



## Foreign Affairs Committee

### Oral evidence: [Government foreign policy towards the United States HC 695](#)

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Written evidence from witnesses:

[Dr James D. Boys, Associate Professor of International Political Studies, Richmond University; Senior Visiting Research Fellow, King's College London](#)

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Members present: Richard Ottaway (Chair); Ann Clwyd; Mark Hendrick; Sandra Osborne; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Frank Roy; Sir John Stanley

Questions [1-59]

*Witness:* **Dr Robin Niblett**, Director, Chatham House, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chair:** I welcome members of the public to this sitting of the Foreign Affairs Committee. This is the first evidence session of the Committee's inquiry into Government foreign policy towards the United States. We are going to be questioning three leading experts on the relationship between the UK and the US, including the defence relationship, especially in the light of both states' decisions at the end of August on military action in Syria.

I welcome our first witness, Dr Robin Niblett, the director of Chatham House. Dr Niblett, thank you very much for coming, and thank you for your patience. We'll get going; I think one or two more members of the Committee will be turning up, but as we are quorate and I know you have to get on, we will start now.

The history of our country is well documented, and I obviously will not go into it now, but how would you characterise the coalition Government's approach to the United States since they came into office in 2010?

**Dr Niblett:** Thank you very much, Chair, for this opportunity to share my thoughts with the Committee. I quickly offer my congratulations on your election to the Privy Council.

**Chair:** Thank you.

**Dr Niblett:** It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to return to this very important subject. How would I characterise it? I think the approach has been fairly steady. The Government sought to recalibrate the approach at the beginning, when it first came to power, from what was perceived to have been a relationship in which the UK side was perhaps too much in thrall to the US to one that is more businesslike—to use the current Prime Minister’s phrase from, I think, 2006, a relationship that is “solid, but not slavish.”

I notice that the Foreign Office’s submission to the Committee uses the phrase that the objective of the relationship remains “a strong, close, and frank relationship that brings concrete benefits for the UK and advances our shared objectives.” That sounds to me like a continuation of what is going to be a recalibration away from a special relationship that is somewhat obsessive on the UK side towards something that they have called more essential. I think that is more about Britain talking to itself, and the Government talking to itself, rather than talking to America. I do not think we are trying to send a message to the US; I think we are trying to send a message to ourselves that we must not let the emotional connections we have had with the United States dominate our position. We have to recognise that there are divergences in strategic priorities, interests and even approaches, whether they be on Asia—we will talk about this in a minute—or Russia, but at the same time we have to recognise that there is no alternative to this being the UK’s most important relationship.

Quickly, I suppose what I would say as an opening comment is that I think this remains the Government’s most important bilateral relationship, and I think the Government is putting time into it. The travel, the meetings and the kinds of relationships that have been built have no less effort behind them. The difference is that we are both on slightly different tracks at the moment. You have two Governments, both the Obama Government and the Government in the UK, that see foreign policy as more connected to domestic politics than for a long time in the past. At times, and obviously we will come to this in a minute, the need to be able to keep your domestic politics on side may trump aspects in which there might have been a need reflexively to sustain this bilateral relationship. So there is readiness on both sides perhaps to do that more than in the past.

Basically, I would say that the relationship strikes me as not having changed that much in the past three-plus years, and it is one that is pragmatically and usefully very close and helpful to each side.

**Q2 Sir John Stanley:** Dr Niblett, from the American Government’s perspective, do you consider that the American Government still regard their relationship with the UK as being special? If so, in what way do the American Government consider it to be special?

**Dr Niblett:** I am struck by the fact that many more American officials will insist on the word “special” than we will now in the UK. Of course, that does not mean that they believe it is more special; the Americans are polite, but also they do not want the UK to slip away from being one of their most trusted bilateral relationships internationally. They give us the word—they give us the term—even though they have a number of special relationships in various types and ways. They give us the word partly because, first, we are a very important ally, and secondly they want us to stay in that space and they do not want us to feel that they

are doubting the nature of the relationship. I do not mean to be overly psychological about it, but I think there is a bit of a dance going on here.

From the US perspective, the relationship is special in the context of intelligence co-operation. The extent of that specialness has been unwittingly—or deliberately, but in some cases unfortunately—revealed through some of the recent intelligence leaks. When you look at core aspects of American security, the terrorist threats to the United States come from very similar sources to ones that we are engaged in having to tackle: Afghanistan, Pakistan, al-Shabaab, Somalia and second-generation or third-generation citizens of this country but also, as we are now discovering in some cases, of the US as well. The connectivity of the intelligence at the counter-terrorism level remains extremely strong.

It is a fact from the US perspective, although I think they are very frustrated about the extent of the defence cuts, that we are one of probably only two reliable allies that will go abroad and can go and deploy force alongside them. Even if it is minimal, the political value of it is vital. We continue to play a very important role in the special forces dimension of it, which is often what pre-conflict is these days. From the US perspective, we are a very special ally. The fact that I put “very” in front means that we may not be the only one.

**Q3 Mr Roy:** Richard Haass, the president of the US Council on Foreign Relations, has described the House of Commons vote against military action in Syria as “anti-Americanism”. Is that interpretation widespread in United States foreign policy-making circles?

**Dr Niblett:** Tempers and emotions got pretty high in the immediate aftermath of that vote, and all the policy institutes got out there and commented on what it might mean for the longer term. I do not agree with that viewpoint. I do not know whether Richard Haass would completely agree with it himself; he would probably qualify it. The fact of the matter is that there has been a real resentment that the UK had got pulled into the Iraq war, in particular, and that perhaps even the way that the Afghanistan conflict played out was a US-led operation that we have followed on.

To go from that to say that that led to an anti-Americanism is too strong. It has led to a far more critical approach to any US suggestion that the UK should become involved in overseas military operations alongside the US. That is not the same as anti-Americanism. It is a critique of past American foreign policy that the British foreign policy establishment and military establishment feel we should really learn from. So I would not call it anti-Americanism.

**Q4 Mr Roy:** You used the words “followed on”. In supporting the United Kingdom’s participation in military action in Syria, was our Prime Minister exhibiting some sort of traditional reflex of former British Prime Ministers when the US proposes military action overseas?

**Dr Niblett:** My interpretation of the situation was that there was an assumption by our Prime Minister that he had the votes to be able to get the kind of approval that he would require in order to be able to be alongside the US on an operation that he had been

advocating, I would argue, more strongly than President Obama had been. I would say this is quite different from the Iraq reflex. The reflex then was one where the US was leading and we, in the end, came in behind and pulled along. This was an example where, publicly, the UK Government and the French were very strongly in favour of arming rebels at one point and definitely of some type of military punishment for those chemical weapons, and there had still been quite a bit of resistance on the US side. The desire of the Prime Minister to be able to lead and say, “I can get a vote and be there, and if the decision to go militarily is taken on a weekend, I will have parliamentary backing” is quite understandable, and does not strike me as the same type of reflex that we have been talking about in the 2003 period.

**Q5 Mr Roy:** What would your view be in relation to the fact that they had the vote on 29 August and the Prime Minister lost it? By doing so, has that not proved in a perverse way, some would say, more influential over the United States’ thought process than if we had just agreed to go ahead?

**Dr Niblett:** It depends what you mean by the US thought process. As we saw, the decision by President Obama not to go ahead with the military strike was taken—yet again—over the objections of all his closest foreign policy and security advisers. This was the second time that the President has overruled them.

**Q6 Mr Roy:** But what about the influence of our vote?

**Dr Niblett:** I think our vote influenced the US President, but I do not think that it necessarily influenced the US thought process. I can go back to the Richard Haass reaction. There is often a difference between foreign policy establishments and political leaders. We have seen it here in the UK between the desire of the Prime Minister and of a number of members of his party to be able to push ahead with some type of action and the resistance of a lot of the UK foreign policy establishment to that particular course. In my opinion, it had an impact on the President’s thought process and gave him some room to follow what I think were his instincts.

**Q7 Mr Roy:** That was the short-term process, but what about the long term? How does that affect the relationship?

**Dr Niblett:** If I may say so, this is where it becomes more interesting. I suppose that the simple answer would be to say: “Look, all’s well that ends well. We didn’t do the vote—the US didn’t do the vote. Now we have a UN resolution on chemical weapons and maybe this will be some type of doorway to a Geneva II process. Therefore, after that Syria vote bygones will be bygones”. I take a less sanguine view. In both capitals in the UK and in the US—let us say in Washington and among many of America’s allies—there will be questioning and wondering now about what does America’s word to be there and push on something mean. Ditto, from the American standpoint, will the Brits be with us at a moment of crisis like this again?

Both of us are looking at the other askance. By the way—I know that this extends beyond the coverage of this hearing—but if you are in Manila, Seoul or Tokyo, and you are looking at what US deterrence means, it is time to wonder where are the red lines, where do they stand and where do they stop? Things may end up being okay—things may not go down a terrible track on the Syria course—but the idea that there is a selectivity to when we are special and when we stand alongside each other is now becoming part of the normal lexicon. We will be selective: we are special, but we have to take our own sounding. The very fact that Governments in the west in general have taken such a beating from the sequence of the global financial crisis, where eyes were taken off the ball, together with Iraq and its management and Afghanistan, there has been a real loss of confidence in governance by the people, if I can put it into a large picture. Governments are trying to reacquire some of that political legitimacy by giving voters more of a say on foreign policy.

It is my personal opinion, but if you give voters a say on foreign policy issues in which they have less time to get deeply embedded, the answer is generally: “Hey, if you are asking me, no. I thought you guys decided this stuff. You’ve got more information than I have.” If that is going on in the US, the UK and maybe other parts of the world, we may end up in a Germany-type situation. If we are all a bit more like Germany we will all be a bit more selective about what we do and do not get involved in. That will have implications for the US-UK contribution to transatlantic security.

**Q8 Ann Clwyd:** Dr Niblett, is there widespread agreement among US foreign policymakers that the doctrine of humanitarian intervention allows the use of military force against another state to be lawful in the absence of a UN Security Council resolution?

**Dr Niblett:** I do not consider myself to be an expert on this, but I will do my best to answer that question. Hopefully you will put it to my colleagues who will take part in this evidence session later.

My sense about the United States is that it has been for a long time the architect of international institutions such as the UN, GATT, the WTO, to the extent that, having been the architect and having written the laws, it has felt that it can sometimes set the laws to one side. Being the country that upholds the laws and that gives them their backing and, in many cases, their strength and meaning, gives the US a rather exceptional position vis-à-vis laws at times. The US may be—if I can use this word—selective about when it thinks, say, UN backing for humanitarian intervention is absolutely indispensable and when it is not.

In the UK, resistance to the Syria intervention had a strongly legal dimension to it—it was tied into public opinion, but the law was a strong part of it—but in the US, it was much more to do with plain public opinion. There was a concern that, in domestic politics, the US President was going to find himself with Republicans saying, “Yes, go ahead; get involved in that conflict,” then coming back later and hitting him over the head when it went wrong. He took what he thought was an astute political decision, although I don’t think international law entered deeply into it. You have in Susan Rice, the national security adviser, and Samantha Power, the UN ambassador, two people who were strongly involved in the concept of responsibility to protect and wanting to get that at least into an international format, within which the responsibility to protect doctrine was developed. In my opinion, if the US feels it

needs to act, even on humanitarian issues, beyond the remit of UN approval, and if it thinks blocking is taking place it will not be hamstrung by international legal requirements.

**Chair:** It was quite noticeable in the build-up to the non-intervention that the words “responsibility to protect” rarely came into speeches. It was only when people were under pressure that they made that point in defence.

**Q9 Mark Hendrick:** Dr Niblett, do you believe there is any evidence that UK policymakers feel that being close to the United States is an end in itself?

**Dr Niblett:** I think yes, and I don’t think there is anything wrong with that. The US is the most powerful nation in the world. It is a nation that, for various reasons, seeks to use that power. It may have adjusted the way it uses it after the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan, but times come and go and circumstances change. The United States, unlike many of the world’s other great powers, continues to have a sense that it can defend itself best furthest away from its shores, as we saw recently in the abduction of the al-Qaeda operative in Libya and the attempts to take the al-Shabaab leader off the coast of Somalia. From their approach to the use of drones, we can see that this Administration, even under Barack Obama, will project force and seek to secure themselves and their security as far from their shores as they can. If the UK Government have global interests—whether from citizens or business—or concerns about terrorism and radical groups, they are going to want to know what the US is thinking. We are going to want to try to have some type of influence over those decisions, and being close to the US is a way to do that. That is a logical thing to do.

I think it is fair to say that there is something unique—I am not deliberately avoiding the word “special”—about the UK and the US’s strategic outlooks. We are both countries—in our case, for more historical reasons and in the US’s case for the reasons I just gave about wanting to defend forward—that understand security as being beyond our borders, not just something that you can hide behind our shores in protecting. The UK is especially sensitive, given our experience of terrorism, that instability far away from our shores can come back and hit us at home. The US has a similar concern and a similar type of outlook.

We both have deep investment in open markets and a rules-based system because of our dependence, especially in the UK case, on global trade—in the US case, it is global investment. Certainly, what will help drive US growth in the future will increasingly be what happens beyond its shores.

We are both in the UN Security Council. We are both key players of NATO and, again, with forces that can be projected, and generally we have had the political support to do that. If I add all those things up, put in the intelligence relationship and the nuclear relationship, I think it would be irresponsible of any UK Government not to try to be close to the US.

**Q10 Mark Hendrick:** Do you think that the UK is less valuable to the US than it was in the past?

**Dr Niblett:** In relative terms, I think it is less valuable.

**Q11 Mark Hendrick:** Do you think that the US is less valuable to the UK than it was in the past?

**Dr Niblett:** No, I think the US remains as valuable, even though we do not agree on everything: from climate change negotiations to how to deal with Russia; austerity; Arab-Israel—I could go through the list of day-to-day policy issues we do not agree on. However, for the reasons I have just described, at that strategic level, the US remains incredibly important to the UK.

From the US perspective, the rebalancing of foreign policy to Asia, we are tangentially valuable to that—probably more valuable than any other European country—

**Mark Hendrick:** I will come to that in a minute.

**Dr Niblett:** Sorry. Let me hold off, then, on pivots and rebalances. Within Europe—unless you are coming to this later on—there is the issue of the growing ambivalence that we feel about our relationship to the EU. Again, if you look at the desire of Governments to be as close to their peoples as possible on issues of foreign policy—this is not just a Syria question; this reads over potentially into Europe as well—you will find from a US perspective that there is concern that our ambivalence to our position in Europe means that they have to hedge. They will hedge with France on security issues. They will hedge, perhaps, with central and eastern European countries on different issues. A lot of their bases are now in Italy, thinking about how they will project power down into the Mediterranean area and, obviously, the relationship with Germany is hugely important in terms of the broader eurozone. I think, on the area of Europe, we have become relatively less important. We were a swing vote; we were the—agent is too strong—country with the closest views to the US inside the European debates, but now we are less attached.

The second most important area, where we have clearly declined in value, is in the scope of our military capabilities. We have it in critical areas such as in special operations forces and intelligence forces where we remain as valuable as ever, but if large-scale force needs to be deployed, we do not necessarily have it. Again, I do not want to get on to pivot stuff, but if the US has to go somewhere and has to thin out somewhere else, are we in a position to back them up where they thin up? I am not so sure. So, on the security front, the Europe front and America's changing strategic perspective, for those three reasons we are less relevant.

**Q12 Mark Hendrick:** In terms of securing US support for UK international objectives, what is more important: the scale and quality of the UK's contribution to the US-UK defence relationship, the UK's diplomatic effort, or the political persuasion of the incumbent US President?

**Dr Niblett:** It is very difficult for us to influence—I have to be careful what I say, because there are historians in the room who will probably correct me—or change a US president's doctrine, instinct or position. Perhaps at the margins—Reykjavik, and Maggie Thatcher trying to get Ronald Reagan off and doing unilateral nuclear disarmament almost immediately. There have been moments when relationships with Presidents and so on have

been important, but, in the environment in which we are in now, which is multifacetedly complex and where, as I said earlier, the domestic dimension plays so much more into foreign policy—I am trying not to say, “All of the above”, but I am backing into a “not all of the above” answer—I will strike off the President as being the most important. That aspect is important—I do not underestimate it—but it is not the most important.

That brings us to defence and diplomacy. In today’s world, I would say that, marginally, our defence capabilities remain more important, but I think that that is changing. The reason I say “marginally” is that in the next four to five years, and it is already happening, our diplomatic capability may become more important. It is the extent to which—and I think that this Government has perhaps got it right—as we develop our bilateral relationships, which is principally a diplomatic exercise with some security back-up, we can manage and triage those with the US to meet our collective objectives. This will become a more important thing in future.

The combination of diplomacy and development, and trying to make sure that conflicts do not emerge or spill over, which has less of a defence component and is more about diplomacy and how we tie that in with development, will become more important. That kind of G8/G20 summitry—how you manage collections of countries around agendas—will become more important as US relative power declines and Britain becomes an agenda setter. We did that quite well in the G8 presidency, which we held this year. Diplomacy is coming up on the inside track and, in rather crude terms, defence and intelligence—if I can count that in there as well—remain the thing that, in the end, the US just cannot do without right now.

**Q13 Mark Hendrick:** In our relations with third countries, is closeness to the US a positive thing, or do you think that our independence is a better chip to play?

**Dr Niblett:** This has changed in the past two to three years. Our closeness in the era of George W. Bush, to be frank, was not a help with third countries. Right now, people do not think that we are as close to the US as we used to be, so we are not under the same disadvantage. They look at America’s concerns about our Europe policy, at our declining military capabilities and at the US pivot—we will come to that in a minute—and they put all those things together and they think, “You know, is the UK as important as it was?” So they wonder, but then they look at the intelligence and all the stuff that came out through the Snowden leaks and they think, “Ah, so there is still that special relationship under there somewhere.” Has that been a help? Potentially, that is a little bit of a problem for us.

I am trying to think of a decent answer to give you. On balance, every country knows that the US is the most important other country in the world. All countries know that we have a somewhat better “in” than just about any other country. They are not sure that we are that influential, but they think that we may be better informed and that we may be able to get a message over, or back it up, better than just about anyone else. It is in that kind of rather ambivalent way—we do not carry many costs any more, but we carry some minor advantages.

**Q14 Mark Hendrick:** Coming to the pivot, do you believe that the UK Government need to do anything about the US's pivot towards Asia? What do you think our response should be?

**Dr Niblett:** If you take my earlier point, that one of the most important issues is to remain close to the United States, for our own self-interest, then to the extent to which we are not interested in security in Asia, we will be increasingly less relevant to the United States. To the extent to which we try to split out commercial diplomacy from, let's call it security diplomacy—America both engages economically and hedges from the point of view of alliances and security—there is a slight risk that in our rush for our wonderful bilateral commercial diplomacy, we will trip over some of the trade-offs that need to be undertaken. I know that our relationship with China is back on track, but America takes a very different view of its relationship with China at all sorts of commercial and security levels. We saw that with the arms embargo when we were in favour of lifting it back in 2005-06. The UK was hit as hard as any other European country for making that proposal.

On one hand, we need to be attuned to security in Asia. I think we are, and I think the Foreign Office in particular has been trying to push that, as it is important. Secondly, from an operational and practical standpoint—Malcolm Chalmers may get to this later—in terms of how we think about our defence investments, my view has long been that to underestimate the value of naval power in the next 10 to 20 to 30 years will cost us in terms of our national interest and certainly our ability to be engaged in what will be one of the most important geopolitical realignments of the 21st century, which is the changing balance of power in Asia. I don't think we can hide from that. It does not mean that the UK needs to be involved in some defence operation of Taiwan, but if America needs to deploy significantly large amounts of its naval and other assets to the Asia-Pacific region, who is backing up on other trade routes, who is looking at the Gulf, who is backing up on piracy? Where are we? I think that is part of the UK's responsibility.

**Q15 Mark Hendrick:** You think perhaps the UK and France will be looking after Europe and the Atlantic, while the Americans focus on the Pacific.

**Dr Niblett:** Absolutely. I think that would be a more natural division of labour given both our political inclinations and our security and alliance interests. We have some security interests in the Asia-Pacific region, but not to the same extent as the US. What should we be doing about it? We should be understanding and close—we have the capacity to do that—which means ensuring that we hedge a little in our own commercial diplomacy, and we need to think about what that means for defence investment in future.

**Q16 Mark Hendrick:** Finally, both the UK and the US are building up good relationships with many of the world's emerging powers outside the transatlantic area. Do you think this will be the UK piggybacking on US influence to extend its global influence and reach, or do you think the UK has its own distinctive assets to bring to developing relations with emerging nations?

**Dr Niblett:** To answer the first part of the question, I don't think the UK can piggyback on the US in its relationships with emerging powers. It is one thing to say that we

do not necessarily suffer from being close to the US in third-country eyes, but it is different to say that we benefit in terms of pushing our own agenda. We have very little to gain from trying to follow the US, or to be in tandem with the US, in third-country relationships. I don't think the US is looking to have us sitting alongside it on such things.

Sorry, what was the second half of your question?

**Q17 Mark Hendrick:** Does the UK have its own distinctive assets to bring to any relationship with an emerging nation?

**Dr Niblett:** I am with the Prime Minister on this. I think we have a number of assets to bring. Many of the strongest assets that emerging countries will want to move into in future will be variants of the rule of law and transparency. They may not be there yet, but we see how London is used as a place for legal and court cases. We see how the elites send their kids here for education. We see how they use London as a base for IPOs and other commercial operations. The UK is the second largest service exporter in the world after the United States, and certainly the largest per capita.

We have real assets, for all sorts of historical reasons, within that broad service sector that runs from finance, law and accounting through to communications, education and creative industries. These are real assets where we can compete with the US, to be frank—sometimes out-compete the US—and where by being able to export, embed and cross-invest we are actually opening up some of the better transparency that will help those emerging powers become more stable emergers. One of the biggest risks in emerging countries is that they drop off the rails at some point—that they hit a middle-income trap and what seems like opportunity turns into crisis, and then you have large middle classes that become frustrated and, potentially, political instability. Political instability then leads to looking for scapegoats, and suddenly in Japan, China, Taiwan—take your pick—things start to go bad. The UK can really play, in a self-interested way because it is good business, a valuable role in that space.

My second point, very quickly, is that we have shown a deft hand in our diplomatic capabilities at a global level. We are somewhat hamstrung in our ability to show a deft hand in Europe these days, and we are having to play a more defensive game. I am not saying that it is always a bad game. I think the reform agenda is a good agenda to have in Europe, but it is a difficult one to play. To the extent that we are not seen as being as close to the US, which we are not, just look at the G8 tax transparency and trade agenda; objectively you could say, on a non-partisan basis, we played a pretty good hand. I think that is a space the UK could play in in the future.

**Chair:** Dr Niblett, we have got two more groups of questions for you. I know that you are on a tight timetable and, more to the point, one of the witnesses behind you is also on a tight timetable, so can we keep the answers focused?

**Q18 Andrew Rosindell:** Good afternoon. Do you believe that from the point of view of the United States the proposed transatlantic trade and investment partnership is purely about boosting economic growth, or do you believe that it has a greater strategic significance?

**Dr Niblett:** The quick answer is that it would be hard for me to split out which is more important. It is important for both reasons. It is important for economic growth, for all the reasons that are laid down. The figures have been put out there, including \$100 billion growth in the US market, and so on. There is a real opportunity for them to export more and invest more efficiently for better returns. They definitely see an opportunity for economic growth at a time when growth is going to be hard to sustain in the US at the kind of rates they had before. They also have the competitive advantage now, with cheap energy inputs, to export at a cheaper price to Europe. From a plain commercial standpoint, there are plenty of advantages.

Strategically, though, it is also important. There is a risk for the US—it is a risk for us in the UK as well—that NATO will become its own back-up insurance policy. If we have coalitions of the willing and we need them, we have got a few people who, if we agree on the issue, are trained up and can command and control, and we can do things together. Really, NATO is not a place to discuss the big strategic stuff. The US may, in its own slow way, detach somewhat strategically from NATO. What takes its place? I think what we will end up with out of TTIP is a constant process of regulatory negotiation, convergence and debate that ultimately, if it does become that, could become rule-setting for the world and counteract some of the risks of a less transparent approach to business that may emerge from some of the emerging powers.

There are three reasons for the US: first, there is commercial advantage; secondly, it becomes a new forum for transatlantic co-ordination; and, thirdly, it acts as a counterweight somewhat to the rise of some of the emerging powers that do not share the same values.

**Q19 Andrew Rosindell:** Do you think that with TTIP being agreed, the US and the UK will have a closer relationship through that partnership, or do you think it will actually dilute that relationship?

**Dr Niblett:** I think, on balance, closer. We are closer on a number of the regulatory issues than some other countries. Our economy has less to be out-competed on. France, to state the obvious, has more issues in which US unfiltered competition could be detrimental politically to their political economy, not just their economy—maybe even Germany as well. We are likely to be closer, on balance. We will have some issues where we might disagree, but on balance we will be closer.

**Q20 Chair:** Dr Niblett, there is, as you are well aware, a UK-US Joint Strategy Board. I am slightly vague as to how often it meets. Are you aware that it has played any significant role?

**Dr Niblett:** I would have to speak from third hand, rather than first hand or even particularly good second hand. I hear that it has not lived up to its billing. The logic is there, for the reasons that this hearing has already revealed with its questions. But naturally—and I do not want to be over-critical here—the last two or three years have been one of the most complex times in international relations that certainly I can remember. We do not have time to talk about Egypt or about Syria any more, because we are on to Iran—never mind TTIP or China's rise, etc. So it is not surprising to me that the urgent has overtaken the important.

Much as the National Security Council, perhaps even in the UK format, ends up spending more time on the urgent rather than on the strategic, so the bilateral effort to do the things that should be done—

**Q21 Chair:** Do you think that we are strategic enough?

**Dr Niblett:** No, we are not and if Government do not have the time, it is the job of organisations such as ours, RUSI, IISS, the universities and all the folk you have here on this panel—to try to do our bit to help to do that.

**Q22 Chair:** Dr Niblett, thank you very much. While I have got you here, may I congratulate you on a very successful Chatham House event with Hillary Clinton on Friday afternoon? It was rather relevant as far as we are concerned with this inquiry, and it was a tremendous event. Many congratulations and thank you very much for coming this afternoon.

**Dr Niblett:** Thank you and thank you for listening and for this opportunity. It was much appreciated.

*Witness:* **Dr James D. Boys**, Associate Professor of International Political Studies, Richmond University and Senior Visiting Research Fellow, King's College London, gave evidence.

**Q23 Chair:** Moving rapidly into the hot seat, I now welcome Dr James Boys, who is the associate professor of international political studies at Richmond University and a senior visiting research fellow at King's College, London. I am sorry that you have had to wait, but at least you saw the reason: democracy barging in on this occasion. May I start with the same general question that I put to Dr Niblett at the outset, which will perhaps allow you to say anything you want by way of opening remarks? How would you characterise the coalition Government's approach to the United States?

**Dr Boys:** Thank you, Chair. I offer my congratulations on your appointment to the Privy Council.

I think this is very interesting. It is certainly a great pleasure to be here this afternoon before this panel. I commend you for your hearings on this. One of the problems has been that in the past there has been far too much uninformed navel gazing, yet far too little intelligent and informed discussion about US-UK relations. From some of the questions that we heard in a previous session, it is clear that there is too much focus upon whether the current Prime Minister gets on with the current occupant of the Oval Office. I hope that we can address issues such as history, tradition, culture and language, which have united our nations over the past 200-odd years.

If we look at the attempt by this Administration to come to power and try to redress the relationship with the United States that it inherited after the last Labour Government, we have seen an attempt very much to recalibrate that relationship. There certainly was a sense

among the incoming Conservative members of the Administration that this relationship had been imbalanced. You had seen an odd turn of events perhaps, that had seen Gordon Brown come to office seeking to distance himself from George W. Bush for political reasons, then hoping to get a good relationship with Barack Obama that seemed to fail to materialise.

Any hesitancy that could have emerged in Washington over the decision to invest in this relationship with the coalition Government, perhaps because of concerns about whether it would last and the duration of the Parliament, were put to bed by the commendable decision by the Government to make sure that it would survive an entire term in office. That, I think, has allowed for the development of a good relationship between the Prime Minister and the President, which has filtered down through various levels of Government. I certainly hope that today's hearings and the investigations you are carrying out will help to cement that moving forward.

**Q24 Chair:** Do you think it differs from the 2005-10 Government?

**Dr Boys:** I think that what you have seen—I said this in my opening statement and my submission to the panel—is an attempt to redress that relationship. We are all familiar with the unfair accusations that were levelled at Tony Blair during the George W. Bush era, and the “poodle” concept. Whatever one thinks now, I don’t think anybody is referring to David Cameron as Barack Obama’s poodle. I think that is in everybody’s best interest.

**Q25 Mr Roy:** We have heard the word “anti-Americanism” used in relation to the vote here on 29 August. Is that interpretation widespread in foreign policy and with decision makers in the United States?

**Dr Boys:** Certainly Richard Haass is a distinguished individual, and one respects a lot of the work he has done, but it is important to recognise that there is a political dimension to his writing and his work. I don’t believe the vote in the House was a vote of anti-Americanism. There were widespread domestic British reasons for why that vote occurred, and that cuts to the heart of why the vote went the way it did.

Senior members of the Administration and people who understand the relationship in Washington DC will realise that just as domestic matters in the United States have a huge impact upon foreign affairs the same is true in the United Kingdom. The Speaker of the House, Tip O’Neill, famously said, “All politics is local,” and the same can be said for international relations. We forget the domestic impact on foreign affairs to our detriment all too often.

**Q26 Mr Roy:** You spoke about the relationship between the Prime Minister and the President, but was our Prime Minister falling into a niche when he went along with the idea of going into Syria with the Americans? Was that a typical thing for a British Prime Minister to do?

**Dr Boys:** I don’t think we have seen anything particularly typical this time. Indeed, one has to be careful about what lessons to draw from history. Although we can certainly see

examples of British Prime Ministers following the American presidential lead, we can also see the opposite occurring. One is reminded, for example, of Margaret Thatcher's famous quip to George H. W. Bush, when she basically insisted that he have a spine when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait—"Don't go wobbling on me, George." So we can see the exact opposite sometimes.

I think in this case we have seen an example of the Europeans taking the lead throughout the Arab Spring period. People talk about the Americans leading from behind, for example. That certainly wasn't something one heard during the Administrations of George W. Bush, Ronald Reagan or even Bill Clinton. I think we are in an interesting geopolitical era at the moment, where you don't see America asserting its geopolitical strategy and might as it may have done in the past. Within the Obama Administration—this is all the more revealing for having come after the George W. Bush Administration—you see a White House that is committed to a withdrawal from commitments overseas. In his decision to turn the vote over to Congress we can see an example of that. It is almost a diminution of the presidency, if you will, in terms of its efforts to engage at an Executive level on the bigger playing field, which may have long-lasting effects on the office, moving forward.

**Q27 Mr Roy:** Did our 29 August vote have a bearing on the Americans' road map and where events have ended up now?

**Dr Boys:** I think it did, but not necessarily in the way people imagine it would have done. If you look at what happened here you see a Prime Minister who was trying very much to learn the lessons from what had happened 10 years before. There was a sense, rightly or wrongly, that the Executive in this country had become divorced from the legislature. To give the vote to Parliament was commendable. It was unfortunate, from a political point of view, that he lost, but perhaps in the long term, as Dr Niblett said, we may see an advantage in that. I think everybody is a lot happier, quite frankly, that we have not had to get involved militarily in what would have been a very dangerous scenario.

However, if you look at Washington DC, I don't believe you see a President who was itching for a fight. In fact, I think the exact opposite. If you go back to the President's August 2012 statement, when he talked about the "red line", that was very much an off-the-cuff remark. One of the interesting facets of this Administration in Washington is that for all the praise that Barack Obama has received for his delivery of a set speech, he has tended to get into trouble when he has gone off the record. I think that ever since he made the "red line" remark, he has been looking for ways out of a commitment to fight in Syria. If he was looking for a way into Syria, there were many ways and opportunities for him to have pulled the trigger.

I assure you that no President of the United States would look to the British Parliament and say, "Gee, the Brits didn't vote our way. That has tied my hands, so I will not engage." I think the exact opposite is true. We have seen Presidents who will use their Executive action time and again, calling on their powers from the constitution to act as commander-in-chief. They would certainly not be tied by a British vote if they did not wish to be. To answer your question succinctly, I think that the Administration in Washington was relieved by the vote here. It allowed them a "get out of jail free" card, if you will.

**Q28 Mr Roy:** What will be the long-term impact, if any, of the vote on US-UK relations?

**Dr Boys:** I do not believe, ultimately, that it will have a long-term impact. It has had a short-term impact on the decision about whether to engage. Moving forward, it is far too easy to look at incidents and say, “This is bound to have a long-term detrimental impact.” That is the sort of thing that headline writers like, and it behoves all of us as academics and parliamentarians to take the longer view and recognise that often history is replete with turning points that turn out to be anything but.

**Q29 Sandra Osborne:** What is your view of whether UK policy makers want to be close to the US as an end in itself?

**Dr Boys:** I cannot speak for parliamentarians, but I can say that there are many benefits from doing so. I would certainly hope that the more one learns about the specific benefits of the relationship and moves beyond focusing on the personalities involved, the more one will realise that there are a great many benefits to be derived from that relationship.

I do not want to echo too much of what Dr Niblett said, but there is the sense that we have paid too little attention to the very strong benefits that are drawn from that relationship. One thinks, for example, of the intelligence community, and the idea that we have great ties between GCHQ and the National Security Agency. I know that that has come under rather a lot of strain because of the revelations that have come out of the US, and one or two people in particular, thanks to *The Guardian*. Once that storm has blown over, though, the long-term benefits will be seen. Again, I am sure that conversations with your colleagues on the Intelligence and Security Committee will reveal this to be the case. If you look at the stream of intelligence that flows between our two countries, and if you look at the ability of policy makers, parliamentarians, intelligence community officials to pick up the phone and have an immediate conversation with their counterparts in Washington DC, they will tell you that this is an invaluable relationship and one that we downplay to our detriment.

If you move into the military sphere, you have the idea of interoperability between battle tanks, for example, or between battalions, and satellite communications passed between nations. Going back historically, if you look at the battle in the Falklands, if you look at the degree to which the Americans were stripping down their front-line armaments to give state-of-the-art technology to the Harriers, for example, and the use of overhead technology to pass to the front-line troops so that we knew where everybody was in the south Atlantic—I think that there are many tangible benefits to that relationship. I would hope that the more policy makers know about that relationship, the more they will treasure it and wish to encourage it.

**Q30 Sandra Osborne:** Is the UK less valuable to the US now than it has been in the past?

**Dr Boys:** I think that we overstate the potential decline in our relationship, to be quite honest with you, and I will tell you why. We are still one of only five members on the

Security Council with a veto. We are still America's closest international ally militarily through our relationship with NATO. I know it is easy to focus on the potential pivot, and I do not want to preview any questions that might come on that, but sometimes we look at this like a zero-sum game and think that if somebody else wins we must lose, but look at the constant closeness of the relationship between our two countries, between our leaders, between parliamentarians, between the military and on many levels. On an academic level, there is the capacity for exchange of students—some of whom, I would point out, are in the room today—coming over from the United States to study, and going across the pond to elite universities in the United States. The history, the language and the cultural connections between our two nations ensure that, whether you define the relationship as special or unique—however one chooses to describe it—it will remain essential to British foreign policy moving forward.

**Q31 Sandra Osborne:** How about the other way around—the value of the US to the UK?

**Dr Boys:** The Americans are sensitive to our perspective of the relationship. There is a lovely story that I understand the British ambassador was involved in regarding a visit by John Major to President Clinton. When President Clinton was urged to use the expression “special relationship” he threw his head back and said: “Special relationship—how could I forget?” There is an idea that perhaps there is a degree to which that expression is used as a sop to British sentimentality.

I believe it is also understood that the concept of the “special relationship” as an expression is more familiar to people on this side of the pond than in the United States. However, whether you describe it as special, unique or essential, there is a recognition in the United States among the populace and policy makers that it is an important relationship. It is not the only special relationship. It should of course be pointed out that whenever a Head of State visits Washington, the President of the United States will say, “We have a special relationship with—” and you can fill in the blank, effectively, be it the Chancellor of Germany or the Head of State of whichever nation. There is a degree to which politeness is at stake, but to be honest, when you come back down to the importance and the intangible relationships that exist on a whole range of the issues, some of which I mentioned earlier, it is clear that on both sides of the Atlantic there is a recognition of the value in the relationship.

**Q32 Sandra Osborne:** You have made it clear that you do not think the political bent of the incumbent US President has much to do with securing active US support for the UK Government's international objectives, but what do you think is the most important? Is it the defence relationship or do you think it is the diplomatic relationship? What is your view?

**Dr Boys:** You are absolutely right. We can look back over several decades now and recognise that it really does not matter which political hue the President or the Prime Minister have. We have seen examples of Labour party Prime Ministers getting on very well with Republicans—who would have thought that Tony Blair would strike up such a strong relationship with George W. Bush after his very close relationship with Bill Clinton?

The only challenge is how one differentiates that question. Clearly Dr Niblett struggled, I think, and came to some conclusions. I would say that it is very difficult to try to divorce them, because one has an immediate knock-on effect upon the other. The relationship between the President and the Prime Minister colours the wider relationship. If you have a recognised situation whereby the two leaders do not get on, it colours and perhaps has a knock-on detrimental effect moving down the food chain—not to a point where it would be ruptured, but it would certainly make relationships less cordial.

That clearly has a knock-on effect on diplomacy. If you are trying to develop a diplomatic negotiation, for example, and there is tension in the room, then that is going to have an impact as well. That will obviously knock-on to any attempt to deploy militarily. All too often there is an overlooked human dimension to international relations and diplomacy. At the end of the day, people have to get on as individuals. However, it must also be remarked that most of the time when people are in power they recognise the fact that, whether or not we disagreed when we were in opposition, we are now the authority for our nations and it is in our national interest to get on.

Clearly, the relationship between the two countries militarily, diplomatically and politically is very important. If we try to erase one of those, we perhaps miss the bigger picture, which is that there is an interconnectivity to them. We need to examine that.

**Q33 Sandra Osborne:** What about with third countries around the world. Does the UK benefit from being seen to be close to the US or from being more independent from it?

**Dr Boys:** There have certainly been times in the recent past when we have not benefited from being seen to be too close to the US. The ideal role that we should play is first friend to the United States. Friends can be honest with one another. In the past, we have perhaps been too close and too hesitant to come forward and offer sage advice and perhaps to ask for things in turn for support. That has had a detrimental effect. Around the world during the last 10 years, people have looked at the United Kingdom and thought, “They are ultimately too close to the Administration in Washington DC.” That has changed, I believe, since the coalition Government came to power. Developing nations might well look at the United Kingdom now and say, “Fair enough, we can see a shift.”

There has also been a difference in terms of the developing nations that the United States and the United Kingdom have focused on. To give a quick example, David Cameron’s focus on India is in stark contrast to what the Americans have done. They have focused much more on China, and I know there will be certain questions coming up about the pivot to Asia. We have a colonial history to draw on to a certain degree, and if there are questions about that later, I would be happy to address them, but the idea of somehow piggybacking on the back of the United States really is not in the interests of Britain or the United States.

**Q34 Andrew Rosindell:** You mentioned the special relationship, but what is most important, of course, is that we share similar values to the United States of America. Forget the special relationship for a moment. Can you explain why, given that our nations are founded on democracy and human rights and on upholding those values, the United States of America, despite the so-called special relationship, will not support the United Kingdom

today over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, even though there has been a referendum in which 99% of people voted to remain British? Can you explain the American attitude, because I am at a bit of a loss?

**Dr Boys:** Sure. When President Obama came out with some of his remarks earlier in the year, and certainly last year, they caused consternation among many people in the United Kingdom, especially considering the very clear, close relationship that exists at a governmental level between Downing street and Washington DC.

One has to understand that the United States is not just an Atlantic power allied with the United Kingdom, but, of course, a western hemispheric power, and it is clearly trying to play it both ways. I think it wants to maintain a strategic relationship with the United Kingdom militarily, politically and at an intelligence level, but it also needs to be recognised that the United States is a western hemispheric power and therefore has close ties with Argentina. We do not, of course, see a great deal about America's ties with its neighbours to the south, because we are focused on our bilateral relationship with the United States, but if one goes back as far as the Monroe doctrine, for example, one sees that the United States very much wishes to maintain its role as master of its own house in its hemisphere, and that has great strategic, historical and political importance. The idea that the United States does not want to see any empire with a foothold in the western hemisphere is problematic for us to hear about.

One needs to remember that, at the outset of the Falklands conflict in 1982, the Reagan Administration, who were as close to Margaret Thatcher as any Administration could perhaps be accused of being, similarly had views which many in the Conservative Government at that point found very troubling. The Reagan Administration initially tried to hem and haw; they talked neutrality and about trying to be an honest broker. It was only a little later that it really came through with the goods.

I have to say, in all honesty, that if push came to shove, we would be able to rely on the United States as a firm ally militarily and politically. There is a degree to which we have to recognise that there have been political changes in Washington since the 1980s. You have a Democrat in the White House now. He will only be there, obviously, for another three years before he is forced out of office by his term limit. I think Obama has his own political perspective on this issue, but if it became more serious, and the Prime Minister of Great Britain were to make it clear to the President of the United States that a national interest was at stake, I think the American President could be relied on.

**Q35 Andrew Rosindell:** But in a similar vein, the United States completely disregards the human rights of British people on the Chagos Islands. They insisted on those British people leaving, and they refuse to allow them to go back to their home on the islands. What is it with the United States that, when it comes to British territory, they have a blind spot about human rights and democracy, but expect the United Kingdom to stand with America when they have an issue?

**Dr Boys:** There is no doubt—this harks back to some of the questions asked in the previous session—that to some degree there is a hypocrisy about the United States on the world stage. It is clearly the biggest player on the block and it always talks about the role of

international law. It hoists itself on its own petard on occasions, to be quite honest with you: the idea that the United States is the first to defend the rights of its own international citizens, its failure to sign up to some human rights conventions, for example, and the issue with the International Criminal Court, is a major problem. It is unfortunate, to put it politely, when British nationals get caught up in that. In the bigger picture, however, British history, British legalities and British politics are very closely enshrined in the United States. While it is unfortunate when incidents of this kind happen, we perhaps need to see the bigger picture and not focus upon what are unfortunate small details.

**Q36 Mark Hendrick:** Dr Boys, you were here when I asked Dr Niblett about what he felt the UK reaction should be to the US pivot to Asia. In your submission to the Committee, your point is that the UK should not overreact to the US pivot. Why? What do you mean by overreacting?

**Dr Boys:** We see this as far too much of a zero sum game. We look at the specific gain as being our loss and we need to be a little bit smarter than that. We also need to look at the lessons of history and the fact that historically we have seen examples of this attempted in the past. If one goes back to the Clinton Administration, for example, Bill Clinton tried to do something very similar. He came in after his inauguration in January 1993 and spoke repeatedly about the need to refocus upon the Pacific region, moving forward into the 1990s and the immediate post-Cold War world. He found very quickly that this was not as easy as he might have thought.

Bill Clinton is a charming individual—I have been fortunate enough to meet him—but he could not charm the Chinese. For example, he tried to tie the continuation of most favoured nation status with the Chinese to changes to their human rights record. The Chinese said, “That’s very interesting, Mr President. Let’s see how far you go with that.” Of course, in the end the Administration were forced to back down. I believe we have seen something very similar with regard to the Obama Administration. In their first term, as Secretary of State Clinton made reference to repeatedly, they focused very much the pivot to the Pacific, yet where has that led?

If you move into the second term, for example, Hillary Clinton is no longer in the Administration, John Kerry is. He made his first stop as Secretary of State very clearly here in Europe and in London, and made a forceful point of visiting Foreign Secretary Hague. Bill Clinton did not visit Europe for the first 12 months in his first term in office, and when he did, he went to NATO headquarters and not to London. You see none of that positioning within the Obama Administration, and as that Administration start to draw to a close, in all honesty you will see the great problem that the American electoral time scale presents to Barack Obama. He does not have the time to initiate the great pivot to the Pacific that people thought he may have if this had begun in earnest and stayed on track in January 2009.

**Q37 Mark Hendrick:** You and Dr Niblett both mentioned that you did not feel that the UK should in any way piggyback on the US. You also mentioned that you felt that there was a US focus on China, whereas we are perhaps more looking towards India. If you think back to the support that the US gave India on its nuclear programme, for example, obviously

India is not totally out of US eyes. What do you think UK assets bring to the project of building up strong relationships with emerging nations?

**Dr Boys:** One of the interesting things that this coalition Government have done is try to move away from a sense of collective guilt, if I can put it that way, over our colonial past. Maybe the first speech that William Hague gave as Foreign Secretary addressed this. We can play upon our great history and our great traditions in an attempt to bring out from the emerging countries of the world a sense of adherence to the rule of law. In case my statement gets misinterpreted in any way, I am certainly not talking of trying to export back to them, in a sort of “white man’s burden” focus, any facets of British life, but if you look at the establishments that need to be put in place in some developing countries, I think there needs to be an adherence to the rule of law and what we might think of, for example, as the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy. I think nations could do a lot worse than to adhere to the model that is practised here on the banks of the Thames, for example.

A great many times people ask, “Should nations adopt a parliamentary system of government or a presidential system of government?” We are actually very blessed at this point to look across the Atlantic and see one of the great problems of a presidential system of government, in as much as it can shut down. I do not believe this Parliament has the ability to shut down government, but that is obviously in your hands, if it is. Our traditions, our respect for law and our parliamentary system, which we are in the midst of today, are very much tools that could be taken to developing countries.

**Q38 Chair:** I think the position is that we go on to autopilot, rather than shut down.

Do you think the EU-US trade agreement is of economic significance, or is there a more strategic dimension to it?

**Dr Boys:** I think it is important to recognise that the TTIP has been on the table for a very long time. I am a student of the Clinton Administration, and it is important to note that the John Major Administration visited Washington DC in 1995 and had discussions about the concept of what was then being referred to as the trans-Atlantic free-trade area, building upon the NAFTA acronym. I believe it was Richard Holbrooke who said at that point that it was a good idea whose time had yet to come; perhaps now the time has come.

To address your specific question, Chair, I do not believe you can distinguish between the two. One of the interesting facets of this Administration under Barack Obama is the number of officials inherited from the Clinton Administration, under which the key tenets of US national security were formed around issues of national security, full stop; democratic promotion; and economic expansionism. If you look at what the Obama Administration is proposing, which in many ways is basically an extension of NAFTA across the Atlantic, and at how NAFTA has played out, how essential it has been to the economic development of the United States and how important economic security is both to the United States and to Europe, it is impossible to divorce the two, quite frankly.

**Q39 Chair:** Do you think that it would strengthen the UK-US relationship, or will it not make much difference?

**Dr Boys:** I think where that relationship will be very important is in deciding how things turn out with regard to the referendum that the Prime Minister has promised. I do not think the timing is insignificant, quite frankly. For example, we have the idea that London would be very much in favour of a free-trade relationship with Washington DC, yet the opportunity now emerges at the very time that the British Government have promised a referendum on whether the United Kingdom will remain in the European Union. It is quite clear that Washington DC will seek a free-trade agreement with the EU directly, and not with the United Kingdom directly, so I think one of the great challenges for this Administration is that an opportunity emerges to have a free-trade agreement with the United States and to move into the TTIP agreement at the very time at which the United Kingdom's future status within the EU is coming into question. We will have to wait and see how that develops.

**Q40 Chair:** I could not agree more. It would look pretty stupid to come out of the EU just as the EU is signing an agreement with the United States.

You may have heard the questions I put to Dr Niblett on the UK-US Joint Strategy Board, which does not seem to have taken off in the way that was originally envisaged. Do you agree with that? Do you know much about it? Have you followed its activities?

**Dr Boys:** I have, to a certain degree. In fact, my written submission to the panel very much focuses on that. I put out a report that unfortunately got completely consumed as it was released on the first day of the Olympics last year.

**Chair:** Have a word with your press officers.

**Dr Boys:** Yes, indeed. They have been severely rebuked.

Liam Fox was kind enough to put his name to the paper that was produced, which very much talked about the decision to initiate a Joint Strategy Board and lamented the fact that the board has been a bit of a dead duck, quite frankly. When it was announced during President Obama's state visit here, it was, as I understand it, added quite late in the day to the press release. What it sought to do was perhaps to institutionalise a relationship that happened in practice, if not necessarily by statute. Whether that is a good thing or not is debatable. Sometimes there are benefits from having loose affiliations that allow ad hoc meetings.

The idea of initiating a Joint Strategy Board to bring together the national security apparatus of the United States with that of the United Kingdom had its benefits. One of the problems is that if you announce that you are going to do something and make a big fanfare about doing so and then nothing follows through, you have raised all sorts of levels of expectations and you start asking questions like, "Where is this Joint Strategy Board? How is it meant to meet? What is going to happen with it?" It would perhaps have been better either not to have launched it or to have waited to launch it and done it properly.

That cuts to some of the problems that the coalition Government had with its redesign of the UK's national security strategy architecture. There was an attempt to reach across the Atlantic to take acronyms such as NSC, for the National Security Council, and initiate them in a very quick fashion without necessarily thinking through how they would be deployed on

a day-to-day basis. The JSB was a very good idea. My understanding is that it has not been implemented to the degree to which it was meant to be, and that is all too lamentable.

**Q41 Chair:** Is it too late to turn this around? Should the Foreign Office be doing anything to correct it?

**Dr Boys:** There is a role for the Foreign Office to play, very much, with regard to US-UK relationships. I for one would like to see a far greater emphasis within the FCO on American specialists. The fact that we only have one part-time specialist working in the FCO on US foreign policy or American issues is remarkable, and if the general public knew that, I think they would be quite surprised. We may well have 400 members working out of the American embassy, which is remarkable, but we really need to have more specialists here in Whitehall.

I know that Ambassador Meyer, when he was our man in DC, called for the idea that if we are going to train cadres to come in to focus on Chinese, Russian and EU specialists, we really should have American specialists working in Whitehall. The idea of strengthening the JSB is of great importance, and the Foreign Office could take a great lead in doing so, but it would need to have the tie-in and the buy-in of the American National Security Council if it is to do so.

**Chair:** Dr Boys, thank you very much. It has been a very helpful session, and we really appreciate you taking the time—and bringing some of your students with you.

**Dr Boys:** Thank you very much, Chair.

*Witness:* **Professor Malcolm Chalmers**, Research Director and Director (UK Defence Policy), Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), gave evidence.

**Q42 Chair:** Professor Chalmers, may I give you a very warm welcome? Thank you very much for coming along today, and for finding the time to come and speak to us. You have had the opportunity of being able to listen to your predecessors, because we have had a couple of votes here and are running the best part of half an hour behind schedule, I am afraid. I am sorry about that. Is there anything you want to say by way of opening statement? I have a fairly general question to start with. In the 2010 SDSR decisions, what weight was given to considerations about the impact on the UK's relationship with the United States?

**Professor Chalmers:** Perhaps I can make a couple of remarks first, if I may, Chair? I add my congratulations on your appointment to the Privy Council to that of the other witnesses.

**Chair:** You are very kind. Thank you.

**Professor Chalmers:** I wonder whether I could start with the Syria vote in the House of Commons, which you highlighted in your call for evidence. I think that that crystallised a

shift in the approach to military intervention, both in our country and in the United States which has really been happening since 2009-10. That has significantly raised the bar for military action, certainly when military action is dominated by intervention rather than by deterrence and defence. Indeed, Defence Secretary Philip Hammond alluded to that area.

That links to your question about the SDSR, because that shift, if it continues, will shape the sort of decisions and priorities taken in the next SDSR. There is a danger in this regular review process that we start thinking about the next one while we are still implementing the previous one. It is a difficult balance to achieve but, at least for outsiders such as myself, it is our bread and butter to think about these broader strategic questions and that is indeed what I will do.

The one point I would make, by way of further introduction, is: I do not think the way that vote in the House of Commons turned out was bad for the relationship with the United States. Indeed, in some ways it was an indication of the degree of influence the United Kingdom has, because if the vote had gone the other way and the House of Commons had backed military action, I think it probably would have happened within days of that vote, and the United States would have taken its place. The fact that Parliament declined to support military action clearly had an impact on the calculations of the President, who was, of course, reluctant to take action himself. The way it has turned out in Syria—which none of us predicted, I think—has, so far, at least on the issue of chemical weapons, probably exceeded the expectations that we had.

In the short term, that has not been a bad outcome or detrimental at all to the degree of influence we have, but the whole continuing episode has reinforced that general trend away from discretionary military intervention. It is the biggest trend; more than the pivot or rebalancing—we will come on to it later as another overlapping trend. The withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan and the reluctance to get involved in more such operations is, I think, shaping the debate about defence in the United States, as it is here.

**Q43 Chair:** That is helpful. On the SDSR, are any of these things being implemented at the moment? Do you see any of the focus towards the US actually materialising?

**Professor Chalmers:** I think our defences, conventional and nuclear, have been closely integrated with the United States for a very long period of time.

**Q44 Chair:** Is the US showing a lot of interest in the Trident successor?

**Professor Chalmers:** On Trident's successor, all three elements of the deterrent are reliant on US technology to a greater or lesser degree. The missile we already have, and it is therefore the area in which we are less dependent, but in terms of a possible future warhead or the submarine, we are clearly reliant on decisions in the United States.

From a UK point of view, the risk in relation to the United States is that those involved in nuclear decisions to the United States do not always pay enough attention to UK requirements, which are not the same as US requirements. I think there is a risk that planners in the United Kingdom are aware of. In terms of the United States' attitude towards our

domestic debate on this issue, the Trident alternative review and so on, it seems to me—I think this was true also in the SDSR in 2010—that American officials are pretty reluctant, especially at the most senior level, to get involved in our domestic defence politics, and quite rightly so.

I remember, in the SDSR, there were various people from different parts of the Ministry of Defence who would be trying to call in aid their counterparts in Washington in one branch of the American armed forces or another. Certainly at the top level in Washington people said, “No, that’s your business.” There are some areas in which we have a particular interest. The joint strike fighter—the F-35—was clearly one, because that was a joint programme with the United States, but in general the Americans are pretty reluctant to get involved in our politics. They will react when we make decisions, of course.

**Q45 Chair:** So they stand back from the strategic questions?

**Professor Chalmers:** They stand back from the capability questions, not from the strategic questions. If the United Kingdom appeared to be going into review with an option of significantly diluting the relationship with the United States and moving in some other direction, they certainly would weigh in there. The primary purpose of a regular SDSR—this distinguishes it from the national security strategy—is to make decisions about the balance of investment between different military capabilities.

**Q46 Chair:** Moving on, we are drawing down from Afghanistan at the end of next year, which will mark the end of joint operations with the United States. Can you see the UK and the US working together on joint operations in the future?

**Professor Chalmers:** I think we will continue to prepare to do so. The United States is the world’s superpower, and it is very much in our interest to have a close relationship with it. For all sorts of reasons—cultural and historical—we are fortunate to have that close relationship. All our services will continue to plan for operations together, and if there are future operations in which we feel it is in our interest to be involved, we are very likely to do those with the United States.

Our armed forces would look very different indeed if we were planning on the basis of primarily national operations. We are not. We are planning on the basis of most of our military operations—certainly above a certain level of complexity—being with others, primarily the Americans.

**Q47 Chair:** Do you feel that the UK has non-military assets that it could contribute to any future operations?

**Professor Chalmers:** The UK has many non-military assets, which are really important in the security space—in operations, but also in deterrence and in trying to avoid the need for operations. Our intelligence services are critical to our national security, and they are an important aspect of our relationship with the United States, in part because we bring real value to that relationship from our intelligence assets, and in part because we have a

degree of privileged access to US intelligence, which other European countries, even NATO countries, do not always have. That is very important indeed.

Our diplomacy also has a really important role. You see that in one crisis after another, where UK has independent knowledge and an independent ability to understand and think about things. It is no value to the Americans simply to be a yes man, but I don't think we are a yes man. We have our independent analytical capability. We come to our own judgments and we discuss them with the Americans. Sometimes we disagree, but usually, in terms of the fundamentals, we agree.

**Q48 Sir John Stanley:** Professor Chalmers, a comment was made to me in Washington on the Hill a fortnight ago, which is still ringing in my ears. The comment was, "There is a rising perception here that when it comes to defence the Europeans are freeloaders." Do you recognise and accept that perception? Do you believe it is correct?

**Professor Chalmers:** I recognise that perception. I think it is growing in the United States. It is not a new argument. You would have heard an argument like that in the Korean war of 1951-52. You would have heard a similar argument during the Vietnam war of the 1960s. You would have heard it even after the end of the cold war. It is part of the natural dynamics of the US relationship with its European allies. Clearly, in the sense that European countries spend a much smaller proportion of their GDP on defence than the Americans, it is justified.

The only thing I would add to that is that it is also true in my experience that very often, in particular among those who are not Europe specialists, the United Kingdom is not always differentiated from other European countries when that sort of statement is made. The more people know about Europe and the UK, the more they understand that the UK is in a rather different category. But even we spend a lot less on defence proportionally than the US. I am currently writing a paper about the costs of military intervention over the past couple of decades. The supplementary cost of the military operations that the United States conducted after 9/11 comes to around £800 billion; the cost for us is somewhere under £30 billion. We spent on those operations something around 3.5% of what the United States spent, and we were by far the largest European contributor to those operations. It is therefore understandable from an American point of view that they see the value of European countries—even the United Kingdom—in military terms as being of an order of magnitude less than their own. They wonder why a European Union with a GDP comparable to that of the United States does not do more.

**Q49 Sir John Stanley:** What is undoubtedly different from the Korean and Vietnam wars is the present budgetary situation in the United States. If that rising perception continues, what decisions would you expect the US Government would make about its allocations of expenditure to Europe as opposed to elsewhere?

**Professor Chalmers:** I think the allocation of defence expenditure—indeed, the basing infrastructure in Europe—will continue to decline, because the main operational role of American military infrastructure in Europe is now as a trans-shipment point for operations elsewhere. We are blessed by the fact that there is not much need for deterrent operations in

Europe because there is not much of a threat right now. The Poles would probably say that we still need to hedge against a potential future Russian threat, but even that is not immediate. In terms of the balance of investment in priorities, I think that American priorities will be in the Middle East and in Asia-Pacific, not in Europe, and understandably so.

**Q50 Sandra Osborne:** What has the reaction been in the US to the Government's intention to transfer Defence Equipment and Support to a private contractor?

**Professor Chalmers:** As in our discussions about which capabilities to cut during a defence review, the Americans will quite rightly be reluctant to get involved in our internal discussions, but I know that many of those involved in the defence procurement business and more broadly in Washington have quite a long list of questions as to what such an arrangement would mean. Of course, those questions have not yet been answered and are currently being worked through. As we test the GoCo option against the DE&S-plus option, many of those issues may well be resolved, but whatever answer we come up with here, it will be important that it satisfies the sort of questions that are asked in the United States about protection of intellectual property, about any potential conflict of interest for the contractors involved in running the process, and about how the UK Government continue to perform the role as an intelligent customer.

We should not underestimate the extent to which the full GoCo model for DE&S is a radical departure from what any other significant military power has done in the past. In that sense it is experimental. It is not a route that the United States has considered going down itself, for example. There will be a lot of questions. That is not to say that those questions cannot be answered, but in so far as the Government go for the more radical option, transatlantic diplomacy will be a really important part of its introduction.

**Q51 Sandra Osborne:** What about the current US programme of defence cuts and restructuring? Do they have any immediate direct implications for UK military co-operation, including US bases in UK territory?

**Professor Chalmers:** I don't think they have much implication for US bases in UK territory. I am not certain, but to my knowledge there are no such implications. The most worrying thing about US defence cuts is that they are being conducted in a way that is arbitrary and across the board. The sequester process means that there is no effective prioritisation. The Americans have spent an awful lot on defence; there are ways in which they could spend less if they had an intelligent discussion about priorities and cut down some of the very considerable inefficiencies in their system, but that is not what they are doing. They are taking an across-the-board axe to the programme, which is difficult.

One example of an area where it could impact on the UK if the current funding system in the United States continues and we have the continued freezing, basically, of budgets across the board is that the UK programme for Vanguard replacement depends for the submarine design on the continuing development of a common missile compartment. That is being funded on a joint basis with the United States and that programme depends on the US Congress significantly increasing funding for a common missile compartment over

the next few years. If that does not happen because of the inability to come up with a stable defence plan in the United States, that will impact on what we can do here.

**Chair:** Mr Chalmers, we have a problem in that we have another vote. This is turning out to be a nightmare afternoon as far as our timetable is concerned. If you are able to come back, on the assumption that there is one vote and we get back as quickly as possible, would you mind waiting? I will do my best to get you away by 5 pm.

**Professor Chalmers:** That is fantastic.

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

*On resuming—*

**Chair:** Once again, Professor Chalmers, I do apologise for the interruptions. Sandra, you have the floor.

**Q52 Sandra Osborne:** Can I ask you about the fact that the US is increasingly turning to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones? Cyber defence and warfare is an increasingly important element in both UK and US defence policy. How might those new areas of capability affect the US-UK defence relationship?

**Professor Chalmers:** Unmanned platforms are an area of very rapid technological development. Indeed, most advanced military powers are putting considerable resources into investing in this area, including the UK. Many of the important issues in the next SDSR in 2015 in this country will be precisely about how rapidly we should move in that direction, which clearly will have very substantial financial implications.

Where there may be continuing differences between our two countries is in the circumstances in which it is legitimate to use those. Whether they are manned or unmanned is not really the issue; the issue is about rules of engagement and the extent to which you need target-Government support if you are deploying UAVs across the frontier in the case of Pakistan, Yemen or wherever. The UK and the US have always had slightly different interpretations of the legality of such operations, and that will be a continuing issue. In terms of the purchase of those capabilities, in sea and air but indeed also in land the trend towards unmanned systems will continue apace, I think, given the technological opportunities available.

On cyber, the wisdom of the Government's investment of extra money in cyber capabilities as a result of the 2010 SDSR has been shown over the past three years, and I would not be surprised if there were more such investment in future. Certainly, some Americans I talk to will say that the UK has done pretty well in this area, on both the defensive and offensive sides, and has significant things to offer the United States. That is something that you may well want to explore further with American witnesses as you go on gathering evidence. This is an area into which a lot of effort is being put. It is very important to our national security. The amount of militarily important intellectual property that is

disappearing from both our countries, and indeed other countries, as a result of successful cyber espionage is quite staggering. Trying to defend that in future is a pretty important national security interest.

**Q53 Sandra Osborne:** Looking to the future, say 2030, what do you think the US would like the UK to be able to do in military terms?

**Professor Chalmers:** I think the answer to that is probably as much as possible. There will be elements of our military capability that right now they will value more than others. Special forces are probably one of the clearest examples of that. We can think of others, but in my view we should be careful about not organising our forces according to what the Americans see as most valuable, because from a national point of view it is more important to have a balanced and flexible set of capabilities. We do not know what is going to hit us in 10, 15 or 20 years' time, and we cannot entirely rely on the United States to fill gaps. The United States has exactly the same calculations. If something is important to the Americans in military terms, they will make sure they can do it. They have the resources to do that much more than we do. It is important, of course, to have capabilities that give us credit and a great reputation with the Americans—that is important—but in my view we need to be pretty careful about going down a road of such specialisation, if it means we become more dependent on the US.

**Q54 Mr Roy:** On military perceptions and co-operation after Afghanistan and Libya, how is our capability and performance viewed by the US?

**Professor Chalmers:** Perhaps the biggest problem in relation to both Iraq and Afghanistan—our operations in the south of Iraq and in Helmand—is that perhaps prior to those operations, we overestimated what we could do and we were brought up short in both cases. We understood that our degree of dependence on the US in operations of that scale—I am talking about both the operations in Iraq as a whole and Afghanistan as a whole, because our operations were not hermetically sealed from the broader operation—was very considerable indeed. In so far as there was in the end strategic success in the south of Iraq, it was not primarily because of us. In so far as there may be strategic success on some measure in Afghanistan, it will be due to the broader coalition effort, in which we played a part.

Do I think that as a result of those military operations the Americans think less of our armed forces? I do not think that is the case. People may say things in terms of particular units replacing the Brits in northern Helmand or whatever, but there is still a general perception that British forces perform very creditably indeed and that our forces are by far the most capable of the US's NATO allies. At the same time, we have limited resources. We can never deploy anything like the scale that the Americans can.

**Q55 Mr Roy:** In broad brush terms, are our relations better or worse after Afghanistan than they were at the beginning? Are we perceived better or worse?

**Professor Chalmers:** I think the fact that the UK has been the most reliable and largest-scale European ally in Afghanistan has enhanced the UK's reputation in the US. All I can say is that we should not overstate that impact. It has been very important. We deployed something like three times as much as the next largest European contributor in Afghanistan. The French were, I think, in a dangerous place; the Germans perhaps less so in the north. It was a very substantial contribution, but if one is being very frank, both in London and in Washington the discussion has moved on from Afghanistan. Only those directly involved in Afghanistan right now in policy terms are thinking about it very much. Across Whitehall now, people are already thinking about the multiplicity of other crises we are facing. Psychologically, people are almost in late 2014 already.

**Q56 Mr Roy:** Moving on, are you picking up any concerns among UK policy makers that the end of the joint military operation might loosen or devalue UK-US military ties after Afghanistan?

**Professor Chalmers:** I think these ties are enduring. They are deeply embedded institutionally, but even more importantly, they are deeply embedded in the strategic cultures of both our countries. That is something that will remain unless there is a major strategic shock to disrupt it. As we have seen historically, even when there are significant divisions between our two countries—over Suez in 1956, the Vietnam war or, on a smaller scale, Grenada—we have bounced back. While it might be overstating it to say that it is in our DNA, we both have a fundamental interest, as the two strongest military powers in NATO, in continuing the relationship. There are hiccups, but the fundamentals are pretty strong. It is not only on the defence side; as I said earlier, the intelligence side and the diplomatic side are also very important.

**Q57 Mr Roy:** What was the significance of the operation in Libya for UK-US military relations? What did it do to that relationship? Did it cement it? Did it loosen it?

**Professor Chalmers:** That was a case, which is not unique, of a joint operation on which the Europeans took the political lead and the Americans were leading from behind and coming in behind the Europeans, but it is not the first time that has happened. If you look at Kosovo, it was Tony Blair who went to Washington and urged President Clinton to raise the possibility of using ground forces. If you look at operations since the end of the cold war in their totality, it is as much the Europeans in the lead as the Americans, so we should not focus on only a small number of those operations. The fact that the Americans listen to the Europeans, particularly if the British and French are united—and they listened on Libya—is testament to our significant influence, and it is a disproportionate political influence given the relatively low weight of our military power. What we shouldn't do is reduce the weight of that military power so far that we begin to lose that political influence. I do not know at what weight that tipping point is, but I do know that if the UK and France only had the military capability of the Netherlands or Italy, it would be too far.

**Q58 Chair:** That completes the questions that we have prepared for you. Are there any points that you would like to make, or do you think we have covered the ground from the defence angle?

**Professor Chalmers:** I think you have covered the ground admirably, so I have nothing to add.

**Q59 Chair:** In that case, I thank you very much indeed. I apologise for the interruptions, but I am glad that I got you away on time.

**Professor Chalmers:** Not at all. Thank you.