



House of Commons  
Defence Committee

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# Special Relationships? US, UK and NATO: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report

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**Sixth Special Report of  
Session 2022–23**

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## The Defence Committee

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# Sixth Special Report

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The Defence Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2022–23, [Special relationships? US, UK and NATO](#) (HC 184) on 7 March 2023. The Government response was received on 9 June 2023 and is appended below.

## Appendix: Government Response

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### The UK–US Relationship

**1. It is a testament to the depth of the defence, security and intelligence relationship between the UK and the US that changes in direction and political leadership in both countries have not undermined the relationship. However, that depth requires regular engagement at multiple levels. It cannot be taken for granted.** (Paragraph 10)

The Department welcomes the report’s recognition of the depth and breadth of the UK/US relationship. The Integrated Review Refresh is clear that the US remains the UK’s most important ally and partner. We have a common understanding of the threats we face and share the same values and objectives for addressing these challenges. As a result, we cooperate to an unprecedented degree across the full spectrum of defence business. The Department does not take this relationship for granted and invests significantly in it, including progressing our military-to-military relationships and joint training, enhancing the bilateral intelligence relationship, deepening our science and emerging technology partnerships, or collaborating on specific strategic initiatives such as AUKUS or our longstanding co-operation on Carrier Strike capability. The Department also maintains the largest of its British Defence Staffs in Washington DC to facilitate engagement with the US at all levels, from the strategic relationships with the Pentagon to the military-military relationships between the Single Services.

**2. The UK benefits from the UK-US relationship through its access to US military thinking, equipment and research as well as the opportunity to train and deploy alongside US counterparts. The UK-US relationship enhances the UK’s security.** (Paragraph 18)

The Department agrees that the UK derives great value from the US relationship. Our research, technology and industrial collaboration with the US is critical for ensuring our Armed Forces can field the capabilities we need to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. This cooperation also ensures our militaries can train, exercise, operate and fight together on operations around the world. In particular our relationship with the US is critical for our nuclear programme and maintaining our deterrent, as the ultimate backstop to our national security and the security of our NATO allies. The AUKUS agreement also provides another platform for deepening our collaboration with the US and Australia on emerging technology and capability development.

**3. It is also important to recognise that the US also benefits from the relationship, through the UK’s expertise in niche capabilities, as well as through the leadership role that the UK plays in NATO. Furthermore, the role the UK has played in coordinating assistance to Ukraine has demonstrated not just to the US but the whole of NATO its**

**reliability as an Ally and partner.** (Paragraph 19)

The US values the contribution the UK makes to sharing the burden of international leadership. Our reach across all theatres, from global network of overseas bases to the capabilities we bring to bear from the nuclear to the conventional and in new domains such as cyberspace, demonstrates this.

UK-US cooperation on Ukraine has played a vital role in facilitating international donations of military equipment to Ukraine, and we are pursuing all avenues to meet Ukraine's critical capability requirements through a coordinated military and diplomatic effort. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, the Defence Secretary has hosted two international donor conferences to coordinate military aid from over 35 partner nations, while Secretary of Defense Austin has hosted many Ukraine Defense Contact Groups. The UK has also established the International Fund for Ukraine—a mechanism that uses contributions from international partners to procure priority military assistance at pace—and, through our role as framework nation for the Joint Expeditionary Force, continues to cohere Partner Nations' efforts to deter Russia.

**4. The UK clearly has some difficult decisions to make about investments in the modernisation of capabilities as a result of current levels of inflation and unfavourable foreign exchange rates. Whilst it is vital to maintain some sort of technology sharing with the US, UK efforts to develop innovative technological solutions with allies should also look wider afield.** (Paragraph 27)

The UK values its capability partnership with the US highly, with several bilateral and multilateral capability programmes aimed to modernise and integrate our armed forces and jointly tackle shared threats across the globe.

The UK will also continue to pursue bilateral and multilateral capability programmes with different partners and allies across the globe in line with the objectives set out in current Government strategy. Notable examples include the UK's Future Combat Air System (FCAS), which sees UK working with Italy and Japan to develop the next generation fighter demonstration aircraft; AUKUS is where we are working jointly with US and Australia to develop cutting edge military capability; and the commitments made during the recent UK-France Summit to jointly develop future complex weapons systems, with the specific goal of delivering a future cruise capability in 2030.

This Government is clear in the UK's ambition to work with a range of partners in developing our armed forces' capability. Working alongside and being interoperable with our allies and partners, especially NATO, remains an essential element of delivering Defence outcomes and of our capability development. The Integrated Review Refresh 2023 and the 2021 Defence Command Paper outline the UK's commitment to deepen relationships with a wide range of actors across the Indo-Pacific, Gulf, Africa, and beyond, seeking to build long-term ties across our shared interests, and looking for new opportunities to collaborate across a broader range of issues. In parallel, the Defence Capability Framework's core principle is to be allied by design when developing future military capability, ensuring we work with a range of partners and allies from the earliest stages, enhancing interoperability and the potential for export opportunities.

**5. The UK should explore the value of linking contracts to increase UK exports to the US and lobby the US Administration to reduce the regulatory burdens placed on UK defence companies.** (Paragraph 28)

The UK works closely with the US to support UK industry and its interests in global and US markets. All avenues of alignment are regularly explored, with a particular focus on creating efficient cross-national processes to support exports and technology transfers.

Regulatory and bureaucratic constraints provide significant barriers to our ability to collaborate bilaterally between the UK and the US, negatively impacting the UK-US defence industrial partnership. This poses a risk to our allied defence capability readiness and reduces the willingness of our industry to fully collaborate due to the time and cost involved in compliance. Alongside US International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), other constraints include information exchange (especially the misuse and overuse of the NOFORN classification), technology transfer, and the speed of agreeing Project Arrangements and MOUs. Impacts of these issues range from significant delays, increased programme costs, degradation of our competitive edge in terms of near-term readiness as well as development of future capabilities, and in some cases endangerment of lives.

We have demonstrated to both State Department and DOD that the UK has a comparable technology protection regime to the US and therefore should qualify for some relaxations and freedoms from unnecessary bureaucracy. Work is underway with the US Administration and Congress to make some headway in pursuing reforms or exemptions for the UK and Australia, noting AUKUS highlights the need to do things differently between the closest of allies.

**6. The outcome of the Doha Agreement was the return of the Taliban to power in a country where the UK lost 457 service personnel and the MOD assessed that it had spent £27.7 billion on Operations Herrick and TORAL. We examine the decisions made in relation to the Doha Agreement more fully in our Report on Afghanistan. However, it is clear that the signing of the Doha Agreement served domestic US Administration priorities of the time. The absence of other NATO Allies and the Afghan Government at the Doha negotiations meant that decisions taken did not necessarily reflect the interests of all involved.** (Paragraph 32)

US Ambassador Khalilzad's (Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation) negotiations were bilateral and did not include Coalition partners. Ministers, CDS and other senior officials at the time worked with the Afghans, and Allies including the US to try to maintain our strategic direction and broker a workable peace. UK influence on the decision to withdraw was ultimately limited by a decision process and timescale that was led by the US President himself. The UK made clear our concerns and advocated strongly for a continued presence in some form. Extensive attempts by NATO and smaller groups of nations failed to gain traction in no small part due to the large gap left by US withdrawal. The UK also requested an extension to the withdrawal date which was rejected. Noting the extensive support structures in place at the time of the drawdown of NATO and Coalition forces, there was an increasing chance of a collapse at some point. The key question was when, on which estimates differed. A collapse was predicted by many sources despite the withdrawal process markedly reducing the intelligence footprint. Noting that President Ghani fled the country on 15 Aug 21, this further damaged our ability to hold the initiative as the Taliban advanced on Kabul.

**7. The US have engaged widely with allies and partners on Ukraine. Although this did not deter President Putin from his course of action, it helped to build a unified response. The US is to be commended for its approach in declassifying intelligence and combatting Russian narratives. UK Defence Intelligence have also kept the public informed about the situation on the ground in Ukraine. Their clear and sustained analysis is partly responsible for continuing public support for Ukraine. (Paragraph 37)**

In the lead up to Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 Feb 2022, the UK and US coordinated the release of sensitive information to expose Russian attempts to install a puppet regime in Kyiv and to fabricate a pretext for invasion. The UK and US have since led efforts to further declassify information to highlight Russia's military failures. Russia continues to use information operations to falsely cast Ukraine as a threat to justify its aggressive stance. We will continue to expose their playbook, including false flag operations, disinformation, and cyber-attacks, and challenge false narratives by providing an accurate and truthful picture of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

**8. We welcome the US public commitment to greater engagement with partners and allies. However, the UK Government needs to encourage the US to engage at the planning stage for any operations that could have an impact on the UK or UK armed forces. (Paragraph 38)**

The Department agrees on the need for even closer engagement and alignment between close allies. We also welcome US efforts to improve engagement with allies at all levels, from the strategic to the tactical. At the strategic level, the Joint Statement signed by US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and UK Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace in April 2021, committing to closer UK/US engagement as we develop our defence strategies signalled the intent to deepen alignment. The biannual UK-US Defence Dialogue co-chaired by the Permanent Secretary and the US Deputy Secretary of Defense also exists to drive progress on our shared priorities, including strategic alignment, joint force development, nuclear cooperation and climate security. At the more tactical level, our close military-military engagement with the US in response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine continues to be vital in co-ordinating operational and planning and activity.

## **The UK-NATO relationship**

**9. The UK makes an impressive contribution to NATO. We welcome the decision within the Integrated Review of 2021 to ensure that the UK maintained its prominent role in NATO. However, we are concerned that if the Government fails to protect the defence budget from inflationary and foreign exchange pressures combined with the withdrawal of a battle group from Estonia, it will send the wrong message to Allies and adversaries alike. Unity is vital in understanding what the threat is and how best to counter it. (Paragraph 51)**

The Department is pleased that the UK will continue to spend a minimum of 2% of GDP on defence and is set to spend more than 2% this financial year. The Prime Minister has provided Defence additional support in the Spring Budget of £5 billion over the next 2 years. This will bring the UK to around 2.25% of national income and represents significant progress in meeting our long-term minimum defence spending target of 2.5% of GDP.



At the NATO Summit in Lithuania in July 2023, the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary will be seeking to ensure that all Allies invest more in our collective defence and carry a fair burden share.

In response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the UK doubled the number of UK troops in Estonia. This was always a temporary deployment. The overall capability of our commitment in Estonia is far more important than the numbers of troops alone. At the NATO Summit in Madrid, the UK pledged to enhance our cooperation with Estonia and strengthen security in the Baltic region. The Defence Secretary and his Estonian counterpart, Hanno Pevkur, met in London on 8 November 2022 and signed a joint Defence Roadmap, committing to ever stronger ties between our two countries. We remain committed to implementing this Roadmap with Estonia.

**10. The Joint Expeditionary Force has proven itself to be effective, acting as a force multiplier for both its constituent countries and NATO. We have heard that the UK should focus its efforts within NATO on the High North. Given that UK Defence is calling for greater NATO focus on the High North, it appears obvious that under the SACEUR's new regional plans the UK should be looking to work with our JEF partners to complement this activity whilst remaining aligned with wider NATO plans. We therefore recommend that the Government ensure that it has the necessary personnel and capabilities available to lead NATO operations in the High North. (Paragraph 52)**

The JEF continues to provide a range of credible military options to respond from peacetime through to times of crisis or conflict, as well as an important forum to discuss defence and security challenges affecting Northern Europe. The JEF will complement both NATO and Participant Nations' national response capabilities by aligning JEF activity with NATO's Regional Plans, homeland defence plans and peacetime vigilance activity.

**11. We welcome the likely accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO. We recommend that the Government continue to engage with interlocutors in both Hungary and Türkiye to lobby for ratification in the near future. (Paragraph 65)**

We warmly welcome Finland joining the Alliance on 4 April 2023 and remain fully committed to Sweden's NATO accession. Sweden and Finland's membership will make all Allies safer, NATO stronger and the Euro-Atlantic area more secure. It remains our objective to meet as an Alliance of 32 States in Vilnius. We further encourage Turkey to provide a clear path for Sweden's accession ahead of the Vilnius Summit. Moreover, we continue to encourage Hungary to conclude its ratification of Sweden without delay.

**12. NATO has been revitalised by the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine - there is a unity of purpose and agreement on what the threat posed is. However, it is still in the relatively early stages of its shift to refocusing on the defence of continental Europe, and political and technological developments are required to ensure NATO maintains its technological edge. (Paragraph 81)**

We agree that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has underlined NATO's role in deterring threats to Allies, and convening Allies around key issues like support for Ukraine. When NATO adopted its New Strategic Concept at Madrid in June 2022, Allies committed to taking steps to strengthen NATO and our national capabilities to address both current and future threats. The Strategic Concept includes the both the Defence and Deterrence of the Euro-Atlantic Area Strategy, based on a 360-degree approach to collective defence,

and the NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept, which sets out a 20-year vision for NATO's development and guidance on how to implement it. At the Madrid Summit, Allies agreed to accelerate implementation.

We agree that the Ukraine conflict has highlighted the importance of adapting to the technological challenges and retaining our technological edge. NATO is also taking steps to do this, such as through the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA), a mechanism to find technological solutions to critical transatlantic defence and security challenges, and the NATO Innovation Fund (NIF), which provides critical investment to start-ups developing important capabilities. The UK is hosting the European Headquarters of DIANA, in partnership with Estonia, which will also feature a hub in Tallinn.

**13. We welcome NATO-EU engagement, both on China and defence capabilities, where it is complementary, rather than duplicative. We are also supportive of the UK's application to join PESCO. (Paragraph 82)**

The Department shares the Committee's view on the benefit of NATO-EU engagement and is pleased that it supports the UK's application to join the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) Military Mobility project.

We are encouraged that NATO's Strategic Concept and the EU's Strategic Compass present similar views on much of the strategic security environment and welcomed the signature of the NATO-EU Joint Declaration in January, which contained specific commitments to work together more closely on resilience, geostrategic competition, emerging and disruptive technologies, foreign information interference and more. NATO-EU cooperation in these areas would contribute to UK priorities and prove vital as the threats we face evolve. We will need close NATO-EU engagement to protect long-term European security, particularly in developing and procuring defence technologies to replenish our stocks as we continue to support Ukraine.

We are particularly mindful of advocating for complementarity and interoperability on a range of key issues. The UK will continue to support close cooperation and coherence between NATO and the EU as important on a range of challenges, where the strengths and different tools of both organisations need to be combined. We are also calling for the fullest possible involvement of non-EU NATO Allies in EU initiatives and vice-versa. However, we will not support any measures that undermine our sovereignty over our own armed forces, or that leads to competition or duplication with NATO.

## Wider issues

**14. It is clear that the UK and its NATO Allies have allowed ammunition stockpiles to dwindle to dangerously low levels. Whilst Russia is also facing the diminution of its stockpiles, other adversaries are able to maintain and potentially increase their own. This inability to replenish UK stockpiles therefore puts at risk not just our ability to resupply Ukraine but also to counter any threat to our own security. (Paragraph 92)**

The UK has been leading work in NATO on industrial capacity and stockpile replenishment following the conflict in Ukraine. At the Vilnius Summit, we want Allies to agree an action plan to strengthen the industrial base, step up multi-year and multi-national



procurement, increase standardisation and boost interoperability and interchangeability.

**15. Defence industrial capacity needs to be both resilient and scalable. In order to secure supply chains the Secretary of State acknowledged that the Government needs to address skills shortages as well as committing to significant orders alongside allies to ensure that production lines are maintained in the long term and to replace stockpiles of munitions in the short term. Capacity (including redundant capacity) is also key if industry is to be able to ramp up production.** (Paragraph 93)

The Department's Munitions Planning Cycle for 2022 was endorsed in April 2023, taking on board both early lessons learned from Ukraine and DSTL analysis. The Autumn Statement provided the Department with £560 million to bolster munitions stockpiles and industrial resilience, and work to industrial capacity and stockpiles is ongoing. The Department will update the Committee on its plans for industrial capacity and the UK's munitions stockpiles in due course.

**16. It is clear that the manner in which Western Governments procure armaments is not fit for purpose. The MOD produced a strategy aimed at improving the way that it engages with industry and allies almost two years ago and yet we have been told it will take at least a decade to replenish (and then increase to a sustainable level) UK ammunition stockpiles. We have previously recommended that the Department report annually on its implementation of the Defence, Security and Industrial Strategy—a recommendation which was ignored. We therefore recommend that the Department produce an action plan of how it intends to grow defence industrial capacity and reduce the time taken to replenish UK stockpiles. We further recommend that the Department brief this and other relevant Committees on the steps required to fulfil those goals.** (Paragraph 94)

We continue to work closely with industry, academia, and our international partners to deliver the full range of commitments set out in DSIS and ensure that the UK continues to have competitive, innovative, and world-class defence and security industries.

The key theme of the Defence and Security Industrial Strategy, the need to consider industry as a capability in its own right, has been reinforced by the Government's and industry's response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Industry has played a key role in our support for Ukraine.

Regarding the replenishment of UK stockpiles, the Department is fully engaged with industry, Allies, and partners to ensure that all equipment and munitions granted in kind to Ukraine from UK stocks are replaced as quickly as possible. The Department has rapidly and effectively exploited our procurement processes in a way which reflects the urgency of the situation. We have prioritised a more holistic munitions mix over a determination to always replace like for like. To take this forward, a replenishment team has been established in the newly formed Defence Equipment and Support Operations Directorate. A number of substantial contracts have already been placed to directly replenish UK stockpiles. These include securing contracts for Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapons, Starstreak High Velocity Missiles, Lightweight Multirole Missiles, Archer 6X6 Artillery Systems and Carl Gustaf recoilless rifles.

Further developing strategic alignment with industry will mean that together we can better understand long-term strategic challenges and identify solutions to issues such as

the availability of critical skills, resilience within the supply chain, and productivity. We will outline how we are working more closely with industry in the upcoming Defence Command Paper Refresh.

**17. We welcome the Government's acknowledgement that resilience requires investment in increasing the medium and high skills base. We recommend that the MOD enter into a joint programme of work with other relevant Government Departments to identify and remove barriers which stop UK educational institutions from preparing their students to become the workers required for the UK defence industrial base. Furthermore, we recommend that the MOD pilot a procurement approach whereby a set percentage of apprentices are required to be attached to an acquisition programme. (Paragraph 95)**

Ensuring the right mix of skills across the defence and security sectors is critical to creating and sustaining the sort of vibrant, innovative and competitive industrial base we want to have in the UK. Therefore, the Department is working with industry to nurture and develop relevant skills in the sectors, including through sharing expertise, making it easier for people to move between Government and industry, and greater outreach by defence and security departments to identify and attract potential talent.

The Defence Suppliers Forum People and Skills group is a collaborative endeavour between Government and industry which looks to identify and address the skills gap within the UK Defence Sector around STEM related skills. There is ongoing engagement with academia to develop a sustained partnership. This is to enable a demand signal, so that academia is delivering the skills needed. Work, such as the development of a Diversity & Inclusion covenant, is being undertaken to tackle the barriers that prevent diverse people from becoming Defence engineers and on ensuring an inclusive environment to retain those already within the sector. The group also endeavours to reflect and promote the positive attraction of careers within the sector to under-represented communities. Further detail on how Defence continues to support its people will be outlined in the Defence Command Paper Refresh.

**18. The events of the past year demonstrate the need for effective deterrence against aggressive actions which undermine the rules-based international order. The UK must work within NATO to ensure that there is an agreed approach and unity of action. But capable, sustainable armed forces are also a vital part of a credible deterrence. Adversaries must believe that the UK (alongside Allies and partners) will retaliate against aggressive actions which undermine the international rule of law, making aggressors pay a disproportionate price. (Paragraph 102)**

We concur with the Committee's conclusions regarding the importance of effective deterrence. NATO is undergoing a once-in-a-generation military transformation to re-focus on defence against malign state actors and adversaries. The UK has played a central part in designing and delivering this transformation, and UK forces will deploy to enforce it, protecting our Allies and maintaining NATO deterrence. NATO unity has been undeniable. Despite Putin's war of aggression, NATO has grown larger as the threat perception calculus of our neighbours has shifted. NATO Allies and our partners across the globe will work tirelessly to maintain the rules based international order, deter others from violating it and create costs for those who do.