HOUSE OF COMMONS

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: The Indispensable Ally? US, NATO and UK Defence Relations, HC 992

Tuesday 28 Mar 2017

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Watch the meeting

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

Questions 87-134

Witnesses

I: Alex Hall, Director, Europe's Defence, Security and Infrastructure Research Group, James Black, Analyst, RAND Europe's Defence and Security Team, Professor John Bew, Policy Exchange, and the Honourable Franklin Kramer, Atlantic Council.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- Atlantic Council (INA0004)
- Policy Exchange (INA0011)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alex Hall, James Black, Professor John Bew, and the Honourable Franklin Kramer.

Q87 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this session of our inquiry entitled, "The indispensable ally? US, NATO and UK defence relations". We have a panel of four specialists today, who have kindly agreed to answer our questions. I would be very grateful if each of you in turn introduced yourself and said a sentence or two about what you do.

Alex Hall: Good afternoon. My name is Alexandra Hall. I am the research group director for the defence, security and infrastructure group at RAND Europe. RAND is a not-for-profit, public policy research institution which does a lot of work in the defence and security space. We have recently completed a piece of work on the defence and security implications of Brexit and we also look at questions of NATO and European support.

James Black: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is James Black. I work as an analyst in Alex's team and I was closely involved in the Brexit study that she mentioned. More broadly, I do work on strategic issues, policy, acquisition and capability development for the UK MoD, the European Defence Agency and NATO.

Professor Bew: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Professor John Bew. I am a professor of history and foreign policy at the war studies department in King's College London. I am also heading a project looking at Britain's place in the world for the think-tank Policy Exchange, and that is the capacity in which I talk to you today. I have written variously about the western alliance since the time of the Attlee Government right up to the current period. I am probably best placed to speak on the politics of defence and the politics of the alliance.

Franklin Kramer: I am Franklin Kramer. I am a so-called distinguished fellow on the board of the Atlantic Council. I am a former Assistant Secretary of Defence for international security affairs. I have been in two Administrations, but I am very much appearing on my own today. I look forward to it.

Chair: We are very much looking forward to hearing all your expertise. The first question will be asked by Colonel Bob Stewart.

Q88 **Bob Stewart:** You are a pretty distinguished lot, if you ask me. I feel that we are probably being interrogated. My first question—I don't know to whom I would put it—is about, fundamentally, capabilities. In particular, on the relation between the US military and the UK military, how much of it is based on the fact that we in the United Kingdom very much reflect the way the United States military thinks, and their equipment? We try our very best to be interoperable, unless you think of aircraft carriers, for

example. How much do you think that the capability of the UK is aligned with that of the US? Is that terribly important to our relationship? I know it is more than that, but how much is the weighting of it? Perhaps, Franklin, as you are a rebellious colonial, you could start.

Franklin Kramer: It is quite important, but we really start somewhere else. It is almost a cliché these days, but that really is with the common values: the ability to trust and rely on one another—that is a start—as well as the people really knowing one another. For example, I have just seen in a newspaper that Secretary Mattis will be here later this week to talk to people in the UK. We have common strategic and operational-type approaches. Then we have complementary capabilities. Then, finally, you get down to the kit and the material items.

There is no doubt at all that having interoperable materials is quite useful and even important, but it is not useful and important if you don't have the earlier approaches. Knowing that you can rely on each other—so to speak, that either one of us is on the flank—is the critical thing, having worked together and exercised together and having done so many things together. In my own career, I have worked multiple, multiple, multiple times with UK forces, UK political, on UK pol-mil sets of issues, so I think all of that is quite useful.

Q89 **Bob Stewart:** Alexandra, we were really interested, when we went to Quantico, in the officer training for the US Marine Corps. In the physical training, where they are really quite tested, the funny thing was that the person who directed and ran that training was a Royal Marine colour sergeant. The relationship is pretty intense, isn't it? Do you think we are perhaps over-reliant on the United States? We are connected quite closely, but does the Ministry of Defence rely on the United States to come and pull our backside out of the fire when it is needed—for example, strategic airlift in the Falklands or, behind the front line, helping us when we had the Libyan operation? The fact that we rely on the United States so much for that sort of capability takes the pressure off us to develop it ourselves. We do not actually have an all-round capability any more, do we? There are two questions there.

Alex Hall: It is beyond question that we have known shortfalls in particular capability areas.

Q90 **Bob Stewart:** We have no shortfalls?

Alex Hall: Known shortfalls, in particular capability areas, which we look to allies and partners to backfill in certain operational circumstances. Is that reliance too much? I think that is very much dependent on the context of the operation and what you are trying to achieve. It is quite difficult to talk in very general terms about whether our reliance in general is too much.

I would certainly echo Franklin's points about the human side of interoperability and the extent to which a shared history and shared endeavour can really boost a unit or a military organisation to operate effectively together. Therefore, we are very much ingrained in each other's

psyches, doctrines, tactics and procedures. I would not necessarily consider that it was too much of a reliance to be integrated in that way.

Q91 **Bob Stewart:** Professor, are we teaching the Americans something? For example, a couple of years ago, in the maritime aircraft competition, a RAF crew flying a P-8 won the competition. Do you think the Americans get quite a lot out of our fellas too?

Professor Bew: I would suggest that it is the most valued of all America's military alliances. That may change over the next 20 to 25 years. I would say two things from the British perspective that are important. First, it is a product of historical circumstances. The shared interoperability and alliance structures basically come from the fact that Britain and America uniquely have very similar underlying strategic assumptions about how foreign policy and national security should work. That means operating globally, often operating pre-emptively, and often operating on the periphery and quite far away from the homeland. I think those fundamental strategic assumptions are crucial and historically grounded. The second aspect is that Britain, as a power with declining relative power since the second world war, has taken something of a bet on interoperability with the most powerful nation. I suspect that that is probably the best bet out there. Would it be better if we were more independent? There is no question but that it would. Would that even strengthen our hand in our relationship with the United States? I imagine so as well. But I would still venture that interoperability is our best bet.

Q92 **Bob Stewart:** James, what does RAND think are our weaknesses in capabilities? Alexandra has already said that there are some. What does the RAND Corporation think our capability weaknesses are vis-à-vis the Americans?

James Black: I would not want to speak on behalf of the entire corporation, but if you look at the evidence-based research we do, there are certainly areas in which the UK—either in military terms or industrial terms—has decided that it is not the optimal use of its finite resources to invest in keeping up a sovereign capability. We have seen that very noticeably in the last few years, with things like a lack of any maritime patrol aircraft at all—we rely quite heavily on America in that area. We see it industrially with the growing reliance on joint programmes like the JSF and Lightning II, where BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce obviously have a big input, as a substitute for developing a programme on our own.

It is worth emphasising, however, that there are clearly some areas where the UK brings quite unique capabilities which benefit the US. We will have an aircraft carrier soon; that is not unique, but it will be an attractive proposition for them as an ally. There are certain niche areas, like mine countermeasures, where the US has not actually invested very heavily in the past. There are certain new capabilities and technologies like high-altitude pseudo-satellites for which the UK offers a peer or near-peer proposition to the US.

Bob Stewart: I just have one comment. I have heard that our aircraft

carrier, which has about 12 airplanes provided by the British on it, might also get 24 American jets—two squadrons—put on board. That would be a hell of a good use, because although we think the Americans have got a huge number of aircraft carriers compared with us, a lot of them are not in very good repair. I do not ask for a comment—if I am talking rubbish, tell me—but I wish to make the point that that is something that we could really do well together. Everyone is nodding their head, Chair, so I have finished.

Chair: Thank you, Bob.

Q93 **Mrs Moon:** Following Bob's question, I wonder whether that interdependence has been damaged by the Chilcot findings. Certainly, for many members of the Stop the War Coalition, for example, there were concerns about the over-easiness of the assumptions of that relationship and that interdependence and interoperability. Do you see it as having been damaged at all by events in Iraq and Afghanistan, in terms of the public perception rather than the political perception? Professor, you are nodding.

Professor Bew: Obviously Chilcot in that respect might be taken as a watershed moment. I think it actually tells a more complex story about US-UK relations than some of the stories that may have arisen from it. One part of that is the fact that the UK did have significant diplomatic and decision-making leverage at certain critical junctures and points; the question is what it chose to use that leverage—that political capital—for, and how it chose to spend it. One aspect was that it focused on the second UN resolution; another was getting President Bush to focus more on Israel-Palestine.

On the question of military operability, there were clear tensions in the US-UK relationship, certainly in the second stage of the occupation of Iraq following the 2003 invasion. I would say that those senior British military figures who were embedded with and worked more closely with the US Army, particularly in and around Baghdad, had a very successful functioning relationship. Obviously there was a diversion of command with the British-controlled portion in and around Basra, and there were tensions to the British approach to so-called counter-insurgency in that area. Those tensions have been present, and to a certain extent they also flowed into the second stage of the Afghanistan campaign, in and around Helmand, but actually there is a pretty robust exchange of ideas and conversation. My own department at King's College London is very much the subject of that. Those type of issues are common in coalition warfare and do not represent some sort of fatal watershed problem in US-UK relations.

James Black: If I might build on that, I would echo the professor's comments about the operational military interoperability being reinforced, although not unambiguously so, by the operations in those two countries. If we look at the public perception side of things, which you mentioned, Iraq has cast a long shadow over British politics in the past 10 to 15 years, not least in the parliamentary vote over possible action in Syria. That clearly was an expression of the UK's ability to influence the actions of its

larger, more powerful partner. Parliament unexpectedly blocked it and caused considerable political difficulty for President Obama at the time. That reflects that the interdependence is still there, even if there was a disagreement about what course of action should be taken in that instance.

Q94 **Mrs Moon:** Mr Kramer, do you have any comment to make?

Franklin Kramer: I suppose the comment I would make is along the Churchill lines: the only thing worse than having allies is not having any. The real point I would make is that you don't want an ally that only agrees with you. You really want someone who has an independent point of view. Hopefully you agree, but it is not always going to occur. I have done this for a long time, and we won't always agree, but we should be true to what we think and then see whether we can work it out.

Obviously Iraq was complicated in many, many ways—I have read the report—but in terms of relations we are past that, at least from an American perspective. I cannot speak to here. We work extremely well together, focused on a number of things, such as the east, the Russia issue, the south, which is complicated, and the counter-ISIL coalition, and more broadly throughout the world. I think we really are quite good allies at this point.

Q95 **Mrs Moon:** I raised the question largely because public perception is very powerful, and public perception in relation to the current US President runs fairly high in this country. I am just wondering what the danger is in terms of the President's desire to stop supporting allies that do not pay their own way. Could that have an impact on the NATO alliance? It is that public perception, as well as the political perception, that we have to be aware of. Any comments on that?

Alex Hall: The alliance is in a slight period of adaptation and change anyway. We have seen the move from the era of pure deterrence into more out-of-area operations, and now we are moving back from having been engaged out of area for very many years to a period of questioning what the alliance is about. Now, the input of particular political personalities is clearly going to drive public perceptions of the alliance at any given time, but I wonder whether there are some more fundamental issues at stake within the countries of the alliance. I know that there are still divergences regarding what the alliance's priority is at the moment, what the principal threat is that faces the alliance and what the alliance should be doing to address the threats that it faces in an era of constrained resources, along with the complicated wider geopolitical backdrop and so forth.

While President Trump's pronouncements and decisions on popular public opinion will have some impact, I wonder whether some of the larger strategic questions about what the alliance should be doing to support the countries of the north-east of the NATO alliance in Europe and the countries of the south to face some of the wider questions that it faces may take precedence over the individual perceptions of a given leader.

Professor Bew: Specifically regarding the President's views on NATO, the first thing to say is that they are more than campaign bombast. They are long-held, well-established views that he has held for over two decades. I think the initial NATO scare is not likely to go away entirely.

The second thing to say about his views is that there are two prevailing opinions about NATO and the broader Western alliance in the White House and around the American national security establishment. One might be called the heretical view, which is what the President holds himself. It asks serious, fundamental questions about the utility and value of the alliance. The other view is the more consensual view held by people such as General Mattis—a key figure here—and HR McMaster, the President's national security adviser. It very much values NATO and, in particular, talks about strengthening the frontier, but still asks for more of a European contribution to defence. I suspect that, out of those two countervailing views, while the argument might not be complete by the end of the first Trump term—if it is only a first term, or if it is a prelude to a second term—you will have some sort of pattern of US behaviour and attitude to the NATO alliance more broadly that maintains both of those two elements.

Even further back, you can talk about serious US concern about burden sharing. It was, of course, President Obama who famously announced what he called the anti-free rider campaign, so the writing has been on the wall. I think it therefore goes to the heart of what key NATO allies do in response to that.

James Black: May I quickly add a slight addendum to that? I agree that it is very easy when discussing interoperability and alliances to focus on ways and means and how co-operation actually works on a practical level. Clearly, we must agree the ends of the NATO alliance, as Alex mentioned, but some of what the US policy wants to achieve is still not clear at this moment in time. The new Administration has not had very long to bed down, and it has not had new crises to respond to. It has not even had senior people in lots of the important policy posts for very long. While there have been lots of announcements that they want to see more investment in defence, both domestically and within NATO, it is less clear at the moment what those resources are being asked to do and what the ultimate strategic aim is. In the previous Administration, we had a pivot to Asia, we had the third offset strategy, and so on. There is not yet an equivalent clear strategic direction coming out of the White House. That is something that will develop over time as new crises and so on emerge for it to deal with.

Q96 **Mrs Moon:** Is there not also a gap, in terms of what the priorities should be for capabilities and the additional spend? It is about what you want to spend it on. You don't want to say, "You need to spend so many more billions." It is about what you spend it on and how quickly you can get the people with the skills to make that capability deployable and of any value.

James Black: Absolutely. We have targets for a 350-ship US navy, but it is less clear specifically what it is going to be tasked with doing. There are similar things in NATO, where you have a 2% spending target. That is ultimately a largely abstract pool of money. It is not a capability or readiness target, as the Helsinki headline goals and the Petersberg tasks get closer to being. You are right that it is input-focused, rather than output or outcomes-focused.

Q97 **Mr Spellar:** But isn't it unusual or even, to an extent, unprecedented to have divergent views from Cabinet members in the defence and security field and the President, seemingly at the moment with no attempt to reconcile them or get one coherent policy? How are we going to operate within NATO in order to evolve a policy in that context?

Professor Bew: As an historian, I can say with some confidence that it is unprecedented. It goes to the heart of how President Trump regards his own role, which is more as an outlier and as someone to stretch the arguments and debate, rather than as a consensus commander-in-chief whose job it is to go through the various contending options and opinions and come to an agreed strategy. That is what is uniquely different in this case and the question, therefore, arising out of that, is to what extent will that settle down? My own view is that perhaps it will not settle down. But to what extent will an agreed position emerge from the White House and more broadly in particular from the Pentagon off the back of that? I think that you can make some guesses on that. This may not go to the heart of a longer-term NATO new strategic concept, for example, but the President in particular has spoken of his desire specifically for NATO to do more on counter-terrorism. So the question is how that translates into action as well. That is also an area that is not clear, but it is certainly an area on which the United States, broadly speaking, will value activity and proactivity on the part of other key NATO allies.

Q98 **Gavin Robinson:** Capability will, I think, feature as part of your answer to this question, Professor Bew, but you referred earlier to some strategic assumptions that are made, particularly on geography, so I am interested to hear whether there is a requirement for the UK to take a more global view of the assistance that it gives to the US, particularly outside Europe. Do you think that we should be considering whether the US will require of us a greater role either in the Gulf or in the Pacific?

Professor Bew: We have spoken already about potential disadvantages of overdependence in interoperability terms. The advantage is that it gives the UK, if perhaps stretched across the full spectrum of capabilities, at least a say. The biggest conundrum or question, therefore, going forward and in grand strategic terms is: what role or instrument might the UK play as part of a broader American strategy towards China? I think we go back to the same fundamental problem that my colleagues from the RAND Corporation have adverted to, which is the lack of a strategic doctrine.

We have heard about a pivot east, which was much debated over the last eight years by the Obama Administration but which never crystallised into a tangible form. We have had, immediately, with the Trump

Administration, more assertive language on how to approach China as a kind of peer competitor in international affairs, which is mainly focused on trade but increasingly the South China Sea as well. Until that area is worked out, it is very difficult for the UK to pose its own position on this while simultaneously trying to have a functioning and successful relationship with China. I note that in a speech at the Heritage Foundation, which is a conservative think-tank in Washington DC, the British Ambassador—I think it was two months ago—talked about our new aircraft carrier being directly for the function of maintaining freedom of navigation in the South China Sea in co-operation with the US. So that is certainly an area that the UK is posing, at least, to be a constructive alliance partner in.

Q99 **Gavin Robinson:** I guess we are commenting a lot on what the US assumptions might be. We have a US voice that is keeping schtum so far, so can I invite you to perhaps address that?

Franklin Kramer: I was listening carefully. One thing that is useful to recognise is that Cabinet members do not go out and do things that the President does not want them to do, so I think there is stronger support for NATO than some of these questions imply. In fact, the President himself has said that he supports NATO. There is going to be a Foreign Ministers meeting in a few weeks, and then the 25 May leaders meeting—I believe that is what they are calling it—so we will see what happens. The other point, in terms of worldwide, if you will, is that there is absolutely no doubt that the US both welcomes and really wants support from allies and, in particular, allies that have the capability to support. So there is a capabilities set of issues, carried out in the Asia-Pacific or the Gulf, or various kinds of support with respect to Syria—the counter-terror coalition and the like—and there is also the geopolitical set of support. One thing I think is important, for example, with respect to China is to take a holistic look at what the Chinese are doing, not just trade or security but trying to create an overall approach. I do not believe that that is particularly easy, but it is something we really want to work on together.

There are other issues that mostly have been left to the US—for example, North Korea, but I think it would be invaluable at least to have conversations with respect to North Korea, because it could cause quite significant sets of issues, and if it did, it would be important to the UK as to what would be happening. I would encourage a broad view, not dependent specifically on whether a carrier can go here or there, but on the geopolitical interests in common. Then one could work out the particulars of the military, diplomatic or other instruments.

Gavin Robinson: I am not sure who is best from RAND.

Alex Hall: Shall I start? I would echo the professor's comments that without the ends that we are trying to achieve it is difficult to know how we would arrange the ways and means. There are areas in which the UK is probably well placed to offer additional support, whether that is in terms of specific capability baskets or more about expertise or regional awareness. You might consider the Gulf to be an area in which the UK has a very

established footprint and track record of successfully operating and liaising with nations in the region. That might be one area beyond purely capability terms to which the UK might be well placed to contribute. In east Asia, clearly, the UK has an established role and is part of many institutional frameworks, so it is possible to conceive of enhanced support and capability there.

I wonder if the other angle is: if the UK is able to take a more engaged and supportive role in its own neighbourhood, within a wider European neighbourhood, that might free up more US assets, whether in capability terms or in expertise and softer skills, to focus on the east Asian theatre without the US feeling conflicted between two geographically diverse theatres. I do not know if James has anything to add.

James Black: I would echo the point: substitution in our near abroad is as much a contribution to what is going on further afield as—

Gavin Robinson: In the Gulf as well—free up US assets in the Gulf and allow them to focus more clearly on—

James Black: Quite possibly. In recent months the UK has been involved in exercises off the Persian Gulf, with maritime forces taking over the kind of role that might traditionally have been a US Navy task. I agree.

It is worth emphasising that this is not just a response to the new Administration in the US. This is an acceleration of a pre-existing trend. We had already seen the UK looking to go back east of Suez—we have seen new bases in the Gulf region, we have seen the new defence staff with a more coherent defence engagement strategy for the Gulf region, and then we have long-standing ties in the Pacific with the Five Powers Defence Arrangements and so on.

It is also worth considering what the other NATO partners' activity would be in this kind of grand global distribution of effort. Clearly you have the new European Union global strategy—the EU wants to have a much bigger role further afield in places like the Gulf and Asia-Pacific—but if it is losing UK capabilities and the UK presence in the Gulf and the Pacific, you could conceivably see more European focus on Europe, north Africa and areas where France, Spain and others have a lot of traditional expertise and are already quite heavily involved, and yes, certainly, greater anglophone activity in the Gulf and Pacific.

Q100 **Bob Stewart:** We are trying very hard to get extra trade with China. Will that jar off the United States in a bit? I know there is a lot of trade between the United States and China too—in fact, China owns quite a lot of the United States, I am told—but is this going to be a source of tension, particularly when there these problems with the Paracel Islands, the Spratlys and Scarborough Shoal, where the Chinese are pushing into the East China and South China Seas big-time, building airstrips on little bits of rock? Is this going to be a source of tension, particularly as you suggested that we might be expanding slightly more east of Suez again? For example, our aircraft carriers could well transit through the South

China Sea, with US aeroplanes on board. That would be a really good contribution and, I should think, well received. I am not sure whether I have asked a question there, Franklin, but can you comment?

Franklin Kramer: I think I have already said it, but I will say it again: I don't think that a China policy should be singly focused. Looking only at trade without looking at security is a mistake.

Q101 **Bob Stewart:** They look at it in the round, don't they? Their ships are designed to be trade and navy, really, aren't they?

Franklin Kramer: Some are, and some are halfway to the coastguard—the so-called coastguard—and the like. As you said, the US trades a lot with China. We will see how all this works out over time with the new Administration, but I do think that looking only at trade to the detriment of security is a mistake.

We have lots of issues with respect to China, and the current Chinese Government have taken a distinctly anti-Western approach in a number of areas. Education-wise, they do not allow so-called Western ideas in the educational facilities in China. There is a campaign in schools called "Never forget 100 years of humiliation" and the like. That doesn't mean that they are not existent in the world and they are not important in many ways—there are other areas, such as climate change, where we definitely want to work with them—but I do think, to use your phrase, that you want to look at them in the round. You want to look at them in multiple ways.

This is an area where I think it would be highly productive for policy makers here in the UK to work closely with policy makers in the US to come to an appropriate overall approach—perhaps not down to a gnat's eyelash, but in broad terms. It needs to be looked at across the board, not sliced. If you do it slice by slice, the Chinese will slice you up. I had a conversation earlier in the day with someone who said, "The Chinese win-win approach is two wins for them and none for you." You really need to think through what they are doing. As I said, they are a country that is going to exist. They are quite important economically, and they are important from a security point of view. We need to figure out how to properly have them integrated into the international system and a rule of law approach, and we will be much better off if we work together across the board.

Chair: We are going to need to speed up a little bit, because we have quite a lot of ground to cover. Madeleine, you have a quick point on this subject.

Q102 **Mrs Moon:** I would welcome Mr Kramer's comments in relation to the fact that not just China but other countries have very poor human rights records, and it is very difficult, in defence and human rights terms, if you desire trade—Britain will be touting for trade on the world market to make up for gaps, perhaps, with Europe—not to be critical and get into a conflict situation. Do you see any potential difficulties there in the future?

Franklin Kramer: Are you asking me again?

Mrs Moon: Yes. I'm afraid that currently you are the person speaking for the American perspective on these things.

Franklin Kramer: I am happy to speak for the American perspective; I just want to point out that I am not in the American Government, so they have to speak for themselves.

We—the United States—have always had a tripartite agenda. There is a security part; there is a prosperity and economics part; and there is a democracy and rule of law part. The arrows do not always point in the same direction. The trick to policy making is to figure out which one you want to emphasise on one day and which you emphasise on another, and how to put them together.

There is no doubt that, in general, people in the UK would not like to live under the Chinese political system, but on the other hand, there is equally no doubt that China exists as a country and it is a major trading factor and a major security factor. Without actually focusing on the particulars as to how one wants to deal with it, there clearly are conflicts, and I think, given the Chinese system, there are going to be conflicts for a considerable period of time, so what we choose to emphasise at which point will vary.

The Obama Administration increasingly, towards the end, did some work with so-called freedom of navigation transits in the South China Sea, to give clear focus to that set of issues with freedom of navigation in the area. The Chinese were not happy. They are militarising the islands, as has been pointed out. I saw a story just two days ago that they are pretty much done with that: they have hard shelters and various kinds of weaponry on those islands. That is not a positive, I don't think, in a "working together with your neighbours" approach in the South China Sea. What we do with the Chinese with respect to that issue over the next two, five or 10 years needs to be worked out.

All of our economies these days interact with China in important ways, so one wants to be able to keep that up. At the same time, we don't want to lose all our intellectual property. The Chinese have talked about, in effect, having national champions in a number of areas. It is perfectly all right for them to want national champions, but it is not all right for us to lose our strengths. They have a history of, one way or another, getting intellectual property that we might prefer to keep for ourselves.

The Germans recently kept them from acquiring a few important German firms—relatively small but leading edge ones. We need to think about all those things. How much impact one can have and how one has an impact on the democracy, human rights and freedom agenda is a very hard question. I know where I would like it to be; that's easy. How one actually accomplishes that—particularly with a Chinese leadership that is, in my opinion, increasingly repressive rather than less—is hard.

Q103 **Chair:** I'm afraid I have to ask you to be a little more concise. It is really interesting, but we will not get through the material. We are keen to move on to NATO. I remind colleagues and panellists that the focus of

this inquiry is the indispensability or otherwise of the alliance between the UK and the US.

I have two short, sharp questions that are easier to ask than answer. First, is it not true that it has been quite common for previous Presidents to start out with people believing that the special relationship between the US and the UK is dead and that they were going to look elsewhere for their special relationships, but the relationship very soon reasserts itself? I certainly remember that happening with previous Presidents. Is there any reason to believe that Donald Trump will be any different from his predecessors in that respect? Secondly—this could lead to very long answers, but I hope not—is NATO defensible without the participation of the United States of America and its military power?

Professor Bew: Briefly, on the so-called special relationship, it is a hackneyed and overused term; I think we can all start from that premise. Fundamentally, however, you are right; it has an enduring quality, which says something about it, over a long historical period. There is an alternative scenario, where Hillary Clinton won the race, in which it may not be so valued and, for example, relationships with Germany might seem more elevated in importance. It is one of those odd things that seems to repeat itself in historical significance. If the Trump Administration increasingly values bilateral arrangements and friendships across the board, as opposed to a multilateral way of proceeding, the relationship with Britain is critical and important.

Chair: And the defensibility of NATO?

Professor Bew: Simply speaking, the United States is the indispensable ally. There is no serious NATO organisation without the US, not only in pure military terms but also because the whole political anchoring of the alliance would fray and fragment should the US decide it did not want to be part of it any more.

Chair: Mr Kramer, do you agree?

Franklin Kramer: Yes. I would say on the special relationship that there are also some particular areas that have been historic—nuclear, intelligence, and these days cyber—so there are lots of bases for that and I think it will continue. With respect to the defence of Europe, it obviously depends on the threat, but if we are talking about Russia, I think the answer is that the United States is required.

Alex Hall: I do not have much to add in response to the first question, but on the second question I come back to the issue of what NATO is doing and what it is configured to be. If it is configured to be an organisation that is to respond to breaches of article 5 in a collective defence scenario, then I would concur that without the US the ability of NATO is much diminished.

Q104 **Chair:** Is it diminished to a point of being non-viable?

Alex Hall: Potentially, yes; I would agree with that. That said, it is a political as well as a military alliance, and that brings all sorts of benefits. I

think that if the NATO alliance were to be refocused to look at operations other than article 5 collective defence scenarios, then the non-participation of the US, or a more limited US participation, would not necessarily diminish it to the point where it was a non-viable entity.

Chair: James, anything to add?

James Black: I concur. Clearly, in any hypothetical article 5 situation, a large proportion of the kind of high-readiness reaction forces are European, as are the carry-on forces, but without the US you will clearly lack some key enablers: air-to-air refuelling; some ISTAR assets; air lift; suppression of enemy air defences—the list goes on. However, I echo the point that the political will is also going to be very difficult to achieve if you do not have the US there, kind of haranguing everyone into action and providing that kind of ultimate framework nation that everyone else can plug their capability into.

Q105 **Mr Spellar:** Do you think NATO has the appropriate command structure and strategic concept to carry out all that is required of it?

Professor Bew: Quite a lot has been done on NATO's command structure, and obviously the strategic concept is—basically, there is one every 10 years and the last one was in 2010. There has been some argument that NATO needs a new strategic concept, because in 2010 hostility between Russia and NATO was not at the stage it is now. That is a key change; another is the essential implosion of the Middle East. While it was in a difficult place in 2010, it had not seen the Syrian civil war. Those are two huge factors that are actually showing connectivity in certain areas, in terms of Russia's expanding influence in that region as well.

NATO does need a new strategic concept, I suppose, but rushing to one every time there is a crisis also has its own difficulties and problems as well. Perhaps we can wait it out until the next one is due.

James Black: Again, it depends on what you are trying to achieve. Certainly, there are new challenges that NATO is already having to work to get up to speed on—things such as so-called "hybrid warfare", which is an unfortunate term but clearly that is something that it is investing a lot in thinking about strategic concept, doctrine and so on. Cyber is another big area, since that has been designated an operational domain at the Warsaw summit. The kind of strategic practical command structure implications of what that really means and how that gets worked down into how NATO does its business are still being worked out at the moment.

I do not think I would want, as Professor Bew says, to rush to develop a concept based purely on what is novel and forget some of the enduring challenges, such as collective defence and territorial defence, where really it is not about inventing the wheel. Instead, it is about going back to something that actually the alliance was quite good at in the '60s,'70s and'80s.

Q106 **Mr Spellar:** That really brings us then to the question of whether the actual decision-making structure is now serviceable, or does that need to

be reformed?

Franklin Kramer: Until recently, when we—all of us—put the multinational battalions into the Baltic countries and Poland, the way that NATO had gone at its operations was through force generation conferences, lots of discussion, et cetera. There was plenty of time. On the eastern front so to speak—in the Baltic area—potentially there is not as much time. One of the questions is this: how much authority does one want to give to the Supreme Allied Commander and how much authority does one want to give to the Secretary-General—the two of them—and how much can the North Atlantic Council, at all levels, decide things in advance, so that you can structure arrangements so that the Secretary-General and the Supreme Allied Commander can take steps that are already, so to speak, pre-approved? Of course, we are always going to want to have the Prime Minister, the President of the United States, the President of France, the Chancellor and all of the other heads of state involved, but there may be times when it is very important to move quickly.

Q107 **Ruth Smeeth:** Thank you very much. Should NATO have the flexibility to provide both collective defence and counter-terrorism?

Professor Bew: In purely military-strategic terms, my view would be that too much focus on counter-terrorism—or crisis management—is perhaps not necessarily helpful to an organisation that has been most effective at deterrence and stabilising the broader European space. That having been said, I think all of these questions and debates on NATO's command structure or focus or expanding the alliance actually miss some real, fundamental political dynamics.

One of those political dynamics is the shifting position and opinion of the United States and its President in particular. He has demanded more action on counter-terrorism. I think there might be a way of—not getting around that; that is the wrong way to put it—reconciling existing NATO concerns with political pressures coming from the White House, which is to talk less in terms of CT/immediate crisis management and more in terms of region management. Clearly, in the absence of an effective joined-up EU policy, particularly in the Mediterranean, north Africa and the Middle East, NATO could do more in that space. That will have obvious broader effects on counter-terrorism. I think if NATO gets its act together more broadly, we will perhaps not chase down these sort of rabbit holes on certain issues.

James Black: Clearly, there is a role, and NATO has committed to take on more effort in this area since the last couple of summits. It is important to stress, though, that that needs to be done in concert with much wider efforts across the EU and across national agencies, bringing in foreign and domestic policy, policing, development aid and so on. The risk of NATO becoming the central focus of action on counter-terrorism is that if you only have a hammer, every problem starts to look like a nail. You might then start heading towards kinetic solutions to problems that would ultimately be better and much more cheaply serviced through non-kinetic

means—capacity building, engaging local partners, counter-radicalisation, economic development and so on. Those are areas in which NATO clearly does not have the expertise or experience in the way that other institutions do.

If you are going to configure your military forces to conduct both these low-end counter-terrorism operations and the high-end near-peer deterrence tasks, there is always a tension that you end up with something that is not particularly satisfactory for either. Certainly, we have seen a lot of the urgent operational requirements procurements done by the UK and other counties to service Afghanistan are not for capabilities that are terribly useful fighting in the Baltics or Donbass or anywhere like that. There is a tension that needs to be resolved there, rather than trying to do too many things, necessarily.

Franklin Kramer: It's probably useful to remember that there is a counter-ISIL coalition that is ongoing. Every single NATO member is involved; they are just not involved as NATO. However, they could have been, so I think it is a false distinction. In fact, in the 1999 strategic concept, that NATO would deal with terror issues was included. The question that was really raised by the prior speaker, Mr Black, is really right. Where do you put your capabilities? How much are you going to focus on what? I think we have all agreed—that is to say, the NATO countries—that we need to do more on the high end. In point of fact, what is happening down in the counter-ISIL coalition is pretty high end. We need to be able to do both.

Q108 **Chair:** We have been spending some time asking ourselves whether the new occupant of the White House sufficiently appreciates the importance and the value of NATO. Theresa May has extracted from him this suggestion that he is in fact behind it. He has said that, now it is more focused on countering terrorism, which was one of his main concerns, he is happier about the American contribution to it. However, is it true in your understanding that perhaps in the NATO countries themselves there is insufficient appreciation of the value of the organisation? Do any of you feel qualified to comment on that—whether, in the post-cold war years, in which so many of the younger people in the NATO countries were born and grew up, NATO importance is insufficiently recognised? Do you think mainly the defence establishments of the NATO countries are reasonably in tune with what their people believe about the necessity of the organisation?

Franklin Kramer: If it is all right, I'll raise one point, which is that France, which was for many, many years outside the integrated NATO military structure, rejoined. I have lost track of the exact year but it was around 2007 and 2008, if I remember correctly. That was really quite a change. In my opinion, that is a change for the positive. I think very highly of the French in general and I think they pay a great deal of attention to security issues, but that was a substantial difference.

Then, certainly in the '90s and the early 2000s, you have the enlargement set of issues. You had countries very much interested in engaging a while back, but that is kind of less important.

Q109 **Chair:** So do you think that given the vital role of the United Kingdom in any American effort to defend Europe and the vital role of the United States in any European effort to defend themselves, there are particular areas where the United Kingdom could do more to contribute to the strengthening of the bilateral relationship—for example, in the highly specialised field of cyber-warfare?

Franklin Kramer: First of all, I think the UK is doing very, very well in the cyber arena. The new national cyber centre and the strategy are excellent. The US and the UK have always worked extremely closely in the overall intel area, and cyber is in some way a derivative of that. So I think ensuring that that continues and then working as closely as possible—I don't want to give a lengthy answer, but I think it would be important to say that, with respect to the multinational battalions that are forward, we need not only to have conventional capabilities, including reinforcement, but also to have good cyber capabilities for that forward defence.

Chair: Any other comments from colleagues on the panel?

James Black: In the sense of UK contributions to bolstering the European will and capability, in the last five or more years, the UK has been very active in things such as the joint expeditionary force—the CJEF—with France, Lancaster House, the new bilateral relationships with Germany and with Poland, and promoting security engagement there. The UK is taking quite an active role in bringing nations together to practise interoperability and so on at the tactical level and that obviously cascades up to the political and strategic level, where you start to build the kernel of trust and mutual dependence and so on. Obviously, Brexit raises a lot of questions about the degree to which that influence is affected by the outcome of the negotiations that are about to begin tomorrow, and the degree to which the UK is willing or able to continue to contribute to the CSDP after it is no longer an EU member.

Professor Bew: That is doubly important after Brexit. There has clearly been a choice to act as a persuader for other European states—other NATO states—to do more on defence. That has been a position that the UK has held longer, and pre-referendum, but it is something that is of elevated importance. My only suggestion as an addendum would be that in the UK's case it might be a better option to show rather than simply tell in this instance, so a symbolic increase beyond 2% would seem to make sense in that respect.

Chair: Yes; I do not think that you will find much dissent from that proposition on this Committee. Alexandra, anything to add?

Alex Hall: No, I concur with everything.

Q110 **Chair:** Thank you very much.

The focus of NATO is always very much on the east and the south. Do we sometimes neglect the importance of the north Atlantic and those other countries that are NATO members who would naturally have a north Atlantic focus? I wonder if you would like to comment, Mr Kramer.

Franklin Kramer: I think the north Atlantic has become much more important; the Norwegians would certainly tell you that. They are quite concerned about the Russians' so-called bastion defence approach. The French are very interested. I read a story that, just yesterday, at naval level, our US chief naval officer, your First Sea Lord and the French equivalent—I don't know what the French person is called, but in any event an Admiral—had signed an agreement on anti-submarine warfare with respect to carriers. In that regard, there is substantial focus on the north Atlantic, so we all need to pay considerable attention to that.

Q111 **Chair:** Any other comments?

Alex Hall: I can't remember who said it, but someone said that NATO is nothing until it decides to become something. Quite often, NATO has only decided to become something in a reactive way. You mention the focus on the south, and it is in a reactive capacity that the southern NATO states in particular are looking in that direction. Although the northern European members of NATO are very much exercised by the north and it is very much in their strategic priority list, if the alliance wants to become more proactive, that is a strategic direction in which more could be done and more attention could be paid.

Q112 **Chair:** We have a few questions that we want to ask about the nuclear relationship, then we will come on to what is probably our final main topic, which is European defence.

On the nuclear topic, there is the closest co-operation between the UK and the United States in the development of the next generation of the UK nuclear deterrent. Do you regard there as being anything other than the most extensive continuing commitment on the far side of the Atlantic to that capacity of the United Kingdom to provide an independent centre of decision making for the purposes of nuclear deterrence in support of the alliance?

Franklin Kramer: Again, I am not in the Administration, and they have to speak for themselves, but I think all of us who are in the broad defence arena think it is extremely valuable for the UK to have a capable, independent deterrent. It is important in the context of NATO and it could be important in other areas, so I think closest co-operation is warranted and I expect that it would continue.

Q113 **Chair:** Any observations from colleagues?

James Black: I agree that it is extremely important to the US. I think the only slight caveat that I would add is that, given the rather huge fiscal resources that have to be dedicated to achieve that nuclear capability, there is a point at which if it were to degrade to a conventional capability, to conventional armed forces, below a certain level, that would be a

concern to the US as a partner. I think certainly in the near term and beyond the interest in having the UK as a second centre of decision is extremely strategically important.

Q114 **Chair:** That comes back to the size of the UK defence budget once again.

James Black: Absolutely.

Q115 **Chair:** It is a very strongly held belief in the United States that Russia is in violation of the 1987 INF treaty. Do you share that belief?

Franklin Kramer: I do.

Q116 **Chair:** And would you like to expand on that in a brief answer?

Franklin Kramer: I have not looked at the classified intelligence, so I only know what it is in the media, so to speak. I know that our officials have said so, and I believe that it is an accurate statement on their part.

Q117 **Chair:** Do any of you have a view as to how NATO should respond to this?

Professor Bew: Broadly speaking, there are a number of agreements of the late cold war period through to the post-cold war period that you could pass a memorandum that Russia is in violation of. So clearly some of the architecture established at the end of the cold war was not sufficiently fit for purpose and has not been doing what is required of it thereafter. I think that requires NATO attention. It also ultimately might require some sort of renegotiated settlement with Russia, which is a prospect that has been raised by the Trump Administration. I think those issues about the post-cold war rules-based architecture established all require urgent attention.

Q118 **Chair:** One of the main purposes of that treaty in 1987 was to remove a specific type of intermediate-range missile, the SS-20, which was capable of being accurately targeted on NATO's military infrastructure. That was why the cruise missiles and the Pershing II missiles were originally deployed as a counterweight. If it were deemed necessary now to respond to a perceived breach of that treaty, would there be any way in which the European members of NATO could achieve that, or would it have to be by some form of US addition to the arsenal of the NATO alliance in order to try to compensate for a supposed breach of the IMF treaty? Any views?

Professor Bew: If the IMF treaty and other treaties or agreements established at the end of the cold war era are to be reformed or reshaped or given ballast, the only way that is going to happen is through a united NATO action. It is inconceivable that that would happen without the United States, because the gear will start going in different directions. I think it is almost a non-starter; it has to be through united NATO action.

Q119 **Chair:** So if it is correct that Russia is in breach of one of the main pieces of security assurance that ended the cold war, we would not be able to do anything to try to offset that, possibly with a view to reaching a new bargain, without the participation of the United States.

Professor Bew: There are bargains that can be done with Russia without the participation of the United States. I would venture that those bargains would divide key European NATO partners in themselves, who perhaps have a different perspective on what that might look like. There are always deals to be cut and bargains to be made in international affairs, but I imagine that it would not look like a very good one.

Q120 **Chair:** The basis of the previous bargain was that the only way in which it was agreed to withdraw one set of missiles was to deploy another set of missiles and then to agree to remove both of them. What I am suggesting is that if one side is in breach of that agreement and you wish to conclude a new agreement, that may involve some sort of counter-move by NATO to form a basis for reaching a new disarmament treaty. I am asking whether there is any source other than the United States that could contribute the hardware that might make such a scenario plausible.

Professor Bew: I think your suggestion is right. If it is a question, I would suggest no.

Chair: You would suggest no. Okay. Thank you very much indeed.

Q121 **Phil Wilson:** Do you think there is any possibility of a group of European NATO member states engaging in developing their own nuclear deterrent? What do you think the likelihood of that is? What would be the repercussions for NATO if it happened?

James Black: There has been a lot of debate about this in recent weeks and months. It is notable in itself that a number of countries, not least Germany, are even talking about this—that was inconceivable a number of years ago, for obvious reasons. Clearly, there are huge legal barriers, if that's what they want to go about doing, given that you have the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and half a dozen others that would prohibit it. There is clearly a huge fiscal challenge, given that Europeans are struggling as it is to invest in conventional armed forces. It is not clear that there would be the political will or the readily available funds to go about doing this. Clearly, it is also a great technical challenge.

It is worth noting that it is also not about just procuring the capability; it is also about maintaining it. The UK's deterrent is a very expensive piece of kit, and that is with all the economies of scale and efficiencies that come from adding your capabilities to a very much larger American pool. It is not clear that it would be most efficient use of very finite European resources.

You get back to the ultimate question, which is who presses the trigger and on what grounds? Do you get back to the same NATO-EU consensus problems that you have had on much less controversial issues? I think it is highly unlikely. The fact that the debate is happening, however, might signal that there is a greater willingness at least to think about other conventional forms of deterrent.

Q122 **Phil Wilson:** Anybody else?

Franklin Kramer: The first point I would make is that there are two nations in NATO, other than the US, that have nuclear weapons, so we are not devoid of a European capability. If what one is really talking about is whether the Germans would or would not engage, I would agree with all that has been said. I think it is unlikely, even though they have raised the issue, and I don't think it would be necessary. At a much lower level, I was there when the TNF-INF discussions started, when Schmidt gave a speech in '77, or thereabouts. It was very complicated and difficult, but we worked our way through it. It was in fact US capabilities, but then we worked very hard to ensure other countries were involved, just as we have with the aircraft. I think if we decide we need to go down the nuclear route—I don't believe anyone has decided that is necessary yet—you would probably find some sort of a reprise of that very complicated, and probably dual-track, approach, which we took at that time.

Q123 **Phil Wilson:** To stick with the European dimension in all of this, what would be the US's view of the EU's desire for further European defence integration?

Franklin Kramer: So you are talking about the recent statements about defence integration from Mrs Mogherini and various other people?

Phil Wilson: Yes.

Franklin Kramer: Right. Again, I am not sure I am qualified to speak for the entirety of the United States, but I can give you my personal view, which is that we want European countries to have an increased defence capability. The 2% problem, so to speak—as others on the panel pointed out, it is not a capabilities point—is illustrative of the problem, which is capabilities, is real: there is a lack of capabilities. If some of that is done by joint efforts—for example, Germany has a lot of multilateral sets of arrangements with the Dutch, the Czechs and various others—that is all to the good. If it turns out to be an, if you will, duplicative, anti-NATO type of approach, I think it would not be good. It depends on how it is undertaken. As long as it is an increase in capabilities, I think it is positive. If it is an undercutting of NATO, I think it is negative.

Professor Bew: A number of political dynamics are at work, which are all significant. Certainly, there is a portion of opinion within the EU that regards common defence and foreign policy as an attempt to cast out and have more strategic autonomy from the US and potentially from the UK more broadly. It is not clear how much support or momentum that has at a nation-state level—particularly at a Franco-German nation-state level. I suspect it doesn't actually have that much support or momentum. The answer to the question is, it depends on what sort of further defence integration and capabilities. If it is to match a capability gap and to be a burden sharer, it would be welcome, broadly speaking—but obviously certain things, like the prospect of an EU army, create a neuralgic response in the UK. Were things to go down that route, that would not be particularly constructive to the broader NATO alliance.

Phil Wilson: Ms Hall, did you want to say something?

Alex Hall: No, I entirely concur.

Q124 **Phil Wilson:** The last point I want to make is this. I know the US Administration has a lot to say about the French military's capability and admires a lot of the capabilities that they have. Can any of you foresee a situation further down the line where the French are the European strategic partner of choice for the US, rather than the UK?

Professor Bew: I think the French have the best matched capabilities to the UK, given that this is one area in which the UK has significant leverage. It has a tradition of a similarly strategic culture and habit and tends to fight expeditionary wars—in certain cases, arguably less effectively, and in other cases more effectively than the UK. Of all the scenarios we have played with, such as an independent EU nuclear deterrent, that is perhaps the one that has the potential to play out. I suspect there are other dynamics at play, which are also unclear—what is the French role in broader European security? To what extent do the French want to pool their existing strength into the broader EU security architecture? My instinct is: not that much. But that is not an implausible scenario, if unlikely.

James Black: I think France is in quite a difficult position at the moment, not least with Brexit. It has invested very heavily in the UK relationship since the Lancaster House treaties. It has insisted that those are Brexit-proof and will endure, and there have been a number of developments that suggest that will continue for at least the foreseeable future. But clearly France now has a number of awkward choices, such as whether it wants to try to supplant the UK as the bridge with the US and Europe between NATO and the EU, now that the UK is removing itself from the picture. There have been suggestions that France will want the coveted Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe role, and things like that.

At the same time, France has historically been rather less relaxed about such close interdependence with the US than the UK has been for historical reasons. It is interested in strategic autonomy. It has emphasised a European approach, politically. Coming back to your question about nuclear weapons in Europe, an obvious solution would be for France to commit its own national deterrent to the NATO or EU alliance, but clearly that is something France has chosen not to do up to now, and there is no reason for that to change.

Finally, it is worth emphasising that France is very heavily engaged—it has tens of thousands of troops on the streets of Paris and other French cities, doing counter-terrorism and reassurance tasks. It is obviously in Mali and many other central African countries at the moment. It is not clear that France necessarily always has the will, the same culture as America or the available capabilities right now to do much more than it is already doing.

Certainly in the future, if the UK were to diverge strategically from the EU, that would diminish its interest to the US as the transatlantic bridge but, as has been the case with many of our answers, it would depend on the context in which you were looking to operate. If you were looking to

operate somewhere like north Africa, the US would quite reasonably go to France as the first port of call. If it was looking at countries with greater expertise in the Gulf or elsewhere, the UK might still be the obvious partner.

Franklin Kramer: My view is that it is not a contest. From the US perspective, you try to work as much as you possibly can with all of your allies. That certainly was what I did when I was there, both times. You try to build strong relationships and get the allies to work together, with each other. We used to use a so-called quad to bring together the policy directors at both the Foreign Office and State Department level and the defence level, so that we knew what was going on together, and then we would have common strategies. I would hope that that would continue.

Q125 **Mrs Moon:** We have a colleague who is not with us at the moment because he is in Archangel—James Gray. James likes to do the "What if?" scenarios. It is my chance to do the "What if?" scenario. Following on from what Phil was saying, if post-Brexit you get this integrated EU defence force that builds an intrinsic military capability, would it be seen as an additional threat by Russia? What is Russia's view of it going to be?

Professor Bew: When one deals with "What if?" scenarios, there is always a temptation to be relatively mischievous with them. I suggest that even if there was a scenario in which you have more effective serious EU defence integration, it would be driven by national priorities and the powers of the EU—particularly France more than any other power, but secondarily Germany and Italy. There is therefore a scenario in which that would be regarded as a strategic threat to Russia. There is also a scenario in which France, for example, has potentially a relatively soft line on various issues of Russian encroachment in eastern and southern Europe. There is a scenario in which Russia does not regard that integration as a threat, but instead as a break-up of the broader western alliance, if its chief, traditional, historical gripe has been with the United States. It depends on which way the wheels go. Anything that looks like a weakening or dilution of NATO would, I suspect, be welcomed in Moscow, as opposed to feared.

Alex Hall: I would add to that by saying it may be welcomed, but also perhaps may become a target for mischief-making and attempts to undermine cohesion. Were this defence entity to be credible and operating in the near-European neighbourhood, I suspect that that would close down some options for Russia or at least make the tinkering on the periphery more difficult, which would probably not be welcomed. Would it be perceived as a threat? Perhaps not in absolute military terms, but in terms of the ability to have political free reign and make mischief, I suspect that it would not be a welcome development in Russia.

Q126 **Mrs Moon:** The idea was that it was strategically significant. I am going to take the "What if?" scenario a little further. What if it was a strategically significant European force that was joined by Sweden and Finland? What would be the reaction of Russia in particular? When we were there, Russia made very clear its unhappiness if those countries

joined NATO. What if they joined this significant European force?

James Black: The reaction would not be positive, understandably. There is a reason why Finlandisation has entered the vocabulary. The Russians have viewed certain areas of the world as their traditional area of influence. I think this gets back to the original question of what Russia would actually do. I do not think it would necessarily change its approach compared to when it has been confronting NATO, which has been to try to undermine political unity and frustrate the decision-making process. Ultimately, it is that unity that is the real threat, rather than the specific capability—kit, number of troops and so on.

We have already seen a number of public statements and incidents with Russia, such as infringing on certain countries' airspace. There have been a number of incidents with Russian submarines appearing or not appearing off the Swedish coastline. Clearly those efforts would likely be intensified. At the same time, it is worth emphasising that there is not a clear will in Sweden or Finland necessarily to sign up to any such "What if?" scenario. Sweden prevaricated about whether it needed a referendum on NATO membership after the events in Ukraine and elsewhere, and it decided that it did not. It is unclear what it would take to force Scandinavian populations to get to that point in the first place, but the reaction in Russia would be that it would not be welcomed.

Mrs Moon: Thank you. I agree with your comment in relation to unity being a threat. I think that is a very helpful comment that coalesces things, and I will take great delight in telling my colleague, when he is back, that "What if?" scenarios are mischievous.

Q127 **Chair:** Thank you, Madeleine. I have just got a single question of two halves to finish off with. If Russia were to make a move against one of the Baltic states, similar to its behaviour in the Ukraine, is there any reason to doubt that the USA under President Trump would honour article 5 of the NATO treaty?

Franklin Kramer: The USA would definitely honour article 5.

Professor Bew: Almost absolutely.

Q128 **Chair:** There is no dissent from that?

James Black: I agree. The only caveat I would add is that if you are talking about some sort of hybrid threat, establishing the threshold past which this measure short of war is headed towards war is always difficult.

Q129 **Chair:** That is why I said similar to the Ukraine where there is very significant—I think the term used earlier was kinetic—action.

James Black: Yes, absolutely.

Q130 **Chair:** If NATO were not on the scene, but instead a European military force was there without the presence of the United States, and Russia made such a move, would you have anything like the same certainty that the countries of Europe, without the United States, would take equivalent

action to what we have just described America being highly likely to take in the event of kinetic aggression against one of the Baltic states?

Franklin Kramer: Counterfactually, you are saying the multinational battalions are not there and it is a different world—that is your hypothesis?

Q131 **Chair:** My hypothesis is that the European Union succeeds in its aim of setting up a European defence force and the United States is not in the scenario. Would a European defence force be able to be relied upon to go to war in defence of one of the Baltic states if they suffered the same sort of aggression as being meted out to the Ukraine?

Franklin Kramer: I actually don't think that question is easily answered, because you would have to decide what the circumstances were in which the US left and how this force came about. The words of the Lisbon treaty are approximately the same as the words of the NATO treaty. So how and why this force got placed there—

Q132 **Chair:** Let me try one more time, and then we will take the hypothesis as having gone as far as it can be stretched. Let us imagine that President Trump is deadly serious when he says that he will not defend NATO states that do not meet not the target but the minimum of 2% expenditure. As we know, Estonia does meet it but the other two Baltic states do not. Let us say that President Trump really meant that, and that America was not going to act under those circumstances—something that I hope is not the case. Do you believe that one could have anything like the same assurance that a European defence force without the United States could be relied upon?

Franklin Kramer: I think the short answer from me is that the US is critical to the defence of Europe.

Q133 **Chair:** Is that the view of you all?

Alex Hall: I'm not clear whether you are talking about political will or military output, and whether you are talking about the qualitative effect—

Q134 **Chair:** No, I am talking about the political will of course. The basis of NATO's deterrence is that any aggressor has to believe that any attempt to repeat the scenarios of 1914 or 1939, when an aggressor thought that they could pick off smaller countries without being at war with the United States in particular—they thought rightly, as it happened, at that stage. Could that apply in a situation where America was not engaged, but the European Union was doing what some of its advocates have been threatening to do, which is to say, "Because there is a danger of the United States turning away from Europe, we must build up a European defence force to defend ourselves"? I am asking how reliable that would be as a deterrent.

Alex Hall: The answer is it depends, obviously, on the timeframe between now and this happening and on the capabilities that were going to be generated, if it was a credible deterrent force. I think it has to be plausible that the political will could exist for the Europeans to step up in that

instance, but we are long way qualitatively and in temporal terms from this being a realistic discussion.

Chair: Let's end on the hope that we remain a long way from that being a realistic discussion. I thank you all for your contribution today. This concludes the hearing.