

Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

Oral evidence: Deterrence in an age of Russian aggression, HC 338

Monday 22 June 2026

4.15 pm

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Matt Western (The Chair); Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom; Lord Boateng; Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi; Lord Godson; Lord Hutton of Furness; Lord Jack of Courance; Baroness Kidron; Mike Martin; Lord Sedwill; Baroness Tyler of Enfield; Lord Tunnicliffe; Lord Watts.

Evidence Session No. 2

Heard in Public

Questions 15 - 28

Witnesses

Professor Anand Menon, Director, UK in a Changing Europe; Dr Benjamin Martill, Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, University of Edinburgh; Nick Witney, Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations.

Examination of witnesses

Professor Anand Menon, Dr Benjamin Martill and Nick Witney.

Q15 The Chair: Today we are holding our second session on deterrence in an age of Russian aggression. I welcome our three witnesses in the first panel and ask them to introduce themselves.

Nick Witney: Thank you very much. I am a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Professor Anand Menon: I am a professor at King's College and director of UK in a Changing Europe.

Dr Benjamin Martill: I am senior lecturer in politics and international relations at the University of Edinburgh, adviser for the Independent Commission on UK-EU Relations, and an associate fellow at Chatham House.

Q16 **The Chair:** Thank you for joining us. To start, over the last decade, perhaps longer, the role of the EU and the consideration given to how it may act in its defence—how it should form itself, perhaps—has been something of great debate. What are the limitations on how the EU can be a defence actor?

Professor Anand Menon: I think the limitations are structural and go back to what European integration is for and how it was designed. European integration has historically been about dispersing the power of member states. Its history in the post-war era was to make sure you could not have another European hegemon and that basically you would tie the larger European states into these structures. In that sense, all the things that many of us bemoan about the European Union—its slow decision-making, the proliferation of committees—are a feature not a bug: a feature designed to make it impossible for any single member state to dominate. From that comes the fact that you have a set of structures designed to diffuse power which are almost singularly ill-adapted to the task of deploying power. The weaknesses of the EU, in both foreign policy and defence, stem from the fact that it was designed for a very different purpose to that which some are asking it to serve now.

Dr Benjamin Martill: My thoughts do not differ much from Professor Menon's. The key thing is thinking about what is driving this. The way the UK has got involved in foreign security and defence policy co-operation comes many decades after its foundation, on the basis of a division of labour between NATO and the then EC. The EC provided for economic integration, whereas defence and security took place through NATO structures. That has left a very lengthy shadow on what the EU does. It is true that since the late 1990s, the European Union has become more involved in security and defence policy. That was part of essentially an Anglo-French bargain.

A couple of things are notable about the EU's move into this area, and which affect what it is able to do. One is that it was always a bargain between different views of how European security should be organised. The French preferred a more European bulwark against what was seen as American dominance, whereas the British preferred the idea that you would keep the transatlantic relationship and NATO alive by allowing for burden sharing, so that the Europeans were not dragging the Americans into every conflict available.

The Chair: Was the problem that needed resolving the UK's leaning towards the US, and France wanting to be a more independent power?

Dr Benjamin Martill: The creation of the security and defence policy of the European Union reflected a kind of bargain between Europeanist and Atlanticist designs on where Europe was going. Now that the UK has left, that has removed one of the stronger Atlanticist partners, which partly explains the move towards further Europeanisation in security and defence.

The other really important part of this is that it was not purely designed to create competition with NATO. It was designed to facilitate burden sharing within that relationship. What the EU did in security and defence policy was very often much smaller scale and much lower intensity than what NATO was doing and, therefore, was seen as a complement to NATO. There were times when, whenever you had a question about whether NATO should really be involved still in peacekeeping on the European continent, you had EU structures that would allow that to happen. I can come on to this later, but one of the really significant changes that has happened after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine is that the division of labour between the EU and NATO has started to shift.

Q17 The Chair: Nick Witney, can you give us a bit more of a flavour of some of the tensions between the EU and its member states, whereby the EU, with its centralised power, is perhaps seeking to have more control over strategy and direction, but member states are naturally always less willing to cede that control?

Nick Witney: The tension has been built in since the very start of the European Community. The Commission was there to represent the federalising tendency—the desire to move towards an ever greater and closer union—whereas the member states tended, rather naturally, to focus a bit more on their sovereign powers, particularly in the defence and foreign policy realms, and to be very cautious of Commission intrusion. Traditionally, the defence and security area has been regarded as very much off limits to Commission interference, as the member states would see it. That has changed quite significantly in the last few years.

The Chair: Is that since Trump?

Nick Witney: No, since before then. I think it has been something to do with the von der Leyen presidency, but even in the presidency of the Commission before that, the Juncker presidency, there was increasing Commission frustration with the fact that the member states had said all the right things for decades about needing to pool their efforts and resources, to cut out waste and duplication in their procurement, and to collaborate more—to get more bang for their euros; indeed, this was the premise upon which the European Defence Agency was set up in the years just after the millennium—but nothing much happened.

The Commission was becoming increasingly frustrated trying to get into this territory and found a trump card in discovering a way to deploy the European Community budget—the general budget of the European Union. They set up the European Defence Fund, which offers about €1.5 billion a year of money which the Commission controls, to ministries of defence to run collaborative projects together. Since the Ukraine war, the other card it has played is the borrowing power of the EU with the €150 billion SAFE programme of cheap loans.

The member states react in a very human way. They are very keen for the free money—free money as seen from ministries of defence, anyway—but at the same time they resent Commission intrusion and the idea that the free money should have conditions attached to it: that they should collaborate more; they should pay attention to the lessons coming out of Ukraine; that the Commission should presume to name a few capability priorities, such as pointing to the yawning gap in air and missile defence that we suffer from across the western European continent at the moment.

Frustratingly, of course, the member states know that the Commission is right in this, but that does not stop them resenting Commission interference. It is a bit like Japanese knotweed getting into a walled garden that has been the Commission's reserve on defence. The member states do not like it and wish to adhere to their sovereign prerogatives to collaborate or not as they see fit, and to spend their money—even this borrowed money—on the capabilities they regard as the most important.

- Q18 **The Chair:** Professor Menon, can I come to you? What has the centralisation of EU power and funding—whether by President von der Leyen or whoever—meant for the UK's involvement, given where we find ourselves following the last 10 years, and our attempts to work with the EU and participate through various programmes, because certain nations in the EU want us to be in that?

Professor Anand Menon: First, to extend Nick's metaphor a little bit, the knotweed grows faster if you lose your weedkiller, and we were the weedkiller. We would not have allowed to happen a lot of the things we have seen in European integration over the last decade. I cannot imagine any British Government not vetoing the creation of a commissioner for defence, for instance. One of the reasons why the EU has changed so dramatically since we left is that we left. We were not able to influence it as we did when we were inside.

On the Commission, you are absolutely right: there is clearly some sort of power battle going on inside the European Union for control over foreign policy at the moment. I think the problem is that von der Leyen is not really very good at this, in the sense that all the signs are that she was quite keen on UK participation in SAFE. She went on record at the summit in May last year to say, "We will have a deal signed on this in the next few weeks". She met the Prime Minister in the margins of the G20 two or three weeks before the negotiations collapsed.

A good Commission president is able not only to lead the Commission but to corral the leading member states into a position where they are all facing roughly the same way. My sense about her is that this Commission is not able to do that as effectively as the best Commissions of the past. Member states slip out of line, and I think that is what happened over SAFE. Member states are still arguing among themselves over what happened about SAFE, but it seemed to be a failure of internal EU politics; the Commission was fairly clear it wanted us in, and thought it was to everyone's benefit that we were in.

The Chair: Nick Witney, do you have any comment?

Nick Witney: Just that I agree with Anand.

The Chair: That is fine. Thanks very much.

Q19 **Lord Tunncliffe:** Can you give us some feel for what the ambition is of the EU, as it is called, in this exercise? Is this meant eventually to be a replacement for NATO if Trump does pull everything out?

Dr Benjamin Martill: I think that depends very much on the politics within the EU. If you are talking about countries like France that have historically sought to challenge NATO's primacy in defence, this position is effectively strengthened by that. For the more Atlanticist countries—which was the UK and is also pretty much Germany, Spain and the eastern European countries—the hope is still that NATO does not fall apart. To go back to Professor Menon's points at the beginning, there are very serious limitations that would prevent you turning the European Union into a defensive alliance along similar lines to NATO—not just the lack of the presence of the Americans but the way the system is set up. I think there will be voices within the European Union that see it as moving in that direction, but then you are talking about a system that relies on building consensus, so you will end up with the lowest common denominator, which will not be that—short of the imminent collapse of NATO. If NATO collapsed, you would see European efforts to create a European NATO or alternative non-EU structures before you would see the EU turn into a defence alliance.

Q20 **Mike Martin:** I would like to turn to UK-EU Security and Defence Partnership. First, it would be good to understand, in light of the comments you have just made about the role of defence in the EU, how that is taking on greater weight, even though that is not how it was meant to be set up, and how the UK would have stopped the EU going down the path it has gone down over the last decade. Is the security and defence partnership a good thing? Does it have legs, or is it not worth the paper it is written on?

Professor Anand Menon: It is a good thing in the sense that it provides opportunities for co-operation, precious few of which have been acted on in the year since—

Mike Martin: Has anything been?

Professor Anand Menon: Bits and bobs. The forums are up and running. It sets up all sorts of dialogues, and they are up and running, so if you believe that talking to each other is better than not talking to each other, that is progress—of a sort.

Mike Martin: We talk to each other in NATO, for example.

Professor Anand Menon: Yes. One of the things in foreign policy that I think the British system has missed a little bit since we left the European Union is the regular interactions that we had with European colleagues,

and this helps in that sense. There is a lack of binding deadlines and timetables, which makes it too easy to just ignore stuff. It is phenomenally broad. It goes all the way from Ukraine to global health to women's rights, which is not to say any of those should not be there. I am just saying that the remit is massive, and I think it has been very hard for the two sides to prioritise. My sense is that it has precious little to do with where we started, which is defence and securing Europe against external threats. It is a nice way to chat. It is a nice way to talk about ideas and co-ordinate on what you might call security rather than defence.

Mike Martin: A bit of a Christmas tree maybe.

Professor Anand Menon: Yes, a little bit of a Christmas tree, and a little bit of a wilting Christmas tree. I was disappointed when I saw the document. It speaks to the fact that on occasion for the European Union, the UK is a third country like any other. This is basically the document it signed with Norway. You can say many things about Norway, but it is not the defence and foreign policy power that the UK is. I would have hoped before this document came out that there was some nod to the specific assets the UK has, and on balance there really is not.

Mike Martin: Okay, so a wilting Christmas tree, Dr Martill?

Dr Benjamin Martill: I think quite similarly. The conversations and dialogues are really important, and then we dropped out of the system. Do not forget that EU foreign policy co-operation has always been much more intergovernmental, so it really was about having those conversations and finding out what was going on. We dropped out of that system, and we could not replace it through bilateral ties because not only is that more complicated, but the External Action Service was well aware that we were trying to do that and so essentially engaged with the member states to make sure that we did not undercut. That is probably a good thing as well, because we do not want to weaken the European Union at the same time as we are dealing with a more difficult environment.

My point is that those conversations help the existing bilateral relationships and help the relationship with NATO. Even if we find ourselves dealing with some trade-offs between pro-NATO and pro-EU versions, at the end of the day the organisations work closely together, and a lot of these relationships are quite positive. Being present in the room at different times within the organisations can be really helpful.

I share Professor Menon's scepticism about some parts of the document. When you read it, it can feel like quite a hollow document in two ways. One is that a lot of the stuff listed is co-operation that took place under the Johnson, Truss and Sunak Governments and was perfectly possible to do informally. In a sense, the first part is a list of things that have been done already without the formal security and defence partnership, which sounds good but of course, it has been done. Secondly, it is slightly hollow because it is pointing towards potential agreements that you

might have—an administration agreement with the EDA or a framework participation agreement to engage in the CSDP—and the dialogues are the main part of it. There is a lot of other stuff that has either been done or is to be done.

Mike Martin: Nick, I will come to you next. If you were advising the UK Government, which aspects of it would you suggest they prioritise now to try to move it on from dialogue to getting the rubber to hit the road?

Nick Witney: That is a difficult question. The big prize is meant to be entry into SAFE, and, as already discussed, that went wrong. I hope we will try again, with a different result. Beyond that, we probably have to think about selling ourselves a bit harder to Europeans. The hard truth is that at the end of the last millennium, when we set up European defence with the French, we were understood to be an indispensable factor in any European effort to create some defence identity that was not NATO. We were not willing and so the effort languished, essentially.

Nowadays, I think the view from the continent is much less admiring of what the Brits have to offer. There are a lot of people who think that we remain too wedded to our ideas of the special relationship, and they see the failures of our military capabilities. The Germans chortle away at our inability to deploy a Type 45 destroyer to the Mediterranean in under two weeks. There is this sense that we are not the power we were, and we need to think about trying to emphasise not necessarily to the Commission in the context of these negotiations but to project ourselves a bit more as an indispensable partner across Europe. Perhaps we can make something out of the ruins of the Franco-German failed co-operation on the next generation of fast jets.

I do wish we would play the nuclear card. We watched Macron make a very significant and important speech on how the French deterrent would be available to allies, and half a dozen to a dozen European states responded very positively to that and recognised that this was a big shift in French policy. I am not sure we said anything about it at all, did we? We probably said what we have said for 40 years, which is that our nuclear weapons are available to NATO—and that is it. It is years since any British Prime Minister or Defence Secretary has given a serious, detailed account of what our nuclear doctrine is, what our nuclear capabilities are, and how we would respond, for example, to renewed Russian aggression that involved going nuclear. We need to be more conscious of having an audience out there to convince that we are still worth while.

Mike Martin: That is fascinating, thank you. I agree, by the way.

Q21 **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi:** Professor Menon, if I may I will start with you on defence-industrial co-operation. In your mind, what are the strategic enablers to have closer UK and EU co-operation on the defence-industrial base that many of us would like to see, notwithstanding the SAFE partnership, which I will come on to later? Which of the strategic enablers are the most important and deliverable for boosting defence

deterrence capabilities over the next five years?

Professor Anand Menon: I am afraid I might swerve your question slightly by saying that you have two other witnesses who know what they are talking about when it comes to defence capabilities. I would not presume to answer ahead of them, quite honestly, because they know far more than I do.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: That is very gracious of you. Let us move on to Dr Martill.

Dr Benjamin Martill: I do not want to pass the buck, but I imagine that Nick Witney knows far more than I do. What I will say is that the difficulties of re-engaging with the defence-industrial side goes back to what we talked about earlier with the role of the Commission and how close that takes us to the single market. When it comes to post-Brexit developments, the view in the UK has very much been that we can identify areas where there is a lot we could add to what the Europeans are doing. It is probably true to say that any version of a strategically autonomous Europe, not EU, would necessarily depend on the capabilities of the UK for its credibility.

That said, we have boxed ourselves into a corner with a more distant relationship from the single market, so it is becoming increasingly difficult in two respects: first, we are outside the single market and that limits what we can do; secondly, we have, as you can see with SAFE, a more competitive relationship with France, with them seeing us as something of a Trojan horse and a potential spoiler for the idea of a European defence technological-industrial base. That is very difficult, and the way it has often been framed, including by the current Government, has been that you can build back the relationship through defence and then maybe you can unlock forms of economic co-operation. I think it is the other way around: you have to start looking at the red lines with the single market, and that would enable greater engagement in defence.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: I will come to Mr Witney. What are the strategic enablers for closer co-operation and which of these are the most important for deterrence?

Nick Witney: I think the second part of that question is rather easier to answer. The Ukraine war has simply introduced a new era of warfare, one in which military power is no longer denominated in the Cold War capabilities we are all very familiar with—tanks, ships and combat aircraft. We are all very familiar with the idea of drones, but the use of technology in modern warfare goes so much deeper than that. It is drones and missiles, sensors and communications, the sharing of intelligence and, above all, AI-assisted battle management systems. The Ukrainians have done an extraordinary job in developing those, largely for themselves, which enable them to hold back the might of the entire Russian army. It has also, incidentally, forced the Russian air force to simply skulk in Russian airspace, offloading glide bombs towards Ukraine. As for the Russian navy, as we know, half of it is holed up in the main

harbour in the Black Sea and the other half is swimming with the fishes at the bottom of the Black Sea.

These transitions, of course, cannot be done overnight. It is this business of accepting the new high-tech nature of warfare for the next decade. It may not last for ever, but we are at a time when defence has the whip-hand over offence. The more we can shift ourselves into recognising that and putting the investment in those places, the more welcome we will be as partners to other European countries. It is more evident to me that they have got the message than we necessarily have in Britain, but typically they are all going off in different directions. The Italians have a thing called the Michelangelo Dome, which is meant to provide one of these all-singing, all-dancing, high-tech battle management systems for controlling air defence and so on. The Germans have their version. The French are going very heavily in all these directions—and we are buying more F35s from the Americans to drop American bombs. That is not your question, so I am straying off piste, but I do wish we would cancel that project, which makes no sense at all. The things that the Europeans understand more, and that the Commission evidently understands, are the urgent capabilities of the future.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: Thank you very much for your candidness. You have brought me to my next question, which is about the obstacles that you and Dr Martill have alluded to. In your opinion, Mr Witney, what are the obstacles to greater integration of the defence-industrial bases of the EU nations and the UK?

Nick Witney: The main obstacles are between 500 and 1,000 years of history and the fatal let-out in the European treaties, which ensures that the single market rules do not have to apply to defence expenditure. That is just an irresistible national temptation for those still in the EU to continue to protect national defence industries, to not collaborate, to build national champions. I think those are the main obstacles and I do not quite know how to get around it, because no one is going to change that treaty opt-out.

When I was running the European Defence Agency we had what seemed to be a moderately successful scheme going in the early days to get everybody to agree that they would not be forced by the treaty to collaborate, but that they would advertise their procurement opportunities on a central bulletin board and treat bids from other countries on the same basis that they would treat bids from their indigenous providers. That seemed to make a bit of progress, but basically the Commission killed it off because it was not done by regulation and anything that is not done by legislation and regulation is not in the Commission's DNA.

Professor Anand Menon: Do you mind if I just chip in on this point?

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: Yes, please do, Professor Menon.

Professor Anand Menon: The trade-off is between short-term national politics and long-term European efficiency. We all know that as a collection of relatively small states, we have to work together to get the sense of scale that we need to compete in a world where continental-size economies are competing, but Governments face the pressure to deliver at home. Every time a Government say, "We are going to spend on defence, and it will be good for economic growth", they are effectively saying, "We are going to spend our money here", almost regardless of whether other people have better kit or we need to be giving that money to someone else. That is a real tension that has always haunted this project—ideally we would be spending as efficiently as possible, but politics makes that very hard to do.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: Yes, let us just build on that, Professor Menon. We have identified the obstacles, but what do you think needs to happen politically to make that defence co-operation more possible? What, if anything, can we learn from the failed SAFE negotiations, during which even the Canadians were able to get a deal, rather than the UK? We and our defence-industrial base were effectively elbowed out.

Professor Anand Menon: I am not sure SAFE is a model for the rest, and the Canadians got a deal simply because they are not going to get many of the contracts, and everyone knew that. So it was far easier to negotiate with Canada than it was with a real competitor. I go back to that old sage Jean-Claude Juncker, who said, "We all know what we have to do. We just do not know how to get elected after we have done it." That is the root of the problem. What do we need to do to fix this? We need to think long term, to think on a continental rather than national basis, and to think of efficiency and threats rather than domestic economic and political considerations. No member state does that.

Someone a lot cleverer than me might start to build in incentives in European Union funding. If we lived in a world where EU defence funding was a lot more significant than it is now, it could build in incentives to try to break member states out of the national holes in which they find themselves, but at the moment it is very difficult. European integration from the start has struggled with this dilemma about national political incentives versus European public goods.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi: Very true. Dr Martill, what do you think needs to move politically to make it happen?

Dr Benjamin Martill: I do not disagree with anything that has been said. On things like SAFE, there is also the question of some of the post-Brexit legacies, and in a way it is quite surprising that 10 years on, we still have Brexit hangovers. If you think about some of the arguments coming out of Brussels and the member states—and they are not totalising arguments; there are a lot of allies who want the UK to be involved—there is a lot of concern that the UK will end up being a spoiler or Trojan horse. There is a lot of concern that the UK cannot be trusted to be a reliable partner, either because it has not shown much interest

previously or because there might be a less interested Government at some point coming down the line or a more Eurosceptic one.

There is perennial concern that what the UK is seeking to do constitutes some form of cherry picking, which again is quite surprising. If you go back to conversations in Europe and in the UK even at the time of the referendum, there was the idea that you could keep security and defence detached from those conversations. It was so clear that there was not the same sovereignty cost for the UK—that there was not so much of a threat to sovereignty—but also that the UK had so much to offer, and it did not come to pass. We have seen previously across the course of the negotiations how time and again, conversations on security and things like Galileo very quickly became the subject of overarching dynamics in the Brexit negotiations.

Q22 Lord Godson: I declare my interest in this inquiry as the director of Policy Exchange, in line with the committee protocols. Thank you for the testimony. I am interested in the points you have made about two things: one is the rights of smaller member states, which you and others have mentioned; the second, and correlated to that, is the needs of longer-term European efficiency.

Presently there are two countries that are holding up the aid to Ukraine—perhaps not the only two, but they are two significant ones. First, Belgium is holding up the €210 billion in frozen Russian assets, and that is a significant factor, as we all know. Secondly, the Republic of Ireland is denying that it has any obligations under the sanctions regime in terms of supplying the 200,000 tonnes of alumina to Russia, as per the present Taoiseach. This has been noted in the Ukraine media and in the *Irish Times*. Someone used the word “incentives”. How do you create incentives to deal with that kind of parochial intransigence, if I can put it that way—and not a little provocatively?

As a final thought in the light of this, somebody was talking about cherry picking—that the EU fears us cherry picking if we went back in. Is not everyone cherry picking: not just the British when we were in there, or thereafter? We tend to self-flagellate slightly in this department, both pre-Brexit and post-Brexit.

Professor Anand Menon: On the second question, I would say, absolutely: the European Union cherry-picks. The sacred principle of the indivisibility of a single market is not so sacred in the areas of agriculture, emissions trading or electricity market membership, which is all cherry picking. The fact of the matter is that the EU have concluded that we are more desperate for a deal than they are, so they can determine what the shape of that deal is. The reality at the moment is that this Government have desperately wanted to get these deals, so the EU feels able to say, “You can have this but not that”. They feel they have the whip hand, whether rightly or not is another question.

On incentives, it is very hard. Generally in the European Union, the way you get around these blockages is by signing package deals. The problem at the moment is that member states are so divided over so many

different things that it is virtually impossible to conceive of a package deal that holds everyone together while getting the concessions you want. The European Union was very good at this in the 1990s. It has become far more difficult now, and, of course, remember that the significant majority of member states are small countries. Trying to overcome resistance by small countries by thinking about whether there are ways of sidestepping their vetoes is very unpopular with the significant majority of member states, which makes it a lot harder to do now than when the balance of member states was quite different.

Lord Godson: It is no better for the Ukraine crisis than for any other subject.

Professor Anand Menon: It is no worse for the Ukraine crisis because not everyone perceives the same level of crisis there. The view of this crisis from Madrid is very different to the view from Riga. Geography still matters very much in how states see their geopolitical interests.

Dr Benjamin Martill: To deal with your second question first, one of the problems is that we tend to think about the EU's precedents and principles rather than its identification of its interests and high degree of unity. It is very clear, looking at the withdrawal agreement, the protocol, the TCA and a bunch of decisions that have been taken, that the EU is perfectly happy to introduce elements of bespoke-ness where it benefits its interest. What it is not willing to do is to cross that line where it thinks that it is essentially offering the UK a sweet deal. That very simple formulation takes it a long way and has been spurred on. The reason it still exists today is that the Commission sees it as a continuing existential threat. You might have an existential threat from Russia and from Trump, but equally, you have an existential threat if the integration project falls apart because you give out sweetheart deals and everyone else wants to leave. Also, the TCA was seen as a good deal, and the EU's unity during the bargaining process was seen as working very well. I think we can expect that to continue.

I guess this takes us back to the first question: that essentially, the EU is not the kind of actor you would expect to want to take quick strategic decisions, and you can overcome that only so far. You have this veto-based consensus system. It is especially the case because, and was designed into foreign security and defence policy precisely because, that cuts at the heart of national sovereignty. I think there are two ways around it, aside from just the bargaining. The really slow one is socialisation, incremental change and activities like the strategic compass, to try to see if you can get the member states on one page, or agreement on shared principles. The second is occasionally deployed by the Commission, which is the threat that QMV will be introduced, which is a very first step: if you keep acting like this, at some point you might lose that right. That is not meaningless, but neither of those is fast nor particularly effective.

Lord Godson: Who is the latest proponent of that?

Dr Benjamin Martill: Von der Leyen has talked about it.

Lord Godson: And is still talking about it.

The Chair: I think we should move on. Lord Watts.

Q23 **Lord Watts:** There are trade talks and defence talks taking place. Do any of you see that bringing those closer together would make it easier for people to get a deal on both? It seems to me that there are benefits to all parties in that way. You talk about the Commission, and people find it easy to attack the Commission, but the Council of Ministers and the Governments themselves have a responsibility in this. If you put the two together, might there be some self-interest in them?

Professor Anand Menon: I will say two things to that. First, we have examples from the recent past of how trade and defence talks can facilitate each other. If you think about AUKUS, we were in trade negotiation with Australia and the AUKUS deal came quite quickly after that, and the two were clearly linked in some way, shape or form. So, yes, you can do that. I think the problem in the European Union is—and I know this frustrates the British Government quite a lot—if you have conversations with individual member states, they will say, “We are very keen to have you back in the fold; we are very keen to co-operate with you very closely”, but those same member states appear to say something very different when they are in a room in Brussels without us. That is an ongoing frustration. When individual conversations with member states about geopolitics get translated into conversations in Brussels about collaboration with the European Union, they get blown off course somehow.

We are not entirely sure whether that is the role of the Commission or the constraints of EU law, or the fact that in the Council, we never manage to be a priority for their discussions. Even the states that are friendly towards us and want to see more collaboration are not willing to burn their scarce political capital arguing in our favour when they have big budget negotiations coming up, which are really important politically for everyone. It is very difficult to do, and despite the fact that many member states are happy to work with us bilaterally and would like to see more security co-operation, that is not at the expense of their reputation and political capital in Brussels.

Q24 **Baroness Tyler of Enfield:** May I take us back to the issue of the “reliable partner”? I am particularly thinking about how we go about offsetting the traditional role of the US in European defence. In which areas do you think the UK could be pursuing deeper EU partnerships to offset some of the acute reliance we have had on the US for strategic issues? How fast could this happen relative to the pace of the Russian threat?

Dr Benjamin Martill: Some of that has been happening already through the coalition of the willing, which I think has been doing quite a good job trying to identify ways that European countries can fill some of the gap left by the funding pulled out by the Trump Administration. Building an

alternative to NATO through EU structures is not going to happen; it is not what the organisation is designed for, and the timeframe is too lengthy. By the time you got started on discussions, Trump would be out of office and there would be a different problem to consider. One thing I think is really important here is the value of signalling where allegiances lie, and the Starmer Government have tried to do that, essentially saying that the relationship with the US and Europe relied on an historical grand bargain—there was dependence, yes, but there was also tacit support for American hegemony and in some cases muted support for America's wars of choice.

Signalling what happens here when Trump says, "Well, we do not need the Europeans"—that the UK might be part of the European voices saying, "Well, we do not need you"—is actually very powerful, because that is a big market for the US. It is an important part of the political grand bargain, and I do not think Trump wants an independent Europe that is strategically autonomous and has peeled off the UK. On where our interests lie, it is fundamentally with Europe and not with the Trump's United States on most issues.

The Chair: Nick Witney, do you have a view?

Nick Witney: If the Russian threat, as experienced over the last four years, has not been adequate to get Europeans to do anything more than spend a lot more money on defence but has not encouraged them to collaborate more or address the huge weaknesses they face, it is hard to know what will. The problem in Europe is that they do not even have a forum to talk about these issues. They have a cat's cradle of bilateral relationships and unilateral agreements cascading across Europe—E3, E4 and E5, and I think there is now an E6—but no recognised forum. We do not have the institutions in Europe, or between Europeans and ourselves, in a recognised way for having a go at these big strategic issues.

As for command and control, if we find ourselves having to resist Russian air and missile attacks—and I would not rule that out because I worry about where things are going in Ukraine at the moment—it will be hard to persuade Putin that his ambitions in Ukraine have fallen flat and that he should just quietly sign a ceasefire, forget about it and tacitly admit defeat. I do not believe that he will send tanks across the borders into Europe any time soon, but given the sort of incidents we have seen around the borderlands of eastern Europe recently—I think it was the Latvian Government that collapsed after a misdirected drone landed—you do not need to do much of that if there is no effective air and missile defence to counter you.

What to do about it? In the absence of the central European institutions, perhaps we should be thinking a bit more about some of the regional arrangements we have. Are we making as much use as we could have of the JEF with the Nordics and the Baltics, for example? Might that be a place where we could pioneer an experiment in getting the necessary collective multinational control over linked air defence systems in the north of Europe? It is hard to know. Otherwise, we have to wait for the

Commission to secure even more money from the EU budget to spend on defence and to make its writ run, but that could be a half-century wait.

Q25 Lord Boateng: I will begin with Mr Witney. You extol the virtues of selling ourselves harder to the European Union. I think it was your phrase that we should play “the nuclear card” with them, and yet is not the problem with our nuclear card that it is highly reliant on the US? How would that help our relationship with the European Union?

Nick Witney: Yes, in an ideal world in the current strategic circumstances, if money was no object, I wish we would buy some of the new French cruise missiles that are designed to be air-launched, with a range of over 1,000 kilometres, as a possible underpinning of the strategic submarine deterrent, but realistically I think we are probably stuck with the Dreadnought class and its appalling expenses. We have always insisted—I hope to goodness it is true, and I believe it is—that although we may be dependent on the Americans for the maintenance of our Trident missiles, the fact is that dependence could be applied by a hostile US Administration over only a period of months or years, and that tomorrow, if the Prime Minister chose to launch a Trident missile or to offload an entire salvo of Trident missiles, he would be able to do it.

As long as that is the case, as long as we have the ability to launch a smaller sub-strategic strike before going full pelt for Armageddon—a small warhead launch from a single Trident missile, something I do not believe the Government have confirmed they still possess for half a dozen years—we can be shoulder to shoulder with the French in offering what Europeans see as an increasingly important part of their defence panoplies. It is the bedrock of defence, at the end of the day.

Lord Boateng: Quite; and the French, of course, do have a truly independent nuclear deterrent. Their policy has always been directed in that way, just as their policy has already been directed, whether at the EU, us or anyone else, at putting French interests first. How can we in any sense have an expectation that they will do anything other than that going forward, with our pursuing deeper EU partnerships where we are currently reliant on the US? Is there any difference between hybrid and conventional threats in any trade-offs we might make?

Nick Witney: I think the question of reliance on the French deterrent is not so much one for us. It is for Germany, Poland, the Baltic states, various Nordics and one or two others—I forget the list—who have expressed great interest in the Macron offer. Then, as with the American deterrent, ways will have to be found of not sharing the nuclear button—which, of course, everybody would like but they cannot have, for non-proliferation reasons if nothing else—and to instil confidence by giving greater insight into operational plans, undertaking forward deployments, joint exercising and generally giving those to whom you are extending a nuclear umbrella, if you have an air launch capability, a share in how that is managed.

Lord Boateng: For Professor Anand and Mr Martill, listening to the

evidence of you all—the botanical references, Japanese knotweed, wilting Christmas trees—it does not exactly inspire confidence in the EU as a reliable partner in any of these areas. Just to push the point, is there any area where you think the trade-offs are worth it in our seeking to establish a relationship with the Commission or indeed individual EU states in this area when they seem, first and foremost, to be pursuing their own interests and getting the UK to pay for the privilege of defending our common European homeland? Where is the attractiveness in all of this for any UK Government of any political persuasion?

Professor Anand Menon: I think the attractiveness stems from the fact that they are a bunch of countries that share our geopolitical interests. If there is one thing the second Trump Administration have made clear, it is that their geopolitical interests are very different from ours. The advantage comes from being a medium-sized state that has partners on its doorstep that share its interests, with whom it makes logical sense to work. That does not mean that all that work has to go through the European Union. We need to differentiate Europe and the EU, and we need to work with Europe. That might on occasion necessitate working via the EU on areas like procurement where, as Nick has been saying, the Commission has built up its role; but the fact of the matter is that to preserve our own security interests, we need to find ways of working more closely with our European partners.

I do not see much in the way of evidence that there is an appetite in government for offsetting our reliance on the United States. I think that we are in a very different position from many other member states. If you talk to officials from most European states, they will say, “We are dependent on the Americans; we need to do something about that”. I am not sure I have heard the same from British officials. Nick talked about the F35s earlier. About a year ago the Portuguese decided to cancel their order of F35s. Why? They said, “We can no longer be dependent on a United States that does not share our interests any more”. Our policy of playing the balancing act of not choosing between Europe and the United States will become more difficult with time.

Nick talked earlier about the role of technology. If we want to work very closely with the European Union on defence, that will involve technology, and we have made a decision in areas like AI to diverge from EU rules to attract American investment. There are some acute choices that we have successfully avoided for quite a long time coming down the road at us, because at that point we will have to decide what our priority is. If our priority is working with our neighbours to ensure security, that will involve some difficult economic choices about our openness to US investment in areas like AI. The EU will not simply say, “Okay, we will accept you being a bit different”. They will impose regulatory alignment in these areas.

Lord Boateng: We will be required to take the knotweed into our garden. That is what you are saying.

Professor Anand Menon: Possibly, yes.

Lord Boateng: Do you say the same, Dr Martill?

Dr Benjamin Martill: To build on the difficulty of the balancing act, I think the combination of Brexit and Trump has put the UK in quite a difficult position. If you think about one of the common frames of reference for UK security policy, it has been the idea of the concentric circles or the UK as a network power. The way we could cope with post-war decline was being part of different memberships where we could shape the direction of travel, and I think that has become increasingly difficult for us to do. Brexit has cut off our engagement with the European Union, and we have not been able very easily to plug into the security debates we thought we might still be influential in.

That has made us less useful, not just for the Europeans but also for the Americans in keeping Europe in a pro-Atlantic, liberal market economy direction. Trump has challenged that role the other way round—that the immediate fallback then is to think about the special relationship. I do not know if Trump believes in special relationships to the same extent. Certainly, he has been very keen not to engage on the basis of traditional US grand strategy, or with traditional allies.

A related point is that before the invasion of Ukraine, on the relationship between the EU and NATO as security providers, regional peacekeeping missions, and the dominant security priorities of the 1990s, for the UK it was a little bit of a choice, so it gave us quite a bit of freedom. We could say, “For this framework, we will go through NATO; for this particular crisis we will go through the EU”. Post-Ukraine we have seen much more of a division of labour between the two. I think of it as a dual-key system whereby effectively, to credibly deter Russia, you need specific actions taking place on the EU side and on the NATO side. That makes it costlier now that we are on the outside. I do not know if that spoke to your question.

Lord Boateng: Thank you very much indeed.

Q26 **The Chair:** Just related to that, there is talk about how the US defence-industrial capacity is quite stretched. It is unable to replace some of the depleted volumes it is supplying to the Iran conflict, but there are constraints on their production anyway. One of the issues seems to be, for all of us, how we might anticipate scaling up our defence systems and needs ahead of any possible conflict closer to home. Given that the US does not have the reassurance or the back-up in terms of capacity, what conversations are going on in Europe about the need to have an agile industrial base that can turn up the volume, particularly if there is an absence of US capability?

Professor Anand Menon: Again, this obviously varies by geography. What is happening in Poland is very different from what is happening in Spain. It is intimately linked to a sense of threat. One of the interesting things about the UK, if you look at public opinion, is that it is pretty clear that the UK public think that Russia is an enemy. It is far from clear that the British public think that Russia is a threat, and I think that is partly a

failure of government. If we genuinely believe, as several Ministers have said over the course of the last 12 months, that we should be on a war footing, that we are effectively in a state of war, they have failed to persuade the British public of that fact. Countries that are on the front line, such as Poland, have got pretty good at producing defence equipment very quickly. So too have the Baltic states, although they are obviously constrained by their limited size. We are not keeping up with that at the moment, and I think the answer lies in that question of the perception of the threat.

Q27 The Chair: How would you change British public attitude to that threat? You say that Ministers have failed to do that. Do you have any ideas about how the Government should go about it?

Professor Anand Menon: If you decide that you are going to make a significant policy change—going to 3.5% of GDP for defence spending is a massive significant policy change—you do not leave it to your Armed Forces Minister to make speeches that no one pays any attention to. You need the intervention of the Prime Minister. You need the Prime Minister to make some difficult choices about priorities.

I was quite struck that I think we missed an opportunity. Following the first Trump and Zelensky meeting in the White House, when Vance was there and we all looked on with horror at what was happening, my hunch was that the Prime Minister would stand up quite soon afterwards and say, “We campaigned in a period of peace; we are governing in a time of war, and the bets are off. This is a different world, and we have to respond accordingly”. Some sense that there was a turning point in terms of the world outside our borders should have been given, and had that been effectively communicated, we could have shifted public opinion; but I do not think public opinion is not ready for the sorts of trade-offs our defence spending commitments are going to employ.

The Chair: Lord Arbuthnot has a short question.

Q28 Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom: What I think you are saying, Professor Menon, is that you think we should spend more money before the people are persuaded that we are actually on the front line, and geographic front lines surely no longer are relevant. How do we persuade the people that we are on the front line?

Professor Anand Menon: I think persuading the people is one of the jobs of political leaders. You persuade the people by making the arguments. There are perfectly good arguments you can make about the vulnerability of undersea cables—that this is not necessarily a question of tanks crossing the border. It is a question about other forms of warfare that we are going to see in the 21st century.

It is naive to expect the public to say, “All right, we will pay a bit more tax or make some sacrifices in terms of cuts, even though we do not feel particularly threatened.” There must be a way for political leaders to start making the argument that the world is very uncertain. The challenges from outside our borders are greater than they have been for a long time.

We need to adapt accordingly, and this will involve some difficult trade-offs.

Lord Boateng: Where in Europe do you see that happening?

Professor Anand Menon: You see it happening most clearly in Poland, where defence spending is now north of 5% of GDP, and that has happened very quickly. The Polish people do not particularly need persuading that Russia is a threat. You see it to an extent in Germany, though of course, the Germans have the luxury of having money they can spend. The trade-offs here are more acerbic than they are in Germany, so it is a lot easier to make those decisions in Germany.

The Chair: That concludes our first panel. I thank all our witnesses today for your time. We will now suspend the session and then move on to our second panel.