

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: [The Indispensable Ally? US, NATO and UK Relations](#), HC 992

Tuesday 14 March 2017

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 14 March 2017.

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Members present: Dr Julian Lewis (Chair); Douglas Chapman; Jack Lopresti; Mrs Madeleine Moon; Gavin Robinson; Ruth Smeeth; Mr John Spellar; Phil Wilson.

Questions 1-86

Witnesses

I: Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman, Emeritus Professor of War Studies, King's College London, Franklin Miller, Principal, The Scowcroft Group, and Professor Phillips O'Brien, Professor of Strategic Studies, University of St Andrews.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Franklin Miller \(INA0013\)](#)
- [Professor Phillips O'Brien \(INA0002\)](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Freedman, Franklin Miller and Professor O'Brien.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, and welcome to this session on our inquiry entitled "The indispensable ally?"—with a question mark, at least at this stage of proceedings—"US, NATO and UK Defence relations". I am very happy that we have a particularly distinguished panel here today. Would you mind introducing yourselves and saying a word or two about yourselves for the record?

Professor Freedman: I am Lawrence Freedman, Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College London. I was a member of the Chilcot inquiry and have written extensively on these sorts of issues.

Franklin Miller: I am Franklin Miller. I am a principal at The Scowcroft Group, which is a business consulting firm in Washington. I am retired from the US Government, having spent 31 years in the national security area, with three years as a naval officer, two years at the State Department, 22 years at the Defence Department and four years on the White House staff under George W. Bush. I am still involved as an adviser on various groups with the Pentagon.

Q2 **Chair:** And you have a particular expertise in the field of Anglo-American nuclear relations.

Franklin Miller: I have been involved in the special relationship since I helped negotiate the sale of Trident II to the UK in early 1982.

Chair: Thank you.

Professor O'Brien: I am Phillips O'Brien, and I am a professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews. I have written a great deal on the special relationship, mostly in terms of the first 60 years of the 20th century, but some stuff otherwise. Mostly, it is the first and Second World War period and the Cold War.

Chair: We are looking forward to an intense tutorial today, so thank you all very much for coming. John Spellar will start.

Q3 **Mr Spellar:** Thank you, Chairman, and welcome colleagues. Does the basis of the UK-US alliance extend beyond the security alliance and to what extent is the relationship based on the UK having appropriate capabilities to be interoperable with the US? In that context, what does the UK bring to the table in the alliance? On the other side of the equation, are we over-reliant on the US as a military partner?

Chair: Who would like to start?

Professor Freedman: The alliance in its current form you can almost trace back to the Churchill-Roosevelt conversations and the Atlantic



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charter. It was clearly based on values, common concerns and a common sense of threat as much it was based on any particular capabilities. During the course of the Second World War, clearly the balance shifted to the United States as the senior partner in terms of capabilities and thereafter the UK was always working out how it could best influence American policy, both to look after its own interests and in terms of the general sense of western security. It has always been an imbalanced relationship in that sense. It works because there is a degree of common heritage, language, culture and so on.

The nuclear element was always particularly important, not least because that was jeopardised after the Second World War with the McMahon Act. The UK had to develop its own capabilities, and until it had done so, it could not get back into a sensible interdependent relationship with the United States. It is the intelligence side that has probably been the slightly more balanced part of it. It has always been important and is probably still as important as anything else.

In terms of actual capabilities, there has been a clear shift, because the UK is no longer as global as it was, and the UK is still struggling—you have done the report—to maintain a full spectrum of capabilities. If it was just reliant on capabilities, especially in the conventional sphere, it would be more problematic at the moment, but it has a broader basis.

Franklin Miller: The relationship is often mischaracterised as something that goes back to the Mayflower, but it is not about that; it is about shared interests. First and foremost, if our national interests diverged, it would not be a special relationship. They have not diverged, because there is a common basis in the rule of law, democracy and free markets and so on. It is on that basis that we have built an interrelationship among various arms of the national security arena. That includes scientists working in all aspects of defence. It includes intelligence across the board. It includes military operations, including the most sensitive kinds of operations—for example, submarine forces. It includes nuclear, which is unique.

I think the interoperability refers not only to the ability to embed British forces in American units and vice versa, with similar operating concepts, doctrines and, in many cases, weapons, it also includes the interoperability whereby we have people embedded in each other's headquarters, including in the Ministry of Defence and the Pentagon and in our intelligence services. There is that kind of byplay and dialogue that builds on all of this.

Professor O'Brien: A few things. As I wrote in my report, I hate the phrase "special relationship", because I think that builds into the phrase an assumption that the United States will do something that is not in its interest for the sake of the United Kingdom. I don't think that has ever been the case. I don't want to give an historical lecture, but for the first 100 years of the United States' existence, the only thing special was that Britain was seen as the greatest threat to the United States; far from being an ally, Britain was actually the greatest enemy of the United States when it looked at the world.



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What we know as this phase of close co-operation begins in 1940 to 1941, because the United States did not want Nazi Germany to dominate the European continent, and it looked at Britain as a very important element within US security. From that point on, it is not special, it is very close. It has been very close for a number of decades, and it has built up institutions. However, within that institutional framework, the United States will behave in a way that the Administration of the time believes is in the American national interest.

As it looks at Britain, I think it has, at certain times in that period, behaved much more closely than others. You might say that the beginning of the post-9/11 period was very close, but you have had other periods where it has diverged. In many ways, the first George Bush, in his reaction to German reunification, showed how quickly, if the special relationship does not work within American priorities, it will do what the United States wants.

Even if you look at the world now, you would say, "Is Britain the most important relationship for the United States?" No. I would say Japan, in a security concern, is a much more important relationship for the United States right now than the British relationship. That feeds into this question. Yes, if you want to have a very close relationship of co-operation with the United States, it has to be based on what you bring to the table. It won't be based on history.

Franklin Miller: To disagree with Professor O'Brien, yes, the relationship is based on shared interests, but that does not mean the interests will always be the same. However, there is no other country in the world with whom we have shared our secrets and embedded people in our institutions, and whose counsel we seek. That does not mean there isn't going to be a crisis in one part of the world or the other, but when you go to the American Government and you speak to American officials, the country that we rely on most to do a range of things, with a range of capabilities that no other nation has in toto, is the United Kingdom.

Q4 **Mr Spellar:** Following on from the mention of the opinions of different Presidents, to what extent does the relationship between the UK and the US rely on the relationship, respect, or possibly even friendship, between a US President and a UK Prime Minister?

Professor Freedman: Obviously, as with all of these relationships, it makes a difference. Personal chemistry can be important. Chamberlain hadn't made any effort to get to know Roosevelt, but Churchill did. I think, as you saw in the Thatcher-Reagan relationship, they were in a similar ideological place and a similar place on the political spectrum, but their personalities were very different. I think they both understood what they were doing in trying to make things work; ditto with Blair and Bush. If you have a complete breakdown in personal relations, clearly it is not going to work, but I think it is much more than dependent on the personalities of the two people right at the top, for the reasons that Frank gave. There are a lot of people working on it all the time.



- Q5 **Mr Spellar:** Getting that down to something slightly more concrete and more immediate, do you anticipate any impact from the President's expressed desire to stop supporting allies that do not pay their own way?

Franklin Miller: We are in an interesting time in American politics. The Administration is feeling its way. The President's comments notwithstanding, the Vice-President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defence have all endorsed NATO. The President's comments, and Secretary Mattis's comments in more detail, reflect the belief in some parts of America that the United States is carrying more than its fair share of the burden. All of us around this table like to think of America as an internationalist nation, forgetting that we were an isolationist nation before 1942 to 1945, so I do not think, especially with the United Kingdom, that there is any notion—any possibility—that we are going to decrease the activities we have within the special relationship. As new kit comes into the arsenal in the United Kingdom, particularly the carriers and the P8s, there will be even more co-operation.

Professor O'Brien: Partly, you might say that a lot of this is a political tool to try to make the Europeans spend more, but it would be a drastic step to therefore walk back the NATO commitment. You might say that, oddly, it has been a rather successful step if Europeans start spending more. It has had a reaction throughout Europe, so in some ways it has achieved what it set out to achieve.

Professor Freedman: Also, the whole question of burden sharing is an issue that has been around for a very long time. Robert Gates, in his valedictory as Secretary of Defence, made a very big play of it. So the Europeans have been aware of this concern for some time and things are starting to turn. My guess is that Putin is as much to do with that as Trump. There is more of a sense of a security concern at the moment than when things seemed a little more benign a few years ago. The point is that there is, and I think will continue to be, some improvement in the European defence effort. Whether it will be enough to satisfy those who do not think the Europeans pay their way is another question, but it is probably enough to postpone the issue for a little bit.

- Q6 **Chair:** What is your assessment of President Trump's attitude on this issue? How far do you think he is prepared to go if NATO's European members will not even meet the guideline of 2%?

Franklin Miller: One, I don't know; two, I don't know that he knows. As Professor O'Brien indicated, I think there is some positive movement in the direction of increased spending. Spending is an imperfect measure of commitment to the common defence, but as the year progresses and the allies continue to assess what President Trump has said, I think that things will move in a positive direction. I do not think that there will be any drastic consequences for any particular ally when the end of the year comes.

- Q7 **Chair:** On people saying that if the European members don't cough up more resources, America could turn its back on NATO, you don't buy into



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that scenario.

Franklin Miller: NATO and the United States are inextricably linked in the defence of the west against Putinism, which poses a not altogether the same but similar threat as Stalinism and Stalin's successors. The United States has a stake in the survival of Europe as a free and independent set of states. Therefore, we cannot turn our back on Europe. That said, I think it would be unwise for any particular nation to ignore what President Trump has said regarding an increased contribution to the common defence. Mattis captured it best when he said, "We can't care more about your children's future than you do."

Professor Freedman: That is the key point: the Europeans need to look at what they are doing for their own sake, for the security of the continent and for the challenges—not just Putinism, but certainly including that. If they are just doing it in order to keep the Americans sweet, I don't think that is going to be an argument that will work very well, as opposed to if you argue for the things that need to be done because they need to be done.

Also because, whatever happens over the next year or two with President Trump, it is going to be harder and harder to sustain over the long term a situation in which the United States is doing a lot more for the alliance than the other allies, especially when—we can talk about this later—you look at the challenge Russia poses. This is a challenge posed by a country that at best has the economy of a middle-sized member of the EU. I think there is a long-term issue here that the Europeans need to address about doing more for their own security, but I don't think you can rush it. It won't be rushed; it will be quite incremental. It is not just an immediate crisis, it is something that has to be looked at over the long term.

Q8 **Chair:** One more thing before we move on. It was mentioned that the UK is struggling to remain a global power. The carriers, interoperability and embedded officials have been mentioned; it is a unique relationship. In the past, when common military efforts have been made between the UK and the USA, the division of power between the two partners—the senior and perhaps the more junior partner—has been set out fairly clearly and has worked quite well. We had organisations, such as the Combined Chiefs of Staff during the Second World War and the joint staff mission in Washington where our Chiefs of Staff sat with their Chiefs of Staff.

Because the imbalance between what each partner contributes to that has shifted so much now, is there a danger that UK forces engaged in common military operations with the US will simply find themselves so integrated and so embedded that they will effectively be taking orders from American military commanders, or is there a sufficient safeguard that the UK voice will be heard in the relationship?

Professor Freedman: This is always an issue every time we are involved in a joint operation. You get round it by having a level of UK contribution that brings with it its own command functions. If you don't have that level of UK contribution, you can't complain if you are under orders. There have been a number of moments when the UK has. The famous Mike Jackson

question was at Pristina airport in Kosovo, when he refused to follow the orders of the American commander at the time—the SACEUR. I think it requires you to have your own capability; if you don't have that at a command level, then you won't.

I think there is a different sort of issue, which you can see in Chilcot, which is that the UK role was developed at CENTCOM. That was where UK officers had to be embedded in the planning process, part of the command structures and so on. Our Permanent Joint Headquarters does not really compare with that. It was a different sort of relationship. I think there is a question of the interface between the British structures and the American structures that causes confusion at times. It is not about weights of influence so much as where you make your influence felt. Our Chief of Defence Staff and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are actually two very different functions in the systems, and I think a number of problems were caused at that level of command. That reflects the different processes. If you want to have an impact, the main thing is to have a sufficient capability, and that will have to be taken into account in the planning process.

Professor O'Brien: On the amount that you can deploy overseas and the size of the force, the larger it is, the more independence you can have with the command. It is a question of how many forces and up to what degree you can deploy with the United States. I don't know what the present structures are, but with the cut-back in the Army in the last few years, one assumes that deployable forces overseas are not of a large size. I have not seen an estimate of what could be deployed if need be, with the Army at its present size, but I think it would be increasingly difficult to have command on any kind of high level with a very small force.

Franklin Miller: But I think that if you went across the road today, you wouldn't find that many British forces operating under American command. They would be operating under UK Government direction, not under joint direction. That is the first point.

The second point I would make is that American forces have shrunk since the end of the Cold War as well, so there are areas where British forces are undertaking missions that need to be undertaken on behalf of the common defence, and will undertake more missions in that regard, with respect to the GIUK gap because of the Russian submarine force. P-8s are an answer to that. Again, I don't think it is under American command; rather, it is doing things that we need to do on a joint basis, which American forces, quite frankly, can no longer cover in the way they could 15 or 20 years ago.

Chair: Thank you. Jack and then Douglas.

Q9 Jack Lopresti: About when we are deployed on operations together, the last time I think there were a lot of UK regiments embedded with the US was in the liberation of Iraq back in 2003. Are we a less reliable or easy partner, because even though we are under the same overall chain of



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command, we have different rules of engagement, and because we are signatories to the International Criminal Court and the US isn't? Does that make us a less effective strategic military partner when we work together closely?

Franklin Miller: I don't think it is less effective. I think there was, in the first instance, a lack of understanding on the part of each command structure of the other's rules of engagement. I also think, having been involved personally in '03 and '04, that the American command structure in Iraq after Saddam was toppled was weak and ineffective. Sanchez, who was theoretically the forward commander, was in my experience, when I went out in the field, not in touch with anything his division commanders were doing. You had five separate fiefdoms operating there, and the British operation at Basra was under its own rules. There were some tensions, and they had to be resolved at higher levels as people began—Lawrence is the expert—on who could do what under whose set of rules. I think one resolves that—in part, not in full—by having the kinds of conversations that were referred to earlier. Some of us have been involved in trying to restart the combined chiefs' discussions. We have done that twice or three times in the past several years. That kind of interaction is necessary to avoid being separated by the common language.

Professor Freedman: It is worth noting, on Iraq, that in the conversations that would be going on with the senior British officer deployed in Baghdad, there could often be great tension with the views of the officers based in Basra. The structural differences created their own tensions. Even within the British command structure there were still tensions.

Q10 **Douglas Chapman:** Good morning. On President Trump, does the new President's slightly more transactional approach and his desire to do a deal on almost everything change expectations of the UK and how we might have to act globally? Are we likely to see, for example, the US ask the UK to become more involved in the Middle East, the Gulf or even the Pacific?

Professor Freedman: We are likely to be asked to be involved or to wish to be involved in those places for our own reasons. Frank can address this more easily than I can, but the nature of the current American Administration makes it difficult to work out where the demands are coming from, what form they will take and how durable they will be. The transactional nature may be relevant in some aspects but not in others. The challenges for the UK lie in where we put our effort, given that it is limited, and there has clearly been a decision of sorts away from Europe. Surely that is our main concern. The Gulf is important—the GCC countries—and one of the big issues is the Pacific, because we never feel that it is possible to ignore that part of the world, but our ability to operate there is limited. That raises questions about the role of the carriers, whether they can make an impact and whether they need more escorts. Those are big issues. It could come to a head if there is a big crisis, for example, over North Korea or the island. It will come to a head in that way rather than just, "We would like you to do more here or more there."



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Professor O'Brien: Building on what was said earlier, if you look at what Trump said during the campaign, who supported him and some of the people around him, that is much more isolationist than internationalist. He does not represent the Republican party's internationalist wing. He represents a wing with a very different outlook. You might say that if push comes to shove, its inclination would be not to get involved in the kinds of events around the world as other Administrations might have done in the past. Britain would not so much be dragged by the United States into international adventure; it might be that the United States under Trump would be less likely to do that, but we don't know because it is so conflicting. He tweets something at 3 in the morning that seems to have a different foreign policy component. He has certainly been more aggressive on the South China Sea than it seemed he might be during the campaign. We just do not know, but it could go one of two ways.

Franklin Miller: I carry no brief for the Trump Administration—I have no remit in that regard—but it is too soon to make judgments. This Administration is still standing up. Its approach to the world is case by case, and not broad and already formulated. The role of some principal advisers—particularly Secretary Mattis—count a lot. Despite the campaign comments, we have seen strong reaffirmation of commitments to the defence of South Korea, Japan and NATO. I understand the question, but I do not think we have an answer at this point.

- Q11 **Douglas Chapman:** A quick supplementary, if I may. Professor O'Brien, in an article you wrote for *The Herald* recently, you said, "The truth is dawning, however, that Brexit will give the US an extraordinary upper hand in negotiations with the UK. The UK will be desperate to conclude such a deal as soon as possible, while it will be a low priority for the US." Is there a knock-on implication for defence issues? We discussed the fairly recent nuclear test involving UK submarines—

Professor O'Brien: This was an article I wrote about a trade agreement between Britain and the United States and what would happen. People were rushing and saying, "Let's have this," and I am very wary of that. I think that if Britain enters into a free trade negotiation with the Trump Administration now, it would all be on American terms, and the United States would hold the upper hand. In defence, I do not think that the United States would be unreasonable, but they would be operating from a very strong position. I am not sure how it would work in the defence relationship, given the implications of that question. I don't think it would be the kind of thing where the United States would demand changes, but you would know, Frank.

Franklin Miller indicated dissent.

Professor Freedman: Linkages of this sort are always very difficult to work out. In a trade deal, the US will have very clear interests of its own. On the other hand, the UK is a close partner, so it will be more interested than it would with other potential partners in working out a deal. This goes back to the original question of where personalities might make a difference, but we are some way away from trying to work that out. What



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I don't think you will see is, "We'll give you this sort of deal if you do that."
I don't think it works in that sort of way.

Chair: Gavin.

- Q12 **Gavin Robinson:** I am glad you called me, Chair. I feared the next question was about an independent Scotland leap-frogging the UK in those discussions, given presidential ancestry. Professor Freedman, you indicated that the Clinton Administration was more focused on economics and Asia than Europe and the US-UK relationship. Do you think there are applicable parallels to that thesis here today? If so, what are the implications of that?

Professor Freedman: Every Administration is different. I remember the story that got the Clinton Administration elected was "It's the economy, stupid." There was a strong view at the time—I think all American Administrations since, certainly including the Obama Administration, have seen a dynamism in the Asia-Pacific region. There is a fascinating article from 2015 in *The Atlantic* by Jeffrey Goldberg on the Obama Administration, in which it is clear that the President saw the Asia-Pacific region as the place where all the exciting, important and dynamic things were going on, whereas the Middle East was just desperate and miserable and no good things ever happened there. Any American President will be responding to those issues.

You would have thought—with good reason, possibly—in the early '90s and maybe at the start of this decade that that was where the big issues were. We did not really expect the big issues to be in Europe, and then all of a sudden in the '90s you had Bosnia—an issue that could return to us quite soon. In this decade, we have had Putin in Ukraine. The American gaze is westward, but they keep on being pulled back to the east because they have a global obligation to. If the Americans are really able to spend all their time on Asia-Pacific because there are no problems in Europe, that is absolutely fine; we should be very grateful. But if there are problems in Europe, as Clinton found, you still get drawn back in.

- Q13 **Gavin Robinson:** You are suggesting that the focus is on Asia because that is where the issues are. Is that to the detriment of the relationship? Does it show we are not indispensable?

Professor Freedman: I think it is a different question. The pivot was talked about before. The balancing of US policy under Obama towards the Asia-Pacific was partly because countries in that region felt neglected—not because of Europe, but because of the preoccupation with Iraq and Afghanistan, which had taken up so much energy. You were building up—and still are—to some very big issues, such as the rise of China. Unlike Putin's Russia, which is still basically a declining power, China is not a declining power. It is going to become more and more important. There is also the North Korean question. Those are big issues that an American President has to deal with.

To a degree, it is a detriment, because there is only so much foreign policy attention that any Administration can give the world and so many



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resources. But that does not mean that if problems arise in Europe, there will be disinterest or, "Well, you lot get on with it." In practice, both the Clinton Administration and the Obama Administration, when challenges arose in Europe, did give it the attention—Clinton took time, but did eventually—it deserved.

Gavin Robinson: Thank you.

- Q14 **Jack Lopresti:** How much is the UK's increasing reliance on an economic relationship with China going to be a particular area of friction between the US and the UK, among other foreign policy issues, where there is some difference between our position and your position—Russia, the Iranian deal, etc? Are they going to be developed into any real threats to our relationship, or are we going to work through them?

Franklin Miller: One has to identify where US and British policy is going to diverge in the areas you mentioned. To my knowledge, the Administration has not taken any steps or announced a policy to walk away from the deal with Iran. So to date, there is no problem there. With respect to China, the question really involves whether the United Kingdom would not join the United States in enforcing the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, which is not an internal Chinese water, as Beijing would like us to believe. So, no problem there. With respect to resisting Russian subversion and blackmail in Europe, there is no problem there. The relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom does not mean that there is complete unanimity in view on all issues, whether domestic, economic, foreign or security policy, but it does mean that there is greater convergence in those views than there is with any other nation on earth, and the capability to support positions when they are strongly held by both Governments.

Professor O'Brien: If I can add a bit to that, the China issue is the big one, and it will be because in 30 years China will probably be the largest economy in the world, if we are looking at present economic growth. It will pass the United States. So this is an issue unlike Russia, which, as was pointed out earlier, is, I think, the 10th largest economy, and declining. This is the question: will Britain be willing in not two but 10 or 20 years, if it increasingly relies on Chinese trade and is outside of the European Union, to act with the United States operating with its allies in Asia, saying, "Yes, we are willing to stand up to what is now the largest economy in the world on the South China Sea"? Would Britain be willing to do that, or even have any operable capacity to do so? That is a very difficult question to answer.

Professor Freedman: I agree. The difficulty with China is that the UK has taken a view that it makes sense to get economically close to China, and there is a precedent. The UK probably did pretty well by taking an optimistic view of Japan and encouraging inward investment into Japan, into the UK from Japan, and so on. That is a view of what an open trading relationship might mean, and so on. So the risk to all of this is not in terms of the freedom of navigation, on which, I agree with Frank, we would probably take similar views, though how much we will do to enforce



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it remains to be seen. If the Trump Administration starts getting into a trade row with China because of currency questions or because of wanting to put limits on that, there could be a major economic crisis resulting from a much more protectionist United States, if that issue is mishandled. That is an area where rhetoric has ebbed and flowed—it may be ebbing a bit at the moment.

On the Iran question, I think the problem with Iran is probably not the question of the deal, at the moment, on nuclear. I don't think it suits anybody really to reopen that. The problem is that if Iranian activity, through Hezbollah or whatever, is seen to be undermining friendly states in the region, this is an Administration probably more ready to pick a fight on those issues—

Q15 **Jack Lopresti:** Or make a stand.

Professor Freedman: Or make a stand. That is a fair point. I do not think there is much doubt that Iran is engaged in those activities. Sometimes there is more provocation than others. The point is that we may just find ourselves having to take a view on some pretty difficult developments in the Middle East. We may have to do that anyway. It is still a very turbulent part of the world and it is very close to us.

Chair: Before we move our focus to NATO, which we are about to do—

Q16 **Jack Lopresti:** I have one more question, Chair, which is quite a huge one. Basically, how do we strengthen and ensure the continuation of the special relationship? Then we can go on to NATO.

Franklin Miller: As I indicated in my written evidence submitted to the Committee, because it is a relationship it requires care and nurture. Those of us who have been involved in it have, I believe, a responsibility to bring on the next generation, to make sure that people understand the importance of working together. The fact that in almost every case I can think of there are no limits to what we do together, with respect to security qualifications and the like, is important. This is something that has to be done in the armed services, in the intelligence community and on Capitol Hill where people do not always have the full picture. This is something in which officials, politicians, soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen and intelligence people have a role. That role is not confined to the US side. It has to be done here with rising generations, and it has to be done cross-Atlantic where engagement is necessary. Much of this is human, and that needs to carry on.

Professor Freedman: I would add one point to that. My impression is that there is an enormous amount of interplay between the services and between the civil servants. In terms of new generations, I would say—I speak for two great universities here—both of us have been very involved in having Americans educated here, Brits going over to the US and so on. Where there is an area of problem is with politicians, frankly. The number of American politicians who would on a regular basis come over to the UK and be engaged has diminished enormously. Probably more British politicians go over to the States. There is not the same knowledge of other



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parts of the world, not just the UK, that there was in the past. I think that that is an area where probably more work does need to be done.

- Q17 **Ruth Smeeth:** Professor Freedman, may I follow up on that? If they are not coming here, and you do not believe that they are as interested in coming here as they were historically, where are they going?

Professor Freedman: Nowhere.

- Q18 **Ruth Smeeth:** Nowhere?

Professor Freedman: They are much more domestically focused, I would say. When I started in the '70s in this business, you would regularly see senior American policy makers come, say, to a Ditchley conference. It just does not happen any more. That is a problem. All of you know better than I that the demands on political life are intensive. Spending time abroad does not necessarily earn you brownie points at home. Those sort of close connections that once existed do not exist to the same extent anymore.

Franklin Miller: Could I observe a couple of things? First, modern technology has made it a lot easier to talk to people than to travel. Secondly, John Spellar, as I recall, is involved in a US-UK parliamentary exchange programme—I don't know if you still are, but I think you were once—so again, does that need revitalisation? Are there ways for us to create new groups or expand existing groups to create the knowledge and insight that are necessary to get political support on both sides of the Atlantic?

Professor O'Brien: I am very wary of things relying on these historical or personal connections, because they can end, and they can end relatively quickly. They come up quickly—the United States in the 19th century actually had very little in the way of these cultural interactions with British universities—and they can go away. In fact, as has been pointed out, there is a climate. I think Britain being this special area where elite Americans come to do their education is no longer the case. I think if that is what you are going to build the “special relationship” on in the future, that is probably a loser. I would say you have to build it. As Britain declines economically, in relative terms, that becomes—

- Q19 **Jack Lopresti:** We would not necessarily agree with that analysis.

Professor O'Brien: I would imagine that, compared with India and other countries, Britain is going to decline economically. That is obviously one discussion we could have, but I would think it partly has to be on how Britain behaves and makes itself valuable to the United States. Ultimately, you have to serve a purpose to the United States if you are going to keep the relationship close.

That is going to be something that needs a lot of thought because, if Britain leaves the European Union in a full break, that takes away one of the important pillars of what made the United Kingdom useful to the United States, which was as a bridge to Europe. Where is it going to be a bridge to now? What kind of role is it going to help facilitate for the United

States within European countries? You might say that it behoves Britain to stay as close to Europe as it can while it is leaving the European Union.

Franklin Miller: I think that is oversold, to be honest. In 22 years of doing special relationship work in the Pentagon, I did a lot that was US-UK. Except when I was doing NATO meetings and working the table anyway, I never went to my UK colleagues to ask them to influence the views of other Governments sitting round the NATO table. At the end of the day, if you want to get philosophical about it, the United States cannot exist as a vibrant democracy if it is an island. There is a requirement that we are part of a global democratic system, and the values that we share with the United Kingdom in that regard are greater and deeper than with any other democracy. Other democracies have not had as deep a set of roots.

I think there are obviously ways—it is important to the United States and to the United Kingdom—to have a relationship based on common interests. If those interests change dramatically, fine, the relationship will change, but I don't see that relationship changing dramatically.

Q20 **Jack Lopresti:** Because we share so many fundamentals, so far as are values are concerned?

Professor O'Brien: I don't think that connection and values is historically particularly close with Britain. I think this is something we have created—this notion of a special democratic shared values. You could say it is just as close with Australia or Canada. It is not something where Britain represents, in the historic American mind, this special thing. It might have been for a certain period in the '80s and '90s, but I would be very careful about thinking that this is something that is—

Professor Freedman: Every relationship is different. It always used to be the case that British policymakers would try not to talk about the special relationship, and then American Presidents would come over and immediately talk about the special relationship. I think there is a difference between believing that we are the first among equals, which isn't necessarily the case, and recognising that everybody has their own special relationship in some way.

I think the idea that the UK was a means to influence other Europeans on behalf of the Americans was certainly oversold. It is certainly the case that you find British Prime Ministers talking in those terms on occasion, but Germany and France, in that sense, have their own special relationship; they don't need us to get access to the White House. I think we have to be quite careful in that regard, but I think you come back to the depth of the relationship that makes the UK position different.

I am not advertising for King's, but we have now more alumni working in Washington than I can ever recall. Lots of people have actually come through not just King's but London and have worked back. That is still a very popular route. There is a lingering influence, it so happens in this area, in the national security sphere. I don't think we should underplay



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that. It means that there are good personal connections that may last careers—especially if it starts out when they are students. I do not think we should understate that, but obviously none of that would withstand a big crisis or falling out at higher levels.

Jack Lopresti: My daughter did a year at Minnesota as part of her four-year university course and wants to go work in the States. I know that that is at a basic human level, but these things matter.

- Q21 **Chair:** Would it be true to say that, every so often, people start to doubt the reality of the special relationship and then some crisis arises and very quickly because of the way in which the two countries tend promptly to rally and stand together, it then gets resurrected and reaffirmed?

Professor Freedman: That certainly happened under George H. Bush, because for very good reasons, a lot was being done with Germany—they were being united and it was the core issue. When the Gulf crisis broke, it was the British who were going to contribute. The danger for us in this is the assumption that we are going to matter when it is in the military sphere and operations may be coming. That is a danger first because it may not be so easy to do, and secondly because it may not be the right response to a particular crisis. I think we have to be a little cautious. In some crises, we may not have the most to offer. We have not been the lead in Ukraine—the Germans and the French have played a far more important role than the British have in Ukraine. They were the ones who you needed to talk to in working out positions. In the past, it has been exactly as you say, but it may not necessarily be so in the future, depending on the nature of the crisis.

- Q22 **Mrs Moon:** I want to move on to NATO, if I may. Just to pose an initial question, is NATO obsolete?

Franklin Miller: Absolutely not.

- Q23 **Mrs Moon:** That solved that one. Is there any need for a new focus then, looking at greater flexibility, so that it is collective defence and counter-terrorism? Do you see any risks in such a refocusing?

Franklin Miller: I think we need the refocusing because we were able to delude ourselves after the fall of the Soviet Union that there was no threat from the east any more, and that has clearly been proved wrong.

Mrs Moon: Indeed.

Franklin Miller: That realisation is now present in most if not all NATO capitals, but to varying degrees. Paradoxically, some that used to be the frontline of the alliance are not as strong on worrying about the threat as they were when they were the frontline. There is a relationship there.

The work on counter-terrorism is more than NATO. There is a lot of Home Office work that does not really involve NATO. It is EU, Interpol and ad hoc coalitions. So NATO has a role, and some of that role is in fighting overseas against ISIL—Daesh—and the Taliban. The existential threat to the existence of freedom and democracy comes from the east. It comes



from the subversion, from the side, from nuclear blackmail, from the snap exercises and all the rest. The alliance has to come back around to recognising that problem has not gone away.

Professor Freedman: Can I just add to that? There is a big issue in explaining NATO, because the great thing about NATO is just that it exists. If there was not that sort of alliance structure in Europe, imagine what it would look like at the moment if we were trying to create it. Alliance formation is a pre-war activity. I think it would add enormous instability if we did not have it. The great thing about NATO is that it sorts that issue out. Everyone is part of an alliance, they have learned to work together, and they are not organising against each other. Just this past week, we have seen two NATO allies, Turkey and Holland, at each other's throats. My guess is that the alliance framework could provide—I am not sure it will—one way of calming that down, just as past arguments between Turkey and Greece were handled within the alliance framework. There is a problem with NATO in that a lot of its benefits come from the mere fact of its existence, whereas people feel that if it is not actually doing something, it is obsolete. Therefore there is a great effort to find things for it to do, which can be a distraction or divisive. It is important that it is a forum in which the range of security problems are discussed. Where there is potential for initiatives within the alliance structure, they should be taken, and the advantages of integrated commands should be used. The bedrock of it is that it sorts out the most dangerous risks in European security just by having everybody sitting around the table.

Franklin Miller: Could I build on that? One of our problems is that we are reticent about the value of NATO. When you think about the demographics—I may get this a bit wrong, so don't hold me to the exact numbers—if you look at most NATO countries, between 25% and 35% of the population was born after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In Turkey, it is up to about 40%. People growing up in that generation never understood the need for NATO and didn't recognise the new, or resurgent, threat from the east—and we don't tell that story. They don't do a very good job of telling that story in Brussels and we are all somewhat leery of propagandising at home, so we don't tell the story of what the value is of the NATO alliance and why it exists anyway; why it is not your grandfather and grandmother's alliance but why it is relevant today. That is something that all our Governments and the Secretary-General need to pick up the challenge on.

Professor O'Brien: The last few years have shown the success of NATO, in why the Russians had to act in Ukraine before it joined. They haven't acted in the Baltics when they could have easily tried to foment some of their own things, because the Baltics are within NATO. The Russians were scared of the prospect of Ukraine in NATO. That is why they went in. It shows the success of the alliance and the effectiveness it has had that Russia has acted in that way.

Q24 **Mrs Moon:** I think if you talk to the Baltic states, they would say that the Russians have acted there, but perhaps not in a way—

Professor O'Brien: But not in the way that they did in Ukraine.

- Q25 **Mrs Moon:** Indeed. Professor Freedman, you described previous US Administration leadership in NATO as “fitful and not always well focused”. NATO survived. Is it going to survive the fitful and not well focused Administration at the moment? What is the threat to it?

Professor Freedman: It has been pretty durable, but we don’t know the stress tests. It is hard to be sure what will cause real problems. In 2002-03, core relationships within the alliance were strained because of different policies on Iraq. That was causing a lot of division and anger within individual countries and within the alliance. We got over it, but it was tough at the time. It is normally my view that crises themselves produce the big tensions.

I mentioned before the Clinton Administration. If you go back to the arguments over what to do in Bosnia in 2003-04, they were quite vicious. The British and the French were deeply at odds with the Clinton Administration. They got over it, because in the end the things pulling us together were stronger and also through just working out how to deal with the security problems they were facing.

We keep on saying that we don’t know enough about this Administration and we don’t know how it will develop. Both Prime Minister May and Chancellor Merkel have got commitments from President Trump on NATO. I think it can cope, unless we have another major crisis in which our interests really start to diverge. I think that for a lot of us that was our major concern about the Trump Administration’s relationship with Russia, to be frank—that there is a risk of European interests being sold out in pursuit of some grand bargain that was being talked about between the United States and Russia.

Paradoxically, I think a lot of the publicity that’s been given to the efforts of Russia to influence the American election last year and the connections with the previous National Security Adviser, General Flynn, have probably made it harder for the Trump Administration to pursue that sort of course if they wanted to. So my guess at the moment is that we are probably back to more or less where we were with the previous Administration on Russia, but we’ll see. I think that is the main risk.

Professor O'Brien: There was a worry about that election. I never would have thought that a major presidential candidate would have said, “We might weaken our commitment to NATO”, and get elected. I think that is a very worrying thing that came out of that election—that when Trump said, “Okay, we might not come to respect the NATO agreements”, it didn’t seem to hurt him in the slightest. And it wasn’t made an issue. It came up, it went away, but it didn’t seem to influence the campaign or the way people voted. That’s an interesting indication, I think, of how important it might be in the American mind, or how unimportant.



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Franklin Miller: I think I disagree there, because, as you all know better than I do, lots of things are said during campaigns and elections. What's important is what the governing party says after the election is over.

I think we collectively—no one in this room—run the risk of asking, “Do you still love me?” too many times. As President, Trump endorsed the alliance when Prime Minister May visited. The Secretary of Defence, the Secretary of State and the Vice-President have strongly endorsed the alliance.

We are continuing our build-up and rotation of forces in the Baltics. We are going to modernise our strategic nuclear forces, which primarily deter Russia. So I think we should take as a given that this Administration is solidly behind NATO.

Now I think that Professor Freedman is absolutely right that an unforeseen crisis may in fact create faultlines, but for now I think we ought to take the serving officials at their word. The United States views NATO as the foundation of its security in the world.

- Q26 **Mrs Moon:** Is the focus on the 2% actually a distraction, when really the issue should be interoperability, deployability and capability? Are we just too focused on the 2%, because that's something that people can get their heads around—the public can talk about 2%—but interoperability, deployability and capability are a bit more complicated? And is there a danger of weakening the alliance by too shallow a focus?

Franklin Miller: I think that danger has been with us a long time. I'm old enough to remember when—during the Carter Administration—it was 4%.

Mrs Moon: Indeed. We all remember that.

Franklin Miller: This is an easily digestible figure, the relationship of which to reality is tenuous—but it's out there. I mean, it's what the alliance has chosen, for better or for worse, to use as a figure of merit. I think you're absolutely right—it's a question of forces in the field, interoperability, capability, and special capabilities that are brought to the field that one nation has and others don't. So I completely agree, but the reality is that we're stuck with 2% as a figure of merit that is more political than real.

- Q27 **Mrs Moon:** But it is what we talk about; it is what everybody talks about, rather than actually talking about the critical issues. May I just move on, because I am aware that we are keeping you a long time?

Something that has been talked about in the press here is the role of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe—DSACEUR. It is held by the British, but that role also acts as the operational commander for EU operations and a collective security and defence policy of the EU, using a NATO headquarters. Could you foresee the UK losing that role?

Franklin Miller: No.

Mrs Moon: Let us hope you are right.



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Professor Freedman: I agree. There is a lot of speculation about that role, but unless there is a putsch to take it away from us we are not going to relinquish it. The headquarters, experience and so on is too important. The EU role is an add-on and it would be subtracted if necessary, but I would be very surprised if this became part of the mix.

- Q28 **Phil Wilson:** I have a couple of questions. You mentioned the Baltic states; Latvia and Lithuania are part of NATO. Do you think that was a provocative action—their joining NATO—as far as the Russians are concerned?

Professor Freedman: Certainly, as far as Russia was concerned, it was provocative. This is a big issue. The best explanation, or apology if you like, for Putin's moves is that we have put him in a corner because NATO has expanded, got closer and closer to the Russian border and countries within the old Soviet space—the three Baltic states are such—have joined the old alliance. Some people talk about this being Cold War two; it isn't really, because in Cold War one the Soviet Union was intact and had allies. All the allies have now joined NATO. I think it is the case that from the Russian point of view it all seems a bit ominous.

I was not arguing for NATO expansion in the '90s, but the fact of the matter is that it was demand-led. It was not that NATO was enforcing it on those countries; they wanted it. If you talk to the Czechs, the Poles or whatever, the idea that we were insisting that they should be left vulnerable, given everything that had happened to them in the past—they have long histories and long memories—was just not practical. Of course, we had never recognised the Baltic states' incorporation into the Soviet Union. They had been taken at the time of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and, again, those countries had memories.

I do not think there was as much choice as people think. A lot of the pro-Putin arguments, if I can put it like that, have assumed that somehow we forced ourselves upon those countries, and they did not want it, just to get at Russia. However, the reality is that there was some reluctance on the western side, but given the history of those countries, they wanted it.

- Q29 **Gavin Robinson:** I just want to build on some of the questions that Mrs Moon asked. Her initial question focused on collective defence and whether that should be stretched out into counter-terrorism. Mr Miller, you made some comments earlier about the strains or tensions between different command structures when focused just on Iraq—as one example involving two countries. In your views, does NATO have appropriate command structures? Does it have the ability to fulfil the obligations and expectations that we have of it, given that there are not just two but many more countries involved, and potentially a greater role to play internationally?

Franklin Miller: My understanding is that with respect to the fight against ISIS and against the Taliban, the command structures have evolved to a point where the multinational interests are represented and carried out in a proper fashion.



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Q30 **Gavin Robinson:** Does that have similar tension to what the simple US-UK involvement in Iraq had at the time?

Franklin Miller: I must say, Mr Robinson, that I am not an expert on that; I have not heard of great tensions in that command structure. My greater worry is about the integration of the Home Offices all across Europe and the FBI in the United States in dealing with the counter-terrorist threat on a domestic basis, and with refugees, which is not a NATO function.

Q31 **Mrs Moon:** But it should be.

Franklin Miller: If you say so.

Q32 **Gavin Robinson:** Do you have any reflections on that? No? Gentlemen, is there anything further on the command ability of NATO or any difficulties there? Does it have the appropriate focus to fulfil its role?

Professor Freedman: By and large, it does not work badly. The great thing about NATO command structures is that as a matter of course it just brings people together. That works in all sorts of ways in keeping allies, countries together, because people have worked together in NATO command. If you do have to work together, even in a non-NATO operation, there are procedures, personnel and so on that fit in easily. I would not therefore make a big play about fiddling with this. If you are dealing with all these other big security issues, it is not suited, and nor is it always the appropriate vehicle. It would be a mistake to alter it so that it can deal with tasks that are not necessarily the best uses of NATO's time.

Q33 **Phil Wilson:** On command structures and the future of NATO, how disruptive to NATO would an independent Scotland be, considering that is where our nuclear bases are situated?

Professor Freedman: We went through all this a couple of years ago, and maybe we will go through it again. If the UK is to maintain itself as a nuclear power, it is clearly extremely important for us to have a nuclear base, so the whole question of Faslane will come back again. It is not impossible to do it somewhere else, but it would be very expensive. That will be disruptive if that is how the issue is handled in this context, and if a different view is taken this time round. Beyond that, presumably the policy of the SNP is not to abandon NATO, so everything else is manageable, but the nuclear issue would be a difficult one.

Professor O'Brien: If NATO is the robust organisation that we think, and Scotland wishes to play a productive role, I do not see that it could be destructive, unless you perceive NATO as very weak. The issue would be how Scotland wished to integrate itself into NATO. Certainly Scotland is a very important part of the north Atlantic.

Franklin Miller: I confine myself to what I said before the last referendum. As I understand it, SNP policy would be to be part of NATO. The objection to the Faslane base is an objection to nuclear deterrence. It is hard to join an alliance that has a foundation of nuclear deterrence when you are opposed to that. Expelling the Royal Navy from Faslane,



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causing extreme imposition of costs, which would undercut one of the two nuclear deterrent arms of NATO, would be counterproductive to the alliance as a whole. There is some sorting out to be done if I grant the assumption of an independent Scotland, which I am not in a position to do.

Chair: Douglas, on this point.

- Q34 **Douglas Chapman:** Gavin might be interested to know there is a tweet going around that the Irish Taoiseach is currently touring the United States and has an annual visit to Washington and the White House quite soon, so it may be that other people think they have a special relationship as well. I am sure you support that.

To stop the friendly fire back and forward, RUSI produced a paper last week regarding the high north—an issue just brought into focus around the north Atlantic—and if the focus of NATO is at present very much on the east, the Baltics and to the south, to what extent do NATO and the UK need to change our thinking about the north Atlantic? Is that an essential part of future NATO?

Franklin Miller: Yes, to the degree that, in a crisis, NATO Europe would need to be reinforced from the United States. Given that heavy equipment moves by sea, control of the sea lanes, as in the Cold War, is important. Furthermore, given the proliferation of Russian naval capabilities in terms of long-range cruise missiles, it would be important to prevent Russian submarine forces from coming down through the gap further to threaten the United States east coast. So absolutely the defence of the north Atlantic is coming back into focus.

Professor Freedman: I agree. It should not be a difficult issue for us to focus on, because it is one that was always pretty to the fore in British thinking. It was not that long ago when the countries close to Russia were complaining that NATO was too focused elsewhere—particularly Afghanistan and so on. It is worth keeping in mind that there is still a tension within the alliance between north and south. A lot of countries in the southern part of Europe feel that their security issues are not well addressed by the alliance as a whole. That takes us back to the counter-terrorism role, but it is related to what has happened in Syria, Libya and so on. There are concerns there, which may be more on the foreign policy than military operation side. You will find in the southern flank some concerns still that we are very preoccupied with Ukraine, Russia and the Baltics, and not interested enough in the big problems they are getting as a result of their proximity to north Africa.

- Q35 **Chair:** Let us move on to the nuclear issue. We had a reference earlier to Putinism. We now face a more assertive and, some would say, aggressive Russia than most since the end of the Cold War, but it does not have the Marxist-Leninist quasi-religious totalitarian doctrine driving it on. To what extent do you think NATO is genuinely facing a renewed challenge from Russia—particularly a nuclear challenge—at either a tactical or strategic level? Do you think that Putin's pronouncements in the nuclear field are largely posturing and meant to exert psychological pressure, or is there a



genuine change in the quality of the nuclear threat that Russia poses?

Franklin Miller: I think that NATO does face a new threat. It is Putin's goal to restore Russia as a great power in his own eyes. Part of that campaign is to break up NATO. The Russian armed forces have been modernised significantly in the last eight to 10 years after their action in Georgia, where they were deeply embarrassed—although they still occupy Georgian territory, not the reverse.

The conventional forces have been upgraded dramatically, but the significant increase has been in the modernisation of their nuclear forces. In and of itself, there is nothing threatening about that. If you are going to have nuclear forces, those forces have to be modernised at some point. You are doing it; we are doing it. The Russians are ahead of us in time, but there is an enormous amount of investment going on right now.

People talk about the US and the UK building new submarines. That is in the future. The Russians have three new ballistic missile submarines in the water, building to a fleet of eight. They have two new submarine-launched ballistic missiles in the field. They have three new types of ICBM in the field. They are building this gigantic SS-18, which is a giant new version of a Cold War relic. Dangerously, they also have completely modernised their shorter-range nuclear forces, to the extent that they have broken the INF treaty, which is a serious act. The Russian generals must have convinced Putin that there was some reason to go out and break that foundational Cold War arms control treaty, to build this new INF system.

My concern is that the Russian military believes that nuclear weapons are a useful battlefield capability. I think that Mr Putin and his people believe that nuclear weapons are a useful diplomatic tool of blackmail, as you see from all the threats they have been making over the past 10 years that sound like Nikita Khrushchev. Those threats have never been withdrawn. Had a British Prime Minister and an American President said, "You are our next target," there would have been a great deal of public outcry. There has been no public outcry. Our task is to convince Mr Putin the political leader that no use of a nuclear weapon can give him battlefield, theatre or political victory, however he conceives it. But I am troubled by the fact that they maintain a vastly bloated arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons, which in fact has been modernised.

Q36 **Chair:** And NATO's counterpart to that is what?

Franklin Miller: One tenth at best, based on dual-capable aircraft whose lives can be measured probably at 10 years and which are being modernised by the F-35—the version, when it finally comes out, with nuclear wiring.

Professor Freedman: To reinforce what has just been said, nuclear weapons really matter to Putin and the Russian leadership, for three reasons. First, they are what make them a major power. Take away nuclear weapons and they are not. They have a veto at the United Nations and that is all that is left. If you look at Putin's speeches, he talks about Russia as a nuclear superpower. He talks about China as an economic



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superpower. You certainly cannot talk about Russia in those terms, but you can talk about Russia as a nuclear superpower. It really matters to them. It is the thing that gives them power and notice and it is why people worry about them.

Secondly, there is a deterrent role for them with regard to Ukraine. You saw, almost as the Ukraine crisis started, lots of references to nuclear power. I think they wanted to use nuclear weapons to tell NATO to stay out of Ukraine. In that sense they succeeded, but the degree of rhetorical excess around that was quite remarkable at times. It was a big play in Russian propaganda.

The third is this point that Frank has referred to, which I think is really important and not well appreciated in Western discussions of strategy, because we do not—hopefully for good reasons—think very much in terms of fighting wars at sword. The Russian strategy compensates for its weakness in conventional forces—its perceived weakness in a straight fight with NATO countries—by putting great stress on short-range nuclear weapons. That is, it assumes that it would go nuclear earlier and contain the impact by in some way confining any use to the battlefield or the battle area. This is an issue that has been around since the '50s in terms of nuclear doctrine and strategy, but the Russians are giving it a lot more prominence than we have thought wise for some time. One of the big moments at the end of the Cold War was President Bush unilaterally saying that a lot of short-range systems would just be abandoned and President Gorbachev following suit. It is a very disturbing development that has quite a lot of operational implications for Western military planning and doctrine.

Franklin Miller: Could I build on one thing? One of the other problems with Russia today is that it is not respecting the treaties that it has signed and the commitments that it has made. Despite the pledges by Gorbachev and later Yeltsin to get rid of a whole raft of ground-launched tactical nuclear weapons and a whole group of submarine-launched nuclear cruise missiles, they are still there. They are violating the INF treaty, in addition to the chemical weapons treaty, the Budapest convention, the OSCE agreement and the Istanbul rules about getting out of Georgia and Moldova. There are a whole series of arms control agreements on the table that the Russians have signed and have simply violated. We do not talk about them. We say, "Well let's just come up with a new agreement," but the Russians need to come back into compliance with the existing agreements before we start talking about new ones. That is my personal view.

Professor O'Brien: I agree with everything that has been said, and I think the Putin regime is unpredictable and dangerous, but we have to realise that this is the 10th largest economy in the world. It is a country with a demographic problem—it is ageing too quickly or dying too early. This is not the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Its border is 500 miles further back than it was during the Cold War. It has the nuclear weapons, but on the other hand, I do not think we also want to react by creating it



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to be a more extreme enemy than it is. If Putin is indeed someone who, in his mind, is trying to put together a Russian national state, that could be a problem, but I would say that it is not succeeding at this point.

- Q37 **Chair:** Let's assume that the Russians did embark on serious military aggression in Europe. Is there any way in which Europe could be defended without the participation of the United States and its armed forces? You are all shaking your heads—so, in that purely military sense, you would remove the question mark from the title "The Indispensable Ally."

Franklin Miller: Yes.

Professor Freedman: As I said, there is no reason why that should be so. Russia is economically in decline, its oil weapon is not what it was and its demographics are lousy, and so on, so there is absolutely no reason why western European countries working together could not cope. But the way things are at the moment and the problems of interoperability and of national priorities mean that we would find it very difficult, and the United States would be essential. If we had to do without the United States, we could, but it would take a long time to adjust.

- Q38 **Chair:** Presumably if we were to do without the United States, we would have to spend multiples of 2%—

Professor Freedman: We would have to spend more than 2%.

- Q39 **Chair:** How much more?

Professor Freedman: You could argue that if we spent 2% sensibly, we could probably manage, but as we do not spend the 2% sensibly—

- Q40 **Chair:** And in most cases do not spend the 2% at all.

Professor Freedman: In many cases it is barely 1%.

Professor O'Brien: I would say that 2% of western European or European NATO's economies would be about a third of the entire Russian economy. If you spent that, one would think you would be able to defend yourself.

Professor Freedman: We could do that, but the adjustments that would be needed would be substantial. As things work perfectly well as they are, it would seem an odd decision to go in that direction.

- Q41 **Chair:** I want to ask Dr Miller about the recent controversy, which we are investigating separately, of the apparently failed test firing of the Trident missile from HMS Vengeance in June last year. I am hoping that we might ask you to send us some written evidence on this, because we are doing a separate study of it. However, I just want to see, in terms of the information that America gives out about test firings, how open the American system is. It has been widely reported that there have been over 160 test firings of Trident missiles as a whole since they came into service in about 1989, and that only a handful of those have failed. Has that openly been reported in the United States?



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Franklin Miller: First, let me say with respect to the controversy that I have nothing to add the statement made by the Secretary of State for Defence. Secondly, I am aware that Lockheed Martin Corporation periodically issues press releases, but I do not follow those regularly. Thirdly, I might just echo the Chairman's comments about the missile. The Trident II D5 missile is the backbone of the American strategic deterrent, as well as the sole UK strategic deterrent system. As you point out, Mr Chairman, it has been deployed since 1989. Since that period there have been more than 160 test flights. The success rate of those test flights is over 98%, so I have every confidence that that missile system today and in future, as it is being modernised by what we call the D5 life extension programme, will continue to be a viable deterrent system well into the 2040s and 2050s.

- Q42 **Chair:** Would you agree that, on those very rare occasions when something has obviously gone wrong—as happened on this occasion—and many people have observed that something has gone wrong, it does no benefit to the credibility of the system to impose a media blackout about it? Really, all it does is to actually raise doubts about the reliability of the system.

You gave the statistic of over 160 tests. Do you know for certain how many have succeeded? You said 98%, which would suggest that we are talking about low single figures that have not succeeded. Is that right?

Franklin Miller: That would work out that way.

- Q43 **Chair:** Are you able to give us a specific figure—whether that is two, three or four?

Franklin Miller: No, I am not.

- Q44 **Chair:** Right. We are talking about the low single figures. Presumably, when something like this happens, isn't it best to be straightforward and up front about what has occurred, so that one can then do the mathematical calculation and show that a highly complex weapons system has been launched and has guided successfully on 97% or 98% of the relevant occasions?

Franklin Miller: Recognising the yawning Pooh trap in front of me, I will revert to my previous statement. I will say that one of the reasons we test weapons systems is to determine how they function, and if we ever have a problem, we can correct that. Again, I let the mathematics speak for themselves.

- Q45 **Chair:** But you are at least able to confirm that, unlike many complex weapons systems, for which a success rate of, shall we say, 80% or 90% would be regarded as outstanding, for this particular weapons system you are saying the figure is in the high 90s?

Franklin Miller: It is above 98%.

Chair: It is above 98%?



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Franklin Miller: Yes, sir.

- Q46 **Chair:** We are working on a figure of over 160 and fewer than 170, so should we all rush to our calculators to work out what the maximum or minimum number of failures could possibly be on that basis?

Franklin Miller: Yes, sir.

- Q47 **Chair:** But you are not going to tell us?

Franklin Miller: No, sir.

Chair: Very good.

Gavin Robinson: If you don't mind, Mr Miller, I do not sense from your demeanour that you are enjoying giving us wholesome, fulsome replies.

Franklin Miller: It would be rude of me to contradict the Secretary of State for Defence in this House.

- Q48 **Gavin Robinson:** I would love to know what conversations led to that position, but no matter, I will not probe that. You stated quite confidently that the benefit of having a test firing, should there be a misfire, is that you can investigate and correct whatever in the system went wrong. On the few occasions that that has occurred, are you aware that there has then been a realisation or a detection of a fault, and that, across the system, there has then been a recalibration, a remanufacturing or something to ensure that what went wrong is now fixed?

Franklin Miller: Yes.

- Q49 **Gavin Robinson:** And do you imagine that that will have happened, or has happened, post-test fire last year across US and UK components?

Franklin Miller: Without speaking to whatever happened last year, any anomaly that is detected during a test flight is the subject of intense scrutiny by the US navy and is corrected.

- Q50 **Gavin Robinson:** Across the—

Franklin Miller: Across the entire fleet, absolutely. The way that the system works is that there is a pool of missiles in Kings Bay, Georgia. They are offloaded, say, from a UK boat. When a US boat comes to outload, it takes those same missile parts, so the Trident II missile fleets in the US and UK are absolutely intermixed. There is a huge advantage to the UK, in terms of economy of scale, because those 160-plus flights are mostly American flights, but the results apply equally to the UK force.

Absolutely, if and when any corrective action is necessary, it is applied throughout the entire Trident II D5 fleet. If a boat is deployed, when that boat finishes its deployment, the missiles are offloaded and corrections are made.

- Q51 **Gavin Robinson:** So at some stage, all are brought back to a central point. Would it be unconscionable to believe that that has not happened following June or July last year?



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Franklin Miller: Without commenting on June or July of last year, there is a course of action that, over time, will correct any flaws detected in the Trident fleet.

Q52 **Gavin Robinson:** Are you in a position to say that that has occurred? Has that been completed?

Franklin Miller: Without respect to anything that happened last June, I would think no, because if you consider the number of missiles deployed, that would be a huge turnover in a short period of time. But I think over time any flaws detected will have been corrected across the entire fleet.

Q53 **Gavin Robinson:** Historically, over time, would that mean nine months to 12, or 12 to 24?

Franklin Miller: I cannot answer the question. I would be guessing.

Q54 **Gavin Robinson:** But two years, five years?

Franklin Miller: I would be guessing. I would mislead the Committee if I gave you a figure. I do not know.

Q55 **Chair:** I have a press release here, dated 31 August last year, and it is headed "Lockheed Martin-Built Fleet Ballistic Missile Achieves 161st Successful Launch". They are being quite specific about the number of successful launches they have had as of last August. Were we to ask American sources how many successful launches there had been up to date, is there any reason to believe that they would not tell us?

Franklin Miller: I do not know.

Q56 **Chair:** But we know that it was 161 successful ones—

Franklin Miller: That is over 160, Chairman.

Q57 **Chair:** Indeed. There was one rather spectacular failure—

Franklin Miller: That was PEM-1—the pinwheel shot, the very first test. None of us forgets that.

Q58 **Chair:** Would it have made sense to impose a media blackout over that one?

Franklin Miller: It was in full view.

Chair: Indeed. As was this recent one.

Right, your loyalty to your conversations with the Ministry of Defence is duly noted and appreciated.

Q59 **Douglas Chapman:** The missile that went astray, or had an issue, did not carry a warhead obviously, because it was a test. I heard it was heading for Florida. Had there been a warhead in place, and a position in which you were already in conflict with somewhere else, would you be fully relaxed with the result coming from that firing?



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Franklin Miller: All 160-plus test missiles never carry warheads. They carry instrumented packages. When a submarine is on war patrol, specific target co-ordinates have to be inserted into the missile guidance system. If the missile goes off in a wrong direction, then the various protocols that would arm the warhead for detonation would be violated, and the detonation sequence would not occur. The missile would know that it was going in the wrong tactical direction.

Q60 **Douglas Chapman:** So there is absolutely no risk at all associated with that happening.

Franklin Miller: Yes. I think the answer to your question is a simple yes.

Q61 **Chair:** It has been reported that—

Franklin Miller: I should say that—no, that's fine.

Chair: Feel free. The more the merrier.

Franklin Miller: One should not believe everything that one reads in the press.

Q62 **Chair:** That is why we try to ask people like the Secretary of State for Defence to set the record straight. By having ham-fisted cover-ups of things that occur in plain view, all it does is sow doubt and give ammunition to the enemies of the programme, doesn't it?

Franklin Miller: I would not believe everything that I read in the press, Chair.

Q63 **Chair:** Let us see if we can establish beyond what we read in the press during the course of our inquiry. Finally on nuclear, it has been reported that European NATO states are engaging in some form of discussions about whether there should be a European nuclear deterrent. What is the likelihood of such an event taking place, according to your perspectives, and what would the effect of that be if it happened?

Franklin Miller: This is exclusive of the UK—as I read the stories, it is exclusive of the British deterrent.

Q64 **Chair:** Yes. It is the idea that the EU, in its search for a separate defence identity, might seek to acquire a nuclear deterrent, which would presumably either have to be something new acquired by one of the other states or alternatively a Europeanisation of the French deterrent.

Franklin Miller: French doctrine and policy is that the French deterrent is not committed to anything except the defence of France's vital interests, which the President of France will define at the time of crisis. France has never fully committed its nuclear deterrent to the defence of NATO, and it would be a stretch to imagine it would extend it to the defence of the EU without any preconditions. That would require, therefore, a European deterrent force to be acquired by someone else, breaking the non-proliferation treaty. As this Committee is undoubtedly aware, nuclear deterrents are bought at some considerable price. We are talking about 1.3% of Germany's GDP. Acquiring a nuclear deterrent would be a lot



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more expensive than that, so I think that the odds of an independent European deterrent that does not include the United Kingdom are very, very low. I would say that they are zero.

Professor Freedman: I would agree. We only have to pause a second to think about not only the cost but the command arrangements to realise that it is a complete non-starter. The history of nuclear policy is full of attempts to try to think about how you involve countries that have not actually taken responsibility for building nuclear capabilities with a nuclear capability. They are always pretty fraught. As you know, Chairman, the multilateral force—the MLF—of the 1960s caused an awful lot more anguish than any practical process. I think this is one of those stories that is put around by people who have not really looked very hard at the practicalities of nuclear weapon construction.

Q65 **Ruth Smeeth:** Wonderful. Moving us on from the deterrent, but still within Europe, may I start with Mr Miller? What do you believe the US view is of the EU's desire to increase European defence integration?

Franklin Miller: If whatever was done would contribute to NATO's military capability, I do not think the United States would object. If the money is spent in a way that does not enhance NATO's defence capability, I think the United States would find it to be a waste of resources. NATO is the only organisation that can defend Europe against a major attack from Russia.

Q66 **Ruth Smeeth:** So everything through the prism of NATO.

Franklin Miller: That would be my view.

Q67 **Ruth Smeeth:** There has been much made, especially in recent days—at least in the British media—about Americans' admiration for the French and their military capability. Can you foresee a situation where the French would be the strategic go-to partner of the US, over us?

Franklin Miller: No.

Q68 **Ruth Smeeth:** I like that answer. What do you believe the likelihood is of increased European defence integration? That is to all you gentlemen.

Franklin Miller: I would question the value of that, given what Professor Freedman said earlier about the fact that NATO has existing command structures, protocols for interoperability and war plans to defend Europe. Duplicating them on an EU basis strikes me as wasteful, unnecessary and destined to fail.

Q69 **Ruth Smeeth:** Gentlemen, do you agree?

Professor Freedman: Yes, I agree. The problem with this whole debate, which has caused enormous confusion, is that there are perfectly sensible things that EU countries can do together, which are not going to interest NATO, whether it is dealing with piracy or peacekeeping. There is a variety of perfectly sensible things that can be done, such as helping with refugees, but that is suddenly translated into a European army or European defence, which it has never been. That has been completely



misleading. It exaggerates what could be done and puts an inappropriate gloss on what is being done, which is often very helpful and is not to be disparaged.

There is a history going back to the early days of Europe—going back to Tindemans and so on—of a belief that Europe as a project will not be complete until there is an army attached to it. There are reasons why that failed in the past, which were partly national rivalries, partly problems of command stretches and also the need to have a common European foreign policy to go with it, because of the difficulties you have with that. France and Britain are going to be at the heart at the moment of any serious European capability, however and under what organisation it happens. If you take Britain out of it, you will have to imagine the French, for example, wishing to do something in Mali and the rest of the EU saying, “Oh, we are not sure if that is a good idea. Won’t it be awkward for us if we are involved in that? We don’t do that sort of thing.” So there is no point in creating any sort of instrument that is described as European defence, unless you have the foreign policy that goes with it. As likely as not, that would be more restrictive than the major European military powers would have wished.

Q70 Ruth Smeeth: And post-Brexit, almost impossible.

Professor Freedman: It is very hard to see how it is going to look credible without the UK. My concern is that it distracts attention from the perfectly useful things that the European countries can and should do together without the United States, below the levels of military operations.

Professor O'Brien: I absolutely 100% agree that, with the United States, everything has to go through NATO. I mean NATO isn’t going to be the key, but this notion that the UK will remain the key strategic partner—that might be for a year or two, but this is not a God-given position, and we don’t know what the Europeans will do. We do not know what the French will do. If Britain doesn’t look after its own military end and the French upgrade theirs, and they perform very well, it is not going to be a change overnight, but there will be more reliance on the French and less reliance on the UK. Britain’s position is not permanent.

Q71 Chair: More reliance by whom on the French than on the UK?

Professor O'Brien: The United States could co-operate more. If the French show themselves willing to do things that the British politically are not willing to do—in the last 10 years, we have seen the British not willing to commit to certain things—and if the French have both the capability to do this and are willing to do so, there might be a natural—

Q72 Chair: This is taking us back to the special relationship aspect not being all that special, which was your starting thesis.

Professor O'Brien: Yes.

Q73 Ruth Smeeth: So this is more about an enduring relationship. On that basis, if we are talking about French upgrades that are more significant, what in your opinion is the British military or the British Government not



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doing yet that they should be in order to secure our position as a key ally?

Professor O'Brien: I am not sure what the force structure is. The problem right now I would say is that the money is not being spent in naturally the most efficient ways. I have my own issue with the aircraft carriers—I think there has been a huge amount of investment in a weapons system, and I am not sure how that will work in terms of really making Britain a useful ally of the United States—and with the shrinking of the Army at the same time, which has been proven to be very useful in co-operation with the United States over the last 20 years. I would say there is this force structure issue. If I was going to say how I would keep myself as a viable as a partner with the United States, it would be to deploy with them—to show that you could actually go with the United States and act with them.

Q74 **Ruth Smeeth:** But the principle around the aircraft carriers is that they would always—not exclusively, but almost exclusively—be part of joint missions.

Professor O'Brien: Do we know the cost? Do we know what the size of the carrier battle group is going to be?

Q75 **Ruth Smeeth:** We know that we are going—

Professor O'Brien: Do you know how expensive? Do you actually think Britain can afford to sail them in an active area for that long?

Q76 **Ruth Smeeth:** I think we are going to find out very shortly.

Professor O'Brien: I would be intrigued to see what the cost would be.

Professor Freedman: The big issue for the carriers and our relationship with the United States is what happens to the F-35 programme. I think that is going to be a test, not of the special relationship or big geo-strategic decisions, but it could become quite an interesting issue.

Franklin Miller: Every time I turn around the cost seems to go down. The aircraft carriers will be an important part of the deterrent, particularly given Russian naval expansion. The carriers allow the United States and the United Kingdom to project power around the Russian periphery. I do not think that ground forces per se from the United Kingdom are the critical element of NATO's land defence. There are other countries that have land capabilities that could be brought up to being fit for purpose, but those same countries cannot contribute in the way that the United Kingdom can, with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Then there is the deterrent.

At the end of the day, if we are using NATO—as we have discussed, it is the only organisation, and in your words it is the prism—then the United Kingdom is the essential ally. I must say, when you look at the French force structure, the French are actively discussing how they are going to produce their next generation of SSBN and potentially replace the Charles de Gaulle. I have no idea how they are going to afford that.



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Q77 Chair: We understand that the RUSI report has indicated that there has been a slight decrease in French defence expenditure from 2015 to 2016. I do not know whether you have heard that. Presumably, despite the doubts about European defence capability, the United States has no objections to, and might see some advantages in, the recent bilateral strengthening of Anglo-French defence co-operation. Would that be a fair comment?

Franklin Miller: The United States Administration has not objected to that.

Q78 Chair: Can it see advantages in it? Certainly members of this Committee have been seeking to encourage our French counterparts to show that withdrawal from the political European Union does not mean in any way withdrawal from a defence commitment to Europe.

Franklin Miller: Again, unless I misunderstand the entire situation—which I may—Brexit involves the EU, not NATO. So there should be no effect—full stop. Second, anything that increases the interoperability of French forces in the field with UK air, naval and ground forces is desirable. I hope that the continued work between the scientific establishments produces the results that have been anticipated as well.

Chair: We are almost at the two-hour mark, and we are coming to the end. The last question is from Phil.

Q79 Phil Wilson: I will combine two questions together. Post-Brexit, let's say that we have an EU that has an integrated military capability and strategy. Would that be a threat to Russia? Secondly, if traditionally non-aligned countries such as Finland and Sweden joined such a force, would that be seen as provocative by Russia?

Professor Freedman: For reasons given, post-Brexit I do not think the EU is going to make its main priority integrating—it may make a point of doing more integration of its armed forces, but there are limits to how far that will go. The bilateral sorts of connections are more likely, and the UK can still be involved in those. The question of Sweden and Finland is a very interesting one—I am going to Sweden tomorrow hopefully to talk about that with the Swedes. They are looking at NATO in ways that they haven't looked before. I think there is some way to go in both countries—note that the Swedes are reintroducing conscription, I think. They are really concerned about Russian activity in their areas.

With everything that one says about Putin and what he may have achieved, one thing he has achieved has been maybe to revitalise NATO and to lead countries that felt secure in their neutrality not to feel quite so secure in their neutrality. It may be that they feel that doing more with the EU is a way of avoiding the big questions with NATO—that is entirely possible—or just keeping things at a bilateral, consultative level. The very fact that this issue is now being discussed and debated is interesting in itself.



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Franklin Miller: I have two points. The first is that there is no way that any Russian military officer could possibly interpret NATO force structure—or as a subset, any EU force structure—as threatening attack on Russia. It is simply inconceivable given the various formations and the smaller numbers of forces that could be brought to bear. Secondly, that said, paranoia has been a part of Russian-Soviet and now Russian foreign policy for generations and for centuries. Whatever would be done with respect to Sweden and Finland ought to be done with a close eye on that Russian paranoia and the fact that Putin has shown enormous sensitivity to activity in areas close to the Russian border, such as Ukraine and Georgia. Whatever the Swedes and the Finns do in co-operation with the EU or NATO needs to be done very, very carefully.

- Q80 **Chair:** Do you think that there is some sort of advantage to having two military blocs, for want of a better term, separated by a band of countries that are more non-aligned, rather than having the two blocs right up against each other?

Franklin Miller: In that NATO is a defensive alliance, I don't think that it makes much of a difference, except in the eyes of those who are completely paranoid about NATO's capabilities.

- Q81 **Chair:** But is it not also the case, as we learned from the Gordievsky defection, that there were times during the crises of the 1980s where the Russians genuinely feared that NATO exercises were the preliminary to an attack?

Franklin Miller: Other more recent works by Professor Gordon Barrass dispel somewhat the notion that the Russians truly feared an attack, but the point is genuine. One would be very cautious about talking about expanding the alliance any further.

Professor O'Brien: All I will say is that I do not like to characterise the Russians as being particularly paranoid over history. I would not want to base foreign policy on the assumption that Russians act differently from other people because they are more paranoid. I think we have to treat them as we would treat any other state and assume that they would look after their interests. I would not assume any special historical paranoia on the Russian side.

- Q82 **Chair:** But if they were paranoid, would that not suggest that we have to be more cautious in our policies to avoid feeding that paranoia?

Professor O'Brien: Anyone could be more paranoid. You could say that the Japanese have been more paranoid over history or that the Americans have been paranoid at different points in their history. I do not see any historical centuries-long tradition of Russian paranoia.

- Q83 **Chair:** I am just going to throw one more into the pot. I was going to ask it earlier, but we got side-tracked. When global conflicts break out, they often happen unexpectedly as a result of action or reaction cycles. One country that we have not mentioned today, but that presumably features very much in the mind of the United States, is North Korea and its



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nuclear potential. Would I be being paranoid if I envisaged a situation where the North Koreans did something against the Japanese, the Japanese then retaliated in some way, the Chinese got involved, the Americans got involved and as a result we got involved? Is that fanciful? Is it paranoia or is it something that could really happen?

Franklin Miller: Creating scenarios and playing war games is often a great deal of fun. It can be intellectually challenging, although it does not necessarily predict the future. I guess the point of alliance relationships is that we are bound by obligations to protect one another, even when those interests may be somewhat further afield than one's own geographic area. It points to the reason why we need to ensure that the North Korean nuclear potential is deterred.

Professor Freedman: North Korea is one of the things to worry about seriously, but it is a very difficult process to write the scenario in which the things we are worrying about come to pass, or how they will come to pass. To have a regime of this sort—for which “paranoid” would not be an unreasonable term—with that sort of capability and with the conventional threat it can pose to South Korea as well, just with artillery, is potentially incredibly destabilising. It is evident that the Chinese want to keep everybody else out of it without having a clear idea what they can do themselves to deal with it. As many people have said, if there is one place they are worried about this year, it would be North Korea as much as anywhere. This is a set of effects. Whether the UK would get directly involved may be more of a stretch, but we would certainly be implicated in some way.

Professor O'Brien: I am not a Korean expert, but I assume that the Government is unpredictable to stay in power, so in that sense it is predictable. It is a regime that is desperately trying to protect itself and its hold on power. It would be unlikely to do anything, such as a catastrophic military intervention, that might lead to an international reaction against its hold on power.

Q84 **Chair:** Let us hope that that optimism is justified.

Professor O'Brien: It is hard to say, if they sparked off a world war one or two, who would jump in on the side of North Korea.

Professor Freedman: China.

Q85 **Chair:** Did I hear China?

Professor Freedman: China would. China has responsibilities. The problem with North Korea is that most scenarios would involve tensions within North Korea, of which there are plenty, and of which recently heard evidence. China is a player in North Korean politics. Part of the trouble at the moment is that Kim Jong-un doesn't like that interference in North Korean politics. It is bound up in some way or other with North Korea and China, but everybody else gets involved.

Q86 **Chair:** Thank you all very much for a marathon session. I hope you feel that your time has been well spent. We have certainly very much



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benefited from your cumulative wisdom. The session is concluded.