



In Defence of Global Britain

The New Government Review of Defence and Security

Robert Clark
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Robert served in the British military for 15 years, including frontline combat tours of Iraq and Afghanistan. Robert has an MA in International Conflict Studies from King's College London.

Forewords

Foreword by General The Lord Dannatt GCB CBE MC DL, former Chief of the General Staff

'This paper is a most comprehensive analysis of UK Foreign and Defence policy challenges in the coming years. It sets out the issues very clearly, and concludes quite correctly that if the UK is going to meet its national and international obligations then an increase in Defence spending to something approaching 3% is essential. This will be a huge challenge to the present Prime Minister and Chancellor but if they are not willing to fund the recommendations this report makes, then the "review of the review" must inevitably conclude that the UK must shrink its foreign ambitions. To confirm the Integrated Review conclusions but cut spending on Defence would be morally indefensible.'

Foreword by Col. Richard Kemp CBE, former British Commander Afghanistan and former Chair of the Cobra Intelligence Committee

'This report comes at an important time for our nation, both in the current economic environment and the increased threats to national security. The author rightly identifies rising threats to UK national interests - and to those of some of our closest allies - emanating from Russia and China. This paper makes clear that last year's Defence Command Paper inadequately resourced our armed forces to meet these threats head on. The time has finally come for the government not only to cease cutting defence spending but to make real terms increases - an even more obvious requirement at a time of heightened insecurity as Putin's war wages in Europe and Xi Jinping menaces Taiwan. I commend this paper and urge the government to adopt the author's proposals, which are the minimum necessary to strengthen our armed forces and enhance national security.'

Foreword by The Rt Hon. Mark Francois MP, former Defence Minister and member of the Defence Select Committee

'This timely report draws attention to the creeping danger of allowing Britain's defences to become inadequately resourced. While last year's Integrated Review and the associated Defence Command Paper sought to further reduce Britain's heavy armour, soldiers and frigates it has clearly been overtaken by events in Ukraine. Despite the predictions of some politicians and academics, heavy armour, artillery and specialist, highly-trained infantry, armed with highly effective weapons systems, still have a central role to play on the modern battlefield.

'We must of course invest in future capabilities and technologies, including domains such as space and cyber but, as the new Chief of the General Staff recently ably reminded us: "You cannot cyber your way across a river." We therefore need to resource both the "traditional" and "newer" domains adequately – it cannot be simply either/or – to be truly effective, it has to be both. In addition, in an era of clear economic challenges, we also need to spend what we have already allocated to defence much more efficiently. What the Public Accounts Committee recently described as Britain's "broken" defence procurement system, needs to be urgently and radically reformed, once and for all.'

Introduction

Former British Prime Minister Liz Truss announced plans to launch a new defence and foreign policy review, whilst in New York to address the United Nations General Assembly in late September. In this speech, Liz Truss articulated the need to contain authoritarian threats to liberal democracies. This comes 18 months after the 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy' (hereafter, the Integrated Review) was published, in March 2021, and in light of Russia's illegal reinvasion of Ukraine. As the new British government under Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has confirmed that this new 'review of the review' will still take place, the overarching theme reflects the growing awareness in British government that the global order is under many threats from authoritarian regimes – specifically, China and Russia.

These threats come in various forms, but can be broadly divided into military, economic, societal, and diplomatic. The military challenges were present long before the reinvasion by Russia of Ukraine on 24 February. The annexation of Crimea and parts of the Donbas in 2014, the shaping operation for the current conflict, and Chinese maritime expansionism and territorial aggression across the South China Sea over the last decade, are both indicators of these differing military threats. The last six months of industrialised and brutal warfare in eastern Europe, combined with Beijing's military escalations, threats, and build ups across the Straits of Taiwan in summer 2022, have merely crystallised the military threats to liberal democracies by these authoritarian regimes.

The economic threats are currently being laid bare across British households, as the winter sets in, European energy markets are suffering under President Putin's tightening grip of Russian fossil fuels as he seeks to punish those who have rightly assisted Ukraine in their defence against his barbarism. Whilst the UK remained relatively unreliant on Russian fuels, the European scramble for alternative energy sources has inevitably inflated prices across the globe, causing inflation at home to soar as global markets react. The Russian war in Ukraine has shown once and for all just how inextricably linked energy, the economy, and security are.

Of equal if not more long-term economic concern is the requirement for Britain to continue its decoupling process from China. Specifically, the over-reliance on Chinese PPE and medical products was made clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, as Beijing sought to leverage its so-called 'PPE diplomacy' across many European nations. Reducing greatly our reliance on Chinese manufactured goods and services will help avoid placing Britain in difficult diplomatic and security positions in the future, in addition to not allowing the British taxpayer and government to fund the PRC's continued human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong. By investing back into British manufacturing, as well as offshoring certain investments into friendly nations and supply chains, the UK can reduce further its reliance on an actively hostile nation which is attempting to hijack and override

the global rules-based order; pitting it closer to conflict with the US as its sights lock ever closer on incorporating Taiwan into the mainland.

Societal threats are a lot more subtle than military and economic, and are especially subtle by the PRC, if not so by Moscow. The role of various Chinese organisations operating in the UK, including the Confucius Institutes, the United Front, and almost every Chinese conglomerate many of whom have links back to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and People's Liberation Army (PLA), are utterly detrimental to British national interests and security. More direct societal threats include varied means to destabilise liberal democracies, including the use of mis- and dis-information to create confusion and, at times, panic in the populations. This is an established method used by the numerous Russian 'troll farms' to spread malign disinformation, subvert democratic practices at home, and engage in espionage and even cyber warfare. An example of how this often discussed but little understood practice has seen recent success was demonstrated by the highly accepted view that Chinese hackers, at the request of Moscow, brought down sections of the Ukrainian government website in the hours before the Russian invasion in February.¹

The lines between the societal and diplomatic threats are increasingly blurred, as this example demonstrates. The many tools which authoritarian states *can* utilise in their attempts to subvert democratic practice are often interchangeable in their attacks against democratic societies, freedoms, and governance structures. The role for instance that Russian and Chinese intelligence agents play in the UK is little understood, as their activities go deep beyond the diplomatic and into organised crime and subversion of the state. In particular, the role of Russian laundered money in the UK should also be considered in this space, as it degrades the liberal values and democratic practices which these states so fear. With China in particular, their use of economic power is often directly linked to the undermining of liberal values abroad; the Belt and Road Initiative is a clear example of how a 'no strings' foreign direct investment (FDI) policy is both highly detrimental for the host nation, but crucially further undermines liberal values globally. Not enough is being done by liberal democracies to counter these complex and multi-faceted threats and long-term challenges.

As part of this research, interviews were conducted with both serving and retired senior military commanders, to help feed into the debate how best the UK government can improve defence in order to meet the requirements of the day. Namely, prepare to mobilise the Armed Force, in order to train, mentor, and fight alongside regional allies and partners both in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, in order to contain the threats posed to liberal democracies by authoritarian regimes who seek to challenge the global rules-based order. Specifically, countering the threats to Britain's national interests in a new era of great power competition, defined by the aggressive, expansionist, and revisionist aims of both

¹ Tucker. 2022.

Russia and China, are now the paramount defence and security objectives for national security.

This report starts with a geopolitical context framed by an analysis of the core assumptions made in last year's Integrated Review, and whether they have stood the test of a turbulent year in geopolitics. Following from this is a threat analysis based first on Russian threats to the UK, how the UK attempt to contain these, and what more can be done to strengthen these containment policies. Following from this a similar assessment from the threats posed by China. After this a capability assessment of the UK's Armed Forces to meet these threats and challenges, and how these may have been affected by the 2021 Defence Command Paper. An argument will be made to raise the UK's defence spending in light of these threats from Russia and China, in-line with various political pledges made throughout 2022, including from the two previous Prime Ministers, the current Prime Minister, and even the current Chancellor. A reverse to the cuts announced last year to British Army personnel, tanks, and Royal Navy Frigates must be a minimum contribution in order to meet current threats, whilst spending should be raised gradually over the next eight years or the UK risks missing its NATO mandated 2 per cent of GDP benchmark for defence spending.

Geopolitical context

2021's Integrated Review was, by and large, an accurate assessment of Britain's core national interests – its ends. Equally, the review identified that the UK should prioritise both its role as a custodian of European defence, but also fully embrace the tilt to the Indo-Pacific – the ways. Crucially, however, where the Integrated Review came quickly unstuck, was through the accompanying Defence Command Paper (DCP) and the Defence and Security Industrial Strategy (DSIS) – the means. Both papers laid out how the Ministry of Defence (MoD) would achieve what the IR and the government were asking of it; namely, to fund the defence component to achieving Global Britain. Unfortunately, these documents vastly under-resourced what the IR was asking of them. The following section provides some clarity to the geopolitical background to the review which is currently being undertaken.

The IR rightly labelled Russia as the number one short-term threat to UK security, whilst correctly identifying China as an economic threat and systemic competitor. Neither of these assumptions have changed since the IR was published, merely substantiated over the course of events of this year. Britain's responses, therefore, should be equally if not more substantial. That is where this new defence review needs to add meaningful and lasting policy, and provides the right opportunity to reverse some of last year's ill-conceived policies within the DCP.

The measures to mitigate against the threats identified from Russia, and China, need refinement however – in particular from the economic threats posed by China's FDI practices – both in the UK and overseas (particularly across the Commonwealth). Domestically, reducing critical supply chains away from China should be a priority, as the Downing Street-led Project Defend (already somewhat meekly concluded and to little policy-related discourse) sought to achieve. Equally important is reinvesting back into the British manufacturing base. In order to achieve that the UK must become more competitive, particularly with sustainable energy production and greater government investment into critical research and technology sectors – particularly the hyper-sensitive semiconductor market. The lack of a government semiconductor strategy is a striking example of long-term short-sightedness, resulting in the current 18 month paralysis seen at the strategic Newport Wafer Fab over whether to accept a controversial in effect Chinese buyout, via a Netherlands-headquartered semiconductor manufacturer. Reliance on China for British PPE and medical projects, in addition to other critical supply chains, not investing into British manufacturing to re-shore those vulnerable supply chains, and the lack of foresight to establish key strategies for the most important emerging technologies, are all recipes for strategic incoherence – and must be addressed by the new review.

The so-called Indo-Pacific 'tilt' solidified by the IR remains a core national interest. Whilst Russia's threats are largely constrained to Eastern Europe, the Baltic region, and the North Sea, the longer-term economic (and therefore security) interests to British policy makers

remain across the many emerging markets and vulnerable maritime transit routes of east Asia; the global economic powerhouse. Of equal concern are the regional powers and nations, many of whom are either emerging or fragile democracies, which are susceptible and vulnerable to Chinese neo-mercantilist economic and trade practices. Additionally the region is ripe for Chinese military expansionism, as the PRC attempt to break out from the first island chain strategy. The recent unsuccessful security agreement proposed by the PRC to ten south Pacific island nations is a clear demonstration of this. No longer can the UK afford to be passers-by to global events such as this; Beijing will almost certainly reattempt their deal in the south Pacific, and Britain must demonstrate its commitment to democratic stability in regions which may be geographically distant, but remain geopolitically important.

Last year's AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United States, and the UK demonstrated a forward-thinking and agile foreign policy, one based around strengthening existing alliances. The UK-US leadership role, displayed both in Ukraine and again with AUKUS, must be exported to other strategic regions. Primarily this should include the Arctic, where the spectre of a Sino-Russian relationship working to undermine both British allies and the liberal order more broadly looms large. Forging new security alliances with existing allies is absolutely critical to containing authoritarian states; a key recent example is the Tripartite pact between the UK, Poland, and Ukraine.

Last year's withdrawal from Kabul by British and American forces highlighted to the world, and in particular to Moscow and Beijing, that the old trans-Atlantic alliance has little appetite for long-term geostrategic interests, even when they have significant skin in the game. The war in Ukraine will continue to destabilise European security further the longer it goes on, and the chess not checkers PRC strategy regarding Taiwan, will test the UK's long-term resolve much like the ultimately failed operation in Afghanistan. This time, the immediate stakes for British national security will be far more profound. The UK must plan far longer-term than with each successive change in government every three or four years. This is one strength of both Russia and China, the ability to think long-term, plan for that strategy, and execute it over several decades.

The new review must consider Britain's long-term interests, building on the IR, but crucially plan accordingly and execute effectively a long-term strategy setting out how these can be achieved. Reducing the British Army by two entire Division's worth, and its fleet of main battle tanks by a third, whilst simultaneously identifying the return of great power competition amid heightened risk of war in Europe (which was to come to fruition less than 12 months after the IR was published), was not planning for a long-term strategy. Similarly, reversing the Indo-Pacific 'tilt', in favour of concentrating more effort in Europe, is not in Britain's long-term interests, for reasons stated above. Both theatres remain important to the UK's core interests; Europe presents short to medium-term challenges and long-term interests (war in Ukraine and energy security), whilst the Indo-Pacific presents long-term challenges in the form of countering an increasingly aggressive and expansionist China. Both must be properly understood, planned for, and delivered on.

Russian threats

The IR correctly labelled Russia as the biggest threat to UK security. The DCP further identified the Russian military threat manifesting in several key forms; territorial aggression in Ukraine, in addition to military aggression in the Mediterranean and Black Sea; chemical warfare (the Salisbury attack in 2018 was a particularly heinous attack which led to Moscow becoming diplomatically ostracised by many European states); nuclear coercion (recently evidenced by President Putin's nuclear threats against Ukraine); and through Russia's ability to threaten undersea cables. Whilst the threat from Russian chemical warfare is relatively limited and constrained, Moscow's territorial aggression across Europe continues to consume political and military capital in order to mitigate against it. Similarly the threat from nuclear exchange (directly linked to Moscow's wider territorial aggression) is also a significant threat, likewise the threats to undersea cables and infrastructure. These will each be considered in more depth.

Territorial aggression

Whilst the IR correctly identified Russian aggression in Ukraine since its invasion in 2014, it did not foresee the extent to which Moscow would capitalise on western naivety only 12 months later, in February 2022. Russia invaded eastern Ukraine in 2014, annexing Crimea and occupying parts of the eastern industrial and mineral heartlands of the Donbas regions, leaving paramilitary forces behind, engaging in clashes with the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) since. The IR and DCP recognised the need to continue training the UAF in their legitimate fight against Russian occupation. After a mobilisation of over 100,000 personnel around Ukraine's border in the winter months of 2021 and into 2022, Russia launched a full-scale land invasion of eastern, southern, and northern Ukraine. The initial days saw Russia reinforcing troops from its southern Crimea foothold, and from across the north from its ally Belarus, in an attempt to capture Kyiv early and decapitate Ukraine's political leadership. The offensive for Kyiv quickly stalled, having reached the outskirts of the city Russian forces were driven back. This was in large part due to the British-supplied anti-tank weapons, primarily the man-portable Next-Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapon (NLAW) and the Javelin missile system – the first international military aid to be received. A withdrawal of Russian troops was conducted from the Kyiv region to redeploy to the Donbas, the new target for the Russian invasion, in early summer.

After a few weeks the offensive in the east began, stretching the new front over 2,000 kilometres in length, and the Russian forces very thinly. By now Russian losses were clearly untenable, whilst western arms continued flooding into Ukraine and the effects of international sanctions began tightening around Russian finances. As battlefield losses and increasingly limited options for victory emerged, the Russian military were widely seen to be committing gross acts of human rights violations and war crimes, regularly targeting residential areas of Ukrainian towns and cities, executing unarmed civilians, and using

sexual violence against women as a weapon of war. International outrage of not only the war itself, but the manner in which it was being waged by Russia, has led to an almost pariah status of Moscow by the international community, as China, India, and Turkey, the only global powers of note having refrained from explicitly condemning President Putin's illegal reinvasion of Ukraine, continued doing so. As the winter months bring the war to almost its first full year, there is little sign of a settlement, as both sides begin to dig-in for a long hard winter ahead. The momentum is with the brave Ukrainian fighters, whilst Russia will soon see its forces somewhat swell as a result of the recent (and deeply unpopular) partial mobilisation.

As of October 2022 the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified a total of 6,221 civilian deaths, of which 396 were children.² This is widely considered a low count, the true picture likely far higher. Both Ukraine and Russia are reluctant to publish details of their armed forces killed in the conflict, but Ukraine announced over 9,000 had been killed by the end of August,³ whilst Russian losses are estimated to be at least 60,000 killed. The war has led to over 14 million Ukrainians leaving their homes, a quarter of the population, whilst approximately half of that number have left the country.⁴ The war has cost an untold financial toll on Ukraine, as well as physical. The emotive and social wounds that Russian occupation has caused is difficult to measure, but relations between Europe's two largest countries will never be the same again, and post-settlement this will likely remain a contentious issue for European security concerns – particularly if President Putin remains in power.

Whilst Russia has undertaken its unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine, the territorial security of neighbouring Moldova, located close to Ukraine's Black Sea port city Odessa, has come under threat. This is even more pertinent given that there are still approximately 1,500 Russian troops based in the breakaway region of Transnistria, bordering Ukraine. Russian officials routinely cite so-called provocations to their troops in Transnistria as an escalation to potential conflict against Moldova, most recently evidenced in September 2022 by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.⁵ Similarly, Romania, which shares a large border with Ukraine to its north, came under increasing pressure during the war in Ukraine after President Putin made threats against Bucharest and Warsaw in 2016 for hosting a US missile shield and air defence systems.⁶ Whilst Moldova is not a NATO member country, Romania is. Whilst the limits of Russian land and somewhat air power have been laid bare during its invasion of Ukraine, there nonetheless remain significant military threats to both states. Whilst the threat of subversion, and even conflict, is higher against Moldova (still very little gain for Russia, but remains much closer via Odessa and retains Russian

² [Ukraine civilian war casualties 2022 | Statista](#)

³ [Almost 9,000 Ukrainian military killed in war with Russia -armed forces chief | Reuters](#)

⁴ [The Ukraine crisis explained - ShelterBox](#)

⁵ [Russia warns Moldova over Transnistria troops | Europe | News and current affairs from around the continent | DW | 03.09.2022](#)

⁶ [Putin says Romania, Poland may now be in Russia's cross-hairs | Reuters](#)

forces), NATO member Romania (and particularly its long border with Ukraine) still remains vulnerable should the Ukrainian Armed Forces fail to contain Russia militarily. It may be a somewhat unlikely scenario now, but an extremely sensitive one given its Article Five (NATO collective self-defence) status.

As part of the threat assessment to European territorial security, the IR identified Europe's northern and southern flanks as especially vulnerable, stating a need for collective security from the 'Black Sea to the High North, in the Baltics, the Balkans and the Mediterranean'.⁷ The Black Sea has been highly contested since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and despite recent 'freedom of operation' patrols by the Royal Navy, Russia maintain an aggressive force posture towards any other naval power operating in these international waters. This was demonstrated in June 2021 when HMS Defender, a Royal Navy Type 45 Destroyer, transited past Crimea on its way to Georgia, from Odessa. The Russian Navy attempted to alter its course, firing shells in the distance and dropping explosives on its path.⁸ These were widely understood to be violations of the Law of the Sea, as they took place in international waters, in addition to no other state or international body recognising Russian claims over Crimea, so they would have occurred in Ukrainian waters at the very least.

Furthermore, prior to the reinvasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia routinely attempted to in effect blockade the Kerch Strait, a bridge constructed in 2018 which links Russia to Crimea. Historically Ukraine and Russia shared joint access and control of the waters, which are used by Kyiv to export agricultural and industrial products from the Donbas at the port city of Mariupol, on the Sea of Azov, out to the Black Sea and beyond. In 2018 Russia interdicted and seized three Ukrainian vessels at the Kerch Strait, in a move widely seen to be politically motivated by Moscow.⁹ Russia subsequently built the land bridge over the Strait connecting it to Crimea in 2018. The bridge was attacked and partially destroyed in October 2022, highlighting how strategically important these waters and region in general is to both states, and how Russia will attempt to manifest its military power projecting its unilateral influence across the Black Sea region.

Undersea cables

Russia is investing and developing significant underwater capabilities. These include a torpedo capable of delivering a nuclear payload to coastal targets,¹⁰ and the development of the K-329 Belgorod submarine. This 182 meter vessel acts as a mother ship for deep diving nuclear-powered midget submarines, capable of sabotaging undersea internet cables in the North Sea. These developments come at a time of heightened Russian maritime and sub-service patrols across the North Sea and around British coastal waters. The Russian

⁷ [Global Britain in a competitive age \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94444/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age.pdf) p.72.

⁸ [HMS Defender: Russian jets and ships shadow British warship - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-56144444)

⁹ IISS, 2018.

¹⁰ [Russia's New 'Poseidon' Super-Weapon: What You Need To Know - Naval News](https://www.navalnews.com/2022/04/14/russias-new-poseidon-super-weapon-what-you-need-to-know/)

military threat towards British undersea infrastructure and security poses one of the most underdiscussed concerns in defence, presenting a significant threat for its ability to be largely clandestine in execution, yet highly damaging in consequence.

The largely-suspected Russian attack on the Nord Stream gas pipelines in September 2022, running under the Baltic Sea near the Danish coastline, highlight the significance of this threat to British national security. The North Sea Link between the UK and Norway is the world's longest undersea power cable,¹¹ importing Norwegian hydropower whilst exporting British wind power, runs across the width of the North Sea and close to the Baltics, and well within the increasing operational patrols of Russian submarine fleets. Not just power transfers, but both British and global internet, banking, and communications cables all run across British seabeds. Due to its geography the UK is a transatlantic hub, around which hundreds of fibre-optic cables pass along the sea bed to Europe. These cables transmit 98 percent of global communications and £7 trillion in daily financial transactions and include the 4,500-mile Havfrue/AEC-2, owned jointly by Google and Facebook, which spans between New Jersey to Ireland, Denmark and Norway, in addition to Google's 4,000-mile Grace Hopper line, which will stretch between New York to Cornwall when it is operational.¹²

These power and communication cables are all as similarly vulnerable to the Nord Stream pipelines attacked in the Baltic Sea, baring the hallmark of Russian hybrid warfare; targeting civilian networks and infrastructure with military force, conducted in a relatively covert manner, to almost undoubtedly deny a likely military response. In the immediate aftermath of the Nord Stream attacks, a Royal Navy frigate was dispatched to patrol the North Sea alongside a Norwegian Navy counterpart.¹³ This recent uptick to undersea security threats comes amid a time of historic increases of Russian submarine activity around British coastal waters. In July 2022 HMS Portland, a Type 23 frigate, in addition to a P-8 Poseidon long-range maritime patrol aircraft, tracked Russian cruise missile submarine Severodvinsk and Akula-class attack submarine Vepr as they transited the North Sea.¹⁴ This followed a similar incident in 2021,¹⁵ and another in 2020, when Kilo-class attack submarine Krasnodor passed through the English channel.¹⁶ The increased Russian submarine activity across the North Sea and around British waters in recent years is part of a wider Russian strategy to dominate the High North. Earlier this year both the UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace and the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) Admiral Sir Tony Radakin highlighted the Russian submarine threats to UK national security,¹⁷ as the MoD published their High North defence paper in Spring

¹¹ [North Sea Link: World's longest undersea power cable linking Norway and UK is now operational | Euronews](#)

¹² [UK leads plans to protect Europe's vital undersea cables from Russian sabotage | World | News | Express.co.uk](#)

¹³ Ensor, 2022.

¹⁴ [Royal Navy tracks movements of Russian submarines into the North Sea \(mod.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ [Royal Navy tracks surfaced Russian submarine in waters close to the UK \(mod.uk\)](#)

¹⁶ [Royal Navy Shadows Surfaced Russian Submarine Off UK Coast \(forces.net\)](#)

¹⁷ [Diver, 2022.](#)

2022. This document identified that 'Russian submarine activity in the North Atlantic has reached Cold War levels. While this activity is not, in and of itself, a breach of international law, it presents challenges which impact upon the interests of the UK'.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ministry of Defence. 'The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North'. 2022. p.5.

Current Russia containment policies

The UK's force posture and geopolitical positioning regarding Russian military threats should be understood within existing security frameworks, including: NATO and Britain's leading role in the enhanced-Forward Presence (e-FP) Battlegroup in Estonia, contributions to Poland's US-led e-FP, and the NATO Air Policing mission; the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), a non-binding defence alliance made up of northern European NATO allies; and the UK, Poland, and Ukraine tripartite defence alliance. Further bilateral relations with UK allies and partners remain crucial, none more so than ongoing British military, economic, and diplomatic support for Ukraine. All of these security and defence agreements and alliances remain critical not just to British security, but that of European security too. One of Russia's glaring weaknesses which has been vividly exposed during its war against Ukraine is the lack of allies that it can count on for support. Whilst Belarus has proven a largely unwilling military ally, so too has China, fearful over international and economic repercussions as the CCP grapple with lower-than forecasted fiscal growth after positive initial post-pandemic stimulation. One of the UK's military and diplomatic strengths is its ability to form robust coalitions in times of crisis, and to sustain and lead meaningful alliances in times of relative peace, so that it is not alone in times of conflict and uncertainty. These must be sustained, strengthened, and in places, expanded upon to meet rising threats.

The political and military support to a stable Europe, in order to constrain Russian aggression, should be understood as a UK-led, US-supported effort, within existing but strengthened European-centric frameworks.

Military aid to Ukraine

The UK was the first international partner to send military aid to Ukraine after Russia's reinvasion on 24 February 2022. On 17 January, five weeks before Russian forces crossed once more into Ukraine, the UK supplied 2,000 Next-Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapons (NLAWs) to Kyiv. On 9 March, less than two weeks after the invasion, that figure had risen to 3,165.¹⁹ As part of its military aid package to Ukraine, as of October 2022 the UK has sent over 10,000 anti-tank missiles, six air defence systems, 200 armoured fighting vehicles, 2,600 anti-structure munitions, 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosives, and 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition.²⁰

Part of the UK's long-term military aid package involves building upon the very successful training mission conducted by British Army personnel in Ukraine. Operation Orbital involved a non-lethal training and capacity building operation, providing guidance and training to the Ukrainian armed forces through several advisory and short-term training teams. This has been the main vehicle for providing training and assistance to Ukrainian forces since 2015,

¹⁹ Mills, p.12.

²⁰ Ibid. p.9.

whilst the UK also launched a maritime initiative to enhance Ukraine's naval capacity, providing training for its naval forces on the Black Sea.²¹ The training and mentoring mission inside Ukraine came to a close in the run up to the reinvasion in February 2022, having trained over 22,000 Ukrainian personnel in total.²² During a visit to Kyiv on 17 June 2022 then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced plans for a much larger Ukrainian military training package, to be conducted in the UK. The plan, currently implemented by the British Army and running successfully, is training approximately 10,000 Ukrainians every 120 days.²³

Since February 2022 the UK has sent over 2.3 billion GBP of military aid to Ukraine, the figure rising to 3.8 billion GBP when including humanitarian and economic aid.²⁴ In September 2022 former Prime Minister Liz Truss committed to matching if not exceeding the military aid figure in 2023,²⁵ to almost certainly include more multi-launch rocket and air defence systems. Due to the immediate operational requirement for the military aid, the majority of the finance is drawn from the Treasury reserves, and not from the defence budget.²⁶ Despite the clear geostrategic imperative of continuing to fund the Ukrainian military, questions of fiscal sustainability to do so require addressing, particularly given the current domestic economic climate. Quite often, simply throwing money at problems does not remedy that issue; rather, a politically coherent long-term fiscal strategy is required in order to keep funding the Ukrainian armed forces. As defence cuts appear imminent, continuing to draw finances from the Treasury reserve will help alleviate potential political concerns, though this may lead to higher repayments at a later stage, especially considering the ongoing rises in inflation.

Operation Cabrit

After the Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014 and the annexation of Crimea, the subsequent NATO Summit of 2015 established the enhanced-Forward Presence (e-FP) Battlegroups (BG) across the three Baltic NATO member states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, in addition to Poland. Britain volunteered to lead the e-FP BG in Estonia, deploying since 2017 with supporting contributions from both France and Poland on a rotating basis, in addition to supporting the US-led BG in Poland.²⁷ The BG in Estonia comprises armoured infantry and armoured cavalry, roughly 900 personnel, usually rotating every six months. Their roles once in Estonia are to train alongside their Estonian and other NATO member partners, whilst deterring Russian aggression towards Estonia's border; in essence providing a 'trip-wire' effect, designed to contain Russian military aggression and subsequent further potential territorial expansion in Europe. The e-FP BG's have so far proven extremely

²¹ Ibid. p.10.

²² Prime Minister's Office, 2022.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Hansard. Volume 716.

²⁷ NATO Defence College. 2020.

successful, by several metrics. In the wake of Russian troops invading European neighbour Ukraine in 2014, many of Russia's other neighbours understandably felt threatened. The majority of Russia's remaining European neighbours, Belarus aside, were either NATO members or NATO allies (Finland and Sweden). The BG's pre-emptively demonstrated collective NATO defence and deterrence of its member states in eastern Europe, and has so far constrained Russian aggression outside of those borders, certainly above the threshold for conflict at least (cyber-attacks, mis- and dis-information campaigns, and Russian 'hybrid warfare' tactics aside).

In February 2022 in the run-up to the invasion of Ukraine, former Prime Minister Boris Johnson led NATO discussions on reinforcing NATO's now-vulnerable eastern flank, announcing that the UK would double its commitment to the Estonia e-FP.²⁸ Further, NATO leaders agreed to reinforce the military presence across Europe two months later in April.²⁹ Britain's commitment doubled by bringing forward the deployment of the incoming Royal Welsh Battlegroup in March 2022, whilst extending the tour of the outgoing Royal Tank Regiment so that they overlapped. Following the end of their six-month tour in September 2022, the King's Royal Hussars are now leading the eFP.³⁰ Following the handover to the Royal Welsh in March, the army began using the term 'Agile Task Force' to describe the Royal Tank's Regiment's presence in Estonia.³¹ This is also used to describe 2 Rifles Battlegroup, which replaced the Royal Tank Regiment in June 2022. The 2 Rifles BG is not part of the eFP, but instead are under UK, not NATO, command. This configuration provide commanders with a more flexible force configuration as a result of changes to the threat, whilst simultaneously reducing the pressure on the army's ever-shrinking armoured infantry battalions. The Agile Task Force was designed to 'strengthen the Estonian-UK relationship; deepen integration; deter the threat from adversaries and demonstrate European solidarity'.³²

The overlapping of the Royal Tank Regiment with the Royal Welsh in spring 2022 meant that the number of British Army personnel in Estonia increased from around 800 to 900 personnel to around 1,700. Both the Royal Welsh and 2 Rifles BG's are returning at the end of 2022, as the King's Royal Hussars BG will assume the eFP, whilst the 2 Rifles 'Agile Task Force' BG is not being replaced. The doubling commitment was only intended as a short-term solution to the security environment post-invasion, however, there are worries that this reduction back to the status-quo is too soon, and gives the wrong signalling both to allies and adversaries alike.³³

²⁸ [NATO - Opinion: Press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, 10-Feb.-2022](#)

²⁹ Brooke-Holland. April, 2022.

³⁰ Brooke-Holland. October, 2022.

³¹ [2 Rifles battlegroup arrives in Estonia to strengthen European security | The British Army \(mod.uk\)](#)

³² Ibid.

³³ [Brown. 2022.](#)

NATO Air Policing Mission

In 1961 NATO established the Air Policing as a purely defensive operation and a permanent NATO mission. The mission ensures that the security and integrity of all NATO Alliance members' airspaces. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) is responsible for the conduct of the NATO Air Policing mission, which is formed from volunteer member states' air forces and headquartered at Allied Air Command in Ramstein, Germany. Overseeing two operational regions, one north of the European Alps and one south, infringements of NATO members' airspace or suspicious air activity is intercepted by Quick Reaction Force (QRF) jets depending on the location.³⁴

As part of Operation Biloxi, the British NATO Air Policing mission, the Royal Air Force (RAF) maintain eight Typhoon jets stationed at RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus, to help with the southern region of NATO's mission, whilst four Typhoons are deployed to Romania for the Black Sea region of the NATO mission. In April 2022 the Defence Secretary announced that two additional Typhoons would join the four already in Romania, until the end of July.³⁵ This was seen as an additional support mechanism for Romania in the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, amid fears that Ukraine's NATO neighbours could be threatened by further Russian military aggression. As an indication of how persistent the threat to NATO's borders were during this period, 140 Expeditionary Air Wing flew over 325 sorties, totalling 850 hours of flight time: more than 3 times that of any previous UK enhanced Air Policing mission in Romania in support of the NATO mission.³⁶

Joint Expeditionary Force

The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) is a UK-led expeditionary force consisting of Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway. Eight of the countries are NATO members whilst Finland and Sweden currently have NATO memberships pending approval. The DCP framed the JEF as an apparatus to maintain security in the defence of the North Atlantic, the High North, and Baltic Sea regions,³⁷ whilst also offering 'flexible options for managing subthreshold competition as well as responding to crises, and improving its interoperability with NATO'.³⁸ The UK deployed elements of Standing Joint Force Headquarters (SJFHQ) numbering approximately 180 personnel to a wider JEF mobilisation across the Baltic Sea members in May 2022.³⁹ The deployment was designed to demonstrate collective resolve and security to the Baltic Sea region in the aftermath of Russia's reinvasion of Ukraine. The UK took a leading role in the deployment, with Defence Secretary Ben Wallace hosting a meeting of JEF member nations' Defence

³⁴ [NATO - Topic: Air Policing: securing NATO airspace](#)

³⁵ [More RAF jets to join NATO air policing mission in Romania - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁶ [Ceremony to mark end of NATO enhanced Air Policing mission in Romania | Royal Air Force \(mod.uk\)](#)

³⁷ Ministry of Defence. March 2022. p.20 and 69.

³⁸ Ibid. p.28.

³⁹ [Joint Expeditionary Force deploys to the Baltics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Ministers in the UK to arrange the subsequent military exercise demonstrating JEF nations' freedom of movement in the Baltic Sea.⁴⁰

Similarly, Ben Wallace convened a JEF member nations' Defence Ministers virtual meeting in the aftermath of the Nord Stream gas pipelines explosions, which occurred in September 2022. A joint JEF members statement released subsequently outlined a collective desire to increase the maritime presence and Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance activities in the region, seeking to 'deter further such acts, reassure allies and demonstrate collective commitment to the security and stability of the region'.⁴¹ In addition ministers discussed increasing shared intelligence assessments to ensure common situational awareness, and in particular cooperation to secure critical infrastructure. As a complimentary and regionally focused defensive alliance with NATO, the JEF has demonstrable applications of utility to a specific region of NATO interest where Russia continually seek to subvert and harass NATO member states whilst operating below the threshold for conflict. The JEF manage to accomplish this whilst not detracting from other core NATO tasks, and with a strong UK leadership role.

UK support for Finland and Sweden

Whilst Finland and Sweden are mentioned in both the IR and DCP as UK partners in the JEF, it is with their application for full NATO membership, made to NATO in May 2022, that will solidify their role further strengthening the alliance's northern and eastern flank (particularly Finland's 1,300 kilometre long border with Russia). Their ascension process to NATO began on 5 July, with the UK officially ratifying their membership on 6 July. Only Hungary and Turkey's outstanding ratifications remain,⁴² as both nation's leaders maintain closer political relations with President Putin than many members are comfortable with. Indeed, one of the most counterintuitive consequences for Putin has been the militarisation of his western neighbours, both of whom (particularly Sweden) have long remained militarily neutral, and remain outside of orthodox military alliances.⁴³

Crucially, during this period of transition to full NATO members, both Finland and Sweden are ironically at their most vulnerable. Not yet full members of the alliance, they could be subjected to military threats and even attack, and yet NATO would not be obliged to intervene. This catch-22 has been vividly demonstrated by the Russian reinvasion of Ukraine, which did not provoke a collective NATO military response. Because of this short-term vulnerability, the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson travelled to Sweden and signed mutual security assurances with both Prime Minister Andersson on 11 May, and then with President Niinistö in Finland the day after.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ [Joint statement by Defence Ministers of the Joint Expeditionary Force - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-defence-ministers-of-the-joint-expeditionary-force)

⁴¹ [Joint statement by Ministers of the Joint Expeditionary Force - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-by-ministers-of-the-joint-expeditionary-force)

⁴² [Finland & Sweden Accession | NATO PA \(nato-pa.int\)](https://nato-pa.int/en/finland-sweden-accession)

⁴³ [Sweden ends 200 years of military neutrality, joins Finland in seeking NATO membership | PBS NewsHour](https://www.pbs.org/news/special-report/sweden-ends-200-years-of-military-neutrality-joins-finland-in-seeking-nato-membership/)

⁴⁴ [Prime Minister signs new assurances to bolster European security: 11 May 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-signs-new-assurances-to-bolster-european-security-11-may-2022)

The declarations have seen a step-change in defence and security cooperation between the UK and each country, intensifying intelligence sharing, accelerating joint military training, exercising and deployments, whilst bolstering security across northern Europe. These were built on a joint visit to London by both heads of state in March 2022, just weeks after Russia's reinvasion of Ukraine, to discuss collective defence measures in the Northern Europe should Russia continue its territorial aggression against further neighbours, especially vulnerable non-NATO nations. The militarisation of Finland and Sweden to join NATO and changing hundreds of years' of neutrality, and increasing their military posture in Northern Europe has been one of the most decisive geopolitical consequences of the war in Ukraine. In a great irony, Putin's territorial aggression has led to the drastic strengthening of the Northern European security environment.

UK, Poland, and Ukraine defence tripartite

Precisely one week before Russia's reinvasion of eastern Ukraine, the foreign ministers of the UK, Poland, and Ukraine, met in London to establish a Trilateral Memorandum of Co-operation. This security agreement demonstrates the commitment to further strengthening the strategic cooperation and engagement between the three nations on the highest priority issues in support of Ukraine.⁴⁵ The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote that this would principally see greater cooperation in the fields of cyber security, energy security, and countering disinformation.⁴⁶ On this last point the UK MoD have provided extensive assistance, helping to counter Russia disinformation and propaganda during their war in Ukraine. This more formalised text builds upon the already very strong bilateral defence relations which the UK maintains with both Poland and Ukraine.

⁴⁵ [United Kingdom, Poland and Ukraine foreign ministers' joint statement, February 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/united-kingdom-poland-and-ukraine-foreign-ministers-joint-statement-february-2022)

⁴⁶ [Ukraine, UK, Poland announce security pact amid heightened tensions \(defensenews.com\)](https://www.defensenews.com/europe/2022/02/28/ukraine-uk-poland-announce-security-pact-amid-heightened-tensions/)

Recommendations: Additional Russia containment policies

Whilst the UK works within existing NATO frameworks (eFP; Air Policing Mission), NATO-partnered frameworks (JEF), and bilateral and trilateral agreements (Finland and Sweden agreements; Poland-Ukraine alliance), in order to help constrain further Russian territorial aggression, the UK needs to develop further security systems within the existing IR framework, but which can further constrain Russian aggression across Europe.

1. Regular maritime JEF patrols across GIUK Gap and North Sea

The Nord Stream gas pipeline attacks in September 2022 highlighted once and for all the extent to which Europe's CNI projects are vulnerable to malign and hybrid-style attacks, which are generally regarded as under the threshold for a direct military response. Therefore, further maritime, and crucially below-surface submarine patrols, are necessary to deter against further attacks to Europe's (and certainly the UK's – given the leading role Britain has in the defence of Ukraine) energy security. Royal Air Force and USAF P-8 Poseidon long-range aircraft can routinely operate comfortably across the strategically vulnerable Greenland, Iceland, UK Gap (GIUK Gap), in addition to the North Sea, which Russian Northern Fleet submarines frequently transit.

These Russian patrols must be more actively identified and shadowed, in order to reduce the risk of a similarly denied attack against UK undersea cables. Russia is well known to target other areas of interest in order to divert attention away from both domestic political failings and difficulties faced on the battlefield. These problems will only intensify for President Putin the longer the war goes on, and so with them, the likelihood and threat of a similar attack occurring again.

2. Reinforce Operation Cabrit

The UK military presence in Estonia, alongside fellow NATO deployments across the Baltics and Poland, has deterred overt Russian military aggression for five years, proving a highly successful model of conventional deterrence, in addition to reassuring vulnerable and important NATO allies and partners. When a military threat is increased, so too must the response. The UK's response to send an additional BG to Estonia, the 'Agile Task Force', this was a positive step in light of the deteriorating security situation in eastern Europe. With no replacement for the 2 Rifles BG who return at the end of 2022, this ought to be reconsidered. The war in Ukraine is far from over, and having an additional battalion of light role infantry based in alongside the eFP allows far greater tactical options for the BG Commander, should the need arise.

The Agile Task Force should be reinstated for 2023, and made a permanent deployment alongside the eFP, for as long as the security situation in eastern Europe remains highly unstable, and contested. The ability for the British Army to deploy and sustain one armoured Brigade in theatre is the absolute minimum test of capability. To withdraw this after one rotation does not send positive signalling to NATO allies, or adversaries alike. With little else in the way of long-term or persistent operations for the British Army, this capability is perfectly sustainable for the long-term, and can be reduced back to pre-invasion levels when the security situation dictates, not based around politically convenient timeframes.

3. Moldova and Romania military aid

Whilst the Ukrainian military has done a tremendous effort constraining Russian military advances in the south and the east of the country to a point not far past the strategic Dnipro river, Odessa to the far west has often been subjected to naval bombardment from the Black Sea, and is within striking distance of the Russian Army should they consolidate past Mykolaiv. The city itself has witnessed Russia's latest strategy of aerial bombardment throughout October 2022, with S-300 surface to air missile attacks, SU-24 sorties, and the direct entry of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps to the conflict, with their 'kamikaze' Shahed-136 drones with accompanying military trainers and advisors.⁴⁷

Whilst the former UK Prime Minister Liz Truss stated a further 2.3 billion GBP for the Ukrainian military effort for 2023, further funding must be considered as a wider package to support and reinforce Ukraine's immediate neighbours to the west; highly vulnerable Moldova, and NATO ally Romania. Whilst the RAF successfully conducted the NATO Air Policing mission to Romania from April – July 2022, further assistance should be provided to Romania as the nearest (alongside Poland) NATO member subjected to Russian insecurity from their forces operating in Ukraine. This should predominantly come in the form of intelligence sharing and a permanent liaison presence in Romania to more immediately identify any changing situation which may affect Romania's territorial integrity.

Consideration should be given as to how best prepare Moldovan defences and their own territorial integrity, should Russian forces push past Mykolaiv for Odessa, or Russian forces stationed in the breakaway region of Transnistria attempt to break through Moldova's own forces and possibly into Ukraine. Liz Truss advocated for NATO-style weapons and equipment for Moldova when Foreign Secretary in the

⁴⁷ [Ukrainian air defense forces shoot down 12 kamikaze drones over Mykolaiv region \(ukrinform.net\)](https://ukrinform.net/en/news/ukrainian-air-defense-forces-shoot-down-12-kamikaze-drones-over-mykolaiv-region)

immediate aftermath of Ukraine's reinvasion by Russia, to be established as part of a support package to the pro-EU and pro-NATO former Soviet nation.⁴⁸ That this has yet to occur, and has only heightened the sense of insecurity in Moldova, as the war in neighbouring Ukraine continues close to its borders.

This military aid to Moldova should include a permanent staff liaison to Moldova, in addition to a defence attaché, to reiterate the strong emphasis Britain places diplomatically upon respect for European borders at a heightened threat from territorial aggression. Furthermore, intelligence sharing on Russian troop movements inside Transnistria should form part of a wide Moldovan military aid package, as should consultation amongst NATO allies to discuss arming Moldova with proven NATO-manufactured air defence systems and anti-armour capabilities, to assist in the initial defence of any land invasion, should Russian forces break west of Mykolaiv or troops within Moldova conduct suspicious activities. The wider UK-led NATO consultations, military and diplomatic aid to the Moldovan government, would send a clear message to Moscow that the UK and NATO are unprepared to allow similar style Russian territorial aggression against further vulnerable non-NATO European states by a revisionist authoritarian regime.

4. Ukraine 2023 aid package

Having committed to continuing aid Ukraine militarily by at least a further 2.3 billion GBP in 2023, the UK government need to now take this opportunity to assess where this money will be best spent. Taken in concert with Ukrainian Ministry of Defence, an assessment should be undertaken to ascertain which threats Ukraine are struggling most to mitigate against, and which effects they want to achieve on the battlefield, and how the UK can help in these regards. October 2022 witnessed the emergence of aerial bombardments on civilian targets at a rate unseen previously, likely conducted in an attempt to break the will of the Ukrainian people, whilst targeting civilian infrastructure and power sources in addition to residential centres. Increasing counter-battery systems, and capabilities to target Iranian-supplied loitering drones, are an absolute must, and relatively inexpensive.

As Russia almost certainly begins seeking to utilise the frozen ground the harsh eastern European winters provide to allow for increased armoured mobility, Ukraine must be prepared for renewed offensives across the southern and eastern frontlines. The ability to defend against these, whilst causing counter-offensives at moments of opportunity, will remain crucial to reducing further still Russian advances until spring 2023. By continuing to target Russian logistical networks and command control

⁴⁸ [Moldova should be equipped to Nato standard, says UK's Truss - BBC News](#)

centres, Ukraine can severely degrade Russian military leadership and resupply, creating the conditions to launch successful counter-offensives of their own, further liberating more Ukrainian ground. Continued British-supplied long-range artillery systems, in addition to the intelligence picture provided to Ukraine, should remain a staple of the 2023 military aid package.

President Putin is almost certainly counting on western support for Ukraine waning over the coming months, particularly as the winter months place more pressure upon European governments to reduce support for Ukraine in return for cheaper energy prices. Here the new UK government must consolidate on previous governments' leading role, and establish an international fund to help aid the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence. This builds upon the so-called Ramstein Format, where NATO defence ministers formed the Defence Contact Group at Ramstein Airbase, Germany, and again later at NATO Headquarters, Brussels. Britain has supplied the second largest military aid to Ukraine since the reinvasion, and should seek to continue this leadership role whilst coordinating international donor efforts in order to achieve greater efficiency and quicker global delivery to where it matters most.

Finally, as the UK prepares to take over from Switzerland in 2023 at the next Ukraine Recovery Conference, united domestic political leadership over the long-term process of assisting Ukraine's recovery must be safeguarded in order to display British unity and leadership for what will be a costly and long-term recovery package, and one that should not be the subject of changing domestic political outcomes in the near-term. Cross-party consultation must be had to ensure a sustainable arrangement for Ukraine's recovery.

5. The full integration of Ukraine into European defence and security architecture

Whilst NATO have spent trillions on defence against the Russian (and before that Soviet) threat over many decades, Ukraine have managed to (so far) contain the Russian military, and degrade it to a state whereby a breakthrough even out of Ukraine through conventional means alone would now seem unlikely. Given the stoic defence of Ukraine, and the practical lessons learnt while fighting Russia, the UK government should support the Ukrainian incorporation within NATO, as a full member, at the moment of conflict resolution. It would prove too impractical to do so prior to this stage of the conflict i.e. whilst Russian troops are still within Ukrainian territory. This is a move supported by both the Ukrainian government and crucially

the Ukrainian population, 83 per cent of whom when polled in October 2022 supported NATO membership.⁴⁹

Not just NATO membership, but fuller incorporation within European security architecture would serve not just Ukraine's interests, but those of NATO and of the UK. In particular, the recently announced Sky Shield Initiative, a NATO-supported pan-European air defence system, would benefit from Ukrainian participation, owing to the aerial campaign conducted against the country by Russian missiles and drones, targeting civilian infrastructure and residential areas. Sky Shield involves Finland, so it remains a non-NATO exclusive project. Further considerations for similar frameworks should be given to allow for Ukrainian participation in broader European defence initiatives – particularly as European and NATO allies begin to reinforce military-security architecture across the continent in light of Russia's territorial aggression. Ukrainian participation would not only act as a cost-reduction and burden sharing exercise, but expertise of fighting against and defeating Russian aerial attacks would greatly benefit European security. As a member of the Sky Shield Initiative, the UK should champion and support Ukraine's participation.

⁴⁹ Reuters. October 2022.

China threats

Whilst Russia presents military threats through continued and potentially further territorial aggression in eastern Europe, in addition to threatening the UK's undersea cables (and those of the UK's allies), the People's Republic of China (PRC) presents far more nuanced and multi-faceted threats to the UK's national interests. Russian threats can primarily be understood in a European context, and largely within existing NATO frameworks, with allies and partners who very clearly understand the threat. Conversely, the PRC operates from the Indo-Pacific region, a contested, US-led, geopolitical environment in which the UK can support within its existing 'Indo-Pacific tilt' strategy, as identified in the IR. Here, the military threats are not so well understood, aside from some within Washington. The CCP present military threats (specifically to Taiwan, China's regional allies across the first island chain, and increasingly to the UK itself), whilst they also readily involve the use of economic warfare to achieve geopolitical leverage. These actions can be broadly understood within China's neomercantilist economic policies; so-called 'debt-diplomacy' and 'mask-diplomacy', and the crude dumping of cheap materials to artificially inflate global markets. This is on top of its state-driven mandate to engage in global technology transfer and IP-theft from civilian enterprises and collaborations, subsequently used to propel the PLA past the US militarily – a state-mandated objective to be achieved by the year 2027.⁵⁰

China's economic warfare practices will not be discussed further, rather acknowledging their existence as a crucial component in the CCP's arsenal of achieving geopolitical hegemony, and their attempts to create a new global order where it relegates the US-led liberal order to the annals of the early 21st Century. The following sections lay out the specific military threats that the CCP poses to the UK's national interests.

China's militarisation

Whilst much international attention for China's recent Twentieth Party Conference went on President Xi Jinping's extension as premier, which was all but inevitable anyway, it's the implications for the continued advancements of the PLA's modernisation program which will bare just as much significance for British policy makers and defence planners.

Xi addressed several aspects of the effort to build up the PLA. In particular, he mentioned the need to establish a new 'military strategic guidance', which will have enormous impact on the PLA. The issue of new military and strategic guidelines doesn't occur very often, with fewer than a dozen issued since 1956, and it typically marks a major shift for the PLA. A central component of the new guidelines will be on China's nuclear deterrent. The PLA Rocket Force has been greatly expanding its nuclear capabilities in the past several years, with a major expansion in the number of ICBMs, in addition to new ballistic missile submarines and a new strategic bomber.

⁵⁰ Clark. October 2022. p.3.

During one of his speeches, Xi said that ‘we will establish a strong system of strategic deterrence’. The new military strategic guidelines will provide revised doctrines governing the PLA’s increasing nuclear forces, maintaining the strong system of strategic deterrence. It is likely that the PLA Rocket Force will shift from a ‘minimal deterrence’ doctrine, centred on eventual retaliation against an adversary’s population areas, to simply deterrence, including options for limited nuclear strikes and so-called ‘tactical’ strikes, and even counter-force and pre-emptive strikes against an adversary’s own nuclear forces.

In addition to the PLA’s new ‘military strategic guidance’, and China’s increasing nuclear arsenal, Xi’s new military appointments also hint at a potential Chinese strategy centred around Taiwan and combat power. First, General He Weidong was promoted from Commander Eastern War Zone, to the new vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) – an extraordinary promotion and one that brings with it a seat on the Politburo, almost unheard of in the Chinese military. In his previous role as Commander Eastern War Zone he is intimately familiar with the planning for a potential invasion of Taiwan, and now as vice chairman of the CMC, he will be well placed to overcome any bureaucratic obstacles to these plans.

Second, General Liu Zhenli fought in the 1979 Sino-Vietnam war, likely making him one of the last senior PLA officers to have combat experience. It is likely that Liu is to be made Commander Joint Staff Department, placing one of the few combat experienced officers leading the main department responsible for both war planning and intelligence within the PLA.

Furthermore, both Vice Chairman Zhang Youxia and General Li Shangfu spent their careers in the Equipment Development Department, or its predecessor, the General Armaments Department. These departments hold responsibility for weapons research and development, researching weapons for space systems, directed energy weapons, nuclear weapons, and cyber weapons. In addition, General Zhang Shenmin spent much of his career in what is now the PLA Rocket Force. All three men have now been appointed new members in the influential CMC, consistent with Xi’s strategy of emphasising new-domain warfare, improving strategic deterrence, and prioritising emerging disruptive technologies for weapons.

These points highlight that the PLA now aspires to achieving a set of modernisation capabilities that will be able to meet any demands Xi Jinping might make of it. This will now be a Chinese military equipped with advanced weapons, enjoyed extensive training time, whilst crafting its own indigenously developed doctrine, as opposed to a legacy dependency upon Soviet cadres and outdated techniques. With this new senior military leadership, combined with the new military strategy guidance, the PLA that emerges in 2027 will be combat ready in a manner previously unseen.

Taiwan Strait

Despite a long-term convention allowing open and free access of the Taiwan Strait for international trading purposes, China used the leader of the US House of Representatives' visit to Taipei in August 2022 as a pretext to a military blockade, closing the Strait for a period of weeks, as the PLA conducted large-scale military exercises and deployments throughout the summer. These military manoeuvres across the Maidan Line – the unofficial Chinese/Taiwan buffer zone – included a sortie of 17 PLA Air Force fighter jets on 10 August alone,⁵¹ whilst Taiwan claimed that Chinese military action invaded the island's territory, with PLA firing missiles and rockets at sea within 12 miles of Taiwan's coast.⁵² Officials in Taipei rightly asserted that this activity was endangering international shipping lanes, challenging the international order, and undermining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, endangering the wider region.

Soon after, the CCP confirmed that they would include further military activities across the Strait in the future, effectively confirming a 'new normal' of heightened military tensions in the region. This has led to some analysts in Washington suspecting that the PRC may invade Taiwan far sooner than previously suspected, including the US Navy's head of operations, Admiral Mike Gilday, who warned that it could be before 2027.⁵³ Whilst some analysts sought to downplay the PLA's actions in summer 2022 in order to reduce political and diplomatic tensions mainly between Washington and Beijing, the military manoeuvres were no less tantamount to what can be accurately described as the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis.

In order to partially mitigate against the threat to Taiwan of a full-scale land air and sea invasion by the PRC, the US Congress are due to vote on legislation to fund weapons for Taipei. The 'Defence Spending Bill' aims to authorise \$US 10 billion over five years, in what would be the first case of the US funding weapons sales to Taiwan, as opposed to more conventional and less controversial arms sales. Whilst the US has sought to remain relatively non-committal regarding the precise nature of its defence agreements with Taipei, should Taiwan come under attack, the long-standing US era of 'strategic ambiguity' may soon be coming to an end. US President Joe Biden remarked in September and May 2022 that the US would directly intervene militarily in the event of an attack, though subsequent official White House statements declared that this did not represent a change in US Taiwan policy.⁵⁴

Successive UK governments have remained more vague as to the notion of direct military support for a US-led military operation in the event of Taiwan's invasion. The UK must be prepared to provide military and diplomatic support to both the US and to Taiwan, in order to ensure a robust response to any unlawful infringement of Taiwan's sovereignty. Current

⁵¹ Hille. 2022.

⁵² [Chinese military drills have invaded Taiwan's territory, says defence ministry, as Nancy Pelosi visit angers Beijing | World News | Sky News](#)

⁵³ Sevastopulo. 2022.

⁵⁴ Wang. 2022.

US defence strategy is highly centralised around denying an Asian hegemon, as Asia is the current centre for the global balance of power, a tenant of international relations which the UK government ascribes. China is highly likely to achieve Asian hegemony should it vanquish a US ally or quasi ally, such as Taiwan (the most vulnerable due to stated CCP intent, proximity to China, and lack of US troops), South Korea, or Japan. Therefore, the defence of Taiwan in particular is central to denying China Asian hegemony. Whilst the US has subscribed to this belief, the UK is more reluctant. This must change. The UK should take this opportunity to reconsider its baseless 'One China Policy', which views the PRC as the one legitimate form of government. Taiwan has never been a part of modern China, and its liberal values which benefit not just Taiwan itself, but the liberal global order, are sufficient grounds itself to warrant a studious reconsideration by the new UK government of its outdated Taiwan policy. UK defence policy regarding Chinese hegemony aspirations in the Indo-Pacific, and the defence of allies (particularly Taiwan) needs further consideration from the new UK review.

South China Sea

In recent years the PRC has sought to militarise large sections of the South China Sea; largely uninhabited small islands, reefs, and rocky outcrops which have been colonised and put to use to support the PLA in its mission to develop a blue (global) Navy, as China begins to assert itself militarily in a fashion previously unseen. In addition to lucrative fishing waters and access for various strategic shipping lanes for much of south Asia, the Sea holds an estimated 11 billion barrels of untapped crude oil, and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.⁵⁵

In addition to building upon existing reefs, satellite imagery has shown that the PRC has constructed ports, military installations, and airstrip, including twenty military outposts on the Paracel Islands, and seven across the Spratly Islands,⁵⁶ whilst militarising Woody Island (the largest of the Paracels), by deploying fighter jets, cruise missiles, and a radar system, despite being simultaneously claimed by both Taiwan and Vietnam.⁵⁷ China seeks control over these waters in order to maintain a robust 'first island chain' defence, which encompasses the South China Sea North from Taiwan South all the way to Malaysia and the Straits of Malacca. Control of these waters, natural mineral deposits, and vital shipping lanes, gives China enormous strategic advantage in the Indo-Pacific.

This malign military assertion has often brought China into diplomatic conflict with neighbours, most notably the Philippines when in 2016 the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague ruled in favour of the Philippines' claim against Chinese breaches of its sovereignty building up and militarising parts of the sea within Philippines' Exclusive

⁵⁵ [5 things you should know about the South China Sea conflict | PBS News Weekend](#)

⁵⁶ [China Tracker | Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative \(csis.org\)](#)

⁵⁷ [Seeing the Forest through the SAMs on Woody Island | Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative \(csis.org\)](#)

Economic Zone (EEZ).⁵⁸ China, a signatory to the declaration, ignored the court's rulings and has since continued its military activities across Philippines' EEZ.⁵⁹

Despite China's increasing territorial disputes with regional powers, the potential control over the South China Sea by the PLA Navy brings significant threats to the UK's economic and security interests, as up to one third of all global trade passes through the shipping lanes connecting the rapidly evolving economies of south east Asia.⁶⁰ The seas account for some 12% of all UK sea-borne trade, approximately 91 billion GBP annually.⁶¹ If conflict were to break out with China, then disruption to British trade would be significant, and subsequent loss to economic growth irreplaceable. Therefore, maintaining free and open access to these international waters, whilst minimising as much disruption as possible to the regions EEZ by an assertive Chinese military, is of paramount interest to British security.

The Arctic and High North

In addition to embarking upon an aggressive long-term strategy of neo-colonialism in the South China Sea, the PRC are active across the Arctic. Despite China's closest point to the Arctic Circle farther than the UK's to Africa, Chinese officials have frequently referred to China as a 'near-Arctic state', since at least 2014 when President Xi Jinping declared an ambition to make China a 'Polar Power'.⁶² This geographically incorrect and dangerous discourse has since borne much diplomatic fruition for China, having been made a permanent observer to the Arctic Council, and includes increased influence in the Arctic Circle organisation,⁶³ in addition to more frequent access to the region. This has most recently been demonstrated in September 2022 when a joint Sino-Russian naval patrol was spotted in the Bering Sea off the Alaskan coast – a flotilla consisting of three PLA Navy vessels, including a destroyer.⁶⁴

China's long-term strategy in the Arctic is to disguise itself through clever signalling that it is a responsible Arctic power interested in common causes for concern amongst genuine Arctic states. This affords the CCP a degree of legitimacy amongst Arctic states without the likes of which it would struggle to sustain a presence. This is reinforced by China's deepening relationship with Russia. Over one half of the Arctic coastline is Russian, and China has already begun defending Russian behaviour in Ukraine at Arctic forums⁶⁵ as a means to continuing Russian assistance for Chinese Arctic access. Enormous crude oil and natural gas deposits, in addition to much decreased journey times for Chinese goods to

⁵⁸ [Cases | PCA-CPA](#)

⁵⁹ [Philippine Lawmaker Proposes Bill Prohibiting Foreign Ships' Incursions – The Diplomat](#)

⁶⁰ [Southeast Asia will take a major economic hit if shipping is blocked in the South China Sea | The Strategist \(aspistrategist.org.au\)](#)

⁶¹ [\(1\) Rear Admiral Steve Moorhouse on Twitter: "UK's #CSG21 is navigating through the South China Sea along with one third of all global trade. #FreeandopenIndoPacific https://t.co/tS8QH0wSXa" / Twitter](#)

⁶² [The Ice Silk Road: Is China a "Near-Arctic-State"? - Institute for Security and Development Policy \(isdp.eu\)](#)

⁶³ [China: "Will Not Acknowledge Arctic Council Without Russia" \(highnorthnews.com\)](#)

⁶⁴ [Coast Guard spots Chinese, Russian naval ships off Alaska island \(navytimes.com\)](#)

⁶⁵ [China: "Will Not Acknowledge Arctic Council Without Russia" \(highnorthnews.com\)](#) .

global (especially European) ports and markets, are the long-term prizes for China's increasing articulation and interference in Arctic affairs.

Meanwhile in November 2019, Denmark's intelligence services warned that the PLA was using scientific research as a way into the Arctic, and that scientific activities had a dual purpose. China has alluded to possible future military deployments, such as in its 2017 'Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative'. This referred to Arctic shipping lanes as a 'blue economic passage', which would need the development of 'common maritime security for mutual benefits'. Attempting to legitimise the safeguarding of future maritime travel and trade with military security is an early indicator of likely future Chinese military deployments across the Arctic, in order to safeguard those trade voyages. Safeguard from whom precisely is a matter of speculation, as Russia aside every Arctic nation is a member of NATO, or soon will be (with the almost certain accession of Finland and Sweden). This therefore raises the stakes in Arctic security significantly. As a genuine 'near-Arctic state' (the world's closest), and as member of NATO, the UK has an active interest in ongoing and future security threats in the Arctic – particularly as the Arctic's proximity with both the GIUK Gap and High North brings Arctic security affairs close to UK waters.

Current Chinese containment policies

Successive UK governments have begun to split from the strategically disastrous Osborne-Cameron so-called 'Golden Era' of Sino-British relations. This period was characterised by large Chinese FDI into British infrastructure and trade deals, with little concern for long-term impacts on both British manufacturing and increasingly malign Chinese influence within UK civil society and national security.⁶⁶ The move in 2020 under Prime Minister Boris Johnson to ban Huawei from any role in developing Britain's 5G infrastructure was a step-change in economic and security relations with China. Whilst the UK government has also been somewhat vocal against Chinese human rights abuses in Hong Kong, and atrocities in Xinjiang against the Uyghurs, much more can still be done to promote human rights and freedoms in China regarding ethical trading policies.

However, of more salient regard is the need to check China's growing militarisation of the South China Sea, the Arctic, and of its almost inevitable desires for Taiwan. Similar to current Russian containment policies, the ability to work alongside like-minded allies and partners is crucial to achieving these ends. In the Indo-Pacific, the UK already has a long established though non-binding security framework, in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA). Complimenting this is the recent Australia, UK, and US – AUKUS – agreement. Whilst both offer different methods and wish to achieve different objectives, the end goals are remarkably similar – increasing security in the Indo-Pacific for all nations to enjoy free and open access.

Regarding the UK's role for Taiwan security, it must make itself more open to the possibility of working alongside and in support of the US' goals to ensure a defence by denial of Taiwan by China, in order to degrade Chinese ambitions for Asian hegemony. As part of this overarching US goal which is in the UK's national interests to support, Britain has access already to bilateral defence relations with the Japanese Self-Defence Forces (JSDF). Tokyo has become increasingly concerned over China's motives for Taiwan, and indeed security in the region more broadly. The UK's relations with Japan, in addition to Japan-US relations, will be instrumental in the coming years as alliances continue working together to offset China's growing ambitions for the region.

Soft diplomatic versus hard military support for Taiwan

At present the UK government vaguely supports Taiwanese democratic practices, but does not commit to overtly supporting Taiwanese independence movements or the acknowledgment of the government in Taipei as separate to the CCP in Beijing. This is in a long-standing convention of the 'One China Policy', which acknowledges the CCP as the governing entity of Taiwan. However, the UK government have advocated for Taiwan representation at international organisations which do not require statehood as a pre-

⁶⁶ <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/25116/pdf/> p.6.

requisite, such as lobbying for Taiwan membership at the World Health Organization.⁶⁷ Despite the 'One China Policy', the UK have recently conducted several 'freedom of navigation operations' (FONOP), patrols through the politically sensitive Taiwan Strait; including Type 23 Frigate HMS Richmond in September 2021, and survey vessel HMS Enterprise, in 2019.⁶⁸ Whilst the US Navy routinely pass through these waters on a near monthly basis, it's very rare for US allies to do so. Chinese state media People's Daily reported that the UK had 'ill intentions', and that the Royal Navy voyage in 2021 'destroyed peace and stability in the area'.⁶⁹

The need for the UK government to begin studious consultation with the US and other partners for the need to support Taiwan's defences militarily over the coming years will be a difficult though increasingly necessary course of action. The conditions for this to occur were set in March 2022 when US and UK representatives held a series of small private meetings to discuss the UK's role in both conflict prevention and, should that fail, a wider conflict between China and Taiwan.⁷⁰ This came at a time when the PRC under President Xi now appear more likely than before to eventually grow tired of Taipei's increasing western/US tilt, and will likely resort to military action in order to bring Taiwan under the CCP's control. The US will almost undoubtedly come to Taiwan's military aid – indeed it is firmly in the US' national interests to do so in order to avoid Chinese hegemony of Asia. Therefore, it is firmly in Britain's national interests to consider what military role, if any, the UK is to have in this likely eventuality. At present, whilst broadly supportive for Taiwanese democracy, the UK avoids further political and diplomatic commitment to Taipei. This era should now end, and with the US begin a consultation to support Taiwan politically. This will send a clear message to Beijing that the UK supports US-led support for a democratic Taiwan, backed up if need be by limited UK military support in the event of an invasion. This will require significant military capabilities to even support a US-led operation; capabilities which are already thinly stretched by an increasing fiscal squeeze on UK defence spending.

South China Sea & Taiwan Strait patrols

The Royal Navy have conducted FONOP patrols throughout the Indo-Pacific's two most contested waterways in recent years, largely on a unilateral basis and last year as part of the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike Group 2021 deployment. Whilst this was at times a multinational operation, drawing US and Japanese components at various stages, the UK's role within both the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait should be considered within existing alliance paradigms (i.e. on a multilateral basis in the future). Greater interoperability with friendly nations' maritime forces will prove increasingly productive as the need to work closer will increase in future years. The ability to conduct these maritime patrols sends clear messages

⁶⁷ Hansard. 801.

⁶⁸ [British warship ignores Chinese warnings and sails through Taiwan Strait \(ukdefencejournal.org.uk\)](https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/british-warship-ignores-chinese-warnings-and-sails-through-taiwan-strait)

⁶⁹ [China accuses British navy of 'evil intentions' as UK warship sails through Taiwan Strait | World News | Sky News](#)

⁷⁰ Sevastopulo and Hille. 2022.

to Beijing that the UK recognises and respects the internationally understood rules of the sea, and with it the free and open access to these waters for all, not just at the CCP's whim with regards to their latest territorial acquisition which they insist all must respect and obey (contrary to the rules of the sea)⁷¹. British and US FONOPs are an absolute cornerstone of the international check against China's aggressive territorial aspirations across these waters, and it remains in the UK's national interests to do so.

The UK should seek closer engagement with fellow members of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) in conducting future FONOPs. A series of multilateral agreements between the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore, initially the arrangements aimed at providing air defence to Singapore and Malaysia, but their scope has since expanded to include land and naval forces' collaborations. The FPDA have a political and military structure, including the FPDA Consultative Council and the Integrated Area Defence System, based at the Royal Malaysian Air Force Butterworth.⁷² Malaysia and Singapore both have significant economic interests in maintaining a free and open South China Sea, whilst their numerous docking and port facilities make them natural partners for the Royal Navy whilst conducting FONOPs in the Indo-Pacific.

AUKUS

Similarly whilst the UK should seek closer integration with FPDA members, including Australia and New Zealand, last year's AUKUS deal between Australia and the US also offers a framework for future UK FONOPs across the Indo-Pacific. Crucially the South Pacific appears to be the latest target for Chinese influence and malign activities, a region where AUKUS has a readily identifiable geographic mandate. In April 2022 Solomon Islands signed a controversial defence and security agreement with the PRC, which focused on boosting the South Pacific island's national security capacity. A clause in the agreement states that China can 'make ship visits to, carry out logistical replacement in, and have stopover and transition in Solomon Islands,' in addition to sending Chinese military forces to the country to 'protect the safety of Chinese personnel and major projects.' This raised concerns that China could send troops to Solomon Islands and establish a permanent military base there, less than two thousand kilometres from Australia.⁷³ This was followed only four months later when in August 2022 Solomon Islands refused entry to US and UK vessels,⁷⁴ confirming fears that the deal with China would significantly impede legitimate UK and US interests in the region.

AUKUS, with the UK and Royal Navy at its head, should be viewed regionally as a security framework for assisting other nations in roles including disaster management, conservation, scientific research, increased trading opportunities and free and open access across the

⁷¹ [UNCLOS+ANNEXES+RES.+AGREEMENT](#)

⁷² Li Jie Sheng, 'The Future of the Five Power Defense Arrangements', The Diplomat (1 November 2019): <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/the-future-of-the-five-power-defense-arrangements/>

⁷³ Council on Foreign Relations. 2022.

⁷⁴ [Solomon Islands halts naval visits after US, UK ships denied entry - BBC News](#)

region. China will continue its campaign of influence over South Pacific island nations, attempting to incorporate others in a similar vein as Solomon Islands, which remains a UK ally and member of the Commonwealth, as are the remaining South Pacific island nations. There is clearly much scope for increased joint UK deployments within this remit, in an attempt to check further revisionist Chinese influence which harms the UK's economic and security interest, and those of close Commonwealth allies and other partners.

Recommendations: Additional China containment policies

In order to counter the Chinese ‘Polar Silk Road’ of trade and investment into the Arctic, the PLA’s increasing presence across the strategic shipping lanes of the South China Sea and the trading routes of the South Pacific, the UK government should seek closer collaboration with existing allies and partners, particularly Japan, whilst working within the FPDA and AUKUS frameworks. Regarding the security of Taiwan, and with it, Asia’s resistance of a Chinese controlled system, the UK should work closer with the US on a bilateral basis for increased support, whilst changing its defence policy on Taiwan to fit more broadly alongside the US’.

1. Formalise training partnership with the JSDF

The most likely course of action for China to dominate Asia will be to pick off US allies and quasi-allies, thereby undermining US (and with, western liberal) credibility, and in effect subverting the global rules based order and replacing it with a Chinese-centric system based on authoritarian governance, abject refusal for human rights, and the lack of freedoms for billions of people. Japan remains a vulnerable US ally in the region, and was critical of China’s actions across the Strait.⁷⁵ In order to strengthen Japan’s defence capabilities, the UK should build upon previous one-off deployments with Japan, including 2021’s Carrier Strike Group, and formalise a defence agreement. The planned Reciprocal Access Agreement allows in theory for Japanese and British forces to work, exercise and operate together, boosting the UK’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific and further safeguarding global peace and security.⁷⁶ This document should also consider how British and Japanese forces can work together as part of a broader regional coalition in times of crisis, and not just bilaterally. The importance of working alongside allies within robust coalitions in future deployments cannot be overstated as a deterrence to future aggression by revisionist powers. Japan is a central component to this, and a crucial defence and trading power which the UK must seek closer interoperability with.

2. Increased diplomatic and defence relations with Taipei

The UK government should take this opportunity to review its defence and diplomatic relations with Taipei. If the government go ahead with their suspected move to remove and ban all Confucius Institutes from UK universities, then these should be replaced with Chinese-speaking cultural organisations, in particular from Taiwan and Hong Kong diasporas. This should reinforce the government’s reviewed relations with Taipei more broadly, in order to reinforce and support the US’

⁷⁵ [Japan’s Evolving Approach to the Taiwan Strait – The Diplomat](#)

⁷⁶ [UK and Japan set to rapidly accelerate defence and security ties with landmark agreement - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

leadership role supporting the government of Taiwan in light of recent Chinese aggression. This would represent a step-change in the regional balance of power; the US President Joe Biden has repeatedly promised military assistance for Taiwan in the event of an invasion. The UK need not be so direct; retaining a previously-seen US-style 'strategic ambiguity' better serves UK interests, whilst staying broadly in lockstep with the US' potential pivot to a more assertive military presence in relation to Taiwan's defence.

The UK's 'persistent presence' in the Indo-Pacific will likely result in a biennial deployment for the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike Group,⁷⁷ headed by one of the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers, with an accompanying flotilla of frigates, destroyers, F-35 jets, in addition to contributions from allies and partners in order to form a formidable battlegroup. This style Group deployed in 2021, and involved various maritime patrols with allies including the US, Japan, and Australia.⁷⁸ At the next opportunity, a CSG deployment involved in a return journey to the Indo-Pacific should include joint US patrols through the Taiwan Strait again, in order to continue demonstrating that the waters are free and open and should not be subjected to Chinese military blockades.

Consideration should also be given to the Royal Navy's HMS Tamar and HMS Spey, deployed to the Indo-Pacific for the next four years as part of the UK's 'persistent presence',⁷⁹ to deploy alongside and work with both US and Taiwan naval contingents in areas such as humanitarian operations, search and rescue, and scientific research (including littoral mapping). This would allow for an increased awareness and interoperability for a likely future British military ally, and allow early progression in knowledge exchange and defence cultural practices. The same opportunities should be considered for the UK's Littoral Response Group, likely deploying to the Indo-Pacific in 2023.⁸⁰

Building on Liz Truss' remarks in April 2022 when she was Foreign Secretary, the UK should provide military assistance to Taiwan, stating that 'We are determined to work with our allies to make sure that Taiwan is able to defend itself'.⁸¹ Whilst the UK have no recent arms contracts with Taiwan, and Taipei purchases most of its foreign-sourced procurement needs from the US, the UK can also ill-afford at present to gift Taipei military aid whilst current British stocks remain severely depleted from Ukraine's efforts, and will require a period of years to increase back to

⁷⁷ [UK Carrier Strike Group in the Indo-Pacific - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-carrier-strike-group-deploys-to-the-indo-pacific)

⁷⁸ [The Role of the UK Armed Forces in Achieving a Global Britain | Robert Clark - The Mallard \(mallarduk.com\)](https://www.mallarduk.com/2021/05/26/the-role-of-the-uk-armed-forces-in-achieving-a-global-britain/)

⁷⁹ [British warship deployed to Indo-Pacific region docks in Singapore | The Straits Times](https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/pacific/british-warship-deployed-to-indo-pacific-region-docks-in-singapore)

⁸⁰ [Defence in a competitive age \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-in-a-competitive-age) p.48.

⁸¹ [Russian military escalation and 'bogus threats' show Putin has been 'outsmarted' by the Ukrainians, says UK PM | CNN Politics](https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/28/politics/uk-aid-taiwan/index.html)

previous levels.⁸² This military assistance however should come in the form of a special military representative to Taipei, such as a defence attaché-style post, in order to better coordinate any military activities across the Taiwan Strait and the wider Indo-Pacific region which overlaps mutual defence interests. Whilst British stocks remain too low to feasibly consider Taiwan military aid at present, consultation should still begin with US and Taiwan representatives on how best to prepare for a long-term and sustainable defence of Taiwan, and how British defence contributions can support an endeavour which is actively being planned for by the Pentagon.

Further measures could include a clandestine deployment of British troops to work alongside a small US Special Forces team training Taiwan military forces in relative secrecy since 2020.⁸³ Additionally a program should be established at both the Defence Academy Shrivenham, and at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, two of the world's most eminent defence institutions, to train Taiwanese officers in the UK. This would further help establish common defence culture and practices between the two, whilst additionally creating lines for military communication that likely wouldn't elicit a strong response from Beijing.

3. US, UK, Taiwan military alliance framework

Building on the discussions between US and UK officials in March 2022, the UK should begin looking at how best to contribute and support a US-led operation in the defence of Taiwan, should the island come under Chinese attack or invasion. Here, the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, in addition to elements of the RAF (for instance ideally two F-35 squadrons), should seek to form a Maritime Force capable of deploying alongside US allies, conducting training alongside the USN and USAF in the Indo-Pacific. Future Littoral Response Group and Carrier Strike Group deployments to the region (likely in 2023 and 2024, respectively) should factor these into their planning cycles and rehearsals, in order to best prepare for the eventuality joining a US-led contingent in the region in times of future crisis or conflict. The UK should be planning for a British Maritime Force deployment now, factored into upcoming training deployments, increases deterrence to China by demonstrating an effective future military coalition, but also prepares UK forces for this eventuality, should it come, whereby the UK will undoubtedly be asked to contribute forces to support the US in a manner which no other European nation will either be willing or capable (with the exception of France; likely militarily capable but highly unlikely politically

⁸² [Army risks running low on anti-tank weapons as it emerges UK is yet to replace missiles sent to Kyiv | Daily Mail Online](#)

⁸³ Lubold. 2021.

willing). To not prepare for and plan accordingly such (likely) eventualities now is strategic suicide.

4. Canada, the UK, and the US (CAUKUS)

There is a prevent need to establish a security and defence agreement between Canada, the UK, and the US (CAUKUS). At present Canadian Arctic coastlines and seas are increasingly susceptible and vulnerable to both Russian and Chinese naval patrols and territorial incursions. Whilst the US and Canada maintain extensive close air defence links through the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), greater emphasis needs to be placed on seaborne threats to North American Arctic territory. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) only maintain a fleet of four aging British-supplied Victoria-class submarines, which require replacing well before the end of this decade. Here UK and US expertise can fill a crucial capability gap; supplying nuclear technology submarines to the RCN, whilst both the USN and RN undertake joint submarine patrols of North American Arctic coasts and seas whilst the RCN upgrade their submarine stock in the meantime.

Last year the UK Chief of the Defence (CDS) Staff General Sir Nick Carter suggested greater UK submarine activity and maritime patrols alongside with the RCN would certainly help Canadian Arctic security,⁸⁴ in order to contain Russia and China whom both seek to exploit this capability gap in an increasingly contested security environment, as vast untapped oil and gas reserves push geopolitical tensions ever closer to boiling point. The CAUKUS notion has received support from former UK Armed Forces ministers,⁸⁵ and is a natural extension of close defence ties amongst three strong allies in order to fulfil a significant defence gap with practical solutions. Increased maritime training, joint submarine patrols, and nuclear technology for an already-civilian nuclear nation would go some significant margin to contain increasing Chinese and Russian military activity across a strategic yet vulnerable NATO front.

5. Reinforce AUKUS

The US are in the process of staging arguably some of their most military sensitive assets in Australia's Northern Territory. A squadron of nuclear-capable B-52 bombers are to be stationed at Tindall Airbase; the location of the bombers puts them well within range of China, as Beijing lies 3,728 miles to the north, while the bombers have a range of 8,700 miles.⁸⁶ This is widely perceived as a growing perception in

⁸⁴ [Royal Navy could expand into the Canadian Arctic to support allies \(telegraph.co.uk\)](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/ukdefence/2022/03/02/royal-navy-could-expand-into-the-canadian-arctic-to-support-allies/)

⁸⁵ Clark and White. 2022.

⁸⁶ Lagan and Tang. 2022.

Washington of China's potential invasion of Taiwan. This deployment complements an existing force of 2,000 United States Marine Corps based at Darwin,⁸⁷ and a sensitive US-Australian radar base at Pine Gap.⁸⁸ This US build-up in northern Australia can be viewed as an increasing cooperation between the two states, framed under the AUKUS security deal. This also includes joint US-UK-Australian submarine training, in preparation for Australia taking ownership of US and UK-supplied nuclear submarines.⁸⁹

Under these arrangements, the UK should seek greater utility of Australian military infrastructure as the US has, by potentially having an annual detachment of Royal Marines embedded with the USMC at Darwin, in order for the three nations' amphibious infantry forces to conduct large-scale live-fire training and combined exercises. In addition, being able to have a Royal Navy frigate or destroyer on a permanent deployment to work alongside US and Australian counterparts would also send a strong message of force cohesion, and strengthening this growing and increasingly important alliance.

⁸⁷ [U.S. and Australian Forces Combine to Enhance Interoperability and Lethality across Long Ranges and in Austere Environments > United States Marine Corps Flagship > News Display \(marines.mil\)](#)

⁸⁸ [An American Spy Base Hidden in Australia's Outback - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

⁸⁹ [Australians to train on British nuclear submarines for the first time | Reuters](#)

British defence spending: The means

The previous sections have reviewed how the central threat analysis emanating from authoritarian states (Russia and China) within the IR still broadly align with British geopolitical priorities, namely the correct identification of Russia representing the single largest military threat to the UK, whilst the need to acknowledge the longer-term and more nuanced threats emanating from Beijing. However, a clearer understanding of both the threat posed to Taiwan of Chinese invasion, and with it, Chinese hegemony over Asia, in addition to the UK's likely supporting role for a US-led military operation in that eventuality, require greater clarity.

These previous sections then identified how current UK policies to mitigate against these threats can be strengthened, in order to fulfil a broader approach to contain authoritarian threats to the UK's national interests, and to those of our allies. Since the original IR was released in February 2021 the central tenants have stayed resolutely in place, having endured the seismic but not wholly unpredictable tests of Russian reinvasion of Ukraine and the Chinese militarisation of the Taiwan Strait. Whilst the pillars of the IR have remained unshakable during this testing year for British statecraft and strategy, the further recommendations listed for strengthening UK policy on Russia and China will provide added clarity and long-term sustainability for achieving the overarching goal; authoritarian containment. Those ways identified must now be backed up by government spending; the means.

Whilst the IR remains broadly intact, and alongside it some reinforced ways (additional policies identified above), the new government review must put right the wrongs of the IR's accompanying DCP. More a cost-saving measure than a serious budgetary exercise to finance the demands of the IR, the DCP was nothing short of strategic incoherence; the IR placing greater demand on the UK's Armed Forces whilst making disastrous cuts to defence. Headline policies included slashing the British Army to its lowest level since the late 18th century, from a target of 82,000 trained personnel, to just 72,500. This reduction is to be achieved by 2024/25, and has already included the disbanding of the 2nd Battalion, the Mercian Regiment,⁹⁰ which had performed gallantly in the Afghanistan campaign, suffering dozens of casualties whilst undertaking three tours of duty.⁹¹ This was a policy directly enacted due to the perceived requirement towards the end of 2019 of reducing infantry mass in order to cut costs, whilst investing both resources and military doctrine into technology which would be perceived to have a greater impact on future battlefields, namely AI, cyber, and drones; the so-called 'sunset to sunrise' capabilities, pioneered by former Chief of the Defence Staff, Nick Carter.⁹²

⁹⁰ [Defence Secretary oral statement on the Defence Command Paper - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-secretary-oral-statement-on-the-defence-command-paper)

⁹¹ [Afghanistan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/afghanistan)

⁹² [Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter's annual RUSI speech - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-the-defence-staff-general-sir-nick-carter-s-annual-rusi-speech)

In addition to axing 9,500 troops (mostly battle-winning infantry), a further part of the 'sunset to sunrise' doctrine involved axing the British Army's armour by a third; the incoming Challenger 3 (main battle tank) upgrades would only be available for two thirds of the existing Challenger 2 platforms. This will provide only enough for two fully-serviced tank regiments in the British Army; another historical low at a time when land warfare has returned to Europe, characterised by infantry, artillery, and armour. To be able to fulfil the UK's NATO commitments the Army was stretched too thinly to provide an armoured Brigade in Estonia, much less an armoured Division – the bedrock of British conventional land deterrence. The ability to provide a naval battlegroup, and prepared for an Army Division too, for conflict in the Indo-Pacific must be a planning consideration for how the UK can best protect its's interests in Asia, and support allies and partners.

The flawed logic of cutting infantry and armour inherently assumed that the nature of warfare would change, alongside the technologies. Recent conflicts in the Caucasus, Ukraine, and at the Indian/Chinese border, however, have all demonstrated that in fact infantry and armour are still required to take and hold ground – the absolute prerequisite for any conflict resolution process to begin. The previous dangerous and myopic vision of placing a premium on artificial intelligence, cyber and drone warfare, at the expense of infantry and armour, subsequently transcended the echelons of the MoD for Downing Street. Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson now famously quipped in November 2021 under robust questioning by the Chair of the Defence Select Committee Tobias Ellwood MP that, 'the days of pitched tank battles in Europe were over'⁹³ – despite Russian armour and infantry amassing on the Ukrainian border at the time in the prelude to the land invasion only three months later.

Prior to this refined British strategy of containing authoritarianism, the government under Liz Truss committed to not only launching a new 'review of the review', but to also in effect almost a doubling of the defence budget. Liz Truss announced that she would defence spending from its current level of approximately 2.1 – 2.2% of GDP, to 2.5% by 2026, and to 3% by 2030, in order to specifically address the military threats posed by Russia and China.⁹⁴ On top of the disastrous hollowing out of the Armed Forces under the DCP whilst attempting to satisfy the increasing demands placed upon them by the IR, increasing defence spending would seem a highly prudent course of action given the threats posed by Russia and China.

Whilst this would mean a current raise from approximately 48 billion GBP, to just under 100 billion GBP by 2029-30, the 52 billion GBP increase reflects a real-terms annual increase of about 23 billion GBP, with (as of October 2022) record high inflation rates and lower than previously forecasted future economic growth, accounting for the difference. The Defence Secretary Ben Wallace stated in September 2022 that it was 'highly likely' that the size of

⁹³ [WATCH: Boris Johnson claimed the days of big tank battles in Europe were over - New Statesman](#)

⁹⁴ [Liz Truss eyes defence review to combat threat from Russia and China and warns of 'decisive moment' | Daily Mail Online](#)

the Armed Forces would grow,⁹⁵ but would not commit to more specific details, nor what the department would do with the increased funding. Wallace made it a point to specify that not raising defence spending – as promised under both Liz Truss and indeed the new government of Rishi Sunak – would in-affect constitute a resigning matter, with his minister James Heapey acknowledging a similar ultimatum, though MoD sources claimed that this may not be true.⁹⁶

The Chancellor Jeremy Hunt is undertaking a budget assessment of the UK's spending, and is widely anticipated to announce departmental-wide cuts to spending in a new budget, to be announced 17 November 2022.⁹⁷ It is highly anticipated that the Chancellor will not spare defence from these cuts,⁹⁸ though they may prove less severe than many other departments, given both the recent political pledges made and in light of war in Europe. Indeed, that the DCP laid out the largest ever cuts to the British Army, to both personnel and armour, yet overall was demanding more from the military, to only 18 months later the same defence leadership claiming that the Army would likely grow, summarises the lack of long-term strategic planning at the heart of Whitehall. This lack of long-term strategic planning process was further encapsulated by an unnamed MoD civil-servant who claimed in October 2022 that 'the key is the here and now, not eight years time'.⁹⁹ This is one of the crippling inabilities at the heart of UK defence which significantly inhibits long-term capability; indecision between cuts one year and reversing those cuts the next.

Current defence spending

In the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO heads of defence committed to ending a trend of downward spending for defence, setting a benchmark of 2% GDP for all member states at the NATO Summit in Wales, 2014.¹⁰⁰

In 2020/21, defence spending amounted to 42.4 billion GBP in cash terms. This represented a real terms increase of 1.7 billion GBP from 2019/20.¹⁰¹ Boris Johnson had announced in November 2020 that the defence budget would increase by 16.5 billion GBP over four years, above the Conservative manifesto commitment to increase spending in this area by 0.5% above inflation.¹⁰² As a result, the annual defence budget will be £6.2 billion higher in cash terms in 2024/25 compared to 2020/21. However, the real value of this spending increase is far smaller, due to rising inflation and lower than predicted growth. When adjusted for inflation, defence spending over this period is expected to increase by £1.5 billion.¹⁰³ Most

⁹⁵ [UK defence spending to double to £100bn by 2030, says minister | Defence policy | The Guardian](#)

⁹⁶ Sheridan. 2022.

⁹⁷ Martin. 2022.

⁹⁸ Davies. 2022.

⁹⁹ Sheridan. 2022.

¹⁰⁰ [Defence spending pledges by NATO members since Russia invaded Ukraine \(parliament.uk\)](#)

¹⁰¹ [Kirk-Wade. 2022.](#)

¹⁰² [PM to announce largest military investment in 30 years - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰³ [CBP-8175.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

of this additional funding however has already been allocated to capital budgets, meaning that the MoD's day-to-day budget is actually set to decline in real terms over this period.

What's particularly concerning when examining the MoD's own published figures, is that the real-terms change from 2023 onwards will be down on previous years, in both cash terms and as a per centage spend. The MoD's Defence Departmental Resources publication contains details of UK defence expenditure. The headline figure for defence spending is the Total Departmental Expenditure Limit (TDEL), calculated as 'the sum of the resource and capital expenditure, minus depreciation and impairments and fixed assets written on/off'.¹⁰⁴ Table 2.1 below extracts the TEDL's figures for the upcoming years, highlighting how in fact in 2023/24 there will be one billion GBP less available for defence spending, increasing to 1.3 billion GBP less by 2024/25, at current 2021/22 prices.

Table 2.1: MoD's TDEL planned figures for upcoming spending levels¹⁰⁵

	Amount (£bn)		Real terms change on previous years	
	Cash	2021/22 prices	£bn	%
Planned				
2021/22	46.0	46.0	+2.7	+6.2
2022/23	47.9	46.0	0	+0.1
2023/24	48.0	45.0	-1.0	-2.1
2024/25	48.6	44.8	-0.3	-0.6

Furthermore, NATO's own calculations show that the UK is set to spend increasingly less of GDP on defence, due to inflation and slower than predicted economic growth:

2020: 2.30%

2021: 2.26%

2022: 2.12% est.¹⁰⁶

It's important to note however that NATO figures include how much a member state spends on defence for other member states, and so these figures for the UK include the 2.3 billion GBP spent on Ukraine military aid, the majority of which came from the Treasury and not from the MoD's budget.

¹⁰⁴ [MOD Departmental resources: 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/91441/2021-22-Defence-Departmental-Resources.pdf)

¹⁰⁵ [CBP-8175.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/publications/2021/1/cbp-8175) p.5.

¹⁰⁶ [220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf \(nato.int\)](https://www.nato.int/docu/2022/220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf)

It's also important to note that defence spending levels are due to continue this downward trajectory as a percentage of GDP for the next two years, bringing spending levels down so low that the UK risks not meeting its NATO obligation of 2%:

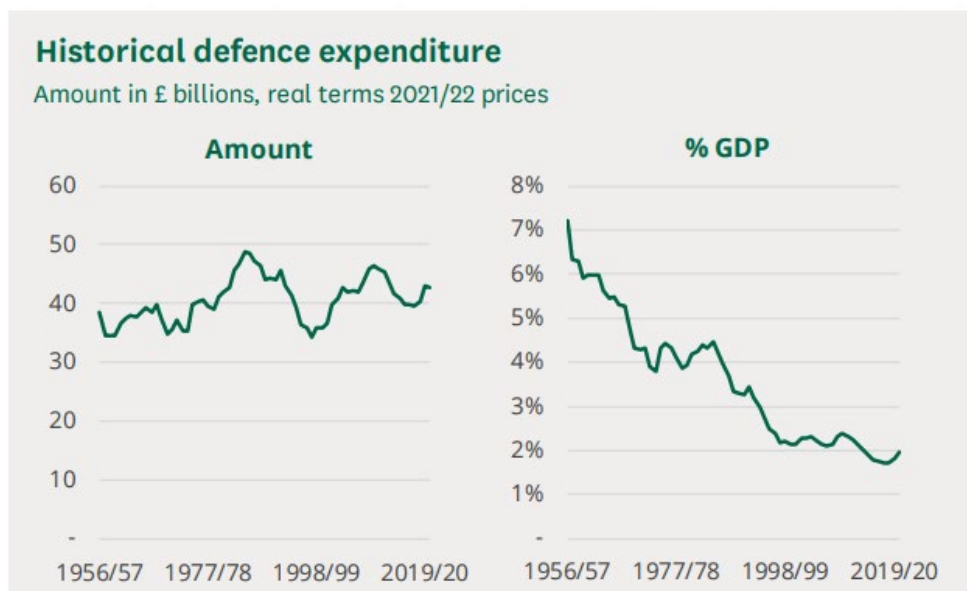
2023: 2.03% est.

2024: 2.00% est.¹⁰⁷

Downward historical trend

Historically the downward trend is deeply concerning. Despite year-on-year economic growth and increased prosperity in GDP terms, defence spending has been reduced from around 7 per cent of GDP in the 1950s, to 5% in 1980, to around 2% in 2024.

Figure 2.1: Historical UK defence spending¹⁰⁸



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As Figure 2.1 shows, the consistent reductions in defence spending as a per cent of GDP will soon result in the UK not spending above 2% GDP on defence, thereby significantly reducing UK influence with allies such as the US, and reduce British standing in NATO and European security. This comes at a time whereby many UK politicians are defining the current global era as one characterised as deeply unpredictable, and 'more dangerous than the Cold War'.

¹⁰⁷ [Tobias Ellwood MP on Twitter: "Our defence spend must match security threats. But NATO's calculations show UK % GDP spend falling: 2020: 2.30% 2021: 2.26% 2022: 2.12% est. 2023: 2.03% est. 2024: 2.00% est. Major OPs \(incl Ukraine\) are met by HMT. Costs should NOT be conflated to suggest we're spending more. https://t.co/8hz4bmceeP" / Twitter](#)

¹⁰⁸ [CBP-8175.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#) p.7.

Financing the 3% pledge

In addition to the 16.5 billion GDP increase announced by Boris Johnson in 2020, and the 0.5% annual increase on top of inflation pledge made in the Conservative manifesto the year before, the former Prime Minister announced in June 2022 at the NATO Madrid Summit a further, more substantial pledge, to 2.5% GDP, by 2030.¹⁰⁹ Whilst a significant percentage raise, 2.2 – 2.5% would represent approximately 5.8 billion GDP more per year (at 2022 prices) by 2030, and would have seemed a reasonable fiscal policy. In cash terms this added amount would have been able to go some way in balancing the MoD's books, long in the red and creating ever-increasing black holes in spending. The National Audit Office's (NAO) 2021 report accused the MoD of overambitious spending which outstrips its resources, as it revealed that the black hole in the Armed Forces equipment budget to 2030 was as high as 17.4 billion GBP.¹¹⁰ In addition to being able to begin plugging the department's overspend, the added 5.8 billion GDP would have allowed for a modest plug in capability gaps. Specifically, reversing the cuts to troops numbers, in addition to going some way to restoring the British Army's significantly depleted main battle tank fleet; the two absolute foremost prerequisites for restoring military credibility after the ruinous DCP.

Any further increases past the 2.5% mark, and with that, significant uplifts in military capabilities (as opposed to merely balancing the books and attempting to reverse recent cuts) would involve a studious budgetary exercise. The Chancellor's November budget statement is likely involving government-wide cuts – with Defence being no exception. However, slashing defence even further would mean breaking the two previous Prime Minister's pledges (Boris Johnson's June 2022 pledge to raise to 2.5% by 2030, and Liz Truss' repeated pledges throughout summer 2022 to raise to 3% by 2030), in addition to breaking a key manifesto pledge (increase annually by at least 0.5% above inflation). Both the department's own figures in addition to NATO estimates have shown that without further stimulus defence spending will fall in 2023 and 2024, by real terms. The MoD will once again be asked to do more, with less. This eventuality will almost certainly lead to the UK breaking its NATO obligation to spend 2% GDP on defence by 2024/25, at a time of heightened insecurity across Europe and increasing NATO European commitments, whilst attempting to maintain a persistent presence in the Indo-Pacific. Something will almost certainly have to give, and it won't be one light-role infantry battalion.

Against an increasingly constrained domestic environment, is the 3 per cent mark now even politically possible, and if so, how is it fiscally achievable? An increase from the current 2.1% level of GDP in real terms, to 3% by 2030, at 2021/22 prices, would involve almost a 60% rise in spending, in cash terms, over the next eight years.¹¹¹ At a time of likely increased government fiscal conservatism, any departmental increased by anything like that amount

¹⁰⁹ [British defence spending to rise to 2.5% of GDP by 2030 \(ukdefencejournal.org.uk\)](https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/british-defence-spending-to-rise-to-2.5%-of-gdp-by-2030/)

¹¹⁰ [Ministry of Defence Departmental Overview 2020-21 \(nao.org.uk\)](https://nao.org.uk/ministry-of-defence-departmental-overview-2020-21/) p.20.

¹¹¹ At current spending levels, with rising inflation and lower than expected growth, 2.1 – 3% represents a 60% rise in spending.

could likely prove highly politically sensitive, and likely unpopular with the electorate at a time of rising public costs and potential social welfare cuts. However, this rise by 60% over eight years would only be economically manageable by rising taxes and/or slashing other departments' spending further – again, both options likely publicly and politically unpopular. One option put forward would require a 5p in the pound increase in the standard and higher rates of income tax by the end of the decade, or an increase in the standard VAT rate from 20% to 25%.¹¹²

Interestingly, the present Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, in an article for *The Telegraph* in March 2022 wrote that the UK urgently needs to increase defence spending, given that land warfare had returned to Europe. Mr Hunt also called for Boris Johnson, the then-Prime Minister, to abandon the planned military cuts from the DCP. He asked: 'Can it be right to reduce our troop levels by 10,000 from the numbers planned in 2015? Or cut our Challenger tanks by a third?' Furthermore, Britain should also increase defence spending to the same level as the US, Mr Hunt proposed, as he declared that 'Peace comes from strength, not luck'.¹¹³

¹¹² [From Famine to Feast? The Implications of 3% for the UK Defence Budget \(rusi.org\)](https://rusi.org/analysis-and-comment/2022/03/01/From-Famine-to-Feast-The-Implications-of-3%for-the-UK-Defence-Budget)

¹¹³ [We've forgotten that peace comes from strength \(telegraph.co.uk\)](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/2022/03/01/weve-forgotten-that-peace-comes-from-strength/)

Capability Assessment

Rather than continually set arbitrary per centage points which catch the electorate's and media's eye, to only consistently have to renege due to temporary convenience, the UK government should seize this opportunity of this new review, and consult a threat analysis of short, middle, and long-term threats to the national interest. The IR has held the test of an incredibly turbulent year geopolitically; the threats which Russia and China pose have proven resolute. Now is the time to seriously finance the mitigations that the UK can put in place, in order to secure our interests, those of our allies, and protect the nation. That doesn't have to mean '2.5 per cent of GDP' for defence, or even 3 per cent. Even a rudimentary capability assessment of the UK's Armed Forces, in conjunction with a thorough threat analysis, can readily identify that the following defence policies are firmly within the national interest:

- 1. Immediately reverse the planned cuts to the British Army personnel numbers announced in the DCP.**

The proposed cut from 82,000 full time trained personnel to 72,500 represented two entire Division's worth. Without detailing further how this would be achieved, it would be the recruitment pipelines which suffer. This would harm recruitment in the future once the desired reduction (to be achieved in only three years' time) was reached. This must be immediately reversed.

Contemporary conflicts including Ukraine have highlighted the old military maxim that 'quantity has a quality of its own', whilst no matter how much an army may have the latest technology incorporated into their capabilities, it still takes infantry and armour to take and hold ground – the decisive engagements which determine a conflict's outcome. The British Army are currently spread far too thinly across multiple global commitments. In the event of a mobilisation or a conflict then there would be far too few troops to meet current commitments. During the height of the Afghanistan campaign, the British Army fielded approximately 10,000 troops, roughly 10% of its force. The back-to-back deployments seen during the campaign was a leading factor in decreased retention. With over a fifth less number of troops available, and likely much closer a quarter less, the Army will not be able to deploy that level of troops again in a future conflict – no matter how much the MoD invests in cyber and AI capabilities to act as 'force multipliers'.

A central tenant to the 2015 SDSR reducing the British Army from 102,000 to 82,000, including five infantry battalions being axed, was that the Army would depend on the ability to have a 30,000 strong reservist force by 2020,¹¹⁴ with plans to lean

¹¹⁴ [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/437272/national-security-strategy.pdf)

heavily on those Reserves to shoulder a third of the burden of long-term operations. However, as capable as the Army Reserves have been during the COVID-19 relief effort, they have not managed to recruit the envisaged numbers to fulfil their role in supporting the British Army in future operations by up to one third of the force. Their planned target for trained personnel by April 2019 was 30,100. As of April 2022 their trained personnel numbered 25,500, a 16 per cent reduction.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, when the DCP was released in March 2021 the full-time trained strength of the British Army was 77,348 – 7 per cent below the 2015 target of 82,000.¹¹⁶ This deficit would likely be replicated with the new figure of 72,500 – a figure which in all likelihood would result in an Army less than 70,000. This would place an inordinate strain to maintain current global commitments, whilst maintaining any credible deterrent to avoid further conflict in Europe, and in Asia.

Recruitment itself is also down. From July 2022/21, there was a 27.4 per cent decrease in people joining the Armed Forces, whilst there was a 20 per cent increase in people leaving the Armed Forces in the same period.¹¹⁷ These figures substantiate the claim that a target of 72,500 full time trained British Army personnel will be just as unlikely as the previous goal of 82,000 was in reality 7 per cent down, and over 5,000 personnel light.

Compounding these personnel issues from a systems perspective is the pressure placed on personnel to work long hours. Recent research conducted by the Labour party has revealed that job satisfaction within the Armed Forces has slumped to 52 per cent, as approximately 4,000 soldiers from the Army revealed that they worked 70 hour weeks, roughly 5 per cent of all personnel. A 14 per cent rise from the year before was also reported in the Royal Navy. Having more commitments than before yet with a smaller force to do it with is undoubtedly placing unnecessary strain on the UK's military.

Ove the next eight years the Army should endeavour to increase recruitment and have a target of 100,000 full time trained soldiers by 2030.

2. Reverse the planned cuts to the British Army's main battle tank fleet.

The DCP sought to cull by one third the number of tanks, to just two tank regiments, leaving little left over for reserves, essential maintenance, and training

¹¹⁵ [Quarterly service personnel statistics 1 July 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics)

¹¹⁶ UK Army to be reduced to 72,500 (parliament.uk)

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

requirements. This would leave the British Army unable to mobilise a war-fighting armoured Division – the cornerstone of the conventional British military deterrent and minimum capability required to contribute to a land-based campaign in Europe since the Second World War. The Challenger Three upgrades must be rolled out to all CH2 frames, and maintain at a minimum three fully fitted tank regiments, in addition to reserve and training stocks, back to pre-DCP levels. The utility of heavy armour has been unquestionably demonstrated by the recent (and ongoing) conflicts in Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, and on the Indian-Chinese border regions.

3. Restructure the newly formed Deep Strike Recce Brigade around the Boxer vehicle platform.

Finally axing the deeply flawed and continually delayed General Dynamic Land Systems' failed Ajax program and replacing with the tested Boxer platform with a 40mm turret, whilst simultaneously investing in the capabilities of the Royal Artillery, will allow for an actually deployable formation whilst meeting the Army's digitalisation expectations.

1 (UK) Armoured Division's Deep Strike Recce Brigade is the doctrinal key to enabling the recent battlefield advances in UAV strike drones, long-range fires, and new digitalised Attack Helicopter and armoured infantry vehicles working together ahead of the main armoured infantry column. By reversing cuts to troop numbers, and in-fact actually bolstering them, investing more into the Royal Artillery and long-range fires capabilities, and axing once and for all the Ajax program in favour of the cheaper (and operationally proven) Boxer, this would eventually create a second Brigade Combat Team (BCT), doubling the Army's reconnaissance and integrated long-range fires capability – two emerging capabilities which will win future wars.

4. Sustainable investment in Scotland's shipping yards across the Clyde.

Once the heart of a globally revered British ship manufacturing base, these ship yards are struggling to meet current operational demands by the Royal Navy, leading to long and costly delays hampering operational capability. The new review comes as the DCP instructed the Royal Navy to cut the number of frigates and destroyers from 19 to 17 by the end of 2022. This came despite the MoD investing almost 8 billion GDP on the two HMS Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers, the large-scale deployments of which require many enabling frigates and destroyers to protect the vulnerable carriers.

With the much-lofted and desired 'persistent engagement' with Indo-Pacific allies, the Royal Navy cannot afford to have its tonnage reduced. Investing in more frigates

and destroyers, the powerhouses of the Royal Navy, with accompanying investment into the dockyards on the Clyde, will strengthen Global Britain's ambitious maritime component, as the government can make good on its pledge of persistent engagement to the Indo-Pacific – both a political and military strategy which will reassure regional allies, and deter revisionist authoritarian powers alike.

This includes keeping the contracts in Britain to manufacture the three new Royal Fleet Auxiliary Fleet Solid Support vessels, likely to be an overseas contract in either India, the Netherlands, or Spain, instead of in the UK with Babcock and BAE Systems, who claim that this particular contract would ensure 6,000 British jobs.¹¹⁸ This contract is a prime example of British manufacturing bases and British jobs losing out on long-term lucrative defence contracts, which would significantly boost Made In Britain, and Scottish shipyards in particular.

¹¹⁸ [Tories set to 'betray' British workers over £1.6bn naval supply ships deal - Mirror Online](#)

Defence policy recommendations

- 1. Immediately reverse cuts to British Army personnel, then gradually increase troop numbers back to 2010 levels, circa 100,000, by 2030.** At 2010 levels of 100,000 troops, the Army was stretched incredibly thin, conducting two campaigns simultaneously in Iraq and Afghanistan until 2009, whilst not having the persistent presence to the Indo-Pacific, NATO eFP BG commitment, or the plethora of overseas training missions, and industrialised war in Europe threatening to bring in a NATO response. The Army must be prepared to conduct warfare in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific. It cannot do so on a force one quarter the strength less than a decade prior.
- 2. Extend Challenger Three upgrades for all remaining Challenger Two fleet.** The current figure for two tank regiments is not enough to field a credible armoured division – long the cornerstone of the conventional land deterrence. CH3 upgrades should be increased to pre-DCP levels, with an additional tank Regiment in order to provide two war-fighting Divisions by 2030; one to operate in Europe, the other in the Indo-Pacific, representing the threats facing the UK and its allies.
- 3. Axe the failing Ajax program, and double-down with Boxer.** That the Ajax program has recently been extended once more to continue the beleaguered trials process, after injuring dozens of troops and costing the UK taxpayer 3.5 billion GBP with no vehicles to show and over five years late, is nothing short of a scandal. Serious faults lie within MoD's broken procurement programs, but the inability for the Army to deploy its spearhead Deep Strike Recce Brigade, due to the failing Ajax, is causing 1 (UK) Div to in-affect be combat ineffective – with no progress or even clear understanding from Defence when these problems may (if at all) be remedied. Allowing Ajax to continue and simply leave for the next government to decide on its future is negligence.
- 4. Invest more into the Royal Artillery's deep fires.** In the land domain artillery is still overwhelmingly significant in achieving battlefield success. At present the Royal Artillery have been underfunded and under-resourced. Gradual troop increases to 2030 should place a premium on reinforcing the Royal Artillery in order to provide a second BCT for the Deep Strike Recce Brigade. This would enable one Brigade to be European focused, whilst another for a deployment to the Indo-Pacific.
- 5. Urgently work with industry partners, including Thales, to renegotiate and extend contracts to replenish British stocks used in Ukraine.** Britain is running dangerously low on anti-tank munitions supplying Ukraine throughout 2022 and likely much

further into 2023.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Ukraine has taught that logistics, stocks, and industrial capacity are key in state-on-state industrialised warfare; these lessons are absolutely paramount and should be reflected upon.

6. Reverse the DCP's decision to cut two of the Royal Navy's remaining 13 Frigates.

HMS Montrose and HMS Monmouth are due to be mothballed as part of the DCP. HMS Montrose was due to be out at sea in the Indo-Pacific until at least 2027, whilst HMS Monmouth is being gifted to Greece as part of a deal to sell the new Type 31 vessels. Both of these submarine-hunting vessels are increasingly important to the UK's maritime security, given the threats posed both by the increased Russian undersea activity in the North Sea and by Russian and Chinese submarine activity across the Arctic – increasingly in the vicinity of NATO territory.¹²⁰ Cutting two vital submarine-hunting Frigates is not within the nation's security interests – and should be reversed.

7. Consider an Act of Parliament to safeguard defence spending. Given the gravitas of authoritarian threats, war in Europe, and an increasingly aggressive China, protecting defence spending against repeated cuts would allow projects to be delivered in a timely manner without risking cuts and delays. Poland recently enacted the Homeland Defence Act, which safeguards 2.5% of GDP for defence, amongst other measure to enhance the Polish military, and protect against future cuts and political changes interfering with military effectiveness.¹²¹ The UK government, under Ben Wallace, could seek to present prospective legislation to Parliament to ensure defence spending remains at a baseline minimum, which should be at least 2.5% GDP. As official figures show, even the NATO mandated 2% baseline is almost certainly going to be missed by 2025.

So what is the magic number?

The following outlines approximate costs towards reversing the ill-thought out decisions in the DCP to cut British Army numbers, armour, and Royal Navy Frigates. In addition, a gradual increase over the next seven years to the size of the British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force, to include additionally required capabilities including increased Frigates, an additional war-fighting Division, and air power, have been included to factor what an overall approximate spend would involve in order for the UK to meet increasing threats head on, through credible deterrence and, if required, war-fighting capability.

¹¹⁹ [Army risks running low on anti-tank weapons as it emerges UK is yet to replace missiles sent to Kyiv | Daily Mail Online](#)

¹²⁰ [Clark and White. 2022.](#)

¹²¹ [More troops and more money for defence – the Council of Ministers adopted a draft Homeland Defence Act - The Chancellery of the Prime Minister - Gov.pl website \(www.gov.pl\)](#)

Raising British Army personnel from the current level of 76,000 trained personnel, back to 100,000 over the course of the next seven years, will require financial increases to the dysfunctional and ineffective recruitment system, in addition to financial incentives for personnel to remain. This year the Army lost more personnel than it recruited. Whilst there are legacy issues including COVID-19 backlogs and delays, the current recruiting model clearly is not working, requiring additional resources; principally personnel to manage applications. At present, many aspiring recruits are ending their application processes due to the time it takes to begin training, often finding alternative employment or education opportunities. It isn't a case of simply just recruiting more people; it's a case of handling the recruiting process more efficiently.

Gradually raising Army personnel to 2010 levels, allocating more resources for recruiting systems, whilst factoring in a 2 per cent above inflation pay rise for serving personnel across the armed forces, would cost approximately 2 billion GBP. This figure can be split across successive MoD budgets between now and 2030, representing approximately a 285 million GBP increase year-on-year. In addition, a new war-fighting Division for the British Army, to include an additional Deep Strike Recce BCT, more artillery, logistics and to encompass the gradual Army personnel uplift, would cost approximately 2 billion GBP. Seven years would be enough time to create this additional Division, and provide the Army a deterrence and capability to field two war-fighting Divisions, to meet the threat of peer-level warfare in Europe and in Asia.

Regarding Britain's fleeting main battle tank numbers, the DCP culled these to field enough for two tank regiments. At present, 14 Challenger Two tanks have been on loan to Poland since July, in order for them to support the Ukrainian Army with comparable Soviet-era legacy stocks.¹²² These are due to be returned to the UK in January 2023. Once received, they along with all remaining CH2 numbers should be pressed forward with the incoming CH3 upgrade, boosting MBT numbers back to pre-DCP levels providing three tank Regiments with CH3 by 2030. The MoD confirmed - post-DCP- that 'warfighting remains the cornerstone of deterrence and bedrock of the British Army'.¹²³ In light of all this, the British Army must seek an additional tank regiment's worth of CH3 platforms, roughly 56 vehicles, at a cost of 302.5 million GBP.¹²⁴ This would represent a doubling of the current planned CH3 upgrades, to represent an overall additional cost of 605 million GBP, to include two additional fully fitted CH3 regiments, in order to maintain two armoured Divisions, by 2030.

Finally, to increase the number of Type 26 Frigates from the seven planned to ten overall, would cost an additional 3.75 billion GBP. The initial three vessels were signed off in 2017 at a cost of 3.7 billion GBP, which combined with export potential and existing supply chains and manufacturing would inevitably reduce the overall costs. The initial three vessels

¹²² [Squadron of British tanks arrive in Poland to deter Russia \(ukdefencejournal.org.uk\)](https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/squadron-of-british-tanks-arrive-in-poland-to-deter-russia/)

¹²³ [Challenger 3 tanks reach next milestone - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/challenger-3-tanks-reach-next-milestone)

¹²⁴ Per unit cost is approximately 5.4 million GBP (2020/21 price) [British Army to possess most lethal tank in Europe - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/british-army-to-possess-most-lethal-tank-in-europe)

additionally provided approximately 3,400 jobs across the UK out to 2035, including 1,700 in Scotland.¹²⁵ Such a relatively modest and long-term investment would safeguard existing jobs whilst providing many more for the next two decades, whilst properly equipping the Royal Navy with additional submarine-hunting capabilities, in order to conduct the multitude of commitments expected of it, at a time of increasing risks from Russian and Chinese submarines.

To leave the UK Armed Forces so under-resourced as to barely able to field a Brigade in Europe, much less a war-fighting armoured Division, in the face of such increasing threats from aggressive and revisionist authoritarian regimes, is nothing short of strategic incoherence. The absolute priority of any government, is to protect the nation and its citizens, and safeguard its national interests and security. At present, under current defence spending levels, the UK government are at significant risk of failing in this most basic regard.

An approximate additional spend of 8.3 billion out to 2030 would be required to fund this relatively modest yet incredibly prudent defence strategy – most just in the endeavour of reversing legacy cuts to the UK's Armed Forces' capabilities. This would represent a minimum standard to increase the Army to 2010 levels, restore tank numbers to a level which they can be utilised in an armoured war-fighting capacity the likes of which the UK must plan for in the near future, and modestly increasing Frigate numbers in accordance with the submarine threats that the UK faces. The 8.3 billion GBP figure, spread over the next seven budgets to 2030, would only represent an increase of 1.2 billion per year, or 2.5 per cent. However, as a slight caveat to this point, the defence budget will likely have to be further supplemented slightly to not only include replenishing British stocks and ammunition used in Ukraine, but to also prepare for a much larger volume of attrition in stocks than recent British conflicts. The war in Ukraine has demonstrably shown how important holding large quantities of reliable and well-serviced stocks and ammunition is to modern peer-level warfare.

¹²⁵ [Royal Navy's Type 26 Frigates - new £3.7 billion contract signed - Defence Equipment & Support \(mod.uk\)](#)

Conclusion

With a geopolitically prudent strategic focus of ‘authoritarian containment’, and with a new operational focus on deployability and lethality against peer and near-peer adversaries, the defences of Global Britain simply must be boosted – certainly not reduced any further which official figures predict – likely to miss the NATO mandated 2% GDP spending by 2025.

Given the rising threat levels and increased commitments placed upon the Armed Forces, maintaining defence spending at present depreciating rates – let alone any potential future cuts – will be nothing short of disastrous for the UK’s national security. This would subsequently severely undermine 2021’s Integrated Review – which has largely stood the test of this year’s turbulent geopolitical events in eastern Europe and the Taiwan Strait.

But this does not have to be at the expense of much higher taxes, or even further cuts to other departments. The relatively modest recommendations laid out in this report firstly involve reversing only (relatively) recently announced cuts, not increases, to personnel, armour, and vessels. Reversing planned cuts is far more politically (and certainly fiscally) feasible, than increases, which should occur gradually over the next eight years.

Indeed, a modest and steady increase to personnel numbers would be prudent, certainly to 2010 levels when the military was less globally deployed than it is now (no Indo-Pacific persistent presence and less overseas training missions), yet was engaged in a Division-minus overseas campaign – the likes of which the UK would struggle to field now, yet must be prepared to fight once more in order to deter and contain authoritarian threats in both Europe and Asia.

A troop increase back to 2010 levels of around 100,000 trained Army personnel would enable both the current global deployments, in addition to the persistent presence envisaged to the Indo-Pacific, whilst maintaining multiple overseas training missions – all military activities previously unseen during higher force levels 20 years ago – whilst maintaining a credible conventional land and sea deterrent in Europe, and a supporting role in Asia too.

This would be the most prudent defence strategy given the UK government’s desire (and indeed, geopolitical necessity) to contain authoritarianism in Europe and Asia, working alongside crucial like-minded allies and partners.

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