

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: The indispensable ally? US, NATO and UK Defence relations, HC 387

Monday 5 March 2018

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Members present: Dr Julian Lewis (Chair); Martin Docherty-Hughes; Mr Mark Francois; Johnny Mercer; Ruth Smeeth; John Spellar; Phil Wilson.

Questions 90-140

Witnesses

[I](#): Ambassador Victoria Nuland, CEO, Center for a New American Security and Congressman Michael Turner.

[II](#): Dr Heather Conley, Senior Vice President for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Dr Nile Gardiner, Director, Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, Heritage Foundation, and Dr Tom Wright, Director, Center on the United States and Europe, Brookings Institution.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Ambassador Victoria Nuland and Congressman Michael Turner.

Q90 **Chair:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this formal hearing of the United Kingdom's House of Commons Defence Select Committee in our inquiry entitled, "The indispensable ally?"—with a question mark; at the moment, anyway—"US, NATO and UK Defence relations". We are particularly grateful to our two distinguished witnesses for being willing to testify today. For the benefit of the record—in particular for the audience back in the United Kingdom—we would be grateful, Ambassador and Congressman, if you would kindly introduce yourselves and say a few sentences about your specialism, your background and your present posts.

Congressman Turner: Thank you. I am Mike Turner from the Dayton, Ohio congressional district 10. I serve on the Armed Services Committee. I previously chaired the Strategic Forces Sub-Committee, which has responsibility for nuclear weapons, missiles, missile defence, space and military intel, and I continue to serve on that sub-committee. I currently serve as Chair of the Tactical Air and Land Forces Sub-Committee, which has all the air force and army acquisition programmes under its jurisdiction. I am also on the Intelligence Committee, and on that committee I have two areas of primary concentration, one of which is the Iran deal and the second of which is Five Eyes, which of course overlaps nicely with this hearing. As an appointment from the Speaker, I serve as head of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation for the United States, and I have just ended a two-year period as President of that organisation. It is great to see you, and thank you so much for including me in your dialogue.

Ambassador Nuland: Thank you, UK colleagues. It is great to be with you today in this formal setting. I am Victoria Nuland. I am currently the CEO of the Center for a New American Security, a bipartisan security think-tank here in Washington. I am a former US diplomat of 32 years. My most recent assignment was as Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, where I saw some of you in the State Department and some of you in London. I am also a former ambassador to NATO for Bush III and a former deputy at NATO, and I have had various other assignments, including a posting in Moscow. I am also a consultant to the National Intelligence Council for European and Russian affairs and a board member of the National Endowment for Democracy.

Q91 **Chair:** Thank you very much for those words of introduction. I should say that we are very grateful indeed to the Atlantic Council for hosting this session: it is very appropriate for a study into the continued value of the north Atlantic alliance and the UK-US military relationship. I would like to ask each of you this: how valued in Washington DC at present is the United Kingdom's military contribution to NATO and to western defence in general?

Ambassador Nuland: I think from the United States perspective, in a bipartisan manner, the UK's contribution to NATO and unfortunately also to European defence is absolutely essential. You and the French are the only full-spectrum allies left in the alliance, in addition to us, in terms of land, sea and air, ability to operate independently, and ability to operate at distance. I was struck by something that Prime Minister May said at the Munich Security Conference: that when the UK leaves the EU, 80% of the military capability of the alliance will reside outside the European Union overlapping set. That is quite concerning. We depend on you not only for your huge range of capabilities, your full spectrum and your willingness to work at distance, but for your rigour in dealing with defence issues, whether those are counter-terrorism issues or traditional threats, and your willingness to be first on the line when NATO is needed—whether that was in Afghanistan or it is now on the eastern edge of the alliance.

Congressman Turner: Thank you. Let us start with the bilateral relationship. No two nations are as close and as integrated as ours in the important functions of both military and intelligence. If you go to any of your facilities or our facilities, you will see the partnership that we have embedded in them. We are not just partners; we are peers. The relationship between the UK and the United States helps each of us to push a little bit further and higher to check one another, making certain that we have the right policies. Our shared values help tremendously to scope that relationship.

The UK is obviously the indispensable ally in a number of ways, including in having been the United States' voice at the EU. As we see that transitioning, we still see the partnership between the UK and the EU as being a strong conduit for the United States in its relationship with the EU on military and intelligence issues. If you look at the Five Eyes relationship, the manner in which we work together is indispensable. It is not merely that we share intelligence. Many times, our intelligence products and conclusions are based on not only consulting one another, but co-producing and working on a product.

On the nuclear mission, and the importance of your at-sea continuous deterrent, you represent what is probably the most important function in military security as we look to the next decade: a return to deterrence. We looked before to how we could project forces, but we did not necessarily look to forward-placing of forces, stability, protection of the European area, and deterrence of Russia and Russian aggression. Together, we are essential in that. Certainly, the UK plays a huge role in NATO itself.

The other aspect that I think you see in almost any NATO decision making, whether at the NAC or any other of the numerous bilateral relationships that form the relationship of NATO, the UK and the United States are generally aligned in advocating the same values of investment in military capability, and making certain that we clearly identify those who are violating international norms. Our voices on Russia's incursion into Ukraine were the same and unwavering. Policy formulation is an important aspect of our overall relationship.

I would underscore that we are returning to deterrence. Your role in that, and in working with the United States in accomplishing that, is essential.

- Q92 **Chair:** Just one more quick question before I hand over to my colleague. Would you say that the re-emergence of an assertive Russia ought to make the United Kingdom think again about some of the retrenchments in defence, in particular the withdrawal of troops from Germany?

Ambassador Nuland: Absolutely.

Congressman Turner: Let me elaborate a little on that excellent one-word answer, to give the true answer to this. The aspect that the UK plays is as the multiplier of that voice. You are absolutely right. There was a time when NATO declared that it had no adversaries, and that Russia was a partner.

Vladimir Putin's announcement of the expansion of his nuclear weapons programme did not happen overnight. It has been coming and happening over years. Many of the nations that, at times, would argue for greater partnership and dialogue, and a lessening of our overall military commitment, knew that Russia was going in this direction, but hoped that they would turn in another direction. They are not turning, so it will take us reinvesting, turning to ingenuity and making certain that we always have ways to hit.

- Q93 **John Spellar:** With that background, is there a concern in Congress and in the Administration that further reductions in the UK's defence capacity and capability could result in a lack of credibility as an ally?

Congressman Turner: I think that goes for all of us, so I would say yes. Even the United States has struggled with that ourselves. We are just now coming off declining defence budgets, and the effects of sequestration on our own readiness. We are not alone in looking to our allies and seeing that we have had diminished capability of our own military. We are now reinvesting. We are reinvigorating our policy debates about what we need to do to increase capability.

I think that that is probably similar for our ally, the UK. That is how we look at the relationship—we are both going to have to be reinvesting together and we are going to have to be reinvesting in capabilities that we have neglected. It is no longer the issue of ensuring that we can project force; it is what that force is going to do, what technology it is going to have with it and what technology is going to be subject to cyber or incapacitating attacks on the field. We are going to have to find ways where your industry and our industry work together to give us the edge on the battlefield that, unfortunately, together we are losing.

Ambassador Nuland: I would obviously agree with all that. I would go even more broadly. The concern in the context of Brexit is that it could go one of two ways for the UK. On the one hand, you could argue that, released from the common foreign policy constraints of the EU, the UK could join us in a more robust set of defence and foreign policy positions around the world and make its own independent investments. On the



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other hand, if you end up with serious economic repercussions from Brexit, you may not be able to afford what you are currently spending, let alone the reinvestment that is required.

As Congressman Turner said, we are not simply talking about all the things that we are currently doing to fly together, sail together, learn together and so on. We are talking about the next generation of war fighting capability—the force of the future. That is working together on artificial intelligence, on combating cyber, on using cyber to our own advantage, on autonomous systems, on space and all those things. The hope is that out of all of this comes a greater Britain, not a little England, because we will be very lonely out there defending the planet if that is what happens.

- Q94 **Chair:** Yes, we sometimes make a point of stressing the fact that many of the people who have been the loudest advocates of spending more money on defence in the United Kingdom have been people in favour of Brexit, so we hope that—perhaps you will correct me if I am wrong—people do not interpret the British decision to withdraw from the EU as any lessening of our commitment to NATO. I hope that aspiration is not unrealistic. Perhaps you would like to comment.

Ambassador Nuland: On the contrary, what we have heard is that, without the constraint of common EU policy, the UK will be unleashed to be even more vibrant in NATO. It has always been *primus inter pares* for you, but it will be even more so. That is what we are all hoping for, obviously, and we are going to need it in NATO. The issue is just the pure economic issue, and then the political will to continue to invest in next generation systems.

- Q95 **Johnny Mercer:** Having served extensively on operations myself, I struggle to see what unique capability the UK has that the US is so keen to retain. What is that unique capability? Is it more our position in Europe, or the idea of not conducting unilateral action—that you would have an ally along with you?

Ambassador Nuland: I think it is all of it. You fly advanced fighter aircraft that can do joint missions with us anywhere and at distance. You have the UAV and drone capacity that allows us to work together, which almost no other ally has. Obviously, there is your unrivalled naval capability, your nuclear weapons and your nuclear deterrent. That has, with rare exception, not been put under political question in the UK, and therefore is a reliable, dependable partnership that also helps to keep the rest of Europe solid on nuclear deterrence.

- Q96 **Johnny Mercer:** What is the unique capability though? Apart from the fact that you would like to have someone else along for the ride, what is Britain's unique capability?

Ambassador Nuland: The ability to deploy at distance and the willingness to do so, the nuclear capability and the key high-end aviation and ground systems that nobody else has except us. When you are at your



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best, you are more martial than the French as well, so you are our best partner on the battlefield.

Mr Francois: Hear, hear!

Ambassador Nuland: Was that on the record? Are my French friends going to read that?

Congressman Turner: I would not want this to appear as an answer on outsourcing of capability, because the United States, in an overlapping way, has any of the capabilities that we would need for an operation. You need an ally that is not just a partner—what do you bring to the table? What tools do you bring to the table?—but a peer. Unlike any other ally, we have conversations with the UK on what we should do—not just “we” as a bilateral relationship, but “we” the United States. That aspect of looking to the UK first on the analysis of what threats there are, how they should be addressed and what our common values are is probably the most important aspect. We could go down the list of all the military capabilities you have, but the most important is that ability to have that dialogue and impact.

When trying to move our NATO partners, the United Nations or others, the United States is not alone in looking to the UK for that bedrock of values that people can use as a litmus test as to what action should be taken. Russia and the Ukraine were the clearest examples. That capability—having someone who does not just echo what the United States is saying, but has independent stature and ability to influence—is probably your most important asset and partnership to the United States.

Q97 **Johnny Mercer:** To do that, you have to come from a position where you can contribute something. The fear in the UK at the moment is that if we continue to diminish our military capabilities, it will become a bit of a one-way street. We will always come to a position where we will support you politically, but there needs to be something there as well. I come back to my original question, because I fail to see what is unique. We used to have unique assets that we would bring to the battlefield with our American counterparts, but what do we have now that you really value, apart from the political and moral support that, frankly, a number of allies could provide you with?

Ambassador Nuland: In my experience, having done two tours of duty at NATO and operational planning at NATO from Bosnia to Kosovo to Afghanistan to deploying on the eastern edge, if you are the United States and you are thinking about, “What percentage of this NATO mission do we have to do?”, it always starts with, “What are the things that only we can bring?”. You, and to a lesser extent the French, are the only allies who, at that very high end of capability, can relieve burden on us, so that we do not have to do all the supersonic flying or all the ISR—you have some of your own.

Your intelligence, including your human intelligence, is often far better than ours because of the way that you deploy. Don’t tell my service that I



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said that, but it's true. You can get there quickly, which most other allies cannot do. You can often deploy, as you did in Afghanistan, in fleeter, smaller or less-hardened packages than we can, which allows you to serve on the outer edge or until we can reinforce or build up. When planning a multilateral mission, we have to bear 50%, 60% or 70% of the burden if we do not have you helping to reduce the high-end burden.

Johnny Mercer: Okay, that is clear.

Congressman Turner: Could I just embellish what Ambassador Nuland said on the issue of intel? That is not only an incredibly important aspect of the contribution the UK makes to the United States; it is also part of what gives you that stature you have. Others besides ourselves know that when the UK is undertaking an assessment, it is reliable.

Now, let me agree with you about what I think is the underlying premise of your question, which is: is the UK's capability absolutely essential for keeping the world safe and in the security environment we're in, and does that relate to what we're able to accomplish together? Absolutely. And I think that the world is getting less safe, and there could be no more critical time than now to ensure that the UK reinvests and ensures that it both maintains the capability it has and looks to future capability.

Q98 **Johnny Mercer:** Finally from me, did it reach over here that we have been through a process over the last eight or nine months, whereby a series of proposals have been put forward that would fundamentally change the shape, capability and culture of the UK armed forces? Did any of that reach across the Atlantic and, if so, what were your views on that, briefly?

Ambassador Nuland: I have to say that, since I left Government a year ago, I am not following the details as closely. My understanding is that there is sort of a sense of consolidation and shrinking of next-generation systems, and that is exactly what Americans worry about. They worry that the Brexit thing is not a liberator, in terms of capability and commitment, and instead that it causes you to look at your navel and pull in your budget.

Q99 **Phil Wilson:** Good afternoon. I have another question about Brexit, basically. I think it's fair to say that, among people on both sides of the argument about whether we should remain in the EU or leave, many of us are in favour of seeing an increase in the GDP that we spend on defence. If Brexit goes through and there is an impact on the economy, which there probably will be, it then comes down to a matter of resource.

Ambassador, you mentioned that it could be liberating, whereby we could look after defence in Europe but also help America on other defence issues around the world. The big issue that we have in Europe defence-wise is obviously NATO, which is a geographic alliance, and there is also global Britain, which is something that we hear a lot of rhetoric about in England at the moment. If we have limited resources, where should those resources go? Should it be on continued investment on NATO, or should it be on helping America around the rest of the world, wherever issues



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appear?

Ambassador Nuland: You have a single pool of forces, as we all do, so I think the No. 1 priority is to stay as mobile and as multi-system and multi-domain as you've always been, and to be able to deploy at distance. Then we can see what the contingencies are.

In NATO, we are in a relatively static state now, with the reinforcement in the east. You're pulling your rotation, but the hope would be that, under any circumstances, you'd be available for that contingency that we can't see. You're about the only country in Europe that we would call on if we had a North Korea contingency, for example, because you can get there and you could handle it.

I hope that you would never get to a situation where you had to make a trade-off between doing all that—the little battalion on the eastern edge of NATO territory, and being integrated with German forces, and keeping your naval assets afloat—and having deployable capabilities for a contingency that we can't see yet.

Congressman Turner: Certainly from a capability standpoint, I agree. The Ambassador is absolutely correct; it's the same. What you can bring to bear, whether it be in something around the world or in NATO capability, is the same.

What we see now—I think that is your reference to where to put priorities—is that NATO has to return to deterrents. That requires a broader presence of troops, investment in Europe and looking at what it will take to deter Vladimir Putin, as opposed to just current operations. Like the Ambassador, I hope that the UK will be able to participate in all that, because as we look to the current threat environment, they are all somewhat related. It is like a balloon: if you put pressure in one place, there goes some place else. We are still in a very critical time period, whether in the Middle East, in NATO, in the build-up occurring in China or in the threats from North Korea and Iran as they emerge; they are all on a very critical path. We need to deal with them together.

Q100 **Phil Wilson:** Do you think that the negative economic impacts of Brexit make it more difficult to do all those things?

Ambassador Nuland: It is a matter internal prioritisation, right? Your population wants domestic spending and infrastructure spending, as does ours. We have chosen in this hostile world to double down on defence and raise the percentage of GDP. The population is supportive of that now, which is partly to do with the combined effects of China, Russia and North Korea and Iran. I could not speak on whether the UK population will allow you to go in that direction, but part of it requires leadership—both parties explaining to your citizenry that it is a dangerous world out there.

Q101 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** On the last two questions about credibility as an ally and capability, do you agree that the credibility of an ally is a two-way street? On capability, which could be impacted by Brexit, with much talk of trade wars this week, and the idea in the *Financial Times* this



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morning that the talks between the United States and the UK on landing and flying rights may have stalled, how does the United States manage the strain that this sort of tension puts on security relationships, not just with the United Kingdom but with the rest of the membership of the European Union, and with Canada and Mexico?

Congressman Turner: I get to provide you with the softer answer. There has been lots of commentary about Brexit having a negative impact on the UK; hopefully, globally we will be in a period of economic growth, so hopefully as you look overall you will not make tough military decisions based on Brexit, but will see an ability to invest with confidence.

In the United States, we are having a period of, I think correct, review of just about all our foundational trade relationships and internal economic structures, which the electorate called for in the last election. They said, "Question everything." From that, it is coming about that we are getting a good and productive to-do list; you saw that with the tax programme that the United States just undertook, which, for the first time, was economic-based instead of just interest-based. When you see a topic come up, I would not be concerned about it having been raised; I would look for the conclusion and see how that reflects on a US-UK bilateral relationship.

Ambassador Nuland: I will be less diplomatic. I have grave concerns about the tones in which the Executive branch has been speaking to some of our historical allies: interference in domestic politics for no clear reason that I can tell, no differentiation in our trade policy between allies and clear trade competitors, and a lack of apparent understanding of the basic compact of alliance—that we share security, with the US playing an outsized role, but we all compete economically on a level playing field and are allowed to get rich without blaming one another. I would hope that we could get back to a place where we remember that rhetorically, politically and on trade terms we are family, and the dangers are beyond the family, not within the family.

Q102 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Congressman, you are right that there is clearly a democratic right to review and also, Ambassador, that families play by rules, usually over a period of time. Do you agree with that?

Ambassador Nuland: Yes, when they are functioning well.

Chair: Moving on briskly, Ruth and then Martin again.

Q103 **Ruth Smeeth:** I am not sure how much we are moving on. This question in theory was targeted at the Congressman, but I think given the dynamic we may get a slightly more expansive answer from the Ambassador. It is quite clear from the discussion so far that challenges may exist in the relationship going forward. Would some of that be mitigated if there was better engagement between UK and US elected representatives? If so, how will we progress that, because there is a concern about demonstrating our value to you under the current Administration?

Congressman Turner: Yes, but I think we also do that a lot, and I think we could do it more. Certainly, with my participation in the NATO



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Parliamentary Assembly I meet very frequently your delegation and, with the transatlantic dialogue, those that you send to the EU/US transatlantic dialogue similarly. I serve on the Armed Services Committee and Intelligence Committee, as I indicated, and, on a committee-to-committee basis, we see each other quite frequently and I think have a dialogue, which is very important.

The Ambassador will probably have a much more colourful description of what happens on the top levels of Government in that dialogue, but I think, on a parliamentarian-to-parliamentarian basis, I think we do pretty well, even though, as with any dialogue, we could certainly do better.

Ambassador Nuland: I would actually go further and say that at this time in our history, the Congress—the House and the Senate—are playing an outsized role, importantly and valuably, within our democracy in national defence and security, checking some of the stranger impulses, ensuring that our diplomatic programmes, for example, are fully funded, supporting democracy, programming, intelligence funding, being very firm on issues like continued sanctions on Russia, Iran and China. It is even more important, and Congress is working quite well in a bipartisan fashion on a lot of those things, despite the headlines of “Parties at war” and “Nation divided” and even within parties there being questioning.

Those of us who care about US leadership are on the US side investing even more now in bipartisan solutions that the Senate and the House can get behind, whether it is how to deal with our extra Iran problems, on top of the nuclear deal, whether it is encouraging continued attention and firmness on sanctions, whether it is the Congress taking into its hands some of the nuclear violations and other things, whether it is petitioning the Congress to maintain levels of funding for US diplomacy and intelligence and democracy promotion in the face of cuts that the Executive wants. I think this puts a premium on— By the same token, as we look at you all, we see a mirror image of really divided politics and really divided views over your future. I would say, as great and historic allies who need each other more than ever, I would urge all of you to intensify your multi-party approaches to us on the congressional side in a bipartisan way.

Q104 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Is the future of European deterrence initiatives safe? Does anything more need to be done to bolster the political effectiveness and physical reliance of NATO?

Congressman Turner: One issue that has been a focus in the beginning of this year for the NATO agenda is the infrastructure throughout Europe. We have the United States Army Corps of Engineers, which provides standards to all of our infrastructure. We are finding with the European reassurance initiative—the advanced forward placement of equipment and troops—that we expanded NATO geographically without taking into consideration how to get from point A to point B. It is much harder than anyone anticipated.



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I don't think the American taxpayer understood, when we undertook the European reassurance initiative, that some of those dollars would actually be going to buy train cars to get things from one point to the other. We understand that there are bridges that we can't cross and train tracks that go through tunnels that cannot carry loads that would be required for military deployment. Perhaps that is an issue that PESCO could undertake.

It is not just a military capability issue but an infrastructure capability issue. Certainly, in Europe, it has been difficult to get standards of infrastructure, even in energy distribution. However, the issue of basic infrastructure that can allow troops and equipment to move is probably the No. 1 priority right now.

Ambassador Nuland: I certainly agree with that. I really like the idea of PESCO focusing on those mobility and infrastructure gaps, if we can get that done. Particularly for countries like the US and the UK, to be able to get where we will probably need to go is pretty essential.

I have actually been very gratified by the broad-based support, not just in a bipartisan manner in Congress but also across the country, for the European reassurance initiative. The more Russia messes with us, the less likely we are to question the need to deploy in the east. I think we may very well move increasingly here to feeling like the eastern distribution ought to be made permanent.

Q105 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** Thank you. I just want to take that slightly forward by asking if you agree that it is not just about NATO but also, for instance, the President's perceived problems with guarantees also given to Japan and South Korea? Does the President ultimately know what the most generous types of those security relationships are? Will he be able to keep to those commitments?

Ambassador Nuland: Obviously, we are reinforcing in Asia now, for all the reasons that you know, having to do with North Korea. I also have concerns when we put into question trade agreements with an ally like South Korea at the very moment when we need to be completely on the same page about how we deal with our present and our future arrangements. I think there are plenty of ways that one can adjust and update trade agreements without threatening to withdraw.

Q106 **Mr Francois:** Could I ask something about American public opinion? The President has made some ambivalent comments about NATO since he has been in the White House. Clearly, he has been anxious that NATO nations pay more towards their own security, which is not at all unreasonable. What is American public opinion like on that? Do you think that Americans understand and appreciate the value of NATO or not?

Congressman Turner: It is a tough question, in relation to how you led up to it. You were leading up to the American public's perception of the imbalance in the United States funding of European security. Let me start there.



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About four years ago, an amendment was brought to the House Floor to pull all US troops out of Europe. No one did anything to lobby against it because everyone considered it to be dead on arrival, so to speak, and completely unrealistic. We were all shocked when it passed.

Hugh Bayley, one of your fellow Members of Parliament, came to me and asked what could be done to try to address the issue. He and I came up with a programme for the NATO Parliamentary Assembly that we entitled "Hugh on the Hill", where we took members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to Members' offices on the Capitol. NATO had no voice on Capitol Hill, so we were going to use members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly as they came to town. Multinational delegations would go and visit all the people who voted no, all the people who voted yes, those who are strong NATO supporters and those who are not strong NATO supporters. The message they got overwhelmingly was, "We just want to send a signal," and the signal was, "We don't want the American taxpayer to continue to get the bill sent to them for the defence of Europe, which certainly has a thriving economy and the ability to defend itself." Everyone is very aware that Russia's economy is the size of either Italy or Spain, and yet it has a military that can rival all of Europe. That gap should not be an inequity in the relationship between the US and the UK.

With "Hugh on the Hill", the next time the amendment was offered and came to the House Floor, it was defeated. The next time, it was defeated by over 300. The next time, the Rules Committee didn't even let it come to the Floor because they considered it to be silly. I think Vladimir Putin has done a tremendous job of both educating people and reinvigorating people's commitment to NATO, because they understand that it is collective defence.

However, there is absolutely more that needs to be done. There is still a very strong case to be made that the bill for European defence is being sent to the American taxpayer. I am fond of saying that, just as we did a European reassurance initiative, I would love to see an American reassurance initiative. It would not just be that our partners in NATO—our allies—decide to rise to the 2% level that everyone committed to in Wales; it would be that they dedicate themselves to capability in an understanding that we have a rival and adversaries.

From the perspective of American public opinion, I think NATO is probably more important than it has been in a long time. The issue of needing our NATO allies to step up to the table and fund defence is still a very important issue.

Ambassador Nuland: I would just say that I think President Trump's trope, both during the campaign and since, that the United States has got a raw deal from all this defence of liberalism and open trade out there in the world, and that we are being taken advantage of, has had far more salience across more sectors of the American public than I would have thought. We are a very big, diverse country, so what leadership says can have a profound impact, including across party lines.



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If the UK can do even better, in terms of helping to defend, keep seas open and all those things, I think the American people will really glom on to that. The question becomes whether we can convince the President that he has been part and parcel of the solution, and therefore that he can begin leading in this country on some of the other arguments. I have been going round the country doing a bunch of speeches about American restraint versus American global leadership, and doing some debates with some of the big restrainers. When you say that this is forward-basing for us for any contingency, that this is the ability to work together and not have to do 100% of it, and that we pay between 22% and 27%, and everybody else pays the rest, including on Afghanistan, the American people really don't know that, but the case has to be made. The more you do, the more it is a win and the more we can reverse-engineer the argument.

Q107 **Mr Francois:** Following on from that, which military capabilities would the United States most want to see European allies develop?

Congressman Turner: The term "develop" assumes that you are not retreating—

Q108 **Mr Francois:** No, to develop forward. If we assume for the moment that the glass is half full, and that there is going to be, not least because of Putin and events in Russia, at least some more investment by European NATO nations, which particular capabilities would you like to see that investment going into?

Congressman Turner: Beyond conventional and beyond current capabilities, including nuclear capabilities, we have got to become better at cyber. We have got to become better at sensing technology to understand the technology that is being utilised to negatively impact our own capabilities. We need to, as an alliance and even as partners, have greater fidelity in our intelligence. We used to know everything that Russia was doing, but when they were invading Ukraine, we all scrambled for any specific intelligence to understand what was moved, what was used and how it was used. We need to return to that level of capability where, when we have adversaries that move, we know what they have, what they are capable of and where they are going. A lot of it is not necessarily in bullets and things that move; it is in what we can know.

Ambassador Nuland: I would say that what we need from allies who are not full-spectrum defenders—Germany and then the smaller countries—is for them to be full spectrum at what they are supposed to be able to do. Why do the US and UK still have to provide so much helicopter lift whenever we deploy? Why can we not get more European mobility? Why do we still have to transport in long-range transport? Why can't the EU or somebody build more of that traditional stuff? Why have non-full-spectrum allies invested almost zero in ISR, which is absolutely essential, and some of the higher-end firing systems and so on? That is what I would ask of them.



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Of you, it is obviously all that next generation stuff that we have to do together: the avionics, the cyber, the AI, the space cueing, the integration of systems, the fast mobility and all those things.

Q109 Mr Francois: In the UK at the moment, we are undergoing a defence review of our own, as you know. To some degree, we have begun to echo your own national defence strategy, which makes clear that state-on-state threats are now the priority. This Committee took evidence from our new Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson two weeks ago, where he declared that for the UK, state-on-state threats were now the priority. That is an important shift in our position. Once you make that statement, there are all sorts of knock-on effects, including in terms of your investment. Our Secretary of State has said that 2% is a floor, not a ceiling. We on this Committee are very hopeful that in negotiations with the Prime Minister and our Chancellor of the Exchequer, there will actually be a plus-up in UK defence spending over the next few years. That would be logically consistent with saying that we now have to deter a state-on-state threat.

Assuming that the glass is half empty and those negotiations go as this Committee would wish, where would you like to see the UK specifically spending more money and on which capabilities? For instance, Congressman, you mentioned the value of ISTAR, and that is one area in which we are already quite strong. If we had some extra cash, where would you like to see it go?

Congressman Turner: I would have to say to all of those that we just went through a debate about increasing our defence spending as a result of years of sequestration. The President came in with his annual budget, and Congress for the first time since I have been here increased substantially the amount that we are going to spend over even what the President had called for. We laid out in our National Defense Authorization Act for this year how those moneys are going to be spent. He has come back with a larger agreed second-year increase for 2019, and we are going to go through that debate this year as to where it should be spent, and it will be in all those areas.

When we look to what our adversaries are saying—they are declaring themselves our adversaries—that intuitively takes us to the tools we are going to need. Space is now a threat. It is not only that the tools we need in space are essential; the fact is that they are at risk. Our troops on the ground and their ability to count on the capabilities they have are at risk. Our ability to deter is obviously a new topic again. Vladimir Putin has announced his pursuit of a weapon to destroy an area the size of Texas or the UK all at once. It is unthinkable that at this time we would be facing these threats again.

As we look at the general discussion of technology—what is also very good by the way is that our military industry is integrated very well, between the UK and the United States—and as we as decision makers look at how we spend those dollars, we will be looking similarly at some of the same people and asking for their ingenuity. I think that is another thing that we

share very well, and that ingenuity is hopefully going to give us an advantage on the battlefields of tomorrow, because certainly our adversaries are seeking them.

Ambassador Nuland: I agree with everything Congressman Turner said in terms of space, cyber and all those things. The other thing that we are confronting that we don't have our arms around is A2/AD, or area access denial—you know, small naval, small subs and all those kinds of platforms that we need to make sure that our cables aren't cut and our sea lanes aren't compromised.

Q110 John Spellar: Some of this takes us back to the earlier question about public opinion, because an absolutely crucial enabler of these developments is public understanding of the threat. Do we need to do much more to get public understanding of the nature of the threat and of the intentions and capabilities in the immediate term of Russia and possibly in the medium to longer term of China?

Congressman Turner: Yes, and I think our Governments are too reticent about disclosing knowledge that we have about what our adversaries or potential adversaries might be doing, because they are using the concept of attempting to shield the means, methods and techniques of gathering intelligence. What Russia has been doing in new nuclear weapons systems and expansion of its nuclear capabilities has been known for a decade. What North Korea is doing now has been known for a decade, yet it has not been part of the public discourse. Now it is part of the public discourse, but it did not happen overnight. The public should have been brought along as we were having these debates and receiving this information, because it would have—I think—helped fashion policy and perhaps could have even been in its own effect a deterrent. When adversaries are allowed to pursue capabilities in secret, they are not held to the same level of international scrutiny that we all are, because we do all pursuits of our technologies and capabilities in public.

Ambassador Nuland: I would agree with all that. I think the underdeveloped place publicly is China, particularly in Europe and the lack of understanding that all of these strategic investments are actually security hedges of one kind or another, not to mention all of the investments that China is now making in ports all along the littoral, including north of you and in the sea lanes that you depend on. I think further attention to that issue in Europe and the UK is important.

Q111 Phil Wilson: Is greater European defence co-operation the best method for improving European defence capabilities, or do you think that it is actually just going to be a protectionist vehicle?

Congressman Turner: We just got back from the Munich Security Conference—I know several of you attended—and General Mike Scaparrotti repeats over and over again the number of systems that are in our European NATO allies' inventories where, in many of the categories, we will have one and there will be 10. It is a big issue for capability, innovation and certainly interoperability. You raised the issue of resources,

and I think it also diminishes resources. If we had a multiplication of our own systems as opposed to the competitive process that allows us to select and move forward, we would also I think have a sense of lost resources.

Ambassador Nuland: The only mitigating factor there is when Europe tries to do things together, even if it is only a couple of nations, things get slow and then it is poor and can be even worse than our system sometimes. If you had complete rationality and a common NATO-EU picture of what needs to be built, and the US could support industrial acceleration and national Governments could support investment, that would be the most rational way to do it: one first-class helicopter; one first-class strategic lift; one first-class ISR system, and such things. You know better than we do whether you are better off with the US having a hub-and-spoke approach—US to UK, US to France, and US to Germany—or trying to get everybody to work together.

Q112 **Phil Wilson:** So you think it is a good idea, in the round?

Ambassador Nuland: Yes. The more stuff the better—how you get it done is the question.

Q113 **Phil Wilson:** Senator Lindsey Graham said that UK involvement in European defence co-operation would demonstrate the benefit of the programme to NATO. Do you think that he is correct?

Congressman Turner: Yes. We have heard his discussions that the UK might enter a relationship with the EU militarily—that is, to continue the importance of your capability and influence. I think Senator Graham's comment is that on the aspect of European defence, the UK is essential. If the EU is to play a role in European defence, your work with them is also essential.

Ambassador Nuland: Over the last five to eight years, the US has developed bespoke arrangements—I know that is a funky word in the UK now—with the EU, mission by mission. For example, we support the Mali force in certain ways. I think the UK could, in a post-Brexit environment, have similar sorts of decision-making opportunities. Do you have something to give to the mission that is needed? Do you want to give it? Can you spare it, given other responsibilities? To the extent that you are involved, I think it will give more confidence to individual missions. With those negotiations, we generally get some decision-making piece that is commensurate with the part that we are playing. It is important to learn how to do that too.

Q114 **Phil Wilson:** I think we will all agree that whatever defence initiatives the EU gets up to in the future, they should complement NATO, not replace it. The UK has sometimes represented joint UK-US initiatives in the EU. What do you think will be the UK-US-EU defence and security relationship after Brexit?

Ambassador Nuland: Hopefully, we will be able to, as we do on other things, develop a three-legged stool, now with two of us pushing the EU,

not just us with you guys on the inside. We have to see how much they are willing to do, but again, I think the bottom line, at least from my side of the table, is that the more Brexit results in greater Britain rather than little England on defence and security, the more options we will have and the better we will be able to work together. That is what we are cheering for over here.

Congressman Turner: One aspect of the relationship is that the UK has been the US-UK partnership voice at the table of the EU. As you step away from that role, I do not think that it is necessary for the US to find an alternative in that alone. I think we can do that together also, which would enhance our ability to impact EU policy together.

Chair: Let's sneak a last one in. Ruth.

Q115 **Ruth Smeeth:** Thank you, Chair. One of the things that has been interesting in discussions with our European partners until this point is that 22% of European defence is provided by the UK. They will be limited on what they can do without us, but one of the things that they have made clear so far is that this provides an opportunity, for the first time in a generation, to consider what European defence policy should look like and what kind of relationship they want with us. I wonder where you want to fit in with that. I was not a Brexiteer—no sarky comments—but for the first time we can turn this into an opportunity, regarding what happens next. I wonder what your views are on that.

Congressman Turner: I don't think our views have changed. Ambassador Nuland would know more about this than me, but I think it is about strong military capability, deterrents, non-duplication and non-division, where we still all come together with NATO as the primary political and military focal point of decision making and deployment, and an issue of joint advocacy for increased investment and sharing of information. I do not think that that will change.

You might be being too hard on yourselves with respect to Brexit. I do not think that it will be as significant or as severe as some of the assessments have said; I know you hope, along with me, that it will not. I do think that there are times when you are too hard on yourselves. This journey that you are going to take—we view it with caution and concern, but not with as much negativity as I think you might think we have, as an ally, toward what your future and your role will be.

Ambassador Nuland: I think, from where we are sitting, you should prioritise the missions we do jointly, which are NATO missions and coalitions of the needed in Syria and so on. If you have extra bandwidth to do some of these smaller EU missions and want to do that for reasons of integrating without us, bringing capability or keeping them close, do that, but start with the things we have to do together as NATO allies and as major security providers.

Chair: As Phil said earlier, whichever side of the Brexit debate members of this Committee were on, we have been united in calling for a greater

proportion of Britain's gross domestic product to be spent on defence. In particular, the figure of 3% is a benchmark that we have been setting ourselves, because that is what we used to spend in the mid-1990s, even after the end of the cold war and even after we had taken the peace dividend.

It is encouraging to hear that you are optimistic about the contribution that the United Kingdom still has to make to the defence of Europe and the defence of the West as a whole. All that remains is to thank you both for sharing your wisdom and experience with this Committee. We are very grateful indeed. We will now move to the second session.

Ambassador Nuland: Thank you. Go get that 3%!

Chair: I hope that's on the record.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Heather Conley, Dr Nile Gardiner and Dr Tom Wright.

Q116 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the second panel session of our Washington DC hearing for the inquiry, "The indispensable ally? US, NATO and UK Defence relations." I welcome our three panellists for this second session. Thank you all for coming and sharing your wisdom with us this afternoon. Before we start, I would say that it is not always necessary for every person to respond to every question, as that might slow things down. We look to you to liaise with each other so that we can get through the questions expeditiously. To start, would each of you just say a few words about who you are and your past experience and present post?

Dr Wright: My name is Tom Wright. I am a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and director of the Center on the United States and Europe there. I am the author of the book that came out last year, "All Measures Short of War: The Context for the Twenty-First Century and the Future of American Power".

Dr Conley: My name is Heather Conley. I am senior vice-president for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Prior to that, I was deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs from 2001 to 2005.

Dr Gardiner: Good afternoon, I am Nile Gardiner. I am director of the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom at the Heritage Foundation. Prior to Heritage, I was aide to Lady Thatcher in her private office in London.

Q117 **Chair:** Very good. Even at this stage, the great lady, the iron lady of the cold war, still has the potential to divide opinion on a Committee as united as this one in favour of defence.

You will probably all want to answer this first question. Is there a perception in the United States that the UK's defence capacity and capabilities are in decline? Do you as experts think that that proposition might be true? I will start with you, Nile.



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Dr Gardiner: Thank you for that question. First, without a doubt there has been a perception for several years in Washington that there has been a decline in overall UK defence capability and a sense that the UK is in relative decline compared to many of its European allies. The UK is still regarded as the most important military ally in Europe for the United States by a mile, but there is a sense that the UK has relatively declined overall. Having said that, no European power at this stage, other than France potentially, challenges Britain in terms of being the most important military partner in Europe for the United States today. But, without a doubt, a wave of defence cuts in recent years have taken their toll in Britain. There is increasingly a consensus view among foreign policy and defence experts that there has been a decline in Britain's overall military capability.

Clearly, British defence spending needs to be significantly increased if it is to be able to maintain its position as America's most important ally and partner. In our view at the Heritage Foundation, UK defence spending should be at least 3% of GDP, if not higher. Without a doubt, the current level of UK defence spending is far too low, but the same message would of course apply to almost every single country in Europe.

I would not agree with the assessment that UK defence capacity is going to decline further as a result of Brexit—quite the opposite, I think. I would view Brexit as being potentially a significant boost to Britain's position as a strong, sovereign, independent military power, and I would see Brexit as a big positive for the future of Britain's defence capability. I hope the British Government will take full advantage of Brexit, which is viewed overwhelmingly positively by the present US Administration, which is very pro-Brexit and sees it as a tremendous opportunity to advance the special relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom. We need to see a far greater degree of investment in the UK's defensive capability, especially in terms of ground forces and the ability to be able to confront a potential Russian threat in eastern Europe, especially in the Baltic states.

Dr Conley: I would agree that there is a perception that the UK's defence capabilities are in decline. The decisions coming out of the 2010 SDSR were absolutely devastating. Some confidence was restored a little bit in 2015 as we saw some of those issues addressed, but I would disagree with Nile. I think we do not know what the Brexit impact will be on the future of the UK's defence spending. We watched very closely the debate between the Defence Minister and the Chancellor about what the future budget will be. We are watching very closely.

What you see today is an incredibly strong bilateral intelligence co-operation, which remains the key pillar of the relationship. We have close consultation in the Asia-Pacific theatre, where the UK is one of the few allies that has a full appreciation of the security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, and obviously in the Middle East as well.

So we have questions about the capabilities that the UK can bring to bear: the power projection and the sustainment of those power projection capabilities. The Libya operations and Operation Unified Protector again



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demonstrated the limitations of sustaining a British force posture for the long term, but—this is where I will curve around to agree with Nile—what we have seen is strong, rhetorical emphasis on a global Britain and a renewed commitment by the UK to its NATO advocacy. The fact that the United Kingdom is leading the NATO battalion in Estonia and the fact that maritime patrol aircraft are being purchased—again, future procurement—suggests that the UK will play a much stronger regional role in the north Atlantic and in northern Europe, and we applaud that.

For us, the perception is there. There are some very positive things for us to look at, but there are questions, and we will have to see how the defence budget—and particularly its shortfalls—will be addressed.

Dr Wright: I agree with much of what my colleagues said. I think the perception does exist, but I also think people do have confidence in Britain's ability to bounce back from it. I agree that the UK is America's strongest ally in Europe; that France is the only one that is potentially a competitor to that role. But I think often we do not look globally, and the UK is really one of four or five countries that the US has a special relationship with; the others being Japan, Israel, Canada and Australia. So I think looking at those five gives you a slightly different context. The reason those are all solid allies is because there is strategic interest either regionally or globally—sometimes both—aligned, and they have got very good capacity.

In addition to what my colleagues said, there are three points in the UK's case that give slight reason for concern. Firstly, there was something of a loss of strategic confidence, I think, after Iraq. Iraq was obviously a mistake, but its effect was maybe more enduring in the UK than in the United States. We saw that in the Syria red line episode and also more generally.

Secondly, there are concerns about political trends of retrenchment both on the left and on the right. As Nile says, it may be true—I do not think so—that Brexit leads to the UK taking a more global role, but it is certainly true that for the last five years or so it has consumed a lot of bandwidth, so it has given a perception of inward-lookingness. Then you see on the other side of the spectrum increased questioning of that sort of Blairite foreign policy, which unsurprisingly continues to be popular here. Finally, there are the trends on defence spending.

One final thing, on the question of a global role: the Cameron Government's policy towards China did raise some concerns a couple of years back. When we look at Britain as an Asia player, that has to be taken into context, too. The incentive structure after Brexit for Britain's policy in Asia is an interesting one that may merit further discussion.

Q118 John Spellar: Dr Conley talked about questions on some of the UK capabilities. What does the US look to the UK to provide in the defence and security partnership?



Dr Conley: I have my wish list of a more focused UK in northern Europe. We recently completed a report, "Enhanced Deterrence in the North," where we see the UK playing potentially a larger role in anti-submarine warfare, providing the maritime, as well as potentially greater air power capabilities, to prevent Russian incursions into sovereign airspace in northern Europe. It complements the UK's land component in Estonia. It also builds on the broader idea that we fully support of the northern group, which crosses this nexus between Sweden and Finland and the European Union and NATO countries. I think there is a bigger regional role to play, and, quite frankly, that is UK homeland defence itself. That is a nice complement to build stronger capabilities regionally.

Again, turning to intelligence sharing, special forces, and particularly close collaboration in the Middle East, that is where we look to the UK again. When additional capabilities come online—the two aircraft carriers particularly—that is more capability and more power projection capability that can be used at NATO's disposal, and certainly bilaterally.

Finally, the fact cannot go unsaid that the UK is a nuclear power and is focusing on the modernisation of Trident. This is going to be increasingly needed as Russia continues its nuclear modernisation, of which we certainly got a full show-and-tell last weekend from President Putin. We need to maintain a strong nuclear deterrent, and we watch those developments in the UK closely as well.

Q119 **Chair:** Can I just briefly ask at this point whether there is anybody in the American defence establishment who does not approve of Britain continuing to maintain its nuclear deterrent? We generally get positive feedback about it, but I just wondered if there is any debate about it at all?

Dr Conley: I do not believe there is any debate that I am aware of. It is an important trilateral dialogue that we have between France, the UK and the US to maintain that strong nuclear capability. I believe it is universally supported.

Dr Wright: I think there is a debate because of the 2% spending. I think the Trident replacement costs are £31 billion or £35 billion, so that is a significant chunk of that. The debate is really around the opportunity cost, and that the amount that it is essentially going to cost will take away from other capabilities. If spending was at 3%, as Nile suggested, maybe that would not be a problem. However, I think that is very politically unlikely.

The reason I think that it is not particularly an advantage is because the reason for US modernisation is extended deterrence, which is very difficult. There are questions about how to maintain the credibility of an extended deterrent. In the UK's case, it is primarily about a deterrent for the UK itself. I think that is more automatic, and those contingencies are a little more far-fetched.

There is certainly debate among some of the NATO folks about where those resources could be smartly allocated. This is obviously an internal



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decision, and I think there is understanding about why it is important. However, I don't think it really adds anything to the capability when you look at what it is directed towards.

Dr Gardiner: I agree with the remarks of my colleagues. I don't think there is any real political debate in the United States about Britain's nuclear capability. I haven't had the chance to ask Bernie Sanders's opinion, but I don't think there has been any example of a major US politician expressing opposition to Britain's nuclear deterrent.

The general consensus view here is that the British nuclear deterrent is an important part of the special relationship. It enhances the special relationship and it is good for America. I have to say that, in the 15 years I have worked in Washington, I have not come across any form of political opposition to the British nuclear deterrent or any kind of concern expressed here in the United States on that.

Q120 **Mr Francois:** Dr Conley, you have suggested that the United Kingdom could host a new north Atlantic command. In what way does your command differ from that envisaged by NATO, and why are there those differences?

Dr Conley: It comes from two parts. My concern is that, if the US decides to host the Atlantic command in Norfolk, it will get lost in Norfolk, very much as the allied command transformation has been lost as a US command. I think that this is an incredible moment to demonstrate European leadership or UK leadership. It is homeland defence. It is the UK taking the leadership role with strong American support.

I think the United States has struggled. It has two ways of leading. It will either direct everything and tell its allies where to go and what to be, or it says: "It's all yours. We're busy. You've got this." We have to find the middle road, which means the Europeans taking a more significant leadership role but with the United States remaining strongly engaged.

We have United States Naval Forces Europe in Naples. We have a centred Europe and a naval presence, but it is looking southward. It would make sense to me to place this in the critical sea lanes of communication. MARCOM could play such an important role.

This is where 2% is a cumbersome measurement. How do you measure leadership? How do you measure putting your focus in your region and saying you will take strategic command of this? I think it is a powerful message that could work against naysayers saying that the US has to do it if it must be done. The UK can do this with strong American support.

Q121 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** What are the benefits of the UK taking a leading role in a specific region, such as the north Atlantic?

Dr Conley: I know this is NATO heresy, because if we start thinking about regional military posture, we lose the cohesiveness of the whole—I take that criticism and accept that it is there—however, in an alliance of 29, regional coalitions need to take greater responsibility for their regional



expertise and focus. It rebuilds national support for NATO when it can be seen working more closely at home, protecting those alliances. As long as all NATO members participate in other operations, whether that is Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean, or looking at the eastern flank, so that we have a continued rotation of those forces, this is a great way for NATO, at such a large number, to begin to have focused groups and regional constructs that can provide the bulk of the collective defence and deterrence with support from the other allies.

It is a new model and a controversial concept, but frankly over the last four years we have seen it slowly emerge with the posture of the enhanced forward presence on the eastern flank. You see where Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey are taking a great role for the Black sea. It is natural, but all allies have to have a meaningful role in participating in every endeavour and activity of the alliance.

Dr Wright: I am not sure I have a strong view on that. The question really gets to what the UK's strategic priority needs to be, and then that should drive the mission. That sounds like a very interesting idea. I could think of a couple of others, depending on what prior investments should be made in the realm of strategic competition, which should be the driving principle.

Dr Gardiner: I do not have any disagreement with what Heather was saying. I would say that Britain's big-picture vision must be a broad vision. Britain plays a very, very important role on the international stage. It should be an even larger role, and should not be limited to particular spheres of influence. Britain is a truly global actor, and very few countries have this capability. Tom was referencing a number of other key US allies, including Japan, Australia and Israel. They do not have the kind of global reach that Britain has.

It is vital that, in the next decade and in the new Brexit era, Britain looks to global leadership and looks towards reasserting a far greater global role that stretches far beyond just Europe. That will require a significant additional investment in defence. The launch of two new aircraft carriers will be a very significant part of that expansion of Britain's global capability, but it has to be underscored in the long run by increased defence spending.

Q122 Martin Docherty-Hughes: Could I just take that a bit further? Having a broad vision would require you to defend the home front. For some of us in constituencies in the north of the United Kingdom, having an undefended Icelandic and Greenland gap is not the best situation in which to provide a defence situation anywhere else in the world. With the sea lanes of communication and the reliance on Norway, Canada and the United States, how do you project a broad vision of defence when you cannot do it on your home front?

Dr Conley: I believe that this is where we can really rebuild support for a critical mission that, right now, needs to be met. It is being met bilaterally and trilaterally with capabilities. If the UK could assert a greater leadership



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role with support from the rest of the alliance, I think it would provide a critical need and capability to the alliance at this moment. The US at this moment cannot fully reinforce its own presence in Europe if those sea lanes are not defended. It is not only by sea. It is also Russia's air presence. I think the alliance is also not paying attention to Russia's footprint in the Arctic. It needs to take a broader look at that. There are enormous challenges, but that does not mean that the UK must only look at the GIUK gap or northern Europe as its only primary defence realm.

Absolutely, the UK can have global power projection and reach. I think there are limits to what it can do and it has to choose those deployments and those missions carefully, but it could do an immeasurable amount of good to protect not only the UK but the north Atlantic and the ability for the US to reinforce, should that be required, in Europe. Right now, we need that gap to be filled.

Dr Gardiner: I agree that both the UK and the United States must play a bigger role in terms of Arctic security. We are ceding too much ground to Russia, which is asserting a great deal of influence in the region. It is vital that the US and the UK lead NATO efforts to stand up to Russia's goals in the Arctic.

Q123 Martin Docherty-Hughes: I would just like to tease out one more bit. It is in the name—the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation—and that includes not only the sea lines of communication, but assets such as North sea oil and other assets for other nation states. That is a serious issue and, no matter whether there is a broader vision, that needs to be recognised in our discussions about investment.

Dr Conley: I always like to say that it is time to put the north Atlantic back into NATO again and to rethink that critical posture.

Just one final word on the Arctic: it is not just Russia's presence. You will see increasing Chinese presence, both in port infrastructure and undersea cables, and that is why a great deal of complexity is coming, not only in terms of the impact of climate effects. There is enormous work to be done there. It doesn't mean that we are not able to deploy and do other missions, whether that is in the Sahel or other emergency operations, but there is an enormous amount to be done closer to home.

Q124 Mr Francois: When we were all talking about Iraq and Afghanistan, we stopped talking about the GIUK gap. Now that both you and we accept that state-on-state competition is the primary threat, suddenly we are starting to talk about all of this again. You have talked about what more the United Kingdom could be doing, Dr Conley. I think a lot of us would have sympathy with that. What about the United States? What about the possibility of you returning forces to Keflavik in Iceland for instance, right in the middle of the gap?

Dr Conley: As someone who was at the State Department at the time when the decisions were made to remove the four F-15s from Keflavik, I have very strong views on that. In fact, what we are doing is putting some of those assets back.



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The challenge has been that, since 2011, NATO has had an out-of-area, out-of-business mantra. It was about crisis management and power projection capabilities elsewhere. In 2014, we had to return to a dual mission of collective defence and deterrence and out-of-area operations. It has strained the alliance enormously to maintain those two strategies. You find that the alliance has developed the tactical tools for counter-insurgency, but it has difficulty rapidly mobilising across two European states right now. We don't have military mobilisation and even our exercises are challenged, because the roads aren't strong enough, the bridgeheads and the railheads aren't working. We have an enormous amount due for exactly that—reinforcing how the US can rapidly deploy. Those are the challenges.

What I worry about when I look at the GIUK gap, or when we talk about the Arctic, is that it is very difficult to get the US Navy to concentrate and focus on the north Atlantic because it is very much pulled to the Indo-Pacific region and is strained in its own readiness and capability questions. That is why I think it is an opportunity to look to our allies to be able to provide some serious capability, such as the UK and Norway with the purchase of P-8s or the fact that the F-35s are coming online. There is now growing capability, but we have to work together and develop that regional capability. This is a time for Europe to share some of the burden and perhaps take a little off the United States Navy in its ability to do anti-submarine warfare in the north Atlantic.

Q125 Mr Francois: Another key capability of ours is amphibious warfare and the ability to reinforce the northern flank. From an American perspective, how important is Britain's amphibious capability? We particularly ask because this Committee recently defended that very strongly against some suggestions that it might be at risk in the defence review. What is the American perspective on that?

Dr Conley: I am watching very closely the deployment of the 330 Marines in Norway on a rotational basis and also having conversations with special forces, which are slowly taking a greater interest in the Arctic and cold weather capabilities. We are quite deficient in those areas. This is where the joint expeditionary forces—this concept of JEF—comes in. We need to think about how we do special operations—amphibious operations—in very difficult terrain. We are only at the beginning of thinking that through. Right now, it is extremely difficult to get the US military to focus on northern Europe. Europe is fighting between CENTCOM and PACOM and the resources that they need, and the land and amphibious component in particular is under great stress. It is going to be difficult to get the US to focus and to be able to put in capabilities when needed.

Q126 Mr Francois: Do either of your colleagues have a comment on amphibiosity?

Dr Wright: No, but I would add that the strategic shift that you mentioned towards interstate competition is obviously very recent. It happened in the last few months. It reflects a broader, newer consensus in the strategic community, perhaps over the last 18 months to two years.

That is a major change of mindset that is going to take at least five to 10 years to adjust to. The issues you were talking about are a key part of that, as are the issues in eastern Europe, but then there is a wide array of other issues to do with cyber, coercion, subversion, the linkage between the Asia-Pacific theatre and Europe, the role of CENTCOM in the middle of all that, how it all hangs together and what the opportunity costs are in terms of counter-terrorism missions. We are really only at the beginning here—you are probably in a similar position—in thinking that through, and there are some difficult, important decisions that we need to be taking in pretty much every area. The NDS and the NSS are just the very first salvo in that debate and discussion.

Q127 Johnny Mercer: Heather, am I right in thinking that the US is contributing funding to the European intervention initiative?

Dr Conley: Yes.

Q128 Johnny Mercer: Do you think that is a sign of the US's continued engagement at a time in Europe when it is generally felt the tide is going the other way?

Dr Conley: I think you should see both the European reassurance initiative and the European deterrence initiative as significant bipartisan funding commitments to Europe's protection, particularly in the light of defence budgets that need to be going up and are straining under both their requirements and their need. That to me is a very strong signal that we are willing to stay.

My concern is simply the limitations on our forces' ability to meet the need. For example, to be better postured in Europe, we really should go back to having four combat brigade teams permanently based in Europe. Right now we have two, and we are rotating one in. The rotations are expensive. The challenge is that we are now entering year 4 post-Crimea and Ukraine, and we are still rotating. We are still thinking, "Maybe something will be different. Maybe this will improve." We have to start shifting our mindset. This may be a decade or two decades plus of deterrence. What does that cost? What contributions are required?

So, take that as a commitment, but I also suggest you should take it as a challenge grant. The US is willing to submit its treasure and its forces, but it needs strong, close collaboration, rapid deployment and deployable forces. That is what NATO is really struggling to put forward in a meaningful way. Take it as the strong message that it is, and the bipartisan support, but it is not an opportunity for European NATO allies to do less; if anything, they need to see that as meeting the same challenge and putting in the same number of resources. A lot of that would be in civilian infrastructure, to be perfectly honest. It should be quite easy to receive support for that in Parliament.

Q129 Johnny Mercer: What else do you think NATO states can do to bolster the political effectiveness and the physical resilience of NATO?

Dr Conley: Here in the United States we talk about NATO as if it were a foreign entity and not that it is us—that a US soldier is a NATO soldier and a UK soldier is a NATO soldier. All NATO allies have to do a lot more in talking about it. I don't think we would talk down NATO if we were talking about our own military forces: our patriotism and our support for our military forces is incredibly strong, yet NATO is a foreign object. We need to start talking in very personal terms. This is where politicians of all political parties and the bipartisanship have to be heard loud and clear.

That takes us back to my theory that if NATO had a local and a homeland support mission, that would naturally build support—you would see NATO. A British citizen will not see NATO in Afghanistan, but they would see that on the coast, in the exercises and in the training. Perhaps that rebuilds support for our essential mission.

Q130 **Johnny Mercer:** What do you think, Nile?

Dr Gardiner: First, on the European deterrence initiative, we have seen a 40% increase in funding under the Trump Administration, which is significant considering that a common accusation made against the present Administration is that they are increasingly inward looking or isolationist. I argue that quite the opposite is the case in its overall approach to a transatlantic alliance. You have seen a bigger US military footprint in eastern Europe—that is vitally important. You have also seen the President on European soil in Warsaw, expressing his firm commitment to the defence of Europe. You have seen, at the same time, the United States calling upon all NATO allies to step up to the plate and to increase defence spending. We have seen significant results on that front—not as much as perhaps we would all like to see, but certainly movement in the right direction.

The stance taken by the President and the White House is critical, because fundamentally US leadership does matter. If the United States withdraws from Europe, that will send a catastrophic message to the Russians. Fortunately, I think that this Administration are firmly committed to the defence of Europe and they are backing that up by increasing expenditure on the defence of Europe and increasing the deployment side. I agree with Heather's call for the deployment of four permanent combat brigades in Europe by the United States; we need to see that done. Far more needs to be done, but overall, the stance of this US Administration has been stronger than the previous Administration in terms of the defence of Europe. That is a very positive thing.

There is an acute recognition in this Administration that Russia cannot be treated as some sort of possible partner; it is an adversary. That is definitely the message projected by General Mattis and General McMaster. It is reflected in the new national security strategy, which is very clear about the nature of Russian state-based threats. There are a lot of positives on that front.

I would add that the European deterrence initiative, at the moment, is not part of the base defence budget. It needs to be placed within the base



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defence budget. Certainly, many think-tanks of Washington are calling for that to be done. That would be a clear demonstration of long-term commitment to support the European deterrence initiative, which is absolutely vital for the defence of eastern Europe at this time.

Dr Wright: Responding a bit to Nile, I think that from the US side, it is important to understand that there are two Administration policies. There is the official policy, as reflected in the national security strategy and the national defence strategy, that sees inter-state competition as the defining organising principle of US foreign national security policy and endorses the European defence initiative and rotational forces in the Baltics; is open to more; reiterates a commitment to NATO; and sees China very much through a strategic lens.

Then there is President Trump's policy, which does not really believe a word of that. If you look at it recently, his speech to introduce the national security strategy, his speech at Davos, the cover letter to the national security strategy, the State of the Union speech and then some other speech—a major speech he made very recently—they were all very consistent. There is one line in each that is a stock line—sometimes, it is not a full sentence—that says, "We face rivals like Russia and China"; but that is it. There is no elaboration on it whatsoever. Indeed, in the speech to introduce the national security strategy he immediately followed that line by talking about the need to partner with Putin personally and how partnership with Putin should be the defining principle. His view is that the main threats the United States faces are bad trade deals, immigrants, terrorism and North Korea—that tends to be his priority list.

I think that when we talk about all this and about the US commitment, we should certainly welcome what Secretary Mattis, National Security Adviser McMaster and others are doing, but I think we also need to recognise that there is a division and some doubt there—regrettably, from my point of view, because I wish the mainstream elements were actually quite strong. But that is where the doubt arises. I do not think you should come away from this thinking that this Administration's approach to Europe or to NATO is as rock solid as any in the past. Certainly, that is true for 98% of people in the Administration, but guess what—the other people in the Administration include the Commander in Chief, so that is a very different set of things.

Very briefly, there is so much that NATO should be doing. Russia was not on the NATO agenda at the last summit, because, I am told, European countries were worried the President would walk out if it was. Will it be on the agenda at the next NATO summit? If it is not on the agenda, how can we even be serious about talking about the fact that Russia is a strategic competitor of the United States? We should start there but then work our way through the Baltics, for sure, but then there are all the issues to do with coercion and subversion—the measures short of war that Russia is using. How do you deter that continual political interference? Are there offensive measures that need to be considered, or can it all be defensive? These are questions we haven't even begun to start on. There has been a



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sort of unilateral disarmament on that side by the Trump Administration, even while they have been reinvesting in defence on other sides. Maybe we might plead to you—I think Britain can play an important role in actually elevating the importance of combating this new type of political warfare that is out there, which the US has been absent on for political reasons.

Chair: That was very interesting.

Q131 **Ruth Smeeth:** Dr Wright, that was fascinating. One of the challenges from our perspective, under a Trump Administration, is how we rebuild the image of NATO. However, based on what you have just said, that is impossible, because 98% of everybody agrees that NATO is a good idea; just 2% of the Administration does not. So, within that framing, how on earth do we ensure that NATO is relevant, going forward, and politically—as well as strategically and militarily—part of the conversation, if the Commander in Chief just does not think that is where we should be?

Dr Wright: He has. Nile is right about the Warsaw speech. He did reiterate the commitment to article 5. That came about because of enormous pressure on him after the Brussels speech, which was a total disaster when he took it out—standing in front of the 9/11 monument, at the new NATO headquarters. So he can respond to pressure; it is not that he never responds. But I think his instincts are deeply sceptical. My own view is that I would not try to shoot the moon on NATO for the duration of his Administration. I think Secretary Mattis had it right: hold the line, ensure that you keep in place what is there, try to do what is possible. Massive transformation that would require the buy-in of the President of the United States is potentially a step too far during his presidency, but setting the building blocks in place to be able to do that in future is wise.

I do think the political warfare side is an exception because it is such a pressing danger that we fall victim to this Maginot-line mentality. The Baltics are important and there is a threat there, but there is this whole other thing that is completely undefended, and the US is not playing the traditional leadership role in defending that. That is where France, the UK, Germany and others—Australia is playing a very important role in this recently—can fill that gap.

Dr Gardiner: If I could briefly respond to Tom's comments. I agree with many of the points he has made and disagree with some. With regard to President Trump, I wish, and I am sure my colleagues do, that Trump would do more to stand up to Vladimir Putin personally. I think he should do that; that is very important. That is not where Trump is personally right now but it is where the Administration is.

The most important thing to look at is the US policy on the ground. Just last week, the Trump Administration approved the sale of 210 anti-tank Javelin missiles to Ukraine. That is something that the Obama Administration refused to do. Actions speak louder than words. I would very much argue that the current US policy towards Russia in Europe is stronger than that of the previous Administration, but I do wish the

President himself would make it very clear that Vladimir Putin is no friend of the United States or the free world. It is important that President Trump definitely states that.

At the same time, the best way to ensure the long-term survival, strength and prosperity of the NATO alliance is if all NATO members are willing to step up to the plate and invest in their own defence. That will reassure American taxpayers, who heavily subsidise the NATO alliance, that it is an alliance that they are fully invested in. When you have a country such as Germany—the economic powerhouse of Europe—spending 1.2% of GDP on defence, that is an absolute disgrace.

American taxpayers are asking why they are spending so much money on NATO, in terms of the US contribution, while countries such as Germany are really not paying for their own defence and are relying upon the US defence umbrella. We are seeing positive moves in the right direction, as opposed to very tough language coming from the White House. That is a message that has to be conveyed to Europe. President Trump was right to go to Brussels and say to other NATO members, “Look, the days when you could simply just rely on the United States without investing in your own defence are over.” I think that is an important message to send and most Americans would undoubtedly agree with that.

Q132 Ruth Smeeth: Can I just clarify what data demonstrate that on the US street, normal human beings in America are raising how much Germany is paying to NATO? There is a conversation here about whether Europe is paying its way but I am not convinced that that is a day-to-day conversation in Ohio. Actions may speak louder than words but do they speak louder than President Trump’s Twitter account?

Dr Gardiner: It is not necessarily a dominant political issue, but polling does demonstrate that Americans believe that other countries should pay more for their own defence. I think that has been established in various polls and Trump’s views reflect that.

As to what President Trump has said on this, in terms of all NATO members spending more on their defence, actually President Obama said the same thing, as did George W. Bush. I am sure countless US Presidents have sent the same message. Trump has certainly been a lot more forceful and aggressive in the way that he has put it. We have seen some results of that strategy. I am sure, having worked closely with a lot of officials in this Administration, that they are 100% committed to the NATO Alliance, article 5 and the long-term future of the NATO alliance. We should be fully assured of that.

Dr Conley: Just very briefly, I have sort of split the baby here. In some ways, both Candidate Trump and President Trump’s questioning of NATO has brought about a resilience around NATO. The Senate is creating a Senate-NATO observers group, and that entity has not been formed since the cold war. Suddenly, Members of Congress are defending alliances because they have been put into question. We are telling you and concentrating on the 98% where there is bipartisan support, and the



actual actions are really powerful. You just have to close your ears, and that is not always easy to do. Publics do listen to that.

I think the problem we may have—this is what I am focusing on—is what the July NATO summit agenda will be, and that is where we are caught a little in the middle. On one hand, you want a summit to advance important initiatives. We went from Wales to Warsaw, but the problem is that we don't right now have a leadership model in the US that will drive that NATO agenda. I believe it will be less ambitious. It will continue to do the work that has been set out by the alliance in Warsaw and in Wales—there is plenty of work to be done—but if it requires a bigger push, or a bigger American leadership model, that is where President Trump's role in White House is important, and where it is not probably going to come out. I think the summit will focus on defence spending, and either taking a victory lap or being quite harsh to Germany and others if they haven't kept up. I think it will try to develop some counter-terrorism mission, because President Trump is very interested in counter-terrorism. But there is not an ambition for this summit, which again is a reflection of the absence of US leadership.

To connect your two previous questions, what is striking to me is that one area that is incredibly supportive of our European posture is our US National Guard, who are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the state partnership programmes. For instance, the Pennsylvania National Guard has been with the Lithuanian military for upwards of 20 years. The Iowa National Guard has been in Kosovo. This is developing good ties, and the National Guard talks to its community leaders about its deployment. We are going to have to rebuild an understanding of NATO and support for it from grassroots up. We do not know what Mr Trump will say or do, but putting that aside, we must regrow support for NATO for a new generation, and that will be a long-term task for all of us.

Q133 Ruth Smeeth: One final short question to turn this on its head. What does NATO as an institution need to do to rebuild faith and trust? If there was one thing that NATO, rather than NATO allies, needed to do to rebuild its reputation and image with its partners, what would that be?

Dr Conley: I would say that we need to see NATO working closer to home. We need to see NATO maritime forces, so that the Italian people understand that NATO is helping to protect Italy's borders and maritime security from illegal migration. A bigger NATO presence in northern Europe will demonstrate to Norway, the UK and others that there is a direct correlation between national defence and NATO. It must not be seen as a far-away entity that is not locally connected. Local politicians as well as the defence and national security community must talk at grassroots level. How many times have you talked about what NATO is doing for your constituency? We don't talk like that, but that is what we will have to do a little bit more—well, I know you talk like that, and I am sure others do as well.

Dr Gardiner: Briefly, just to add to Heather's excellent comments, I would say that most importantly NATO has to get back to basics, which is



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about the defence of territorial integrity for NATO alliance members. For example, the Libya mission should not have been a NATO mission in my view. That should have been simply a coalition of the willing operation. When NATO gets involved in missions like the Libya mission, and looking at the fall-out from that and the current state of Libya, I think that undermines confidence in NATO. For NATO, the most important thing is to return to its basic mission, which is the defence of the territory of the NATO alliance.

Chair: We will come to each of you for the final question from Phil, but I have been assured that Martin has a very brief intervention. Tom, if you want to bring any further remarks into your final contribution, you can.

Q134 **Martin Docherty-Hughes:** You said that with trepidation, Chair. First, to follow on from Ruth's question, some of the answers were about the percentage that other EU or NATO members pay. There is the idea that Germany, yes, has a problem but—forgive a Scotsman using this terminology—scotching a myth, a proportion of our 2% is also paid on pensions and not all on capability.

Dr Wright, you gave evidence to the House of Representative's Committee on Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee on Europe in December, where you stated that the present Administration has a "predatory policy" towards the UK post-Brexit. Given that the US is offering us a worse flying deal or open skies deal than we have in the European Union, clearly military alliances are built on not just a military connection but economic and social connections. Would you like to say something about that?

Dr Wright: I meant it very specifically, actually. In these bilateral trade talks, the Trump Administration's policy is to see Britain in a relatively weak position and to try to maximise their advantage. Your Government have sent the signal that they really want a trade deal with the United States. These guys—the Trump Administration—have not negotiated a deal yet, so they have a critique of trade, which, in the President's view, is very radical. He believes that the US ought to be in surplus with every country in the world. There are only a couple of countries where I think that is the case at the moment. The British deal is a guinea pig for what they would want.

The signals they have sent you are quite harsh. There are several data points. The open skies agreement today was the latest one, but they also sided with Argentina and I think one other country at the WTO against the deal that your Government did with the EU on agricultural import quotas, which was meant to be a done deal. In the speech Wilbur Ross made in London, he said that the UK Government would have to fully accept all US regulatory standards over the EU ones and reject EU standards for any deal to be viable, which, from my reading of your Brexit debate, nobody is arguing for. Even the people who are arguing to leave the customs union and the single market are saying, "There is plenty of room for access," but Secretary Ross was arguing to accept US regulations on the health service, so US companies would have full access to the NHS or full access

on financial services—not a negotiated settlement, but a full agreement on US regulations.

Then we had the Bombardier tariffs and a variety of other things. When you add it all up, Secretary Ross is essentially saying, “The US will do a deal with the UK, you just basically need to concede everything.” My understanding is that UK officials basically understand that. That is why you saw this retrenchment from those talks and why, between Minister Gove and maybe Minister Davis sometime in November, there was a question about regulatory—once you move towards services and away from goods—whether that would be acceptable, and the message was sent that it would not be.

That was the point I was trying to make. They see themselves as having maximum leverage, and they are intent on using that leverage. From your point of view, you probably want a more equal playing field before you engage in that negotiation.

Dr Gardiner: To respond to that very briefly, I disagree with what Tom is saying. I think there is a lot of good will on the US side with regard to a US-UK free trade agreement. The discussions between British officials and US officials on that have been very, very friendly and cordial so far, and we have seen a long line of British officials coming to Washington to discuss a US-UK free trade deal. The President has spoken strongly in favour of it, so has the Treasury Secretary, who recently remarked that Britain would be at the front of the queue for a free trade deal. I think there is tremendous good will on the part of Congress as well on this issue. A significant number of Republican Senators, including Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio for example, have expressed very strong support for a US-UK free trade agreement. There are five pieces of congressional legislation backing a free trade deal with the UK. I would say that the overall picture is far more positive, and I do not agree with the rather gloomy assessment that the United States will milk this for all it is worth and treat Britain as a second-class citizen. I do not think that is the approach of the President, the US Administration, and Congress at all.

Q135 **Phil Wilson:** Do you believe that European defence co-operation within the EU is complementary to NATO, or do you think that it will be a protectionist vehicle for the EU?

Dr Conley: Right now, we don’t know what PESCO will be or will not be. I think that the approach that at least the United States should take is that we should encourage the EU to spend more and look at the key areas where they should spend more. We should encourage them, and put guard rails around what PESCO will or will not do. Quite frankly, we do not know what it will be yet, so let’s encourage the right behaviour, which is spending more, focusing it on the areas that it needs to be focused on, and making sure that it is not duplicative of NATO, or in any way trying to undercut NATO.

The Trump Administration pulled out talking points from 15 years ago and went back at it again. That may be perfectly appropriate if PESCO falls

along those lines, but right now we simply do not know what it is. We do not want it to be protectionist or to exclude the US, but at the same time, Buy America excludes Europe, so we have to be a little more circumspect and humble as we speak on this. It is premature. Let's encourage Europe to do more in the areas where we need them to do more, and make sure it does not cross into areas where it will not be supportive, but let's not squash it until we see what it is.

Q136 **Phil Wilson:** So essentially, let's see how it goes, but it will work if it is complementary to NATO.

Dr Conley: Strong guidelines and strong encouragement. Let's make sure that it does not fall off the rails. You cannot want them to increase defence spending and then make sure that nothing that they come up with is the right answer. Right now, we are in premature days. This may be another EU battle group, which does not mean that we have to worry about it, but let's see if we can make it something. Again, 22 EU members are NATO members. It is the same national defence budget. We are not talking about incredibly different things. We just have to make sure they spend the money right.

Dr Wright: I agree with Heather. Obviously it would work best if it was complementary and not duplicative, but I think there are another couple of issues as well that indicate that it is a good idea. All the conversations about common European security policy, defence policy, PESCO and everything else are usually on capability building. We never really talk about what it would be directed for. There is an absence of strategy in that general strategy discussion. What is the purpose of this capability? What is the European position on the Middle East? What is it co-ordinating towards?

I see in PESCO, and I think this is President Macron's intention too, the possibility of trying to develop a common strategic culture, which I think would make those conversations more fruitful and get us off this 2% thing. I understand why we all talk about it, but I think it is uniquely unhelpful in the broader, long-term conversation. I think that it would be positive, as long as certain limits are observed, but I do not see any reason to think that they will not be. Heather's right: this is not 15 years ago. I think this is a genuine attempt to add capability, and it should be taken at face value until there is reason to believe otherwise.

Q137 **Phil Wilson:** So you think we focus on 2%, but capability and what you are going to bring to the table is equally important, and that is complementary.

Dr Wright: Yes, and equally important to capability is strategy. What is the capability for? At the end of the day, if there is a common strategic culture in Europe, that will outlast the material capabilities. It is more significant than how this is spent or what the procurement is. That is really what is absent, and also the economic and political components. NATO has no sanctions capability. Other than major war, the EU can help with that in a way that NATO finds it difficult to do because of its structure.



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Dr Gardiner: My perspective is a bit different from that of my colleagues. I have to say that PESCO is a ghastly name for a ghastly project. It is a political project to advance the broader European project. It will do nothing whatsoever to advance the security of western Europe. In my view this is just a sort of ego trip by some European politicians: Jean-Claude Juncker, for example. Emmanuel Macron is another who has strongly supported this. This will do nothing whatsoever to advance the transatlantic alliance. It is important to bear in mind that the current US Administration is not the same as the Obama Administration, which was very Euro-federalist. The present Administration has a wide range of views on matters like this, but it is safe to say that the President on the whole adopts a far more Eurosceptic approach to what is going on in Europe as opposed to President Obama before him.

It is certainly not in the US interest to have some form of European Union army, which is the endgame here. Jean-Claude Juncker made it very clear in multiple speeches that this is the end goal of the European defence identity. It will take resources away from NATO. It is significant that some of the loudest cries for defence integration within the EU come from countries committing the fewest resources. One thinks of countries such as Germany and Belgium as prime examples. If this does emerge as some sort of European Union grand army, it will really be a paper tiger. At the end of the day, the Germans are not able to defend themselves. France would be the only significant military force within this. From a US perspective, this is a grand folly that will do nothing good whatsoever for the future of the NATO alliance, European security and the transatlantic alliance. There should be a strong British opposition to this. Fortunately, Britain isn't signed up to it, but I don't think this is in Britain's interests, either.

Also, I do not believe that the United States should invest one ounce of energy in giving any backing to this kind of project. Quite the opposite. There should be a strong signal sent by the White House and the Pentagon that any attempt to erode the NATO alliance will be strongly resisted by the United States. At the end of the day, a lot of those who are backing this grand European defence project are those who do not have much of an affinity for NATO or for the United States. Some of them are very anti-American. The whole effort is political and nothing to do with increasing defence capability.

Mr Francois: Do you think you could come off the fence and tell us what you really think?

Johnny Mercer: Are you broadly in favour of PESCO?

Chair: Order.

Q138 **Phil Wilson:** Do you think it would be a protectionist vehicle for Europe?

Dr Gardiner: Absolutely. I think it will be.

Q139 **Phil Wilson:** Is that not something that President Trump would understand?



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Dr Gardiner: EU protection is bad and American protection is bad as well. The tariff proposal by President Trump is absolutely wrong. It is significant that conservatives in Washington are strongly opposed to the tariff proposal. In terms of the EU, this is another example of EU protectionism. It is a sort of defence version of the common agricultural policy, which is disastrous in many respects. The CAP has been one of the biggest protectionist rackets in modern history.

Q140 **Phil Wilson:** Even though we are part of the EU at the moment, 7% of our defence budget is going to be spent on primary US contracts over the next 10 years. I think it is hard to say that the EU is going to end up having some kind of grand Napoleonic army, when actually our strongest alliance is with America, isn't it? We can still be part of the EU and do that.

Dr Gardiner: One of the most important aspects of the decision of the British people to leave the European Union was to assert sovereignty and self-determination, including in the defence sphere. It makes no sense whatsoever for Britain in the Brexit era to be tied to an EU defence initiative that will, without a doubt, result in a Europe that is more inward-looking than outward-looking.

Chair: I am afraid that time has defeated us, which is probably just as well. May I say how reassuring it is to members of this Committee to see that even a panel of witnesses as well informed as the three we have just been listening to can be just as divided on the question of the EU?

All that remains is for me to thank all three of you. It has been a splendid session and we are extremely grateful to you for giving up your time. I am sure you will see your comments, remarks and interpretations of various aspects of the matters under consideration reflected in our final report, for which we are much obliged. The session is formally concluded.