

‘Global Britain’ and the Future of the British Armed Forces

James Rogers



“As well as offering insightful analysis of the UK’s past role in both European and global security, this report raises a number of urgent questions: what the UK’s future role should be; what our strategy for fulfilling that role is; and whether or not we are prepared to resource it. Despite recent evidence overwhelmingly demonstrating that the UK’s Security is now at greater risk than at any time since the darkest days of the Cold War, the UK government is still failing to offer a coherent strategy as to how we mitigate those risks. Instead it is overseeing an unwarranted and ill-advised decline in the UK’s defence budget and an unprecedented ‘hollowing out’ of our armed forces. Current government policies are placing the UK at risk, and the concerns that this report raises about the funding of our armed forces need to be urgently addressed.”

Dan Jarvis MP – Member of Parliament for Barnsley Central (2011-); Member of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (2017-); Major (rtd.) of the Parachute Regiment

“With the decision to leave the European Union and the emergence of an American president who wants his allies to pull their weight, this report outlines clearly why the time is hardly right for the government to consider further cuts to our armed forces. Britain needs to engage more in Europe and more in the booming Indo-Pacific region. This requires a strong army, a capable air force and a go-anywhere navy.”

Rt. Hon. Mark Francois MP – Member of Parliament for Rayleigh and Wickford (2001-); Member of the Defence Select Committee (2017-); Minister of State for the Armed Forces (2013-2015)

“Britain’s amphibious capability, a crucial part of which are the assault ships HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark, is critical to the nation’s ability to deter challenges in the European littorals of the Wider North and the Mediterranean, as well as theatre entry worldwide. This report shows why the time has come to increase the resources allocated to defence to maintain them.”

Adm. Rt. Hon. The Lord West of Spithead – Minister of Security and Counter-Terrorism (2007-2010); First Sea Lord (2002-2006)

“This report argues that while Britain is a European power, it will increasingly be drawn into the Indo-Pacific region, where the future of the global economy rests. The country therefore needs the ability to continue to underwrite European security, while simultaneously forming closer relations with countries East of Suez. Enhanced defence spending is key to this.”

Rt. Hon. The Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom – Chairman of the Parliamentary Defence Select Committee (2005-2014); Minister of State for Defence Procurement (1995-1997)

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Front cover: HMS Bulwark, as part of the Joint Expeditionary Force

(Maritime) Task Group, cruising through the Suez Canal, October 2016.

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Our security remains involved with that of our continental neighbours: for the dominance of the European landmass by an alien and hostile power would make almost impossible the maintenance of our national independence, to say nothing of our capacity to maintain a defensive system to protect any extra-European interests we may retain.

- Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment*, 1971¹

¹ See: Howard, M., *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars* (London: Pelican Books, 1971), pp. 9-10.

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Executive Summary

1. The capacity of the United Kingdom (UK) to act as a global power has always been determined by the geopolitical situation on the European mainland.
2. British geostrategy has always sought to hold European geopolitics in ‘suspended animation’ to ensure that no single continental country could emerge as a regulatory authority.
3. To achieve this, the UK has long engaged in ‘offshore balancing’, using its island disposition and naval power to hold off a European competitor, building up a coalition, and intervening on the mainland in the event of war to re-establish geopolitical equilibrium.
4. However, the emergence of large industrial powers – especially Germany and Russia – combined with the advent of new transport technologies and combined-arms warfare shattered the British approach. From the early 20th century, the European mainland could simply be overrun before the UK could mobilise a response.
5. After the Second World War, offshore balancing gave way to ‘onshore tethering’, as the UK accepted a permanent ‘continental commitment’ for the first time, forwardly deploying substantial terrestrial and air assets through an alliance infrastructure to maintain continental order.
6. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of threats from the Middle East facilitated the ‘re-globalisation’ of British security policy, which will likely be challenged and compounded by UK withdrawal from the European Union.
7. Meanwhile, the resources successive British governments have allocated to defence, have been in steady decline, having consumed on average 5% of GDP towards the latter phase of the Cold War, to only 2% today.
8. British governments continue to proclaim their commitment to spending 2% of GDP on the armed forces, as agreed in principle through NATO in 2006 and officially in 2014. However, insofar as the UK is a global as well as a European power, and also helps to underwrite NATO, their commitment is hardly worthy of any commendation.
9. Consequently, as the geopolitical situation in Europe and globally becomes more uncertain, the UK ought to invest more in the tools to prevent conflict, of which the armed forces are a significant part. Britain should therefore allot a greater share of its national income to the armed forces, in keeping with its expanding interests and horizons.

1. Introduction

The future success of ‘Global Britain’ requires a focused geopolitical posture and a more robust connection between the United Kingdom’s (UK) military capabilities and its international interests. As a European power with global reach, Britain has long assumed a special geopolitical role.² The country has been an important custodian of the international order since the 17th century, both globally and in relation to the European mainland.³ Today, it is a major economy with numerous overseas interests, a nuclear weapons state, is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and continues to underpin, with the United States (US), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).⁴ Indeed, that the British people and their leaders have long accepted, and even embraced, such a role – funding it accordingly – has rarely come into question. As a former Secretary of State for Defence, John Reid, put it:

We take a view of the world which is not isolationist, which has always been internationalist – which recognises that we not only have rights to defend in the world, but we also have responsibilities to discharge; we are in a sense our brother’s keeper globally. Sometimes it requires us to say, ‘Yes, we will make the ultimate sacrifice’.⁵

However, the extent to which the UK is still prepared to act as its “brother’s keeper” around the world, occasionally even making the “ultimate sacrifice” – deploying its armed forces to deter and coerce to uphold the security of its allies, as well as the cause of liberty – is increasingly an open question. The decision to substantially cut foreign and military spending in 2010; failing to use force to punish the regime of Bashar al-Assad for using chemical weapons against civilians in Syria in 2013; and voting to leave the European Union (EU) in 2016, are all purported to represent the emergence of a more insular agenda in British foreign policy.⁶

This comes at a time when the British government has embarked on a reappraisal of the latest *Strategic Defence and Security Review* (SDSR), which was published just under two years ago, in November 2015.⁷ Undertaken annually to check if the SDSR is being implemented efficiently and correctly, the last of these reappraisals was released in December 2016.⁸ However, the current reappraisal, led by the National Security Advisor, Mark Sedwill, will likely be deeper and more far-reaching. It comes at a time when a gaping ‘hole’ of some £10-20 billion has re-emerged in the Ministry of Defence’s finances.⁹ Whether this hole is the consequence of insufficient resources,

² For an overview of British geopolitical capabilities, see: Rogers, J., ‘An Audit of Geopolitical Capability: A Comparison of Eight Major Powers’, *The Henry Jackson Society*, 12 September 2017, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2017/09/12/an-audit-of-geopolitical-capability/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

³ For an excellent overview of Britain’s pivoting between the European mainland and the wider world, see: Simms, B., *Britain’s Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Allen Lane, 2016). See also: Rogers, J., ‘Why the UK Must Lead in Upholding the European Security Order’, RUSI Newsbrief 34.5 (2014).

⁴ For an analysis of the longstanding British commitment to NATO, see: Baylis, J., ‘Britain, the Brussels Pact and the continental commitment’, *International Affairs* 60.4 (1984).

⁵ See: ‘Interview with John Reid’, *The New Statesman*, 3 March 2003, available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/node/157205>, last accessed: 31 October 2017.

⁶ See: Judah, B., ‘England’s Last Gasp of Empire’, *The New York Times*, 12 July 2016, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/opinion/englands-last-gasp-of-empire.html>, last visited: 30 October 2017; Gaskarth, J. and Leech, P., ‘British Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 26.1 (2015).

⁷ See: ‘Strategic Defence and Security Review Implementation’, *Gov.uk*, 20 July 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strategic-defence-and-security-review-implementation>, last visited: 31 October 2017. For the actual SDSR, see: ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015’, HM Government (2015), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478936/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_PRINT_only.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁸ See: ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: First Annual Report 2016’, HM Government (2016), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575378/national_security_strategy_strategic_defence_security_review_annual_report_2016.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁹ See: Roberts, P., ‘Ministry of Defence Facing Tough Financial Choices’, *Royal United Services Institute*, 29 June 2017, available at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/ministry-defence-facing-tough-financial-choices>, last visited: 31 October 2017. See also: ‘Is there a black hole in defence?’

bad planning or the decline in the value of the pound sterling since the EU referendum in June 2016, is only of partial significance. What matters is whether it will be overcome with efficiency savings, hard reductions in military capability, or increased military expenditure. Any contractions, which undermine the reach and striking-power of the British Armed Forces, would almost certainly reinforce the notion of the UK's decline and dent the country's role and influence on the European mainland and in the wider world. It would also send the wrong signal to the UK's allies, partners and enemies in equal measure. And it would jeopardise Britain's ability to embark on new commercial relationships with emerging countries, not least those in the Indo-Pacific, due to the intrinsic nexus between security and trade. At the very least, the *National Security Capabilities Review*, as it will be called, has already generated much debate, particularly as key military assets, not least the Royal Navy's principal amphibious capability – represented by the large assault vessels, HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark – could be axed.¹⁰

This Policy Paper aims to challenge the notion that Britain's current level of military expenditure is adequate to meet national needs. It will also argue that, similarly to previous points in British history, the country's military capabilities are no longer sufficient to sustain the geopolitical posture it requires. Given the international changes since 2015, it would be folly on the government's part to review only the ways (capabilities) and means (resources) behind the nation's geostrategic posture, without simultaneously re-appraising the posture itself. For the decision to withdraw from the EU is likely to have profound geopolitical implications for the UK, just as the emergence of a less internationalist administration in the US is likely to further destabilise transatlantic relations.¹¹ Two of the key assumptions undergirding British geostrategy have become less stable, and the longer-term implications are unclear. This comes at a time when the international environment is already experiencing – in the words of the 2015 *National Security Strategy* – “long-term shifts in the balance of global economic and military power, increasing competition between states, and the emergence of more powerful non-state actors”.¹²

Consequently, this Policy Paper will argue that the UK needs a bolder geostrategic vision – properly resourced through adequate military spending – if it is to make a success of leaving the EU and charting a new global destiny. It will show that a combination of factors are congealing which dislocate the assumptions under which British strategic and military thinkers have operated. The geopolitical kaleidoscope is being shaken to such an extent that the review should focus on the nation's geopolitical posture, or else the country, as well as the ‘liberal Europe’ it has long endorsed and undergirded, may be left increasingly exposed. After many years of running down the resources allotted to national security, the time has finally come for the UK to consider more carefully if it is time to allocate more. In other words, Britain ought to determine whether it is prepared to provide the resources not only to continue to act as its brother's keeper around the world, and especially in its own neighbourhood, but also – when needed – whether it is ready to make the ultimate sacrifice. If not, the UK will likely be compelled to accept not only a more regional approach to national security, but also a supplemental one at that, which renders the prospect of a ‘Global Britain’ nothing more than a pipe dream.

Thin Pinstriped Line, 17 October 2017, available at: <https://thinpinstripedline.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/is-there-black-hole-in-defence.html>, last accessed: 31 October 2017.

¹⁰ See: ‘Strategic Defence and Security Review Implementation’, *Gov.uk*: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strategic-defence-and-security-review-implementation>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

¹¹ For an overview, see: Ikenberry, G. J., ‘The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive?’, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017, available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-04-17/plot-against-american-foreign-policy?cid=otr-mayjune_release-the_plot_against_american_foreign_policy-041817, last visited: 31 October 2017 and Sestanovich, S., ‘The Brilliant Incoherence of Trump's Foreign Policy’, *The Atlantic*, May 2017, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/05/the-brilliant-incoherence-of-trumps-foreign-policy/521430/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

¹² See: ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015’, HM Government (2015), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478936/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_PRINT_only.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017, p. 15.

2. British Geopolitical Posture: From ‘Offshore Balancing’ to ‘Onshore Tethering’

The UK’s geopolitical situation has remained relatively unchanged for the past five centuries. While, as a large and resource-rich archipelago, the UK has always had firm foundations to act as a global power, it is nonetheless “a Western European power, unable to isolate itself from European affairs, joined to Western Europe by innumerable political, social and economic links”.¹³ In this sense, the overriding British fear has been that a large continental power might acquire hegemonic ambitions and take control not only of the Low Countries, considered by Britons and Europeans alike as a “dagger” or “pistol” aimed “at the heart of England”, but also the wider European mainland.¹⁴ Having gained control of the continent, or a large part of it, such a power could then use its resources to challenge the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean and Baltic seas, followed by the Bay of Biscay, the English Channel and the North Sea; cut British maritime communication lines; and, ultimately, either isolate or invade the British Isles. Through the systematic dismantlement of the sinews of British power, the UK would then be gradually negated, leaving the budding continental overlord free to assert total domination as a regulatory authority, both politically and economically. As a consequence, Britain has only been able to embrace a global perspective when European geopolitics have been placed into ‘suspended animation’.

Placing European geopolitics into suspended animation has always required Britain to act as an ‘ordering power’ to hold the major European powers in check. Winston Churchill eloquently outlined this approach in 1948:

For four hundred years the foreign policy of England has been to oppose the strongest, most aggressive, most domineering Power on the continent, and particularly preventing the Low Countries from falling into the hands of such a power ... The question is not whether it is Spain, or the French Empire, or the German Empire, or the Hitler regime. It has nothing to do with rulers or nations; it is concerned solely with whoever is the strongest or potentially dominating tyrant...¹⁵

Initially, the UK acted as an ordering power through a geostrategy of ‘offshore balancing’ (see Box 1). Using its island status and maritime power to hold off invasion, it tended to throw its weight behind the weakest continental coalition, buying time to launch an expeditionary force on the mainland once its allies had weakened the aspiring tyrant.

However, the industrialisation of the large continental powers, particularly Germany and Russia, allied to advances in military technology, combined further with combined-arms warfare, posted a significant challenge for Britain’s established approach. These giant new powers gained the ability to overrun the continent before the UK could assemble an expeditionary force of sufficient size and strength to push them back. Worse still, the advent of airpower reduced the significance of

¹³ See: Cole, D. H., *Imperial Military Geography* (London: Sifton Praed and Co., Ltd., 1956), p. 1.

¹⁴ See: Whittlesey, D., *The Earth and the State: A Study of Political Geography* (New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 1939) p. 98 and Gray, C., *The Politics of Superpower* (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1988), p. 15.

¹⁵ See: Churchill, W., *The Gathering Storm* (New York City: Rosetta Books, 2002 [1948]), pp. 186-187.

the English Channel and North Sea as a moat, leaving the British Isles vulnerable to direct attack.¹⁶ Thus, if the First World War had stretched the concept of offshore balancing to breaking point, the Second World War shattered it altogether. With the dawning of the nuclear age, a new means had to be found to keep European geopolitics in suspended animation. An approach predicated on prevention was needed, rather than one based on cure. As the then Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, argued in 1948:

If we are to preserve peace and our own safety at the same time we can only do so by the mobilisation of such a moral and material force as will create confidence and energy in the West and inspire respect elsewhere, and this means that Britain cannot stand outside Europe and regard her problems as quite separate from those of her European neighbours.¹⁷

The only problem was that Britain's geostrategic needs in Europe were in conflict with its global imperial interests. The armed forces' senior officers believed that they only had a "limited liability" on the European mainland, and that their principal calling was "imperial defence", rather than supporting the interests and requirements of British foreign policy.¹⁸

Box 1: Differences between Offshore Balancing and Onshore Tethering in Relation to the European Continent

| | Offshore balancing | Onshore tethering |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Persistence | Temporary engagement | Permanent deployment |
| Geography | Continental | Regional |
| Institutionalisation | Weak coalition | Permanent alliance |
| Power centre | British Isles | North America |
| Forces | Primarily maritime | Primarily terrestrial |
| Global focus | Strong | Weak |

However, anxiety of German resurgence, concern over American withdrawal from European affairs, fears surrounding Soviet geopolitical intentions, and India's independence, eventually converged to disabuse the 'globalists' of their ideas and force fundamental change.¹⁹ Britain was about to find itself with a 'continental commitment', predicated on what might be described as 'onshore tethering' (see Box 1). Through at first the treaties of Dunkirk and Brussels, which formed the Western Union, and later, NATO, the UK would for the first time in its history forwardly position a standing army on foreign territory on the European mainland, and commit

¹⁶ For an excellent overview of thinking during the interwar period, see: Howard, M., *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars* (London: Pelican Books, 1971). Equally, Britain's maritime strongholds also became vulnerable: the Second World War revealed that Gibraltar and Malta, which were designed to guard British maritime communication lines to the Middle East and Far East, could also be placed under sustained air attack, to some extent denting their geopolitical utility. See: Spykman, N., *The Geography of the Peace* (New York City: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944), p. 54.

¹⁷ See: Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Mr. Ernest Bevin), 'House of Commons Debate: Foreign Affairs', *Hansard Online*, 22 January 1948, available at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1948/jan/22/foreign-affairs>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

¹⁸ As Elisabeth Barker puts it: "... until the end of 1949 no serious military planning for the defence of western Europe had been done except by the Western Union ... Even this suffered from British reluctance to say what land forces, if any, would be sent to the continent in case of war". See: Barker, E., *The British Between the Superpowers, 1945-50* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 155.

¹⁹ The British decision to retain a large armed presence on Europe, whilst "fire-fighting" international crises (imperial and otherwise) could not be sustained on the budget available. For a comprehensive overview, see: Darby, P., *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-68* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 252-255.

itself to a permanent alliance infrastructure.²⁰ While this did not preclude Britain from maintaining a global military footprint or from undertaking overseas operations – from the Korean War to the Falklands Conflict – it resulted in the UK becoming increasingly entrenched in Europe. During the early 1950s, the continent started to emerge as the centrepiece of the UK’s entire strategic effort, receiving the lion’s share of British military assets.²¹ All defence reviews (see Box 2) between 1950 and 1981 operationalised this policy.

Box 2: UK Defence Reviews between 1945 and 2015

| Date | Title | Primary innovation |
|------|--|--|
| 1950 | <i>Defence Policy and Global Strategy</i> | Preparation for the Cold War |
| 1952 | <i>Defence Policy and Global Strategy</i> | ‘Nuclearisation’ of British strategy |
| 1957 | <i>Defence: Outline of Future Policy</i> | Geostrategic “Europeanisation” |
| 1965 | <i>Statement on the Defence Estimates</i> | British ‘de-autonomisation’ (fighting only with allies) |
| 1975 | <i>Statement on the Defence Estimates</i> | Further geostrategic ‘Europeanisation’ |
| 1981 | <i>Defence Programme: The Way Forward</i> | Total geostrategic ‘Europeanisation’ |
| 1990 | <i>Options for Change</i> | Preparation for the end of the Cold War |
| 1994 | <i>Front Line First: Defence Costs Study</i> | Implementation of the ‘peace dividend’ |
| 1998 | <i>Strategic Defence Review</i> | Preparation for an age of expeditionary warfare |
| 2002 | <i>New Chapter</i> | Combating the threat from international terrorism |
| 2004 | <i>Defence White Paper</i> | Combating asymmetric threats |
| 2010 | <i>Strategic Defence and Security Review</i> | Geostrategic ‘de-Europeanisation’ (withdrawal from Germany) |
| 2015 | <i>Strategic Defence and Security Review</i> | Geostrategic ‘re-Europeanisation’ (deterrence in relation to Russia) |

The *Report on Defence Policy and Global Strategy* of 1950 – the first significant review after the Second World War – began military preparations for the Cold War, including the geostrategic concentration of the British Armed Forces towards the European mainland, particularly West Germany. Its successor, of the same name, released two years later, compounded this move, by emphasising the ‘nuclearisation’ of British strategy, just as the UK was emerging as an atomic power.²² The 1957 review – *Defence: Outline of Future Policy* – took the 1950 and 1952 reviews to their logical conclusion, intensifying UK reliance on nuclear weapons, which the country now

²⁰ See: Baylis, J., *British Defence Policy: Striking the Right Balance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), pp. 19-29.

²¹ For example, in 1949 and 1950, the UK committed, along with the US, to deploy forces permanently on the European mainland to undergird NATO. The British pledged four divisions and a tactical air force. See: Wyn-Rees, G., *Anglo-American Approaches to Security, 1955-60* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1996), pp. 47-48.

²² See: Baylis, J. and Macmillan, A., ‘The British Global Strategy Paper of 1952’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 16.2 (1993), p. 200.

had in greater abundance, to deter a Soviet attack on Western Europe.²³ The reviews of the 1960s slashed back at the residue of the Royal Navy’s capacity for ‘deep oceanic’ power projection, particularly ‘East of Suez’, so that it might better concentrate on overcoming the growing threat from Soviet submarines in the North Atlantic, simultaneously re-confirming the nation’s European credentials to France as it sought accession into the European Community.²⁴ The reviews of the 1970s focused UK military assets on West Germany and the home waters around the British Isles, while boosting the role of the Polaris nuclear deterrent.²⁵ And the 1981 review – *Defence Programme: The Way Forward* – sought to reduce in quantity the Royal Navy’s largest ships and refocus the remainder more on Europe, before the Falklands Conflict refocused attention towards the need of a global navy to defend Britain’s overseas territories, particularly in the South Atlantic.²⁶

However, with the end of the Cold War, and due to the emergence of a volatile mix of rogue, failed and fragile states, religious extremism and international terrorism, coming to the fore, the UK has once again ‘de-Europeanised’ and ‘re-globalised’ its strategic posture. All defence reviews undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War – *Options for Change* (1990) and *Front Line First* (1994) – reduced the country’s continental commitment by: cutting back on Britain’s heavy armoured military presence on the European mainland; scaling-back the anti-submarine capabilities of the Royal Navy; reducing the delivery platforms and the number of warheads in the British nuclear arsenal; and emphasising the need to generate expeditionary forces for rapid reaction at short notice for potentially worldwide deployment, while also slashing military expenditure.²⁷ This period was thought to be a time when the country could cash in on the so-called ‘peace dividend’.²⁸ Meanwhile, the defence reviews undertaken in 1998 and 2010 were particularly significant: the former set the stage for the ‘re-globalisation’ of the British armed forces towards expeditionary warfare, while the latter – cutting across the board, in part motivated by the government’s austerity policy, resulting from the 2007-2008 Financial Crisis – planned for their ‘de-Europeanisation’, with the complete withdrawal of the British military presence from Germany by 2020.²⁹ With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the well-received SDSR in 2015 changed tack and attempted to correct some of cuts undertaken five years before, promising to deliver a 50,000-strong expeditionary force, both for European and global deployment.³⁰

²³ For a succinct overview, see: Wyn Rees, G., ‘The 1957 Sandys white paper: New priorities in British defence policy?’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 12.2 (1989).

²⁴ See: Darby, P., *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-68* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 224 and pp. 309-334.

²⁵ See: Dorman, A., ‘Crises and Reviews in British Defence Policy’, in Croft, S., Dorman, A., Rees, W., and Uttley, M., *Britain and Defence 1945-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 15-17.

²⁶ See: Secretary of State for Defence, *The United Kingdom Defence Programme: The Way Forward* (Derby: Bemrose Specialist Press, June 1981), available at: <http://fc95d419f4478b3b6e5f3f71d0fc2b653c4f00f32175760e96e7.r87.cf1.rackcdn.com/991284B4011C44C9AEB423DA04A7D54B.pdf>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

²⁷ See: See: Dorman, A., ‘Crises and Reviews in British Defence Policy’, in Croft, S., Dorman, A., Rees, W., and Uttley, M., *Britain and Defence 1945-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 20-22.

²⁸ See: Knight, M., Loayza and N., Villanueva, D., ‘The Peace Dividend: Military Spending Cuts and Economic Growth’, The World Bank Policy Research Department, Macroeconomics and Growth Division, and International Monetary Fund (1996), available at: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/154941468766463442/107507322_20041117142015/additional/multi0page.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

²⁹ See: ‘Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review’, HM Government (2010), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62482/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017, p. 28.

³⁰ See: ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015’, HM Government (2015), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478936/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_PRINT_only.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017, p. 6.

3. Implications for the Future: An Expanded Geopolitical Landscape?

Since 2015, Britain’s strategic environment has continued to deteriorate. Russia has continued to modernise its military forces, even if at a less rapid clip than earlier in the decade. This has given Moscow the confidence and swagger to contemplate intensified naval and air activity closer to the British Isles.³¹ Indeed, according to General Sir Richard Barrons, the former Commander, Joint Forces Command:

The risk today and more so in the future is that countries like Russia and China already have capability that could hold the UK homeland at military risk at very short notice.³²

Britain’s allies are potentially even more vulnerable. Russia’s ongoing ‘non-linear’ warfare to generate ‘manageable chaos’ in neighbouring non-NATO countries, preventing them from seeking admission into the Euro-Atlantic structures, has continued to complicate British strategic policy.³³ The threat from religious fanatics, especially Islamist extremists and terrorists, in the form of Al-Qaeda or the self-proclaimed ‘Islamic State’ in Syria and Iraq, has not gone away, even if it has been partially dismantled by an international coalition, to which Britain has contributed significantly.³⁴ Volatility in the Indo-Pacific region – from the rise of China to the unpredictable behaviour of North Korea – has also prompted the US to rebalance its focus away from Europe, a process that continues unabated.

However, since the release of the last SDSR, two additional developments have occurred, which were considered so fantastic in 2015 that they were not even accommodated by the review. First, the British people voted to leave the EU in a national referendum held in June 2016. This set in motion a number of disruptive events: the resignation of the then prime minister, David Cameron; the installation of a new one, Theresa May; the depreciation of the British currency by 15%; the triggering of Article 50 so that the UK could begin formal negotiations to leave the EU; a snap election; and the start of the formal negotiations for the UK to withdraw from the EU. Second, against popular expectations, Donald Trump was elected US president. His failure to support NATO unequivocally during the presidential election campaign; his assertion that his presidency would be encapsulated by an “America First” approach; and his controversial statements on the rights of minorities, etc., signifies that his presidency might be the start of a new form of US administration, which is less predictable and globally engaged than at any point since the 1940s.³⁵

³¹ See: Foxall, A., ‘Close Encounters: Russian Military Activities in the Vicinity of UK Air and Sea Space, 2005-2016’, *The Henry Jackson Society*, 11 July 2017, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2017/07/11/close-encounters-russian-military-activities-in-the-vicinity-of-uk-air-and-sea-space-2005-2016/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

³² Maidment, J., ‘UK must boost defence budget to protect “homeland” against Russian attack, former military chief warns’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 October 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/24/uk-must-boost-defence-budget-ensure-armed-forces-can-protect/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

³³ For a deeper explanation of the concept “manageable chaos”, see: Rogers, J. and Martinescu, A., ‘After Crimea: Towards a New British Geostrategy for Eastern Europe?’, *The Henry Jackson Society*, 1 September 2015, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2015/09/01/after-crimea-towards-a-new-british-geostrategy-for-eastern-europe/>, last visited: 31 October 2017 and Rogers, J. and Tyushka, A., “Hacking” into the West: Russia’s “anti-hegemonic” drive and the strategic narrative offensive’, Defence Strategic Communications 2.1 (2017). See also: Galeotti, M., ‘Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe’, *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 1 September 2017, available at: http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe, last visited: 31 October 2017.

³⁴ For an excellent overview, see: Hassan, H., and Weiss, M., *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York City: Regan Arts, 2015). On the British role in the multinational coalition, see: Mills, C., ‘ISIS/Daesh: the military response in Iraq and Syria’, House of Commons (2017), available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06995/SN06995.pdf>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

³⁵ See: ‘The Inaugural Address’, *Whitehouse.gov*, 20 January 2017, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

Here, the growing focus of the US on East Asia, allied to the political phenomena that gave rise to President Trump – which may not be a fleeting anomaly in American politics – could gradually weaken the UK-US alliance, which is at the heart of the Euro-Atlantic framework.³⁶ Worse, given many Britons' disdain for President Trump (or a future president like him), British governments might feel disinclined to endorse or back American policies, further undermining London's geopolitical salience to Washington, DC. Domestic opposition from within the UK also seems to have discouraged the US leader from visiting the UK.³⁷ The statements of Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, demanding that President Trump's invitation be revoked; a parliamentary petition, one of the most signed in history, demanding that the government cancel the invitation; and the possibility that, on arrival in London, protesters would turn out *en masse* to jeer him, are unprecedented rebukes to a sitting US president. In turn, despite some promising movements from President Trump earlier this year – not least during the British prime minister's visit to the US capital and promises of a UK-US trade agreement on the conclusion of the British withdrawal from the EU – the relationship has not developed as well as was originally anticipated. By contrast, President Trump visited Paris in July at the invitation of France's youthful new president, Emmanuel Macron.³⁸

These are particularly unsettling developments for the UK, not least given the weakening of the Euro-Atlantic structures since the end of the Cold War. The nexus between the three geostrategic imperatives that the late geostrategic thinker, Zbigniew Brzezinski, outlined for any major power, and which animate the creation of NATO, could come undone:

To put it in a terminology that hearkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives ... are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.³⁹

In all cases, the UK seems to have reached a moment where the power relations on which the Euro-Atlantic order has been built are opened to challenge.⁴⁰ In other words, insofar as it is leaving the EU, the UK will cease to act as the geopolitical 'knot' that binds NATO and the EU together, just as the US may be disengaging from the alliance.

Here, the risk is that the "vassals" – Britain's mainland European allies, including even France and Germany – might conclude that they can achieve more by working together with one another than with their Atlantic custodians.⁴¹ In May 2017, Angela Merkel, Germany's chancellor, questioned openly for the first time the British and American commitment to European security:

And that is why I can only say that we Europeans must really take our fate into our own hands – of course in friendship with the United States of America, in friendship with

³⁶ See: Wyn Rees, G., *Anglo-American Approaches to Alliance Security, 1955-60* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), pp. 3-11; Croft, S., Dorman, A., Wyn Rees, G., and Uttley, M., *Britain and Defence 1945-2000: A Policy Reevaluation* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2001), pp. 49-68 and Simón, L., 'Understanding US Retrenchment in Europe', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 57:2 (2015).

³⁷ See: Maizland, L., 'Trump won't visit the UK this year because he's as unpopular there as he is here', *Vox*, 11 July 2017, available at: <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/6/12/15781740/trump-uk-britain-visit-canceled-delayed>, last visited: 31 October 2017 and 'What are the 10 most-signed petitions and what have they achieved?', *ITV News*, 31 January 2017, available at: <http://www.itv.com/news/2017-01-31/petitions-what-are-the-10-most-signed-and-what-have-they-achieved/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

³⁸ See: Samuel, H., 'Marathon handshake ends Trump Bastille Day trip to Paris as Macron seals "diplomatic coup"', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 July 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/14/marathon-handshake-ends-trump-bastille-day-trip-paris-macron/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

³⁹ See: Brzezinski, Z., *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York City: Basic Books, 1997), p. 40.

⁴⁰ See: Simón, L., 'Britain and the Fate of the Europe We Know', *War on the Rocks*, 24 October 2016, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2016/10/britain-and-the-fate-of-the-europe-we-know/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁴¹ See: Oliver, T., 'The world after Brexit: from British referendum to global adventure', *International Politics* 53.6 (2016), available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/67912/1/Oliver_World%20after%20Brexit_2016.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

Great Britain and as good neighbours wherever that is possible also with other countries, even with Russia. *But we have to know that we must fight for our future on our own, for our destiny as Europeans.*⁴²

Further, the French President, Mr Macron, argued in a major speech on European integration delivered to the University of Sorbonne that “our inability to work together convincingly undermines our credibility as Europeans”. In response, he called for a “Defence Europe”, supported by a “common strategic culture”, a “common intervention force, a common defence budget and a common doctrine for action”.⁴³ Of course, these proposals are not new – they have been likened to “old wine in new bottles” – but they are at least today being put forward in a different context.⁴⁴ Already, since the withdrawal referendum in 2016, the EU has pushed forward with the implementation of Permanent Structured Cooperation, envisioned in the 2007 Treaty on European Union, to facilitate future EU military activity, especially in terms of defence industrial collaboration.⁴⁵

For the UK, there are three risks inherent in such proposals: the first, and to some extent, the simplest, is that, against the odds, the EU succeeds, resulting in a “Defence Europe”, with the ability to defend itself and, more importantly, use force or the threat of force to uphold its political and economic interests. The second and most complex outcome is that the EU succeeds enough to find a strategic accommodation with the US *within* NATO, particularly if it gains sufficient capacity to defend its borders, but insufficient capacity to project power overseas. Either way, insofar as it is leaving the EU, Britain would end up more isolated than at any time since the implementation of the ‘Continental System’ during the Napoleonic Wars, and would lack the distance – in space and time – to escape the influence of the European leviathan. Even if the EU retained a liberal political framework, it would become a regulatory power of such magnitude that it could potentially dictate terms on a plethora of issues affecting the UK.⁴⁶ Finally, the third outcome, different, but no better, is that – with so many conflicting agendas and strategic cultures, not least between France and Germany – the EU fails, in which case its members would either gravitate in different directions, causing great disruption, or descend into insecurity and disorder. Indeed, London has long resisted “Defence Europe” not so much because it fears it will succeed, but rather because it fears it will fail, thereby jeopardising NATO’s cohesion and strategic effectiveness.

Thus, as it leaves the EU, the UK will need to play a larger role in upholding the Euro-Atlantic order, albeit in a new context. Britain is – and will always remain – a European country, even if it is not part of the EU. In the words of the former Secretary of State for Defence, Sir Michael Fallon:

⁴² See: ‘After summits with Trump, Merkel says Europe must take fate into own hands’, *Reuters*, 28 May 2017, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-politics-merkel/after-summits-with-trump-merkel-says-europe-must-take-fate-into-own-hands-idUSKBN1800JK>, last visited: 31 October 2017. Emphasis added.

⁴³ An English translation of the speech is provided by Laurent Marchand: ‘Sorbonne speech of Emmanuel Macron – Full text / English version’, *Ouest France*, 26 September 2017, available at: <http://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html>, last visited: 31 October 2017. He argued similarly in a commentary for *The Financial Times* in January 2017. See: Macron, E., ‘Europe holds its destiny in its own hands’, *The Financial Times*, 24 January 2017, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/3d0cc856-e187-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a>, last visited: 31 October 2017. For a good analysis of the speech, see: Pothier, F., ‘Macron’s European vision’, *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 9 October 2017, available at: <http://www.iiss.org/en/politics%20and%20strategy/blogsections/2017-6dda/october-f3ac/macrons-european-vision-9d43>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁴⁴ See: Eyal, J. and Keohane, D., ‘Macron’s “Initiative for Europe”: Is this France’s Moment to Take the Helm?’, *Royal United Services Institute*, 29 September 2017, available at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/macrons-initiative-europe-frances-moment-take-helm>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁴⁵ See: ‘Notification on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to the Council and to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy’, *Participating EU Member States*, 13 November 2017, available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31511/171113-pesco-notification.pdf>, last visited: 13 November 2017.

⁴⁶ See: Blagden, D., ‘The Fate of Britain: Offshore Balancing and the Brexit’, *War on the Rocks*, 28 April 2016, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2016/04/the-fate-of-britain-offshore-balancing-and-the-brexit/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

Although we are leaving the European Union, we remain committed to European security. This is our continent and we will keep on working to help keep it safe. We are not stepping away.⁴⁷

In this sense, and to return to Brzezinski's formulation, not only will the UK need to prevent the "vassals" from coming further together and seeking their own strategic autonomy, but it will also need to keep the Russian and Islamist "barbarians" out. To some extent, the two objectives are linked: if Britain is better able to underwrite European defence, mainland European countries are more likely to defer to it in a geopolitical context. In other words, Britain's borders are no longer the imposing White Cliffs of Dover, as they were until the early 20th century; equally, they are no longer on the River Rhine, or even, the River Elbe, as they were during the interwar period, or the Cold War, respectively. They rest increasingly east of the Vistula River, as far as the mosquito-ridden pine forests on the shores of Lake Peipus or the warm waters of the Black Sea, not far from where pockets of British soldiers and aircraft have already been concentrated as 'tripwires' in Poland, Estonia and Romania to dissuade Russian aggression.⁴⁸ The UK should therefore upgrade its commitment against revisionist and hostile forces, simultaneously confirming its position as an ordering power on the European mainland, and across the wider European area. Indeed, with the internal political division and refocus of the US towards East Asia, the UK might become even more important as it emerges as NATO's only committed nuclear-armed custodian.⁴⁹

Box 3: Reinforcing the British Commitment to Wider Europe

Aside from British sovereign territory – Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Gibraltar and the Sovereign Base Areas on Cyprus – the UK has had an extensive military presence in other regions of the continent, not least Germany. During the Cold War, the "British Army of the Rhine" had 20,000-60,000 troops deployed in West Germany, as well as supporting forces in West Berlin. The SDSR 2010 committed to the withdrawal of all British military forces from Germany by 2019, citing the lack of any operational need for them to be located there. In light of Russia's revisionist behaviour and Britain's decision to leave the EU, this decision should be re-appraised. The British military presence in Germany – the largest economy on the European mainland – is a visible manifestation of the UK's commitment to NATO and its ambition to act as a European ordering power. While there is of course no strategic reason to maintain the same level of military presence as during the Cold War, or indeed, even the post-Cold War period, a residual presence should be retained, which could be calibrated to assist with supporting British forces further east in the event of an emergency.

In addition, the UK has established persistent, though not permanent, deployments of troops in Estonia and Poland, which form part of the British contribution to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. Equally, Royal Air Force Typhoons are periodically dispatched to Estonia, Lithuania and Romania, to assist with NATO's Baltic and Black Sea air policing efforts. To cement this commitment, one option would be to establish – with the consent of the countries concerned – a persistent British air presence in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania. Another option might be to redeploy excess forces from Germany to other, potentially more exposed, counties, on NATO's eastern flank, potentially even – with their consent and agreement – the Nordic states, such as Finland and Sweden. Finally, to reinforce NATO and provide alternatives to EU defence integration, to which many EU countries are at best indifferent, the UK could form

⁴⁷ Cited in: Bames, J. E., 'U.K. to Send Formidable Force to Eastern Europe', *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 October 2016, available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-k-to-send-formidable-force-to-eastern-europe-1477440062>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁴⁸ See: Rogers, J. and Martinescu, A., 'After Crimea: Towards a New British Geostrategy for Eastern Europe?', *The Henry Jackson Society*, 1 September 2015, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2015/09/01/after-crimea-towards-a-new-british-geostrategy-for-eastern-europe/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁴⁹ See: Simms, B., 'The world unbalanced', *The New Statesman*, 6 December 2016, available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2016/12/world-unbalanced>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

much tighter regional clusters of military cooperation – i.e., a Northern Group, of the Nordic and Baltic states to focus on North Atlantic, Baltic and Arctic threats; a Southern Group, including Portugal, Italy, Spain, Turkey and Greece, to confront risks in the Mediterranean; and a Central Group, including Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechia and Slovakia, etc., to deter the potential Russian challenge in Central and South-Eastern Europe – dealing with specific threats to ensure their members’ continued interest.

Finally, given that the UK’s main contemporary competitor – Russia – has a numerical, temporal and geographic advantage, particularly in relation to the Baltic region, both in relation to conventional and nuclear forces (tactical and strategic), the British military presence in the European theatre requires special re-appraisal. Through UK ‘tripwire’ deployments to Estonia, Poland, Lithuania and Romania, the risk of escalation, in the event of Russian belligerence, has to some extent increased. The problem is that Britain may not currently have sufficient means to reinforce them in the event of a crisis, which Russia may factor into its future calculations. A heavy British military force – at least a full armoured division, supported by the requisite air assets – is needed to ensure that these tripwires can be swiftly reinforced. In addition, the UK ought to identify whether it should equip itself with either a tactical nuclear delivery system or some form of high-yield thermobaric weaponry, which could be used to further deter Russian attack and/or prevent premature and unnecessary escalation to the strategic nuclear level in the event of a crisis.

Map of British interests in Western Eurasia, especially Wider Europe



Aside its commitments to the Wider Europe, the UK is likely to try – as it leaves the EU – to develop and expand the geographic dimension of its financial and industrial portfolio, particularly through trade with new regions of economic growth. Here, the vast area from Suez to Shanghai, or from Bahrain to Brunei, along with the wider Indo-Pacific zone, will be of particular salience.⁵⁰ The UK’s most important maritime communication line, the so-called ‘Royal Route’, runs through this area, connecting the British Isles to the oil and gas fields of the Middle East and to

⁵⁰ For more on the significance of the Indo-Pacific for the UK, see: Rogers, J., ‘European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific’, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 9.1 (2013).

East and South-East Asia's manufacturing centres and, increasingly, consumers. Indeed, energy reserves in the region may become more and more important to the UK, especially as North Sea oil and gas reserves deplete and as competition for resources heats up, particularly as China and other Asian countries in the Indo-Pacific zone continue to industrialise. At the same time, there are larger numbers of British citizens living and working across the Indo-Pacific region than there are on the European mainland, all potentially in need of protection.⁵¹ And as Europe declines in population and economic importance over the coming decades, the Indo-Pacific region, not least the eastern sector, is likely to entrench its position as the vortex of the global economy, with the Strait of Malacca and Singapore fast becoming the geopolitical point of convergence – even the 'pivot' – for the entire area. In turn, China's rise and the US' growing focus on the region is likely to have significant consequences, particularly for European security.⁵²

Thus, it should be no surprise that the UK has already begun to step up its strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific.⁵³ Though British activity in the region was run down during the 1960s and 1970s, it was never fully wound up. The country has continued to maintain a kind of 'strategic array' in the Indo-Pacific, stemming from its bases in the Mediterranean (Gibraltar and the Sovereign Bases in Cyprus), towards military facilities in British Indian Ocean Territory (Diego Garcia), Kenya, Singapore, Nepal and Brunei (as well as Hong Kong until 1997).⁵⁴ From some of these facilities, the Royal Navy has sustained a maritime presence in the Gulf and periodically deployed large naval groups to South-East Asia, both for exercises and humanitarian work, while the British Army has gained valuable experience in terms of training and interoperability with local forces. More recently, to solidify its position in the Middle East, Britain has stood up a regional defence staff and reactivated HMS Juffair, its naval base in Bahrain.⁵⁵ It has also signed an agreement with Oman to assist with the construction of a new port at Duqm, which "secures UK use of facilities ... ahead of the completion of the UK Joint Logistics Support Base at the port, giving Britain a strategically important and permanent maritime base east of Suez, but outside of the Gulf".⁵⁶ These new facilities will allow the Queen Elizabeth class supercarriers to berth and thus to deploy more persistently in the region, developments that have been lauded as Britain's return 'East of Suez'.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, the UK has maintained a special interest in South-East Asia – in the form of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), to Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand, respectively – while it has also stepped up security cooperation with Japan and South Korea in recent years with a series of bilateral agreements and memorandums of understanding, to such an extent that the UK and Japan regard one another "as each other's closest security partners in Asia

⁵¹ Figures obtained from: 'International migrant stock 2015', *United Nations Population Division*, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁵² See: Simón, L., 'Europe, the rise of Asia and the future of the transatlantic relationship', *International Affairs* 91:5 (2015).

⁵³ For a clear overview, see: Reeve, R., 'Global Britain: A Pacific Presence?' *Oxford Research Group*, 27 September 2017, available at: http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/publications/articles_multimedia/global_britain_pacific_presence, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁵⁴ See: Rogers, J., 'European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 9.1 (2013), p. 73 and p. 75.

⁵⁵ On the new naval base in Bahrain, see: Spencer, R., 'Britain returns "East of Suez" with permanent Royal Navy base in Gulf', *The Telegraph*, 6 December 2014, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/11277194/Britain-returns-East-of-Suez-with-permanent-Royal-Navy-base-in-Gulf.html>, last visited: 31 October 2017. On the new defence staff, see: 'Britain extends global defence reach', *Gov.uk*, 12 December 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/britain-extends-global-defence-reach>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁵⁶ On the new maritime facility in Oman, see: 'Defence Secretary strengthens ties between UK and Oman', *Gov.uk*, 28 August 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-strengthens-ties-between-uk-and-oman>, last visited: 31 October 2017. On the wider UK interest in the Gulf, see: 'PM to boost defence and security cooperation with Gulf allies', *Gov.uk*, 6 December 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-to-boost-defence-and-security-co-operation-with-gulf-allies>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁵⁷ See: Stansfield, G. and Kelly, S., 'A Return to East of Suez? UK Military Deployment to the Gulf', *Royal United Services Institute* (2013), available at: https://rusi.org/system/files/East_of_Suez_Return_042013.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017. See also the speeches of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary on the importance of the Gulf region to the UK: May, T., 'Prime Minister's speech to the Gulf Co-operation Council 2016', *Gov.uk*, 7 December 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-to-the-gulf-co-operation-council-2016>, last visited: 31 October 2017 and Johnson, B., 'Britain is back East of Suez', *Gov.uk*, 9 December 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-speech-britain-is-back-east-of-suez>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

and Europe, respectively".⁵⁸ Another regional UK defence staff has been established in Singapore, covering South-East Asia.⁵⁹ Consequently, while the UK needs to enhance its terrestrial and aerial assets on the European mainland, it will also still need a strong and globally deployable navy, to be able to reach into the Indo-Pacific and help its allies and partners prevent insecurity from taking hold in the region. This capacity would almost certainly – and critically – be held in a positive light by the country's Indo-Pacific allies and partners, including the US, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, particularly as the UK seeks new commercial agreements with them.⁶⁰

Box 4: Enhancing Britain's Military Presence in the Indo-Pacific

Over the past decade, the UK has sought to rebuild its geopolitical portfolio in the Indo-Pacific, a region fast becoming the world's economic and geopolitical centre of gravity. This space also includes many of the largest reserves of energy, particularly in the Middle East, over which rising powers like China and India are keen on gaining preferential access. And it still contains the most important British maritime communication line – the Royal Route – which ploughs through some of the most hotly contested straits and seas (like the Bab-el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz and the South China Sea), in some way explaining the UK's support for anti-piracy operations in the region.

While the UK is never likely to devote the same level of resources to the Indo-Pacific as it did in the past – when the Indian Ocean was effectively a British lake – it is nonetheless in British interests to do more given the nation's growing economic and political interests in the region. Of course, the Indo-Pacific will always play a supplemental role to Britain's own neighbourhood – the Wider Europe – but it is only logical that the UK should further enhance its interaction with its regional allies and partners as it leaves the EU, particularly through 'defence engagement' and by increasing its regional military footprint.

There are several ways the UK could capitalise on existing policies. For example, operating out of Duqm port in Oman, a Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carrier and naval group could be put on persistent deployment in the Gulf and the wider Indian Ocean region to dampen regional tension, or 'backfill' for the US should it need to concentrate more assets in East Asia. Indeed, if some form of 'cold war' dynamic emerges because one of the region's largest powers embarks on a more expensive geostrategy, the UK may need to assist with deterrence activities, not least because the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres are likely to grow increasingly interlinked geopolitically. In the future, the Royal Navy could upgrade its naval logistics facility in Sembawang in Singapore to operate frigates and/or nuclear attack submarines permanently in South-East Asia. Additional naval or logistical facilities could also be opened, with their consent, either in Malaysia or Australia, helping the country to respond more frequently to humanitarian catastrophes (typhoons, earthquakes, etc.).⁶¹

⁵⁸ For an overview of the FPDA, see: Emmers, R., *The Role of the Five Power Defence Arrangements in the Southeast Asian Security Architecture* (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2010) and Thayer, C. A., 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever', *Security Challenges* 3.1 (2007). See also: Huxley, T., 'Developing the Five Power Defence Arrangements', *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 1 June 2017, available at: <http://www.iiss.org/en/shangri-la%20voices/blogsections/2017-b8c0/developing-the-five-power-defence-arrangements-c523>, last visited: 31 October 2017. For the British-Japanese Joint Statement, confirming the importance both countries afford to one another, see: 'Japan-UK Joint Vision Statement', *Gov.uk* (2017), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/641157/JAPAN-UK_JOINT_VISION_STATEMENT.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁵⁹ See: 'Britain extends global defence reach', *Gov.uk*, 12 December 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/britain-extends-global-defence-reach>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁶⁰ In particular, the British-Japanese relationship has progressed rapidly in recent years, with Japan depicting the UK as its closest partner beyond the US. For more on the development of this partnership, see: 'UK and Japan reinforce defence ties', *Gov.uk*, 26 January 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-japan-strengthen-defence-ties>, last visited: 31 October 2017; Ricketts, P., 'The Case for Reinforcing the UK-Japan Security Partnership', *Royal United Services Institute*, 13 June 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-japan-strengthen-defence-ties>, last visited: 31 October 2017; and Shetler-Jones, P., 'Searching for the "Strategic" in the UK-Japan "New Type of Alliance"', *Asia-Pacific Bulletin*, 31 March 2015, available at: <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb306.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=35033>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁶¹ See: Martin, S., 'British Royal Navy ships could be coming to WA', *The West Australian*, 24 July 2017, available at: <https://thewest.com.au/news/wa/wa-to-benefit-as-uk-lifts-military-presence-ng-b88545837z>, last visited 31 October 2017.

Building on the steps already taken, Britain could also consider the deployment of small pockets of ground forces in the Gulf and South-East Asia to lend reassurance to regional partners. It could exercise more frequently with FPDA countries too, perhaps also inviting Japan, South Korea and – in accordance with the new entente with Paris via the Lancaster House treaties – France to participate. Taking this idea further, another option would be to enlarge and deepen the FPDA, to include Japanese, South Korean and even Indian participation. Finally, given its size and potential, India should be afforded significantly more British attention, so that the two countries are more closely aligned on strategic matters not only in relation to the Indo-Pacific, but also even on matters of global pertinence. In all cases, the Royal Navy’s ‘projection vessels’ – the new Queen Elizabeth class supercarriers and the Albion class amphibious assault ships – will be particularly important in facilitating such engagement and activity.

Map of British interests in Eastern Eurasia, especially the Indo-Pacific



4. Military Spending for ‘Global Britain’

Shifting geopolitics and national decisions mean that British geostrategy is being pulled in different directions simultaneously, and more forcefully than at any point since the early 20th century. But as Graph 1 shows, British military spending, as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is now at a very low level. In fact, it has been in steady decline since 1945, when it consumed over half of UK GDP. Today, according to NATO’s official defence spending statistics, British military spending sits at 2.14% of GDP, the lowest figure ever recorded, save for 2015, when it fell to 2.08% of GDP.⁶² That said, even though the UK spends so little, the sheer size of the economy ensures that the British military budget remains the fifth biggest in the world, although it was the second largest in 2007.⁶³ Strangely, over recent years, all British governments have continued to proclaim their commitment to spending 2% of UK GDP on the armed forces, as if they see this as some form of outstanding national performance.⁶⁴ While almost all other European NATO members fail – with the notable exception of Estonia, Poland and Greece, and soon also Latvia and Lithuania – to meet this target, and often by some margin, the British pledge is, unfortunately, unworthy of any commendation.

From the early 1990s, with the fall of the Soviet Union, most NATO members started to wind down their military spending as a percentage of GDP. By the mid-2000s, it had become apparent that burden sharing in the alliance had gone awry: mainland European countries’ defence budgets were dropping fast, preventing the recalibration of their armed forces for out-of-area operations, or even maintaining them for territorial defence.⁶⁵ This issue was brought to a head at the NATO Defence Ministers’ North Atlantic Council in June 2006, which laid the groundwork for the Riga Summit, due to be held the following December. At this meeting, the ministers – in the words of NATO Spokesman, James Appathurai – “committed to endeavour, to meet the 2% target of GDP devoted to defence spending”. However, he also pointed out that “this is not a hard commitment”, but “it is a commitment to work towards it”, which would “be a first within the Alliance”.⁶⁶ NATO did not adopt this explicit commitment at the Riga Summit, favouring instead a watered down statement, which merely committed the allies to halt further reductions in military expenditure.⁶⁷ Despite this realisation, defence spending continued to fall until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine jolted the allies into action: spending 2% of GDP on defence was finally adopted, officially, at NATO’s Newport Summit in 2014.⁶⁸

⁶² See: ‘Information on defence expenditures’, *NATO*, 29 June 2017, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49198.htm, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁶³ See: Rogers, J., ‘Towards “Global Britain”: Challenging the New Narratives of National Decline’, *The Henry Jackson Society*, 12 September 2017, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2017/09/12/towards-global-britain/>, last visited: 31 October 2017 and International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁴ See, for example: ‘Defence Secretary steps up UK commitments to NATO’, *Gov.uk*, 29 June 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-steps-up-uk-commitments-to-nato>, last visited: 31 October 2017; ‘May pledges annual defence spending rises until 2023’, *Reuters*, 10 May 2017, available at: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-election-defence/may-pledges-annual-defence-spending-rises-until-2023-idUKKBN1862XE>, last visited: 31 October 2017; Johnson, B., ‘Global Britain: UK Foreign Policy in the Era of Brexit’, *Chatham House: The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 2 December 2016, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/events/special/2016-12-02-Boris-Johnson.pdf>, last visited: 31 October 2017; HM Treasury, ‘Spending review and autumn statement 2015’, *Gov.uk*, 27 November 2015, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-and-autumn-statement-2015-documents/spending-review-and-autumn-statement-2015>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁶⁵ For data, see: ‘Press Release: NATO publishes defence expenditures data for 2014 and estimates for 2015’, *NATO*, 22 June 2015, available at: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_06/20150622_PR_CP_2015_093-v2.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

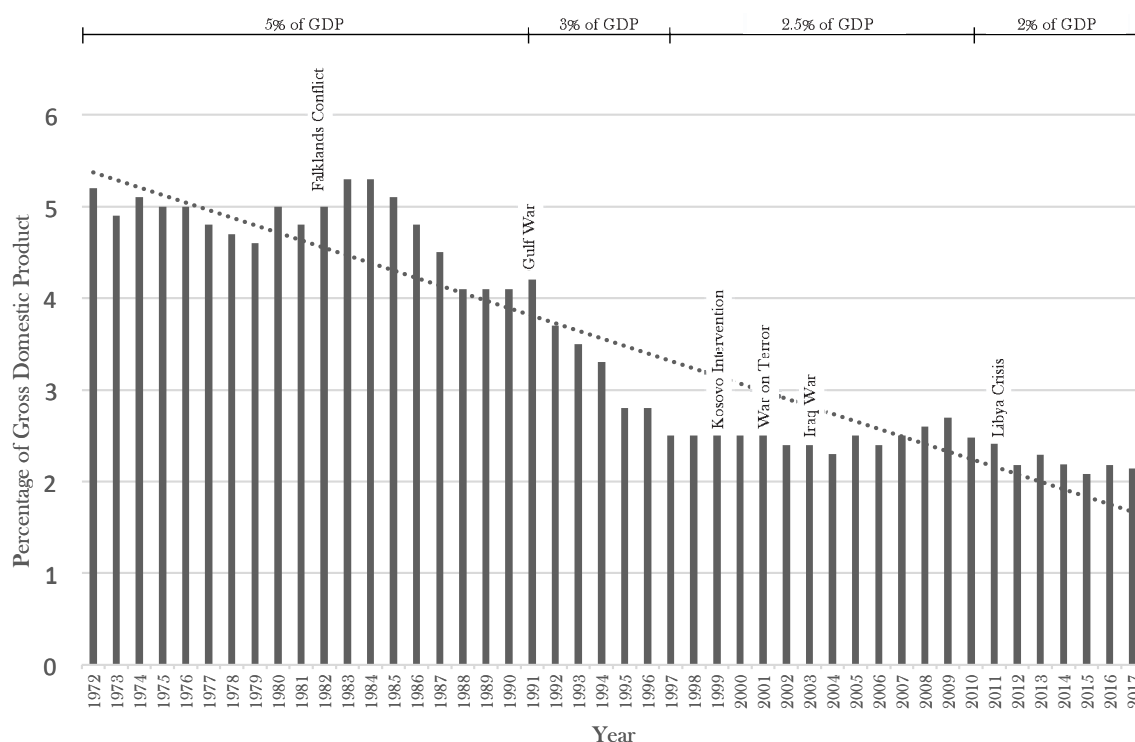
⁶⁶ See: Appathurai, J., ‘Press Briefing’, *NATO Speeches*, 8 June 2005, available at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s060608m.htm>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁶⁷ See: ‘Comprehensive Political Guidance’, *NATO*, 29 October 2006, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_56425.htm, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁶⁸ See: ‘Allied leaders pledge to reverse defence cuts, reaffirm transatlantic bond’, *NATO*, 5 September 2014, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_112461.htm, last visited: 31 October 2017.

While spending a set percentage (i.e., 2%) of GDP on the armed forces has been criticised as an “arbitrary” or “irrational” gauge of each NATO member’s willingness to protect its interests, as well as its political commitment to the alliance, it is not without merit.⁶⁹ As Graph 1 shows, it is clear that, historically, at least in a UK context, approximate levels of military spending – as a percentage of GDP – can be identified. During times of acute tension, for example, during much of the Cold War, when the UK sought to protect its Euro-Atlantic allies from Soviet encroachment, the average level of military expenditure was approximately 5% of GDP. During the immediate post-Cold War era (1991-1996), when the strategic environment was still uncertain, it was reduced to an average of around 3%. And during the years of strategic peace, i.e., 1996-2010, it fell to approximately 2.5% of GDP, before falling again to average out at a touch over 2%.

Graph 1: Military Spending as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)



It is therefore understandable that NATO’s Defence Ministers felt in 2006 that 2% was the bare minimum required for mainland European countries to maintain their *existing* military assets and gradually re-calibrate them for expeditionary operations.⁷⁰ Firstly, the period in which this benchmark was informally adopted was one of the most geopolitically stable periods in the alliance’s history; when NATO’s defence spending accounted for some 60% of the world’s total; when the US, UK and France were the world’s first, second and third military spenders, respectfully; and when no *existential* or *strategic* threat existed to any member state.⁷¹ Secondly, insofar as mainland European countries had little more than regional interests, they did not need to allocate a higher percentage of GDP – like the UK and US – to maintain their armed forces.

⁶⁹ For a critique of the 2% target, see: Lunn, S., Williams, N., ‘NATO Defence Spending: The Irrationality of 2%’, European Leadership Network Issue Brief: Defence Spending (2017), available at: <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2017/06/12/6c4740de/170608%20ELN%20Issues%20Brief%20-%20Defence%20Spending.pdf>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁷⁰ See: Page, R., ‘Defence Expenditure – NATO 2% Target’, House of Commons Library (2015), available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07134/SN07134.pdf>, last visited: 31 October 2015.

⁷¹ For data, see: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008* (London: Routledge, 2008).

Today, however, with the resurgence of Russia and its revisionist tendencies; the rise of China; the growing American interest in East Asia, coupled with the development of nativist politics in the US; and the descent of parts of the southern European neighbourhood, not least Syria, into chaos and disorder, it is increasingly unclear whether the allocation of only 2% of GDP for military purposes is sufficient, even for mainland European countries.⁷² For example, Poland – one of the least affluent NATO members, if one of the most exposed to Russian aggression – has already opted to boost its defence spending to 2.5% of GDP within a decade.⁷³ The Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – have also either exceeded 2% or plan to do so over the coming years.⁷⁴

Consequently, if the UK decides to maintain military spending at just over 2% of GDP, it will be trying to maintain a great power’s military posture with a European power’s level of spending. Indeed, insofar as it has long sought to undergird the alliance as a nuclear power, as well as shoulder an array of global commitments to protect its wider interests, which require additional expeditionary warfighting capabilities, Britain has always opted to be more than just another NATO member. Indeed, Washington, DC has consistently appealed to London, its closest and most powerful ally, to properly pull its weight. This aspiration was signalled consistently by both former presidents George Bush and Barack Obama; by Robert Gates, not least during his valedictory speech as US Secretary of Defence; as well as, more recently, by Donald Trump.⁷⁵ It has also been reaffirmed by the new US Ambassador to the Court of St James’, Woody Johnson, who reminded the British government that it is spending only the “minimum” on its armed forces, and that “we spend twice that much and we could still spend more”.⁷⁶ This is not to say that the UK should slavishly follow American demands, but it is to say that the country should take military spending more seriously, particularly if it wants to maintain the US commitment to help hold European geopolitics in suspended animation, as well as retain the influence that is often afforded from being the global superpower’s most militarily-capable ally.

Writing in 2016, before she became prime minister, Theresa May declared categorically that she would protect Britain’s military clout:

The world has become a more dangerous place than it has been for many years, and a Conservative Government I lead will make a strong defence an important priority. It is vital for our national interest that we maintain what is the most significant security and military capability in Europe – backed up by our commitment to spend two percent of

⁷² See: Cohen, R., ‘Yes, It Could Happen Again’, *The Atlantic* (WW1 Issue), 2014, available at:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/08/yes-it-could-happen-again/373465/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁷³ See: ‘Poland commits to spend 2.5 percent of its GDP on defence’, *The Washington Post*, 23 October 2017, available at:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/poland-commits-to-spend-25-percent-of-its-gdp-on-defense/2017/10/23/a5cd003c-b7e6-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_story.html, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁷⁴ See: Nikevs, O., ‘Baltics Sharply Increase Defence Expenditures’, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 14.5 (2017) and Jones, M., ‘Lithuania to push defence spending above NATO target’, *Reuters*, 12 April 2017, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lithuania-economy-financeminister/lithuania-to-push-military-spending-above-nato-target-idUSKBN17E1KG>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁷⁵ According to Jeffrey Goldberg: “Recently, Obama warned that Great Britain would no longer be able to claim a ‘special relationship’ with the United States if it did not commit to spending at least 2 percent of its GDP on defence. ‘You have to pay your fair share’, Obama told David Cameron, who subsequently met the 2 percent threshold.” See: Goldberg, J., ‘The Obama Doctrine’, *The Atlantic*, April 2016, available at:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>, last visited: 31 October 2017. See also: Baker, P., ‘Trump says NATO allies don’t pay their share. Is that true?’, *The New York Times*, 26 May 2017, available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/26/world/europe/nato-trump-spending.html>, last visited: 31 October 2017; Mandelbaum, M., ‘Pay up, Europe’, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2017 Issue, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2017-08-15/pay-europe>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

See also: Birnbaum, M., ‘Gates rebukes European allies in farewell speech’, *The Washington Post*, 10 June 2011, available at:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gates-rebukes-european-allies-in-farewell-speech/2011/06/10/AG9tKeOH_story.html?utm_term=.89e09f4fc6b2, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁷⁶ See: Coughlin, C., ‘The UK must decide if minimal defence spending is enough, says new US ambassador’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2017, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/24/uk-must-decide-minimal-defence-spending-enough-says-new-us-ambassador/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

gross domestic product on defence – and that we are able to project our power around the world. In particular, it is crucial that we maintain our independent nuclear deterrent.⁷⁷

While the development of the next generation of the British strategic nuclear deterrent has already been approved, it remains increasingly uncertain whether the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary, Royal Air Force and British Army will ever receive all of the £178 billion of new equipment or support they were promised (over a ten-year period) in the SDSR 2015 and the *Defence Equipment Plan 2016* or that they may have some existing equipment withdrawn prematurely, reducing their operational effectiveness.⁷⁸ While over £21.2 billion of these future procurements will be in US dollars and euros, against which the British currency has depreciated significantly since the EU withdrawal referendum, the National Audit Office has questioned the wider financial assumptions on which they were based.⁷⁹ It concludes:

The affordability of the Plan is now at greater risk than at any time since reporting was introduced in 2012 and the Department [Ministry of Defence] faces the risk that in future it may have to return to a situation where affordability of the portfolio is maintained by delaying or reducing the scope of projects. The cost of the new commitments included in the Review considerably exceeds the net increase in funding for the Plan.

Worse, it goes on:

The risk of cost growth is still evident in the Plan, both in existing projects and also because a greater proportion of large projects are at an early stage of development (largely due to a number of new high-value commitments introduced by the Review). This risk is further increased as the Department’s current costing policy has historically underestimated the cost of projects in their early stage of development.⁸⁰

Thus, the severity of the situation makes it clearer as to why the government has initiated not just an appraisal of the SDSR 2015, but a more detailed *National Security Capabilities Review*.⁸¹ The prospect is that a number of military capabilities – including helicopters, marines, combat jets and the Royal Navy’s amphibious assault vessels – will simply be axed because the military budget is no longer sufficient to pay for them.

Cutting substantial capabilities and adding little or nothing in return would hardly be in keeping with the prime minister’s promise to “make a strong defence a priority.” Worse, it would send a poor signal to both the UK’s friends and foes alike. It would confirm the view that Britain is in accelerated national decline; jeopardise the country’s ability to act as an ordering power on the European mainland, which will likely become a growing challenge once Britain leaves the EU’s political structures; and prevent the nation from seeking new economic opportunities overseas. In

⁷⁷ See: May, T., ‘I’ll make sure we build new Trident right now’, *The Daily Mail*, 5 July 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3674319/Ill-make-sure-build-new-Trident-right-THERESA-explains-make-UK-s-defence-important-priority-Prime-Minister.html>, last viewed: 31 October 2017.

⁷⁸ See: ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015’, HM Government (2015), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478936/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_PRINT_only.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017, p. 27 and ‘The Defence Equipment Plan 2016’, Ministry of Defence (2016), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592765/Defence_Equipment_Plan_2016_final_version.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁷⁹ See: Morse, A., ‘The Equipment Plan 2016-2026’, *National Audit Office*, 2017, available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-equipment-plan-2016-2026/>, last visited: 31 October 2017, p. 9.

⁸⁰ See: Morse, A., ‘The Equipment Plan 2016-2026’, *National Audit Office*, 2017, available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/the-equipment-plan-2016-2026/>, last visited: 31 October 2017, p. 10.

⁸¹ See: ‘Strategic Defence and Security Review Implementation’, *Gov.uk*, 20 July 2017, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strategic-defence-and-security-review-implementation>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

particular, cutting back on terrestrial and aerial assets would weaken the UK's hand on the European mainland, while hacking into maritime capabilities, especially the larger vessels, would make it harder for London to secure a future stake in the surging Indo-Pacific region. In this sense, other countries will likely be more inclined to enter into potentially long-term structured economic partnerships with the UK if there is also a strategic component to the potential future relationship. In other words, the greater the UK's military reach, the more likely it will be able to secure new economic opportunities, not only in the Gulf but also in South, South-East and East Asia.

Rather than cutting assets, the British government ought to provide sufficient resources to generate the kind of armed forces the country needs to underpin its changing geopolitical needs. According to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, UK military expenditure only grew from £34.26 billion in 2012-2013 to £35.23 billion in 2016-2017, an increase of just 2.8%.⁸² Insofar as defence spending has not kept up with economic growth, the Royal United Services Institute points out that military spending has now actually slipped beneath NATO's 2% benchmark, insofar as the British government has been accused of 'creative accounting' to meet the target.⁸³ The Treasury, using the United Nations' definition of defence spending as a function of government – a more stringent definition than NATO's – also claims military spending has fallen beneath NATO's guideline, to 1.9% of GDP.⁸⁴ The issue relates to what is included in the definition of military expenditure.⁸⁵ For example, over recent years, the cost of war pensions, contributions to UN peacekeeping missions and an array of other flotsam has been included in 'defence spending' to report the correct figure to NATO. In any case, irrespective of this charge, in *real* terms, the Ministry of Defence's budget is considerably less today than in previous years, not only because of 'defence inflation', but also because the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, decided that certain components – not least the cost of procuring the 'Dreadnought' class of ballistic missile submarine – would no longer be funded directly from the Treasury, as they had been in the past.⁸⁶

While the armed forces' budget should indeed rise 7.7% from £35.23 billion in 2016-2017 to £37.95 in 2019-2020, in *real* terms it will remain relatively static, i.e., growing just 2.6% from £35.23 to £36.16 over the same timeframe.⁸⁷ Had Russia not embarked on a revisionist geostrategy, had Donald Trump not come to power in the US, and had the UK not decided to leave the EU, this quantity of spending might have been sufficient for the challenges and threats identified to face the country. Moreover, had Britain's allies increased their own spending – as some are now doing – Europe would have steadily become a more stable region for the British strategic commitment, leaving the country freer to pursue new interests in key regions in the Indo-Pacific. The general assumptions of the SDSR 1998 – that the UK would undertake more

⁸² Figures are based on Total Departmental Expenditure Limits, i.e., including Department Expenditure Limit (DEL) (excluding depreciation), plus Capital DEL. See: HM Treasury, 'Public Expenditure, Statistical Analyses 2017', *Gov.uk* (2017), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/630570/60243_PESA_Accessible.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017, pp. 27-28.

⁸³ See: Chalmers, M., 'Mind the Gap: The MOD's Emerging Budgetary Challenge', Royal United Services Institute (2015), available at: https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201502_bp_mod_emerging_budgetary_challenge.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017 and Chalmers, M., 'Osborne's Summer Surprise for Defence: Guaranteed Real-Terms Spending Increases', Royal United Services Institute (2015), available at: https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201507_bp_osbornes_summer_surprise_for_defence.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁸⁴ See: HM Treasury, 'Public Expenditure, Statistical Analyses 2017', *Gov.uk* (2017), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/630570/60243_PESA_Accessible.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017, p. 66.

⁸⁵ For a good overview, see: Béraud-Sudreau, L. and Giegerich, B., 'Counting to two: analysing the NATO defence-spending target', *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 14 February 2017, available at: <https://www.iiss.org/en/militarybalanceblog/blogsections/2017-edcc/february-7849/counting-to-two-67c0>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁸⁶ See: 'Trident costs must come from MoD budget, Osborne says', *BBC News*, 30 July 2010, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10812825>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁸⁷ Figures are based on Total Departmental Expenditure Limits, i.e., including Department Expenditure Limit (DEL) (excluding depreciation), plus Capital DEL. See: HM Treasury, 'Public Expenditure, Statistical Analyses 2017', *Gov.uk* (2017), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/630570/60243_PESA_Accessible.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017, pp. 27-28.

expeditionary operations – would continue to hold, even if heavily curtailed by the 2010 review, and then corrected by the 2015 iteration.

However, the decision to withdraw from the EU leaves the UK in a more uncertain situation. London ought to engage its European neighbours more robustly in the years ahead, maintaining sufficient military capability – particularly in the form of terrestrial and aerial forces, as well as new military technologies, from energy weaponry to ballistic missile defences – to remain an ordering power on the mainland and make up for the likely loss of influence caused by withdrawal. Meanwhile, as it scans the global horizon for new opportunities, Britain might be better to do so with armed forces, especially naval forces and auxiliary vessels, with the means to reach the areas concerned, and in sufficient quantity. Therefore, maintaining military expenditure at approximately 2% of GDP is wholly inadequate given the new challenges and opportunities facing the UK at the current time.

5. Conclusion

Successive governments – Labour, Coalition and Conservative – have sent confused messages on the significance of the UK as a military power. The current government has made much hay in recent months on Britain’s supposed ‘security surplus’ in relation to its European partners.⁸⁸ The prime minister declared that she considers the armed forces to be “vital” to the security of the nation, yet seems unwilling to provide the requisite resources to maintain them for the nation’s wellbeing. The Ministry of Defence described 2017 as the “Year of the Navy”, with the arrival of the supercarrier HMS Queen Elizabeth, in Portsmouth harbour – supported by prime ministerial fanfare – yet rumours abound that it plans to scrap the Royal Navy’s amphibious capability, and even a number of frigates and mine hunters, which would weaken its ability to undertake expeditionary or patrol operations.⁸⁹ And as the former Defence Secretary, Sir Michael Fallon, stated again and again, the government is “growing” the defence budget by 0.5% above inflation for the remainder of this parliament, even though this may not mean much in real terms.⁹⁰ In any case, it is clear that – for many years now – the UK has allocated a progressively smaller share of its national income to national security. This may have made sense during the post-Cold War years, but it does not make sense today.⁹¹

It is pleasant to imagine that with good fortune, the next 50 years will be as stable as the last twenty. However, nobody should imagine that we have entered a kind of geopolitical ‘end of History’, even in Western Europe. While the past two decades have been a relatively stable and prosperous era, a plethora of existing geopolitical trends could easily come together, in whole or in part, to generate future flashpoints: the policies of a prickly and revisionist Russia; the further breakdown of order in the Middle East; the geopolitical rise of the Indo-Pacific, not least China; America’s domestic political situation, allied to the US’ shifting geopolitical interests in keeping with its status as both an Atlantic and Pacific power; and, potentially, the emergence of either a more integrated or disorderly EU, over which the UK – insofar as it is leaving the bloc – would have little formal control. What has been forgotten, though, is that military power can be used passively to shape and mould the international environment, preventing geopolitical trends from converging or exploding in undesirable ways.⁹² Indeed, the US naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan captured this idea aptly when he stated: “Force is never more operative than when it is known to exist but is not brandished”.⁹³ This applies to allies and partners as much as it applies to competitors and foes.

At the Conservative Party Conference in September, the then Defence Secretary asked whether the government should consider boosting defence spending to underwrite national interests and commitments more effectively.⁹⁴ A couple of weeks later, Johnny Mercer, the Member of Parliament for Plymouth Moor View, provided a fitting response:

⁸⁸ According to Malcolm Chalmers: “As concern over the future of a Brexit deal grows, some of those involved in shaping policy have been tempted by the argument that the UK should use its ‘security surplus’ – its role as the leading West European military and intelligence power – as a bargaining chip that could be ‘traded’ in return for commercial concessions in the post-Brexit settlement with the EU”. See: Chalmers, M., ‘UK Foreign and Security Policy after Brexit’, *Royal United Services Institute* (2017), available at:

https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201701_bp_uk_foreign_and_security_policy_after_brexit_v4.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁸⁹ See: Higuera, J., ‘Brazil, Chile eye potential second-hand acquisitions from UK’, *Jane’s 360*, 25 October 2017, available at:

<http://www.janes.com/article/75174/brazil-chile-eye-potential-second-hand-acquisitions-from-uk>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁹⁰ See: Clarke, M., ‘General Election 2017: Bad Times for Hard Facts on Defence Spending’, *Royal United Services Institute*, 12 May 2017, available at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/general-election-2017-bad-times-hard-facts-defence-spending>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁹¹ See: Burleigh, M., *The Best of Times, The Worst of Times: The World As It Is* (London: Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1-44.

⁹² For a good analysis of the many roles of military power, see: Cohen, E.A., *The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power and the Necessity of Military Force* (New York City: Basic Books, 2017).

⁹³ See: Mahan, A. T., ‘The Place of Force in International Relations’, *The North American Review* 195.674 (1912), p. 31.

⁹⁴ See: Fallon, M., ‘2017 Speech at Conservative Party Conference’, *UKPOL*, 3 October 2017, available at: <http://www.ukpol.co.uk/michael-fallon-2017-speech-at-conservative-party-conference/>, last visited: 31 October 2017 and Coughlin, C., and Farmer, B., ‘Britain should increase 2% defence spending

I think if you look at both the threats we’re currently facing, which ... have developed significantly in the last few years, and Brexit, what the UK looks like after Brexit, there is an increased role for our Armed Forces and we’ve got to fund it.⁹⁵

He is right: by using its land and air forces more actively, the UK could continue to deter threats to the security of its European allies or prevent them from coming together in inappropriate ways; equally, with its maritime forces, it could better assist in upholding the peace in the Indo-Pacific, especially in the Gulf, if not yet in South-East Asia. Unless it wishes to facilitate the development of EU military structures, and then come under their influence, or address the fallout of their failure, the UK must provide the resources to remain an active ordering power on the European mainland, continuously ‘tethering’ the continent to the British Isles, so as to dampen future geopolitical friction. At the same time, to make a success of ‘Global Britain’, both from an economic and political standpoint, the nation must engage more actively than ever to ‘balance’ against competition in the Indo-Pacific region. While the new needs will come at some cost, it is always cheaper to invest in prevention, rather than pay for a cure. Britain’s armed forces therefore require resources commensurate with the new geopolitical reality. Consequently, military spending must be increased.

5.1 Policy Recommendations

To provide a military posture fit for a ‘Global Britain’, the following measures should be implemented:

- Over the next five years, the UK should increase military spending as a proportion of GDP. It should allocate an additional 0.2% of GDP to the armed forces every year until it achieves a military budget equivalent to 3% of UK GDP, which is around the average (3.2% of GDP) British military spending over the past 40 year period (1978-2017).⁹⁶ In hard currency terms, this means military spending would reach approximately £71 billion (current prices) by 2022.⁹⁷ Of this:
 - a. 2% of GDP should be allocated to provide ‘base capabilities’ for NATO, including the development, maintenance and upkeep of the British nuclear weapons system. Consequently, the UK should continue to meet NATO’s additional target of spending 20% of its military budget on the procurement of new equipment.
 - b. 1% of GDP should be used to move above the ‘base capabilities’ required to underpin European security, i.e., to support British interests beyond the European mainland, insofar as the UK faces significant challenges and threats beyond the NATO area, and because it is seeking to secure new commercial relationships with countries outside the EU. Although there will be considerable overlap between spending for NATO and spending for global commitments, it

target, says Michael Fallon’, *The Daily Telegraph*, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/03/britain-should-raise-nato-2-defence-spending-target-says-michael/>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁹⁵ See: ‘Johnny Mercer: Conservatives Must Honour Their Commitments To Defence Spending’, *Forces Network*, 22 October 2017, available at: <http://www.forces.net/news/johnny-mercere-conservatives-must-honour-their-commitments-defence-spending>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁹⁶ ‘Information on defence expenditures’, *NATO*, 29 June 2017, available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/on/natohq/topics_49198.htm, last visited: 31 October 2017.

⁹⁷ Calculations based on estimates from the International Monetary Fund. See: ‘Report for Selected Countries and Subjects – Gross Domestic Product, current prices (National Currency)’, *International Monetary Fund*, September 2017, available at: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.x=41&pr.y=9&sy=2017&ey=2022&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=112&s=NGDP&grp=0&a=>, last visited: 31 October 2017.

should be possible to broadly determine which capabilities are primarily for each purpose.

- c. This spending baseline - i.e., 3% of GDP - should be mandated through an Act of Parliament, providing the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces with greater continuity when undertaking defence planning. The law should be implemented similarly to the International Development Act (2015), guaranteeing a budget of 0.7% of GDP for the Department for International Development.⁹⁸
- This budgetary allocation for military purposes should be reviewed during every update of the SDSR to determine whether it is sufficient or whether the strategic environment has deteriorated to such an extent that British military expenditure should be further increased.

⁹⁸ Department for International Development, ‘International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015’, *Gov.uk* (2015), available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/12/pdfs/ukpga_20150012_en.pdf, last visited: 31 October 2017.

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