going, then unless views in the Department of Defense—which are built from below and reflect the views of a lot of American generals, who have very close relations with their British counterparts—have changed, I think it could potentially be quite risky to our reputation in Washington.

The third thing—just quickly—is that if we believe in global Britain, which I think is the right objective in the post-Brexit world, I think it is right to increase defence expenditure, although I worry that the extra money will go to fill shortfalls in the budget rather than buying new capability, but also I don't think we should be reducing overseas development expenditure. That is not the picture of global Britain that I think we need

to be projecting overseas, so I am disappointed in the Government's decision, if it's a final decision, to have done that.

Q38 **Chair:** Thank you for that, Kim; it's very helpful. Doug, are you still with us? No, he's not with us. With that in mind—just developing the theme a little bit—we have the geopolitical challenge of the One Belt, One Road programme that we are seeing the Chinese advance. They are luring ever more countries, ensnaring them perhaps, into their sphere of influence. We are putting a lot of money into very high-spec equipment.

Is not forward presence something that we need to think about? I am talking about building friendships and alliances on a more basic level, so that we don't get nudged out in Commonwealth countries—we are seeing this across Africa and Asia as well. Yes, of course we need to build the fifth-generation equipment, but should we not also be expanding our presence in different aspects of the Commonwealth and, indeed, in NATO, to prevent China from advancing, in a very, very slow but methodical way, and nudging us out? Sir Adam?

Sir Adam Thomson: As you pose the question, Chairman, it is terribly difficult to say anything other than yes, I agree with you—because I have the luxury of not being the Chancellor of the Exchequer and so I don't have to prioritise. There is a complicated mix to address the problem of "Westlessness". Like Charlie Kupchan, I am 100% of the view that the single most important thing we have to fix is ourselves, and that is the biggest strategic long-term threat. It's social cohesion. It's fairness for all citizens. It's competence. It's justice. But you can't any longer—I mean, less and less separates the domestic and the international. We are more and more entangled with the world, and the world with us.

I guess part of the trick is going to be making what we do abroad work for us domestically, and vice versa. Clearly, that includes sufficient military capability with our allies, not just to defend ourselves but to project our presence. But I think it also includes doing that in ways that build our soft power. Forgive me for being partisan here, but forward presence is also diplomacy. It's there 24/7, 365, virtually everywhere. And that, too, requires a good deal of support. There's no short answer.

Q39 **Chair:** My final question is to Dr Kupchan. It goes back to your very interesting point—just to finish that off. The absence of a China strategy of the EU—it has just signed a new deal with China, so again, that is going to dilute its position on China. But for the US and the UK, in a fresh moment, to be able to reassess where China is going—this is very opportune where we are as countries, in order to move forward, given that threat that's coming over.

But it was actually Russia that I was caught on when you said something about getting them to look more to the west. I am reminded of Peter the Great, going back to his time and his grand embassy. St Petersburg was built after Peter the Great visited England and took a look at what was going on. He wanted to move Russia to look more to the west and be more European. For a couple of centuries, that was the way it was.

Should we not wake up to the fact that, if we are not careful, on the current trajectory Russia will end up having to choose whether it moves more to the east, becomes subservient and works more closely through Vostok 2018—that massive training exercise that the two nations held—rather than being welcomed back into the friendships of the west? I am talking about the long term, obviously, because things that are playing out right now don't resonate with that at all.

Dr Kupchan: I align myself with the spirit of your question, and I will maybe tie it to the comments that Adam just made. What China is doing is in some ways pushing out economically more than militarily, and we need to create a response in kind.

I am not sure we can really match them. We can't show up with big bags of money and build ports and roads in Africa and other places where the Chinese are now showing up, but we can take advantage of the degree to which Chinese behaviour is itself working to our advantage. Look at Australia today and the degree to which the Chinese have been pushing it into closer alignment with the Commonwealth and the United States.

At the end of the day, I take a similar position on Russia. The quasi-alliance between Beijing and Moscow is, in my mind, unnatural. I would think that the Kremlin may wake up sometime soon, look at central Asia, which it used to own more or less, and say, "What the hell happened? It is now a wholly owned subsidiary of China."

The task is difficult because, as I said earlier, I don't know that Putin is ready to take a different approach to the west, but if I were sitting in the Kremlin and I looked at NATO, Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus, I would say, "Is this my most significant threat?" If I looked to the east and I saw China coming on strong, and its military and military technology developing, I would say, "No, I need to worry much more about my east than I do about my west." I am enough of a realist to believe that that day is coming.

One of the conversations that the UK and US should have is how to make that happen. I think the US and the UK are the best placed to have that conversation, and then they can work together to move the EU, although I think it was Kim who said earlier that on the continent there is already concern about that. We have Nord Stream 2 and other issues in the hopper. I believe that there is an opportunity there to pull Russia westward, or at least to signal that this is an option geopolitically. We need to talk about how to make that happen.

Chair: That is very, very interesting indeed. These are the sorts of things that I would like to see come out in an integrated review. It would be very interesting to see that. They certainly will come out in our report, when we finally produce it. Whether it will have the same impact, I don't know.

Unless there is any other final comment to make, can I say thank you very much indeed? I think I speak for everyone on the call when I say that the opportunity that presents itself with this new Administration coming in and

the bond that exists between the United States and Britain means that we can help rebuild the western alliance, stand up to some of the challenges that we face, and become less risk-averse, as we have been over the last few years. Lord Darroch, Dr Charles Kupchan, Sir Adam Thomson and General Doug Lute, thank you very much indeed for your time. Thank you to the Committee members and the staff here. That brings to a close this Defence Committee hearing.