Remaking the Case for NATO

Policy Exchange

Collective security and the British national interest

John Bew, Gabriel Elefteriu and Andrew Ehrhardt

Foreword by Michael Fallon and George Robertson

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Executive Summary

- As the international order enters a period of profound change, a strong, healthy and forward-looking NATO is an absolute strategic necessity for Britain. Apathy, historical amnesia and wishful thinking are three enemies of NATO that need to be tackled head on. There are long-term historical trends at work that threaten the Western Alliance and the travails of NATO cannot be laid at the door of President Trump alone.

- The domestic cross-party consensus that has traditionally placed a high premium on NATO as the bedrock of UK national security is beginning to break down. There is a false narrative about NATO that presents it as being less important than, or even contrary to, British involvement in the United Nations. Other false narratives that risk undermining NATO are the notion that it is merely a relic of the Cold War, or the idea that it is the European Union that has kept Europe at peace for more than half a century. There is no viable successor to NATO as the guarantor of European security or the foundation stone of transatlantic unity.

- In response to the current strains within NATO, the absolute bare minimum the government must do is to commit to some sort of graduated defence spending that breaks free from the 2% threshold and fills the "black hole"; while also signalling a willingness, in certain contingencies, to make further leaps towards 3% should the geopolitical situation demand. It is sometimes objected that such targets are symbolic but we are living in an era in which symbolism matters (particularly to the current US President).

- Strengthening NATO is vital for "Global Britain" to be made a reality. It not only ensures collective defence but amplifies the UK's influence abroad. The debate about NATO and national defence needs to be reframed – from a calculus that focuses on mitigating risk, to one in which defence is seen as part of an investment in a broader mosaic of international influence, prosperity and security.

- In providing the collective security that was missing before 1945, the success of NATO has arguably allowed the UK to spend less on defence over subsequent decades. Questioning the most successful and stabilising alliance in the history of international relations because of current political tensions – with no obvious alternative to take its place – is whimsical, self-harming and self-defeating. NATO should not be seen as an unwelcome strain on the public

purse – or an awkward relic of eras past – but instead as a guarantor of prosperity at a record low historical cost.

- As well as a being a strategic necessity, taking a leading role in strengthening NATO also provides a strategic opportunity for Britain, allowing the UK to play a constructive part in future European defence, reinvigorating relations with continental allies in the post-Brexit era, and putting the vital relationship with the United States on a firmer long-term footing.

Foreword

By Rt Hon Sir Michael Fallon MP, former UK Secretary of State for Defence, and Rt Hon the Lord Robertson of Port Ellen KT, former Secretary General of NATO and former UK Secretary of State for Defence

As NATO approaches its seventieth-year birthday, there are many challenges facing what has often been called "the most successful alliance in history". Some of these are military, brought sharply into focus by renewed Russian aggression, the ramifications of the wars in Syria and Yemen, the continued threat from Islamist terrorism, and the growing clout of China in international affairs. Yet NATO also faces challenges to its cohesion brought about by internal political developments within the Alliance, from the criticisms made by President Trump to the continued failure of many European signatories to make good on their promises to do more on defence.

This new Policy Exchange report, Remaking the Case for NATO: Collective Security and the British National Interest is a hugely important piece of work that comes at a vital moment in NATO's long and distinguished history. Crucially, the report illustrates the vital role that NATO has played in the British national interest, ensuring the collective security that has prevented Europe befalling, once more, the catastrophic fate of the first half of the twentieth century. As the authors demonstrate, it was the UK that played the starring role in the formation of the North Atlantic Alliance; and no nation has been more firm and clear in its support for NATO since.

Today, arguably, the role of NATO is arguably more important to Britain than at any time since 1949, as it seeks to preserve its security and prosperity in a rapidly changing world. Alongside its seat on the UN Security Council, a leading role in NATO is part of what the authors call a "mosaic of influence" that allows the UK to amplify its influence, binding it to allies who, despite bumps along the road, share the fundamental values that have preserved freedom in the West.

For NATO to survive beyond its seventieth birthday next year, it is vital that it continues to constitute a credible deterrent. This cannot simply be measured by the numbers of boots on the ground or the quality of military hardware but on the basis of political will and the sense of unity that has kept the alliance together. It is incumbent upon NATO members to respond to the demands to commit more to collective defence. Ultimately, however, adversaries will not simply be deterred by more money, or magic spending targets, if this does not translate into credible outputs.

The authors of this report also remind us of something that is too often forgotten today. The case for NATO has to be constantly re-made

to populations in its member states. Compared to the Cold War, we live in relatively benign times. On many occasions in NATO's past, of course, questions have been raised about the future of the Alliance. The reason why NATO survives is that there is nothing better than it. In Europe, there is no viable successor to NATO, despite years of talk of more EU initiatives on defence. For the United States, as it seeks to pay more attention to the Indo Pacific, what is better in Europe than an alliance with a permanent coalition of friendly states? That is a relationship that was built on the embers of the Second World War, that has survived the Cold War and showed its worth when America came under attack at the time of 9/11, the one and only time in which NATO's Article 5 was invoked.

Our government and our political classes have a responsibility to remind people of NATO's historical purpose and all the advantages it has brought to the West, in general, and the UK, in particular. Complacency, apathy and lazy criticism of the Alliance needs to be tackled head on. By banding together, NATO members have saved incalculable amounts in blood and treasure. Ultimately, as this report describes, NATO should not be seen as an unwelcome strain on the public purse – or an awkward relic of the Cold War era – but instead as the most successful alliance in history, a guarantor of prosperity and security at a record low historical cost.

Policy Overview

NATO remains the bedrock of UK national security

- **As the international order enters a period of profound change, a strong, healthy and forward-looking NATO is an absolute *strategic necessity* for Britain.** If aspirations to "Global Britain" are going to be met, NATO is arguably as important to our security—and therefore prosperity—as it was in the years of its creation after the Second World War. Coinciding with the NATO Summit in Brussels on 12-13 July 2018, and ahead of NATO's seventieth birthday in April 2019, both the NATO Alliance and the UK's role within it require urgent political attention.

- **Apathy, historical amnesia and wishful thinking are three enemies of NATO that need to be tackled head on.** The value of the organisation has long been understood throughout the UK national security establishment – almost as an article of faith. But so entrenched is this conviction that the case for NATO – an understanding of its *foundational principles, historical mission* and *contemporary importance* – is assumed rather than explained.

- **There are long-term historical trends at work and the travails of NATO cannot be laid at the door of President Trump alone.** The advocates of NATO are not used to having the purpose of the organisation questioned. In recent years, they have lost ground against a small but growing and influential band of critics, both inside the UK and beyond. Against the backdrop of renewed Russian aggression, instability in the Middle East and the rise of China, the argument for maintaining the Western Alliance needs to be adapted to the twenty-first century.

Countering false narratives about the role of NATO and its importance to the UK

- **There is a false narrative about NATO that presents it as being less important than, or even contrary to, British involvement in the United Nations.** This is a specious distinction based on a jaundiced reading of history. NATO—and the principle of "collective defence" which it enshrines—has been the bedrock of British grand strategy since the Second World War. From inception, it was also regarded as *complementary* rather than *contradictory* to membership of the United

Nations. NATO was designed to deliver on the things that the UN Charter promised but could not guarantee.

- **Another false narrative that risks undermining NATO is the idea that it is the European Union that has kept Europe at peace for more than half a century.** One can make a very strong case for the importance of the EU in diluting national rivalries and lessening economic friction, but the importance of NATO in allowing the EU to flourish should not be written out of this story. The fact that NATO has guaranteed European security has allowed the EU to focus its efforts on domestic economic and political renewal after decades of instability and conflict. Further European integration at the economic and political level has not changed this fact.

- **For most of NATO's existence, with the exception of a brief period in the 1980s, there has been a broad consensus on the frontbenches of the major British political parties as to the Alliance's vital importance to UK interests and European security.** This can partly be explained by the fact that the creation of NATO was led by a Labour government and fully supported by the Conservative opposition at that time. One could even go so far as to say that the British Labour Party has had the starring role – more than any political party in Europe or North America – in both creating and sustaining NATO. That consensus is beginning to fray, however, with the current Labour leader having expressed his scepticism about the value of the organisation (and the youth wing of the party recently condemning NATO as an imperialist construct).

- **There is no viable successor to NATO as the guarantor of European security or the foundation stone of transatlantic unity.** Likewise, there is no plausible vision of British foreign and defence policy in which NATO is allowed to wither or fragment. It may be that NATO members need to widen their purview, looking beyond Europe and paying more attention to other parts of the world, particularly Asia. But that should not be an argument against NATO; if anything, it should underscore the importance of arriving at a new compact for European security that reinforces NATO for the challenges ahead.

Making the case for NATO today: putting the politics first

- **The vitality of NATO can no longer depend upon the axioms of previous eras.** Polling figures continue to show a consistently high level of support for NATO among the UK population, but there is an inevitable generational shift taking place. These changes in opinion are the result of a fading of collective societal memories of both the Cold War and the Second World War – experiences which made the case for NATO more obvious to older generations.

- **Much concern has been expressed about the statements of President Trump regarding the future of NATO, but there are also other visible strains in the Alliance, from the US to Germany and Turkey.** In addressing these problems, however, the UK must get its own house in order first. That means leading the way in quelling American concerns about the failure of European partners to commit more funds to their own national defence. More precisely, it means the UK setting an example by its own actions – primarily on defence – rather than simply cajoling or *persuading* others to do more.

- **NATO's principal challenge today is *not financial or operational but political.*** Most of the friends of NATO understand the vital importance of defence spending (and meeting, at the very least, the agreed target of 2% of GDP). Likewise, most of the advocates of NATO understand the necessity of modernising the organisation to better equip it for the challenges of the future. But the long-term issue facing NATO is inherently *political* in nature.

Beyond the 2% threshold: input, output and symbolism

- **As the House of Commons Defence Select Committee recently noted, the proportion of GDP spent on defence is "not a perfect index of commitment to NATO" but there is "no other unclassified measure that is as easy to assess, to understand or to use as the basis for making comparisons."** As such, the most effective way to demonstrate British leadership – and to consolidate and strengthen NATO as a whole – is not simply to exhort others to action but to make a significant increase in defence spending itself.[1]

- **When it comes to levels of defence spending, two *magic numbers* dominate this debate in the UK.** The first is the NATO guideline of a minimum of 2% spending of GDP. This was first suggested in Riga in 2006 and agreed in 2014 at the Newport Summit (as a target to be reached by 2024). The second is the ideal 3% target suggested, most recently, by the Defence Select Committee. Between these poles, it is estimated that an increase to something like 2.5% is required to fill the so-called emergency "black hole" facing the Ministry of Defence.

- **To respond adequately to the crisis facing NATO today, the absolute bare minimum the government must do is to commit to some sort of graduated defence spending that breaks free from the 2% threshold and fills the black hole; while also signalling a willingness, in certain contingencies, to make further leaps towards 3% should the geopolitical situation demand.** This will have *three immediate pay-offs* with *long-term advantages*: taking the sting out President Trump's current criticism of NATO; heading off further EU initiatives that run counter to NATO or that cut out the UK; and allowing the UK to demonstrate its long-term commitment to European security (and therefore prosperity) after Brexit.

1 'Indispensable allies: US, NATO and UK Defence relations', House of Commons Defence Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2017-19, published 26 June 2018, p.31.

- **In political terms, NATO is not accelerating fast enough to keep up with a fluid international situation.** More importantly, the UK is currently not well-poised to deal with emerging threats or to seize emerging opportunities. When the 2% target was agreed at Newport in 2014, the world looked markedly different: the Skripal poisoning had not occurred; NATO had the strong support of the US president; the threat from non-state actors (specifically Islamic State) was deemed to be of higher priority; only sparing attention was given to the effects of the rise of China; and there seemed little prospect of the UK leaving the EU.

- **It is sometimes objected that such targets are *symbolic*, but we are living in an era in which symbolism matters (particularly to the current US President).** It also pointed out, justifiably, that it is NATO *output* that really matters (in terms of the type of spending, efficiency and operational utility) rather than *input* (the amount of money going on). But one cannot ignore the uncomfortable political fact that it is input that is currently the matter of contention; and it is a perceived failure to ensure sufficient input that is the single most important threat to NATO today.

- **As it stands, one of the most damaging aspects of the domestic political debate about NATO and defence spending is that it is framed in such narrow terms, with a limited sense of historical perspective.** Some advocates of increased defence spending emphasise the emergence of new threats and the urgency of acting in response (such as from non-state actors, Russia, or in the cyber domain). Others stress the need for a "full spectrum military" or for the UK to remain a "tier one" nation. These tend to create headlines and sometimes bring constructive pressure to bear on the Treasury or Cabinet Office. However, it also encourages the creation of a false dichotomy – which is then presented to the public as a one-time choice between putting funds in the Ministry of Defence or the National Health Service.

- **The debate about NATO and national defence needs to be reframed – from a calculus that focuses on mitigating risk, to one in which defence is seen as part of a broader mosaic of international influence, prosperity and security.** The fundamental point about seeking security in alliances – and maintaining them over the longue durée – is that is far *less* costly to the nation over the course of decades. When those alliances fragment, as the historical record of UK defence spending shows, the costs begin to spiral out of control and threats to prosperity multiply. NATO should not be seen as an unwelcome strain on the public purse – or an awkward legacy of previous eras – but instead as a guarantor of prosperity at a record low historical cost.

Taking the long view: collective security and the British national interest

- **The first step in making the case for NATO – and in correcting the trends towards amnesia, apathy and wishful thinking – must be a better understanding of the origins and subsequent history of the Alliance.** NATO's core purpose has always been the maintenance of peace, rather than the prosecution of a military or ideological agenda. In the Atlantic world, it has provided much needed ballast to the so-called "post-1945 rules-based international order". Without NATO, the world since 1945 would likely have been far more violent and unstable.

- **The creation of NATO was partly a response to the failures of the League of Nations to achieve "collective security", something that had led to the breakdown of international order and the horrors of the Second World War.** Collective security was a concept that was particularly popular with many in the Labour Party who saw it as deriving from the socialist instinct to band together rather than act alone. More precisely, it was seen as a more sustainable alternative to notions such as the so-called "splendid isolation" of the late Victorian era, the hyper-active alliance building that had failed to prevent the First World War, or the 1930s policy of appeasement which permitted radical territorial revisionism of the Versailles settlement.

- **In essence, collective security is based on defence and deterrence, rather than aggression and militarism.** Among the many benefits of this system is that it allows its participant states to spend less on national defence collectively rather than more if they pursued individual, separate defence strategies or bi-lateral alliances alone.

The need for clarity about NATO: a balance between self-criticism and self-harm

- **Unless the case for NATO is made effectively, it will be further damaged by misconception, misunderstanding and deliberate subversion.** There is a danger that debates about the UK's role in NATO become weaponised or confused with other issues facing foreign and defence policy – such as the strength of the US-UK relationship in the period of Donald Trump's presidency, EU-UK relations after Brexit (in which defence will be extremely important), or the independent nuclear deterrent.

- **NATO should not be placed on a pedestal or insulated from criticism; there are justifiable reasons to criticise the organisation and the choices made by NATO members in the past.** Lessons should be learned and there are many things that NATO could do better in the future. Yet the danger is that reasonable criticism gives way to a sustained de-legitimisation campaign, that an anti-NATO

narrative goes unchallenged, and that the vital role that NATO plays in supporting UK national interests is not fully appreciated.

- **At the time of NATO's foundation, Ernest Bevin, Labour's great Foreign Secretary, expressed his wish to create a "spiritual union" binding together the West.** Today it is fashionable to run down the idea of "the West" as a functioning or cohesive force in world politics. Yet the idea that we are drifting ever further apart is based on a straw man version of the past as a golden era of Western unity. Divergences, disagreements and tensions within the Western Alliance are not something unique to the twenty-first century.

- **The history of NATO has often been a fractious one but the story is also, for the most part, one of remarkable success.** Seeking to run down the most successful and stabilising alliance in the history of international relations because of current political tensions – with no obvious alternative to take its place – is whimsical, self-harming and self-defeating.

The heightened importance of NATO in the post-Brexit era

- **As well as a being a strategic necessity, a reinvigorated role in NATO also provides a *strategic opportunity* for Britain**, allowing the UK to play a constructive part in future European defence, reinvigorating relations with continental allies in the post-Brexit era, and putting the vital relationship with the United States on a stronger long-term footing, stabilising it beyond the presidency of Donald Trump.

- **A stronger NATO is also the best answer to British concerns about further EU defence integration after Brexit.** It is no longer in the UK's national interest to engage in "constructive ambiguity" about EU defence integration, as in the past. The EU vision of defence integration – with an EU army as its endpoint, as outlined by Jean-Claude Juncker and others – is unrealisable in the near future and unconducive to British interests in any event. The UK should continue its commitment to the defence of Europe but through the NATO framework, and should discourage any further attempts at creating new defence structures on the continent that duplicate or compete with the Transatlantic Alliance.

- **Recent geopolitical developments in Europe show that NATO has become *more* rather than less important for European defence than it has been for many years.** The actions of Russia under President Putin underscore just how much NATO is still bound together by shared interests and security concerns. The Skripal affair underlines an important truth: that the UK's safest response to acts of aggression, seeking a firm response which offsets rather than encourages the risk of escalation, is achieved by acting in concert with allies.

- Two positions within NATO remain particularly important for the UK: the first is the that of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe which has traditionally been held by a British military figure (a convention that the UK must seek to maintain); the second position is Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, to which Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach has just been appointed, but which is a rotating position. This comes at a vital time at the history of the organisation and is an opportunity for the British to pursue an enhanced leadership role.

Looking back to look forward: taking the long view on NATO

- This report is not about the technical questions facing NATO, debates over the current doctrine, operational capabilities and geopolitical priorities. Its aim is to provide a historical perspective on the UK's role in NATO, with the intention of shining a light on today's events. The NATO Summit of July 2018 is a welcome opportunity to discuss how to make NATO more efficient and effective. However, this paper argues that the *politics* behind NATO (both domestically and internationally) require far more attention if the Alliance is to survive. As Britain has played such a central role in the creation and longevity of NATO – mediating between American and European concerns – it is vital that it steps up the challenge facing the organisation today.

- As Winston Churchill once said, "arms—instrumentalities—are not sufficient; we must add to them the power of ideas." It is significant that this quote was recently used by a senior US official with responsibility for American policy towards NATO. In fact, the same individual (discussed in the last section of this paper), also quoted another former British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, as a warning for today. When it comes to NATO, we cannot afford to "float lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a diplomatic boat-hook to avoid collisions."

- At the July 2018 NATO Summit, it may well be that President Trump singles out Germany or other NATO members who fall considerably short of the 2% defence spending target. The UK will continue to pose as a persuader of European allies to do more on defence. But the fact remains that, as the United States reassess the long-term value of the Alliance, it is Britain that is the bell-weather for how seriously the European members of NATO take their own defence.

- There is also another danger looming – of Brexit being seen as the prelude to a British withdrawal from global responsibilities. The timing here is doubly important given that President Macron is attempting to expand France's international role with a new defence spending programme (even if it falls short of 2% of GDP).

There is already evidence of a narrative gaining ground in the highest echelons of the US national security establishment that France, rather than the UK, might be a more reliable long-term ally. The reported words of US Secretary of Defence James Mattis, writing to his UK counterpart Gavin Williamson, should be taken very seriously: "A global nation like the UK, with interests and commitments around the world, will require a level of defence spending beyond what we would expect from allies with only regional interests. Absent a vibrant military arm, world peace and stability would be at further risk."[2]

2 Ewen MacAskill, "US defence secretary intervenes in UK military budget row", *The Guardian*, 2 July 2019.

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Introduction: A unique and enduring alliance

In just under a year's time, April 2019, NATO will celebrate an important anniversary. It will be seventy years since the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, on 4 April 1949 in Washington DC, which gave birth to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation shortly thereafter. While the British have an honourable tradition of honouring the memory of war, the great achievements of peace and diplomacy are too easily forgotten. The seventieth anniversary of the Treaty of Brussels, signed on 17 March 1948 as the forerunner to NATO, passed with barely a mention earlier this year. The landmark of seventy years of existence in the history of NATO cannot be allowed to go by without celebration of its past, an understanding of the advantages it brings, and serious reflection upon its future.

> NATO has proved remarkably resilient over the course of the last seven decades, through tumultuous and dangerous times in international affairs. It is often called the "most successful Alliance in the history of international relations" and the UK has played a vital role in this story, both in its creation and in securing its longevity.

NATO provided for the security of the West throughout the Cold War but its importance extends beyond that. It has played a vital role in preserving international security, particularly in instances when the United Nations was unable to do so. The idea that the utility of NATO ended with the fall of the Soviet Union is misleading and fails to appreciate how unique the Alliance is. Its continued importance has been demonstrated many times since. NATO led a humanitarian intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and also rallied behind the United States following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The latter was the first and only time in NATO's history that a member state invoked the famous Article 5 of the original treaty, which holds that an attack on one is an attack an all. Article 5 remains the ultimate security guarantee for many NATO members to this day. That said, the focus on Article 5 sometimes obscures other important parts of the NATO treaty (such as Articles 2 and 4) and the spirit (and sense of shared values) that underlies the core idea of collective defence.

During its existence, NATO's fortunes as an organisation have undulated according to the geopolitical climate. Moreover, the greatest challenges to NATO have sometimes come from within its key Alliance members, as

much as from external threats. From its inception, there have been tensions between NATO signatories as to its core purpose, where or whether it should be expanded (in terms of signatories or areas of geographical focus), the extent to which members were bound to collective action, and the levels of burden sharing on military spending among member states.

Such concerns have been as prevalent at the core of the Alliance as much as on its fringes. For instance, the United States is by far the most powerful and important member of NATO, yet it has often raised concerns about the future direction of the organisation. At the same time, tensions have often been evident between other member states, and the utility of NATO has been a subject of live debate in many countries. This has led to embarrassing arguments and damaging ruptures, although NATO has maintained a striking degree of resilience. In 1966, France under President Charles de Gaulle decided to leave NATO's military command structures (if not the Washington Treaty itself), only re-joining under Nicolas Sarkozy in 2009.

NATO has undergone a number of periods of enlargement – the merits of which have been hotly contested. Following the twelve founding members, it grew larger by expanding to include Greece and Turkey in 1952, West Germany in 1955 and Spain (after the post-Franco transition to democracy) in 1982. The greatest, and most controversial, period of expansion occurred after the end of the Cold War. In 1999, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined the organisation and in 2004 they were followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Albania and Croatia joined in April 2009 and Montenegro as recently as 2017. At the time of writing, there are four further countries which have expressed their desire to join and at different stages of accession: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia and Ukraine. In some cases, notably that of Ukraine, potential membership status continues to be a major source of contention between Russia and the West.

Every decade since its foundation, a NATO anniversary has prompted celebrations of the success of the organisation but also deliberations on its future role. As we approach NATO's seventieth birthday in April 2019, there are a number of looming challenges to the future health of the Alliance:

- First, the recent actions of Russia under President Putin have been specifically designed to cause suspicion and division within and between a number of NATO member states.
- Second, the current president of the United States has raised major concerns about the value and worth of NATO to America, going so far at one point as to suggest the organisation was "obsolete".
- Third, the cost of keeping NATO in good military health – primarily through defence spending – is questioned by a growing number of NATO allies, who seem unwilling or unable to match the agreed commitment of spending a minimum of 2% GDP on defence.
- Fourth – and this is something that has significant implications for the role of NATO in British national security -- traditional criticisms of NATO that were once regarded as being on the fringes

of left-wing British politics have been revived and catapulted to the highest levels of Her Majesty's Opposition.

Debates about the functioning, reform or future of NATO will continue apace over the foreseeable future. There is no natural law that the organisation will survive, in its current form, to be a hundred years old. Yet there is a distinction to be made between discussions about the overall purpose and effectiveness of NATO, and the perspectives of different member states within it. To be precise, the advocates of NATO tend to focus on the functioning of the organisation in a way that does not always take full account of the political context in which it operates. Thus, when it comes to suggestions as how to improve or "fix" NATO, they tend to focus on military matters, institutional reform, or strategic doctrines. Such efforts are of course vital, as NATO remains a military alliance. However, NATO was a political alliance in inception and the political coherence of the organisation is what is under most strain today.

For the UK, to an extent that is not sufficiently appreciated, NATO has been the bedrock of national security since the Second World War. No country played a greater role in the creation of the Alliance. While the power of the United States is unmatched by any other member state, the constancy of British support for and influence within NATO is second to none amongst the rest of its members. Today, despite the changed circumstances of international affairs since the time of its creation, NATO remains a strategic necessity for the UK. Alongside membership of the UN Security Council, NATO also provides an opportunity in pursuit of "Global Britain" – a platform and a framework to amplify British influence on the international stage.

The heightened importance of NATO to the UK can be explained by a combination of factors. It includes an increasing Russian assertiveness and other shared challenges to NATO members from instability and conflict in the Middle East, mass migration and terrorism. But it also matters because of where NATO sits in the broader architecture of British national defence and foreign policy. Specifically, NATO continues to guarantee the collective security that the United Nations Charter only promises in theory. The commitment to NATO should never be seen as separate or conflicting with the UK's investment in UN – but as reinforcing it. Finally, as was the case at the time of the formation of NATO, a reinvestment in the security of the European continent (in which the UK should continue to play a leading role) offsets some of the potential loss of influence that might be caused by Brexit.

The purpose of this report is *not* to provide a general assessment of the military readiness of NATO, its strategic doctrine or operational capabilities. Nor is the intention to provide an exhaustive history of the UK's involvement in the organisation or its various missions. Instead, the aim is to focus more specifically on the *political* function of NATO, as a means of illustrating its historical and contemporary value to UK national security and foreign policy.

The report argues that the case for NATO needs to be made more clearly and effectively by government and parliamentarians, that cross-party support needs to be rallied behind it, and that Britain can no longer be complacent about the future of NATO in the face of a number of growing challenges. The role of the UK Defence and Foreign Affairs Select Committee are particularly important here. In this respect, there might be further scope to follow the model of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee which, at a time of uncertainty in US foreign policy, has led the way in mobilising Congress to pass motions in support of NATO Article 5 and ensuring sanctions against Russia.[3] Should NATO be allowed to wither, so the other crucial pillars of British national security and influence – such as our role on the UN Security Council – will be, at best, diminished or, at worst, severely damaged. When it comes to the current fashion in some quarters for running down NATO, a stern warning should be made: "be careful what you wish for".

3 'Congress Steps Up on Foreign Policy', *Wall Street Journal*, 22 June 2017.

Running Down NATO: New critics of the Western Alliance, at home and abroad

There is a fashion for running down NATO today that stretches across the political spectrum and has different manifestations across the Euro-Atlantic world. Given the vital importance of America to the survival of NATO, it is the views of the US President, Donald Trump, that have become the greatest cause for concern ahead of the July 2018 NATO summit.

It was as a candidate in the Republican presidential primaries that Trump went so far as to call NATO "obsolete". In fact, a closer examination of his foreign policy statements since the 1980s suggests a striking degree of continuity in his hostility to NATO and other aspects of America's security and trading alliances.[4]

Since Trump's inauguration as president, some of this rhetoric softened. In an April 2017 joint news conference with Jens Stoltenberg, Trump claimed NATO is "no longer obsolete", partly because his criticisms supposedly prompted the organisation to set up a new division on intelligence sharing.[5] Although he failed to endorse Article 5 on his first visit to Europe as President, he subsequently did express his support for it in a major speech in Poland in July 2017.

Nonetheless, Trump has continued to return to the theme that NATO members are failing to pay a sufficient amount to maintain the Alliance. Just a month after declaring NATO was no longer obsolete, he warned at NATO headquarters that "twenty-three of the twenty-eight member nations are still not paying what they should be paying for their defence" and called on them to pay their fair share.[6] Ahead of the July 2018 NATO summit, he was also reported to have sent strongly worded letters to a number of NATO allies urging them to take immediate action in increasing their spending on defence.

While the tone of these warnings has sent shockwaves throughout NATO, it is misleading to assume that Trump is somehow unique in holding such views. America's desire to lighten the disproportionate burden it carries in support of European defence is not an aberration but a long-established stance. Trump is certainly not the first to raise such concerns. Barack Obama, his predecessor, adverted to what he called a "free-rider" problem within the Western Alliance, pointing to the failure of a number of NATO members to take more responsibility for their own defence. Similar doubts have often reared their head in internal American debates about the United

4 Brendan Simms and Charlie Laderman, Donald Trump: The Making of a World View (London: Endeavour Press, 2017).

5 Jenna Johnson, 'Trump on NATO: 'I said it was obsolete. It's no longer obsolete'', *Washington Post*, 12 April 2017. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/04/12/trump-on-nato-i-said-it-was-obsolete-its-no-longer-obsolete/?utm_term=.f50bd7934169

6 Robin Emmott and Steve Holland, 'Trump directly scolds NATO allies, says they owe 'massive' sums', Reuters, 25 May 2017. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-europe/trump-directly-scolds-nato-allies-says-they-owe-massive-sums-idUSKBN18K34D

States' role in the world since 1945.[7] The sentiment has become more firmly embedded in American grand strategy as it rebalances towards the Asia Pacific. The December 2017 US National Security Strategy was clear on the implications of this thinking: "The NATO Alliance will become stronger when all members assume greater responsibility for and pay their fair share to protect our mutual interests, sovereignty, and values."[8] As the American foreign policy commentator Michael Mandelbaum has written, the current president's criticism of NATO is "not simply a personal eccentricity that will vanish after Trump leaves office."[9]

In focusing too narrowly on the irascibility and unpredictability of President Trump, there is a danger of engaging in an act of wilful displacement. For one, mainstream European attitudes to NATO are also changing in a way that does not necessarily ensure confidence in the long-term future of the organisation. The most obvious sign of this is the fact that only four other NATO members – the UK, Poland, Greece and Estonia – meet agreed targets on spending.

When one begins to examine attitudes to NATO within signatory states, the picture becomes even less harmonious. As the second wealthiest NATO signatory, attitudes to the Alliance with Germany suggest growing ambiguity about its worth. The lack of political will to get anywhere near the 2% target is all the more striking given recent reports about the dire state of the German armed forces. Since Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, Chancellor Angela Merkel has also suggested that the dependability of Germany's key NATO allies has been put into question: "Of course we need to have friendly relations with the US and with the UK, and with other neighbours, including Russia…[but] we have to fight for our own future ourselves".[10] The main opposition party takes an even firmer line in resisting any substantive increase in investment in NATO.[11]

France's ambiguity about the long-term utility of NATO is also worth considering, given that it traditionally commits more to defence and has a growing budget. Under President Macron, France has led efforts to build a common European defence budget and defence doctrine that goes beyond the European Union's so-called Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework agreed last year. In other words, Macron's current intention seems to be to build a *third force* in European security, by assembling a "coalition of the willing" outside both NATO and EU structures.[12] A first step has already been made in this direction, with nine European countries (including Britain) signing up to President Macron's European Intervention Initiative on 25 June.[13] The extent to which these initiatives are compatible with NATO over the long term is unclear.

In the UK, support for NATO has historically been far more widely shared than it has in the US, Germany and France. The traditional cross-party consensus on the value of NATO is, however, beginning to break down. An anti-NATO mood has resurfaced on the left of the political spectrum. In some respects, the existence of critics of NATO is nothing new; it is a legacy of the Cold War and has always been in the DNA of groups such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or, more recently,

7 Mark Landler, 'Obama Criticizes the 'Free Riders' Among America's Allies', New York Times, 10 March 2016. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/world/middleeast/obama-criticizes-the-free-riders-among-americas-allies.html

8 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America', The White House, December 2017, p. 48. Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf

9 Michael Mandelbaum, 'Pay up, Europe: What Trump gets right about NATO', Foreign Affairs, September/October 2017. Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2017-08-15/pay-europe

10 Patrick McGee and George Parker, 'Europe cannot rely on US and faces life without UK, says Merkel', Financial Times, 28 May 2017. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/51ed8b90-43b9-11e7-8519-9f94ee97d996

11 Von Jan Drebes, 'Nato armaments target impossible with SPD', RP Online, 10 August 2017. Available at: http://www.rp-online.de/politik/deutschland/nato-ruestungsziel-mit-spd-unmoeglich-aid-1.7002460

12 Paul Taylor, 'Emmanuel Macron's coalition of the willing', Politico, 2 May 2018. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macrons-eu-defense-army-coalition-of-the-willing-military-cooperation/

13 Daniel Boffey, 'Nine EU states sign off on joint military intervention force', The Guardian, 25 June 2018. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/25/nine-eu-states-to-sign-off-on-joint-military-intervention-force

the Stop the War coalition. What is different is now is that opinions that were previously on the fringes of the political mainstream have become increasingly more influential in the higher echelons of the Labour Party (in a way not seen since the early 1980s).

Throughout his career, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has consistently attacked NATO, despite the Labour Party's central role in its creation. Typical of this attitude was a 2014 article in the *Morning Star* in which he wrote disparagingly about the role of the Attlee government in foreign affairs: "NATO was established to cement a transatlantic anti-communist alliance centred in Western Europe and strongly supported by the British Labour Foreign Secretary Ernie Bevin. For all its magnificent achievements on the domestic front, the Attlee government was pursuing neo-colonial wars in south-east Asia, cracking down on growing independence movements in African colonies and secretly developing its own nuclear weapons."[14]

In recent years, Corbyn has focused instead on the argument that NATO has outlived its purpose due to the end of the Cold War. He has called it a "dangerous Frankenstein" of an organisation and suggested that it is time to "close it down". After the Russian incursion into Ukraine in 2014, he commented that "the hypocrisy of the West remains unbelievable" and laid the blame at the door of NATO: "It operates way beyond its original 1948 area and its attempt to encircle Russia is one of the big threats of our time." During his first leadership campaign in 2015, Corbyn expressed the view that NATO "should have been wound up in 1990 along with the Warsaw Pact".[15]

Some of this hostility to NATO results from an instinctive anti-American stance on international affairs. These are views that have been long held by those in Corbyn's inner circle, such as Seumas Milne. It should be said that Corbyn's public statements on NATO have become somewhat tempered since he ascended to the leadership in 2015. Like Donald Trump, however, he has been deliberately ambiguous in his interpretation of the UK's commitment to Article 5. At the Labour Conference in 2017, for example, he ventured the view that the collective security guarantee in the North Atlantic Treaty "is not necessarily military; it can be diplomatic, it can be economic, it can be a lot of things."[16]

There still remains a significant distance between the position of the Labour leader and a large proportion of Labour's parliamentary party on fundamental questions relating to NATO and the broader Western Alliance. The 2017 Labour Manifesto still retained Labour's commitment to NATO, as the agreed position of the party. Nia Griffith, the Shadow Defence Secretary, has continually stressed the importance of NATO to the UK. Even then, however, the extent to which the Labour leader and his inner circle are fully supportive of this stance remains unclear. As recently as May 2018, Robert Griffiths of Communist Party of Great Britain, has said there were "no major differences on immediate issues" between his own position and that of Jeremy Corbyn, including their shared opposition to NATO and nuclear weapons."[17]

Squaring the circle has proved a challenging task. According to the

14 Jeremy Corbyn, 'Welcome to the Nato-fest', *Morning Star*, 28 August 2014. Available at: https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-3235-welcome-to-the-nato-fest-1

15 John Bew, 'Corbyn's sect betray Labour's proud foreign policy traditions', *CapX*, 15 May 2017. Available at: https://capx.co/corbyns-sect-betray-labours-proud-foreign-policy-traditions/

16 Ben Glaze, 'Jeremy Corbyn triggers new NATO row at Labour Conference after refusing to pledge to back an ally', *The Mirror*, 26 September 2017. Available at: https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/jeremy-corbyn-triggers-new-nato-11237998

17 Joshua Chaffin, 'Communist Party of Britain embraces comrade Corbyn', *Financial Times*, 10 May 2018. Available here: https://www.ft.com/content/ee215d4a-4ebf-11e8-a7a9-37318e776bab

Shadow Foreign Secretary, Emily Thornberry, the Labour leader has since "been on a journey" with regards to NATO. "There have been a number of discussions", she said in May 2017, "It is quite clear that the predominance of opinion within the Labour party is that we are committed to NATO."[18] Given the repudiation of the Attlee and Blair legacies, Thornberry has sought to identify with other traditions in the Labour Party, such as Robin Cook's so-called "ethical foreign policy". Yet even this begins to run up against certain internal contradictions. For example, Cook was the foremost advocate of a *NATO-led* intervention in Kosovo in 1999. Corbyn – along with John McDonnell and Seamus Milne – strongly opposed intervention on the grounds that it did not have a UN sanction. This is in keeping with Corbyn's more recent rationale for not supporting any military action against the Assad regime in Syria in which he has consistently invoked the lack of a Security Council resolution. It is worth noting that even Michael Foot, arguably Labour's most radical leader before Jeremy Corbyn, supported NATO's existence and also supported its 1999 intervention in Kosovo.

As in the case of Trump, to dismiss such views as idiosyncratic – or a legacy of previous eras – is to ignore the deeper changes of attitude that have been taking place within the Labour Party. A generational shift can be detected here, seen in the attitudes of younger Labour members. At a National Youth Policy conference in October 2017, Young Labour delegates backed a motion opposing NATO. The motion stated that "Labour should commit to withdrawal from NATO on the basis that it no longer meets our collective security needs, is headed by a man variously viewed as an authoritarian and a fascist [Donald Trump], and that its continual aggression makes people in the UK less safe than they otherwise would."[19]

In the event of Jeremy Corbyn becoming Prime Minister, therefore, the UK's commitment to NATO – let alone Article 5 – would immediately come under question. This would be an unprecedented situation in post-war British politics. The diminishing influence of the Labour parliamentary party might be an important factor here, given the hostility to NATO seen among a younger generation of Labour members. Another factor worth considering is the prospect of a Labour coalition with the Scottish Nationalist Party. The only party with a serious presence in Westminster (more than 10 MPs) which does not mention NATO in its manifesto is the Scottish National Party.[20] This is doubly significant given that SNP were once openly hostile to the Alliance, even though they voted to repeal their anti-NATO policy in 2012.[21]

All of this is to say that NATO's cohesiveness is being tested by a growing number of political cross-winds, at home and abroad. This does not mean that fragmentation is inevitable, or that these are irreversible trends. For one thing, there are no viable alternatives to NATO; there is no serious political appetite, or capability, to build a new European security framework in the near future (either through PESCO or the new Macron initiative) that can be in any way comparable to NATO. Nonetheless, the UK has a vital role to play as the senior NATO member that has – over the last seventy years – been most invested in, and committed to, the Alliance

18 David Hughes, 'Labour will honour commitment to give Donald Trump state visit if they win election', *The Independent*, 14 May 2017. Available at: https://www. independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/jeremy-corbyn-would-not-cancel-trump-state-visit-a7735081.html

19 Lucy Fisher, 'Young Labour calls for NATO withdrawal', *The Times*, 16 October 2017. Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/young-labour-calls-for-nato-withdrawal-cgx8f92dg

20 'Stronger for Scotland', Scottish National Party Manifesto 2017. Available at: https://www.snp.org/manifesto

21 'SNP members vote to ditch the party's anti-NATO policy', BBC News, 19 October 2012. Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-19993694

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UK Public Opinion and NATO: Strong foundations

As a carefully constructed seventy-year old alliance system, NATO is not something likely to excite a large swathe of British public opinion. For many years its benefits have been assumed rather than explained. As the strategic landscape in which NATO was created has changed dramatically, the rationale for the continued existence of the Alliance is not so immediately obvious as it might have been to those who lived through the Cold War. As noted already, the advocates of NATO face a difficult challenge in that they must convince younger, post-Cold War generations about the importance of the organisation. This means disentangling the NATO question from other live and emotive debates such as Britain's future relationships with the EU or US, particularly under Trump, or the maintenance of the independent nuclear deterrent.

The good news is that the case for NATO starts on strong foundations. Polling figures suggest that support for the organisation among the general public has proved to be high, consistent and enduring.

A 2014 Chatham House survey showed that 36% of the UK public consider NATO "vital" for security, while a further 25% consider it "important", entailing a clear majority of 61% in its favour. Only 14% of respondents agreed with the statement that NATO was no longer relevant. Within this dataset, however, some other trends were also notable. First, older respondents were much more likely to say that NATO remains vital (half of those aged over 60, compared with just one-quarter of those aged 18–24). Men are also more likely to see NATO as vital: 44% compared with 28% of women. Almost one-third of female respondents said they did not know what to think about NATO's importance. Among "opinion-formers", almost half (47%) consider NATO to be vital, while 14% – exactly the same proportion as in the public – say that NATO is no longer relevant."[22] A further breakdown of polling figures along party lines suggests that the views of Labour voters (*as distinct from members*) are broadly representative of trends in national opinion. For example, Chatham House found that 60% of Labour voters (set against 61% of all respondents) thought that NATO was "vital" or "important" to the UK's security.[23]

The most extensive study of broader international attitudes to NATO (across member states) remains that published by the Pew Research Center in 2015.[24] Pew has also conducted a more recent (2017) study

22 Thomas Raines, 'Internationalism or Isolationism? The Chatham House-YouGov Survey', Chatham House research paper, January 2015. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150129YouGovRaines.pdf

23 'Chatham House-YouGov Survey - General Public Results, Fieldwork dates: 6-12 August 2014', Prepared by YouGov plc on behalf of Chatham House, 2014. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150129YouGovGP.pdf

24 Katie Simmons and Bruce Stokes and Jacob Poushter, 'NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid', Pew Research Center, 10 June 2015. Available at: http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/nato-publics-blame-russia-for-ukrainian-crisis-but-reluctant-to-provide-military-aid/

that is not so exclusively focused on NATO but nevertheless allows us to see how opinions have changed since 2015.[25] The results also provide an insight into public attitudes should there ever be a reason to act upon Article 5. One of the most striking themes to emerge is that the constancy and robustness of support for NATO among the British public outstripped those of any other European public.

The first study (2015) took responses from over 11,000 people across 10 countries. To the question "If Russia got into a serious military conflict with one of its neighbouring countries that is our NATO ally, do you think our country should or should not use military force to defend that country?" 49% of British respondents said Britain should respond militarily, compared to 37% who said Britain should not. This placed the UK third after the United States and Canada. Two years later, support for military action fell, with 45% in favour and 43% against. The overall view of NATO improved slightly, however; in 2015, 60% of the British public expressed a favourable view of NATO, which rose to 62% in 2017. Notwithstanding the election of Donald Trump as president, faith in the US coming to the aid of NATO allies under threat has not changed – it remains at 60%. On specific policy challenges facing NATO, there is more uncertainty. The 2015 study also showed that the UK supports Ukraine's admittance into NATO (57% in favour, 25% against), but the UK was divided on whether NATO should send arms to the Ukrainian government (42% in favour, 45% opposed).

From these broad findings, some further observations can be made. The feeling among UK opinion-formers (as identified in 2015) is notably pro-NATO, with almost half of respondents going as far as suggesting that NATO is "vital". In the broadest terms, this is in line with broader British public opinion, with a safe majority maintaining a conviction that NATO is important for UK national security. Such sentiments are further augmented by a recognition among the British public that effective support for NATO might even include a willingness to support a fellow member state by going to war – the key foundation stone of NATO's credibility. Additionally, there is also a healthier respect for NATO among British elite and public opinion in Britain than in much of Europe. Against this, however, one can see a number of challenges in making the case for NATO. The greatest of these is the shift in generational perspectives. One can also see that instinctive support for NATO breaks down somewhat when presented with a specific policy problem such as the situation in Ukraine.

As Michael Mandelbaum has written, the "ultimate arbiters of NATO's fate are the voters of its alliance members."[26] Taken together, the polling data suggests that the case for NATO is far from hopeless but that there is little room for complacency. The rest of this report, therefore, will move on to explaining the original purpose of NATO, describing its development over time and outlining the challenges it has faced (from its inception to today). It will end by offering some suggestions as to how the UK can take steps to contribute to the augmentation of the Alliance before in the year preceding the seventieth anniversary of its foundation.

25 Bruce Stokes, 'NATO's Image Improves on Both Sides of Atlantic', Pew Research Center, 23 May 2017. Available at: http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/05/23/natos-image-improves-on-both-sides-of-atlantic/

26 Michael Mandelbaum, 'Pay up, Europe: What Trump gets right about NATO'.

Present at the Creation: Britain and the birth of NATO

Although one of the victors in the Second World War, the United Kingdom was a fragile power in its aftermath. The country had been almost bankrupted by the war and its empire was beginning to fragment. By 1946, the number of Allied forces in Western Europe dropped from over five million to under one million under a massive process of demobilisation. In Eastern and Central Europe, however, the Soviets had not yet demobilised and they retained as many as four million men in the field. Between 1946 and 1947, the wartime cooperation that had existed between the United States, United Kingdom and the Soviet Union began to fracture across various fault lines.

The UK's post-war situation called for new and effective means of securing its national interests through collective defence. It was long believed that Britain's security depended on European stability – in which no one power would be allowed to dominate the others (to ensure a balance of power). Added to this was a more recent conviction – based on the experience of two world wars – that this could only be achieved through a more effective sharing of defensive responsibilities between Western European countries and the United States. Faced with these new challenges, it was the strategic vision of British diplomats which allowed the government to achieve its four primary aims of uniting the countries of Western Europe, enlisting American economic, political and military support, deterring the Soviet Union from further territorial expansionism and maintaining a leading role in European and international affairs.

Some versions of Cold War history hold that the ideological tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was the central driving force behind the breakdown in East-West relations. This factor was to become increasingly important in later years but initially, historical Anglo-Russian tensions were more pronounced in the aftermath of the war. Some observers, including US Secretary of State James Byrnes, felt that the British government was too consumed by historical fears of Russian incursion into British areas of influence, a suspicion which dated back to the "great game" of the nineteenth century. Within Whitehall, however, the view was very different. In response to Soviet desires for an increased presence in the eastern Mediterranean and a foothold in North Africa, the British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin went so far as to accuse the Russians of once again

trying to come "across the neck" of the British Empire. Although Bevin and Prime Minister Clement Attlee had briefly entertained the idea that Britain could be a social democratic "third force" in international affairs, mediating between communist Russia and capitalist America, this concept was soon disabused.[27]

In February 1946, the East-West divisions began to calcify as Stalin declared to crowds gathered in Moscow that the capitalist and communist systems were incompatible. Only a month later, Winston Churchill, during a speech in Fulton, Missouri, spoke of an "Iron Curtain" descending on Europe. Growing British and Soviet tensions over Persia further strained relations, while the Soviet Union established increasing economic and political influence over countries in Eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria.

By the end of the year, the mounting differences between the United States, Soviet Union and Great Britain concerning the future political and economic outlook for Europe led to gridlock during the fifth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers. This diplomatic breakdown, coupled with British intelligence reports outlining Soviet designs for Eastern Europe, led British and French statesmen to conclude that the countries of Western Europe needed to align militarily to counter the threat of a consolidated Soviet Union expanding its westward frontier.

It was against this backdrop that the pillars of the future Alliance were constructed. The first step in this process had come in March 1947 when Britain and France signed the Treaty of Dunkirk, an agreement which promised an Anglo-French military alliance for fifty years. While the treaty was primarily focused on the prevention of renewed German aggression, it soon became the foundation stone of Anglo-French cooperation on other matters affecting the continent. In itself, however, this was deemed insufficient for the defence of Western Europe. Signs of American commitment to European reconstruction were therefore seized upon. The development of the Marshall Plan, put before the US Congress in December 1947, was a particularly welcome development. With this came growing pressing from Washington DC for the British to engage more constructively in European economic and political integration. Crucially, however, the British government now conceived its contribution to Europe as something that could more readily be given in the realm of defence.

The chief proponents of this vision of a defensive alliance – and the protagonists in the process to realise it – were the Labour Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, and a number of key officials working under him in the Foreign Office. In January 1948, Bevin put forward his idea of a 'Western European Union' made up of the United Kingdom, the Benelux countries, France, Portugal, Italy, Greece and the Scandinavian nations. The premise was simple: to ensure the security of democratic nations in Western Europe, the United Kingdom needed to join with other nations to deter a much larger and more ominous force in the Soviet Union. Thus, following the principle of collective security, it would find its strength in numbers. "We in Britain can no longer stand outside Europe and insist that our problems and

27 John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Life of Attlee* (London, 2016), pp. 363-85.

position are quite separate from those of our European neighbours," Bevin argued. "Between all there would be an understanding backed by power, money and resolution and bound together by the common ideals for which the Western Powers have twice in one generation shed their blood."[28]

The policy rested on two pillars. First was a recognition of the instability that would continue to beset Europe if much of the continent remained fearful of invasion after the conclusion of the recent war. Given the blood and treasure spent in liberating Europe from one form of totalitarianism, the looming prospect of a successor to Nazism could not be tolerated. As Bevin described, "The Russians are exerting a constantly increasing pressure which threatens the very fabric of the West." Therefore, in his view, political and "spiritual forces" needed to be mobilised in common defence. There was undoubtedly a desire to avoid any sort of armed conflict, but at the same time, the lessons of the interwar years loomed large. Thus Bevin and officials in the Foreign Office formulated a two-pronged response: "Deterrence and collective security were to be the remedies."

Second was a recognition that British leadership was needed in formulating a common strategy for Western Europe, both as a prelude and precondition to further American (and Canadian) support. "The policy I have outlined will require strong British leadership in order to secure its acceptance in Europe on the one hand and in the Dominions and the Americas on the other," explained Bevin. Material aid would come mainly from the United States, but "the countries of Western Europe which despise the spiritual values of America will look to us for political and moral guidance."

The idea of a broader "Western Union" was conveyed to the Americans via the British Embassy in Washington DC in January 1948. Developing ideas that he had first conveyed following the breakdown of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London at the end of 1947, Bevin outlined a more elaborate plan for a new defensive arrangement, beginning with a "solid core in Western Europe." In a memorandum shared with the Americans, the idea behind NATO was born:

> *"It is not enough to reinforce the physical barriers which still guard our Western civilisation. We must also organise and consolidate the ethical and spiritual forces inherent in this Western civilisation of which we are the chief protagonists. This in my view can only be done by creating some form of union in Western Europe, whether of a formal or informal character, backed by the Americas and the Dominions.*
>
> *It is clear that from secure entrenchments behind their line the Russians are exerting a constantly increasing pressure which threatens the whole fabric of the West … essential though it is, progress in the economic field will not in itself suffice to call a halt to the Russian threat. Political and indeed spiritual forces must be mobilised in our defence.*
>
> *I believe therefore that we should seek to form with the backing of the Americas*

and the Dominions a Western democratic system comprising, Scandinavia, the Low Countries, France, Italy, Greece and possibly Portugal. As soon as circumstances permit we should, of course, wish also to include Spain and Germany without whom no Western system can be complete. Almost all the countries I have listed have been nurtured on civil liberties and on the fundamental human rights. Moreover, most Western European countries have such recent experience of Nazi rule that they can apprehend directly what is involved in their loss. All in a greater or lesser degree sense the imminence of the communist peril and are seeking some assurance of salvation. I believe, therefore, that the moment is ripe for a consolidation of Western Europe. This need not take the shape of a formal alliance, though we have an alliance with France and may conclude one with other countries. It does, however, mean close consultation with each of the Western European countries, beginning with economic questions. We in Britain can no longer stand outside Europe and insist that our problems and position are quite separate from those of our European neighbours. Our treaty relations with the various countries might differ, but between all there would be an understanding backed by power, money and resolution and bound together by the common ideals for which the Western Powers have twice in one generation shed their blood.

… If we are to preserve peace and our own safety at the same time, we can only do so by the mobilisation of such a moral and material force as will create confidence and energy on the one side and inspire respect and caution on the other. The alternative is to acquiesce in continued Russian infiltration and helplessly to witness the piecemeal collapse of one Western bastion after another.

The policy I have outlined will require a lead from us. The countries of Western Europe will look to us for political and moral guidance and for assistance in building up a counter attraction to the baleful tenets of communism within their borders and in recreating a healthy society, wherever it has been shaken or shattered by the war.[29]

Two months later, on 17 March 1948, the first plank of this strategy to build a "Western Union" was put on parchment. The Treaty of Brussels was signed which provided for "collective self-defence" in the event of attack on Belgium, Britain, France, the Netherlands or Luxembourg.[30] Within weeks, on 3 April 1948, President Truman signed the Economic Cooperation Act, finally bringing the Marshall Plan to life. Despite these positive developments, however, British officials suffered no illusion that the grouping of Western Europeans nations was somehow capable of deterring the superpower to the East over the long term. Bevin and officials in the Foreign Office knew full well that in order to successfully deter Soviet advances into Western Europe, an American military guarantee was of the utmost importance.

Such a military commitment from the United States, however, was far from certain. The traditional aversion in American foreign policy towards "entangling alliances" with European nations ran deep; and perhaps more

29 'Summary of a Memorandum Representing Mr. Bevin's Views on the Formation of a Western Union', The British Ambassador (Inverchapel) to the Secretary of State (Byrnes), 13 January 1948, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1948, Western Europe, volume II, 840.00/1–1348.

30 'The Brussels Treaty: Treaty of Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Collective Self-Defence', NATO, 17 March 1948. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17072.htm

disconcerting to British officials in the period was the experience after the First World War, when the US Congress rejected any formal American commitments to the League of Nations. Avoiding a similar scenario would determine the fate of the nascent Western Union.

Over the next year, Bevin and his officials at the Foreign Office worked to mediate a range of differences between American and European leaders.[31] The sense of urgency intensified following ominous events such as the Prague coup of February 1948, when Czechoslovakia fell to the Communist Party, and when the Soviet blockade of Berlin began in June 1948. Significantly, Soviet aggression dampened domestic criticism from those on the left of Labour Party – a grouping called "Keep Left" including Richard Crossman, Michael Foot, Tom Driberg and Ian Mikardo – who had held out hope that the United Kingdom could be a "third force" between America and the Soviet Union. In the face of these developments, they recognised the challenge of maintaining this independent course.[32]

As Moscow sought to extend the sphere of Soviet domination westward, a new approach emerged in British Foreign Office planning. It was based on the simple premise that "the free nations must get together" to preserve the post-war peace and prevent them being "picked off one by one." Russian membership of the UN meant that the Charter could not be modified. This, in turn, meant that "collective security will not be practicable. The only alternative – admittedly a second best – is the organisation of Regional arrangements."[33]

In June 1948, there was a crucial development when the US Congress passed the Vandenberg Resolution, which called on the Truman administration to pursue "regional and collective agreements for individual and collective self-defence" provided that they were in accordance with the UN Charter. Those who had signed the Brussels Treaty were informed that the United States was prepared to discuss joint military planning in the event of a Soviet attack on Western Europe. This led to the Washington Exploratory Talks on Security that began the following month.

A number of issues emerged in the course of negotiations, many of which have resurfaced at different points in NATO's history. First, the Americans urged better coordination and standardisation between Europe's different militaries. Second, there were disagreements over potential expansion. While the Americans were keen to include Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Ireland and Portugal, British officials warned that there was a danger of "taking on too much and spreading the butter too thin." Third— and most fundamentally—was the question over the level of obligation expected of one signatory when another was attacked. The United States, for one, insisted that any American response could not be a simple matter of treaty obligation but instead would require the approval of the President and eventually Congress.[34]

British-led diplomatic efforts were long and arduous but culminated in success. The re-election of Truman as President in November 1948 improved the prospects for a breakthrough as talks resumed following a two-month hiatus. When agreement was finally reached, membership was

31 Alexander Rendel, 'Secret Explorations: The Anglo-American initiatives', in Andre de Staercke et al., NATO's *Anxious Birth: The Prophetic Vision of the 1940s* (London, 1985), pp. 11-18

32 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power*, pp. 238-9

33 Secretary of State's Review of Foreign Affairs to the Dominion Prime Minister's, 8 October 1948, in *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, pp. 18-37

34 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, p. 12

offered to Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden – with only Ireland and Sweden declining. Spain, under General Franco, was to be kept outside; while after much debate, Italy, Greece and Turkey were not offered membership initially, although they were to join four years later.

On 4 April 1949, the founding 12 nations – Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the UK and the US—joined together in Washington, DC, to sign the North Atlantic Treaty. The Atlantic area was defined as stretching from the North Pole to the Tropic of Cancer. As for Britain's role within the organisation, Ernest Bevin and Clement Attlee were particularly keen that she should be seen as an equal partner with the United States in the NATO decision-making process and the first among equals within Europe.

In Britain, the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty won Ernest Bevin plaudits from across the political aisle. While the Foreign Secretary would later come to regard it as his greatest achievement, the role of British officials in the creation of NATO had been indispensable, a fact that was not lost on American officials involved in the planning stages.

> Writing to the senior British diplomat Gladwyn Jebb in 1954, General Alfred Gruenther, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe from 1953 to 1956, said, "It was from you that I received the first idea about NATO. That was when you came to the Pentagon six years ago to explain the Brussels Pact."[35]

Of the 14 articles in the Treaty, Article 5—declaring that an attack on one was an attack on all—was the centrepiece. It laid the foundation for a defensive organisation based on collective security, and one that would prove to be the main bulwark against Soviet incursion into Europe for the rest of the century. The first NATO strategic concept was agreed in October and was based primarily on the deterrence through the use of an atomic weapon. This, de facto, made the US the most important decision-making nation within the Alliance, leading to some tensions with the French in particular.[36] In its earliest years, the sense of urgency among NATO members was increased by the surprise Chinese and Soviet attack on Korea in 1950. In 1952, the existing signatories were joined by Greece and Turkey. In 1955, they were joined by the Federal Republic of Germany, giving the fullest form to Ernest Bevin's original vision of a "spiritual union" of the West.

From its formation, moreover, the UK also set out to play a leading role in the defensive organisation itself. General the Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay was appointed NATO's first Secretary General in 1952, beginning a long tradition of fulsome engagement by the most senior members of the British military. It was Ismay who famously said that NATO's purpose was to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."[37] Even at the time, long before any "pivot to Asia", there was the nagging concern that the US would prioritise its military and diplomatic energies in Asia. As Clement Attlee later reflected, the North Atlantic Treaty

35 Sean Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Netherlands, 2008), p. 240

36 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, p. 15

37 'Nato Leaders: 'Lord Ismay', NATO website, undated. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/us/natohq/declassified_137930.htm

assuaged those concerns, "Europe came first. In the order of priority in world strategy that was Number One."[38]

There was, of course, more to this story than the exercise of some form of narrow realpolitik. The Atlantic Alliance could not have been brought to fruition without the sense of "spiritual union" that Bevin had identified. Of course, that sense of spiritual union has come under great strain many times since. In the last decade alone, the sense of shared values and purpose that has unified the Atlantic world at certain points – after the Second World War, at the height of the Cold War or in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 – has been somewhat dimmed.

And yet the key point about the Treaty of Brussels and the North Atlantic Treaty is that they were designed to transcend—and therefore outlast—vagaries within the Western Alliance. Indeed, one reason why the Labour Government pushed ahead with the treaty was due to the belief that the approach favoured by the opposition leader, Winston Churchill, was too dependent on "summitry" as a means of dealing with international crises. In their view—one that was shared by Churchill himself— this approach was too dependent on the Conservative leader's personal rapport with his counterparts such as Josef Stalin. Something more stable and systematic needed to be put in its place.[39]

Nor should NATO be seen as somehow separate, distinct or even damaging to the concomitant investment that Britain was putting into the United Nations at the same time. In fact, one reason why the Labour Government sought a defensive alliance of this nature was because of the recognition that the United Nations was an imperfect vehicle for the preservation of international security. With the prospect of stalemate between the communist world and the West, there was a fear that the UN might follow the fate of the toothless League of Nations.

> Crucially, the signatories did not see their commitment as separate to the United Nations Charter, but rather as expressing the firmness of their continued commitment to it. As Article One of the North Atlantic Treaty stated: "The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations."

Ultimately, NATO embodied the most fundamental grand strategic principle of the UK in the last hundred years: that of "collective security." Although it was the failure of collective security which had led to the collapse of the international system during the League of Nations era, it was the application of the principle in a more effective system which was to prevent such a breakdown from occurring again after 1945. It was thus the existence of collective security in the form of NATO that enabled

38 Francis Williams, *A Prime Minister Remembers* (London, 1961), p. 175.

39 Bew, *Citizen Clem*, pp. 363-85.

the genuine investment in multilateralism and a rules-based international order that could be pursued under the banner of the United Nations.

The same logic therefore applied to the most controversial but arguably most important article in the treaty, Article 5. The first part of Article 5 established the principle that an attack on one member of the NATO Alliance would be considered an attack on all members. But once again this was specifically tied to the right of individual or collective self-defence as guaranteed by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. As Bevin himself put it in the House of Commons on 12 May 1949, the purpose of NATO in the context of post-Second World War Europe was "to act as custodians of peace and determined opponents of aggression."[40]

40 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, p. 9.

NATO and the Cold War: Some historical reflections

The purpose of retelling the United Kingdom's starring role in the formation of NATO is to counter some of the simplistic narratives that have risen up around this story and continue to jaundice contemporary understanding of the organisation. The most important of these are worth outlining:

- First, the decision to turn to NATO was not a betrayal of the idea that the UK could be a social democratic "third force" in international affairs, mediating between capitalist America and communist Russia. It arose from a recognition that such a position was untenable, largely because of growing evidence of the seriousness of the Soviet threat, and Moscow's willingness—to paraphrase Lenin—to push the bayonet deep where little resistance was met.
- Second, the idea that Britain's close involvement in NATO derived from somehow being ad hoc to an overly aggressive American security agenda does not stand up to scrutiny. On the one hand, tensions between London and Moscow were more pronounced in the immediate stages of the Cold War than they were between Moscow and Washington. On the other hand, "keeping the (sometimes reluctant) Americans in" was one of the greatest diplomatic challenges for the UK.
- Third, the idea – common today among NATO's critics – that NATO somehow detracted from or undermined the United Kingdom's commitment to the United Nations is not only baseless but an inversion of the truth. The two were supposed to be complementary and the commitment to one underscored the investment in the other. Following the experience of the League of Nations, there was an understanding that multilateral institutions were invaluable but not by themselves sufficient to protect and preserve the rules-based international order established in 1945.

The subsequent history of NATO is neither one of unbroken success nor one of seamless harmony. NATO has faced many troubles in its long existence, including disputes over its size and scope, its military strategy, its operational doctrine and diplomatic functions, as well as familiar questions over the costs involved and the spreading of burden between its signatories. This is not the place to tell the story of NATO's institutional

or organisational development during the Cold War but with an eye on current debates about NATO, there are a number of important observations that are worth making about its historical development in the Cold War, especially as it bears on the Transatlantic Alliance today.

At its most effective, NATO was the physical embodiment of an otherwise abstract idea of the West. In May 1954, the American theologian, public intellectual and foreign policy commentator Reinhold Niebuhr wrote an essay on the spiritual purpose of NATO which was to be included in a volume to celebrate the first five years of the organisation. Niebuhr understood the special circumstances which had led to its formation but also reasoned that there was enough of a convergence of worldviews among its key protagonists to ensure its longevity:

> *Historic communities are founded on the one hand by the pressures and exigencies of history; and on the other hand by common culture and common aspirations. If these two factors are necessary for the stability of a community, the Atlantic community is assured stability; for it possesses both factors. The immediate pressure of history was the necessity of a common defense against tyranny … But even the direct common peril will not fashion a community if there is not some common stuff in its culture.*

For Niebuhr, "the spiritual facts correspond to the strategic necessities."[41]

Despite this optimistic prognosis, those more closely involved in the organisation felt that this higher political purpose was not fully understood by those who focused on tactical military challenges. In March 1956, the then Secretary General of NATO, Lord Ismay, warned of potential long-term challenges for the organisation if it was seen too narrowly in military rather than political terms. This view, he argued, would likely drain its legitimacy in the decades to come:

> *A direct method of bringing home to public opinion the importance of the habit of political consultation within NATO may be summed up in the proposition that 'NATO is a political as well as a military alliance.' Not only would the habitual use of this phraseology be preferable to the current tendency to refer to NATO as a purely military alliance, but it would also be more accurate. To refer to NATO as a political alliance in no sense denies, depreciates or deprecates the fact that the Alliance is also military.*[42]

In the same period, NATO ran into a series of other difficulties arising from the external threat from the Soviet Union as well as from matters of internal cohesion. The ruthless suppression of the Hungarian uprising at the end of 1956 illustrated the lengths to which Moscow was prepared to go to preserve its sphere of influence. Almost simultaneously, the decision of Britain and France to partake in the invasion of Egypt—in response to Colonel Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal— led to a rupture in the relationship with the United States. Specifically, the Americans believed that the action was in violation of the conventions of the United Nations,

41 'The Moral and Spiritual Content of the Atlantic Community', *Reinhold Niebuhr Papers*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Box 16.

42 'The consultation process and Article 4', NATO website, 17 March 2016. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/topics_49187.htm

and their decisive response led Britain and France into a humiliating withdrawal. The lack of prior coordination and consultation between the allies was clearly a threat to cohesion.

In December 1956, a report to the Atlantic Council by the so-called "three wise men"—Halvard Lange from Norway, Lester B. Pearson from Canada and Gaetano Martino from Italy—examined the grounds for improving non-military collaboration within the Alliance. They called for "harmonizing policies in relation to other areas." This included a range of recommendations, from increased scientific collaboration to better coordination of foreign policy in non-NATO parts of the world. In early 1957, a summit of the NATO heads of state in Paris saw some of these measures adopted. Even then, however, the United States began to raise questions about the desirability of an enhanced role for NATO outside the Atlantic area. For one, Washington had separate treaty obligations which stipulated that it could not bind itself rigidly to any commitment to consult formally with NATO members about its policies in other parts of the world.[43]

The potential that competing foreign policy objectives had to undermine NATO – as had been seen over Suez – was to repeat itself over a serious of incidents involving the "external policies" of a number of signatories. These included: France in Algeria; Portugal in Angola; and Belgium, France and the UK in Congo. Major differences also existed over the willingness to recognise the government of communist China—with the US refusing to do so—as well as American involvement in Vietnam a decade later.

Tensions also became evident in the attempt to establish an operational doctrine for the defence of Europe itself. In the 1950s, European NATO members were generally satisfied with the doctrine of "massive retaliation" because it guaranteed the credibility of a US strategic nuclear deterrent against Russia. As counter-intuitive as this might seem, the horrors of the Second World War led to a general preference for a form of security that threatened, if breached, a potential exchange of nuclear weapons. As an American national security memorandum of the era explained, "Given the horrors of World War II, let alone those in prospect in a nuclear holocaust, they were willing to stake everything on preventing World War III from occurring."[44]

The United States, of course, had a different set of priorities. The doctrine of "massive retaliation" would put the onus on Washington, DC, to risk a nuclear exchange with Moscow, should an incursion be made into NATO territory in Western Europe. An American President would then effectively be taking an action that – given Soviet nuclear weapon capability – could risk the annihilation of his own people.

As the Soviets made progress towards near parity in nuclear weapons capability – creating the potential for "mutually assured destruction" – so the Americans began to ask the Europeans to spend more on conventional defence. In this way, NATO could develop a deterrent capability that did not depend entirely on the first use of nuclear weapons. Another factor here was the expansion of the Cold War away from Europe into the Middle East,

43 'The Three Wise Men Report and the origins of the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme', NATO website, 13 December 2016. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/news_139363.htm

44 'The Future of NATO: A Pragmatic View', 1 November 1967, State Department Policy Planning, Vol. 2, 9/67-12/67 (1 of 2) *Lyndon Baines Johnson Papers*, 1963-1969, University of Texas, Austin, National Security File, Agency File, Box 54

Asia, Africa and Latin America and a concomitant change of Soviet strategy. The 1955 NATO Summit in Geneva had identified this shift towards what was called "competitive coexistence" – a political and economic struggle for the support of neutral and uncommitted nations across the world – which would require a more dynamic response.

For these reasons, serious cracks began to appear in NATO's overall cohesion towards the end of the decade. On 17 September 1958, General Charles de Gaulle, who was France's President of the Council (Prime Minister), sent a memorandum to both President Eisenhower and Harold Macmillan, then British Prime Minister, asking for a restructuring and refocusing of NATO. The memorandum proposed the establishment of a tripartite directorate of the Alliance, made up of the US, UK and France. It also called for a more expansive, global role for the organisation. Three-party discussions followed for the next three years but no major reforms were attempted. France grew increasingly irritated at what it viewed as an insufficient involvement in decisions involving the nuclear deterrent. For example, the Commander-in-Chief of NATO forces—a post which was always to be held by an American—was prohibited from sharing with national governments information concerning which NATO bases located on their own territory housed US nuclear weapons. When no progress was made, General de Gaulle withdrew France's Mediterranean fleet from the Integrated Military Command in 1959 and its Atlantic Fleet followed in 1962.[45]

Thus, when he replaced Lord Ismay as Secretary General, Paul-Henri Spaak, the former Prime Minister of Belgium, was faced with a growing crisis of purpose within NATO. In his tenure from 1957 to 1961, he sought to expand the purview of the organisation beyond a narrow military alliance and beyond Europe – initiatives which were met with some resistance. In 1959, a new NATO headquarters opened in Paris, but as NATO entered its tenth year, the strains were undeniable. Among other problems, British officials reported that Spaak was concerned about the "continuing problem of satisfying public opinion that NATO is coping effectively and vigilantly with changes in the world situation." Some of his solutions – such as using NATO to distribute Western economic aid to the under-developed world, were met with increasing opposition.[46]

Throughout this period, the UK consistently sought to mediate between American and European concerns about the future of NATO. In an echo of today's dilemmas, a Future Policy Study commissioned by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in 1960 warned that the most likely cause of American withdrawal from NATO would be a shift in European attitudes, particularly within France and Western Europe. It concluded: "In so far as 'Fortress America' will remain a possibility over the period, it will be so because European, rather than the United States, policies may bring it about, e.g., if they tend towards neutralism or disengagement."[47]

The report went on to warn that a major threat to the sustainability of the

45 Report by Hubert Védrine to the President of the Republic, *The consequences of France's return to NATO's integrated military command, on the future of transatlantic relations, and the outlook for the Europe of defence* (14 November, 2012), pp. 3-4.

46 Report from UK delegation to NATO in Paris, 8 October 1959, in *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, p. 82.

47 Future Policy Study, 1960-1970, 29 February 1960, CAB/129/100.

Alliance was the disparity of defence burdens. Thus, it was vitally important, "that a better parity of effort should be brought about, and by a process of levelling up rather than levelling down." In sum, it was concluded that "The core of our foreign policy is and must remain the Atlantic Alliance. Whatever happens, we must not find ourselves in the position of having to make a final choice between two sides of the Atlantic."[48]

By the early 1960s, some progress was made in overcoming these divisions in the way that the UK had sought to achieve. A new strategic doctrine in 1963 reflected a willingness to respond to American concerns about developing a range of alternative defensive tactics other than retaliation with strategic nuclear weapons. This had a destabilising knock-on effect in other ways, however. Given the ongoing question over whether America would risk nuclear war for the defence of Europe, France began to increase its calls for greater European oversight on the terms and timing of their use.[49] In March 1966, de Gaulle warned American President Lyndon Johnson that he was considering withdrawal, noting that France was "determined to regain on her whole territory the full exercise of her sovereignty."[50]

De Gaulle followed through on this warning in June 1966 in what became the most acrimonious split in NATO's history. Although France remained a North Atlantic Treaty signatory, de Gaulle withdrew the country from NATO's Integrated Military Structure entirely.[51] A memorandum by the US State Department the following year described the convergence of a series of crises, as NATO approached the end of its second decade of existence. The memo pointed out that in April 1969, the treaty would be 20 years old, meaning that any member could withdraw from it at one year's notice. Only France was seriously considering such a move, having already withdrawn from military cooperation; but the anniversary was likely to occasion a broader reassessment of core aims by members. Norway, for one, was considering a plebiscite on its own NATO membership.

More broadly, there was a sense in Europe that the Soviet threat which had led to the creation of NATO had somewhat dissipated. As a State Department assessment from 1967 described, the security of Western Europe had become "more or less [the] exclusive responsibility of the US, and this dependence on the US became the more galling, as anxiety about the Soviet threat lessened." In some respects, NATO could be considered as a victim of its own success:

48 Future Policy Study, 1960-1970, 29 February 1960, CAB/129/100.

49 The Future of NATO: A Pragmatic View, 1 November 1967, *Lyndon Baines Johnson Papers, 1963-1969*

50 Report by Hubert Védrine to the President of the Republic, *The consequences of France's return to NATO's integrated military command, on the future of transatlantic relations, and the outlook for the Europe of defence* (14 November, 2012), pp. 3-4.

51 Jamie Shea, '1967: De Gaulle pulls France out of NATO's integrated military structure', NATO website, 12 December. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_139272.htm

52 The Future of NATO: A Pragmatic View, 1 November 1967, *Lyndon Baines Johnson Papers, 1963-1969*

The spectre of Communist domination over all Europe, a Europe which would thenceforth carry the revolution to other parts of the world, has come to an end, and in ending has deprived the Atlantic vision of much of its original inspiration. Very likely the Soviet ambition to conquer Europe, if it ever really existed, died because of NATO and the resolve which brought NATO into being. The closest approach to war in Europe was a series of ideological confrontations over Berlin. But whether or not NATO deterred a Soviet act on Western Europe, it did provide a sense of security to all Western Europeans which undelay their successful efforts to rebuild their institutions and revitalize their economies.[52]

Talk of potential "détente" led to another dilemma about whether NATO could or should seek a larger role in diplomacy, particularly with the Soviet Union. The initial American reaction to this idea was hostile. Their feeling was that NATO machinery could not provide for the proper 'management' of détente in Europe. This was more likely to be accomplished by "conventional diplomatic intercourse." NATO, the memorandum argued, "can and should concern itself with the security aspects of détente but it cannot and should not be expected to concern itself with formulating the agreed *political* design of a European settlement."

Nor were the Americans keen on the idea of further NATO involvement in the extra-European theatre as "NATO's record of concerting policies outside the NATO area is a history of disappointments and it is highly improbable that this can be changed." There was little point in burdening it with a task it would be expected to fail. Attempts to develop an agreed Alliance position on the Arab-Israel dispute, arms shipments to the Middle East, or the security of European oil supplies, were predictably unsuccessful. Added to this was the growing division over American involvement in Vietnam.

In sum, it was agreed that NATO needed an image uplift. "If NATO remains in the public eye as exclusively an organisation to protect Western Europe against a diminishing Soviet threat, it will appear increasingly anachronistic, a symbol of American obsessive anti-Communism", continued the State Department assessment. That meant "doing in NATO what NATO can do best" and leaving conventional diplomacy to the foreign ministries of its nation states. This was not yet a "council of despair" but the watchword to preserve NATO was to be "prudence."[53]

In August 1968, however, the events of the Prague Spring saw a renewed sense of urgency about NATO's purpose as Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia to stem a popular uprising. But as NATO approached its twentieth anniversary, the United States, embroiled in a costly war in Vietnam, began to become more frustrated about the burden it carried in leading the opposition to Communism worldwide. A definitive shift in American policy surrounding NATO's twentieth anniversary followed the election of Richard Nixon as US President in November 1968. Nixon's National Security Advisor and future Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, believed that Europe must begin to take more responsibility for its own security. This was the basis of what became the Nixon Doctrine, which promised American fidelity to NATO but demanded greater proactivity from European allies in increasing conventional forces.

Much of the next decade of NATO's existence was dominated by contending interpretations of what became known as "flexible response" – the balance between conventional and nuclear forces in NATO's strategic doctrine. Another question which returned was whether or not NATO should play a more expansive role in the diplomatic sphere – seeking to contribute to an easing of tensions between East and West. This seeded the idea of arms control between NATO and the Warsaw Pact which was to develop alongside the emergence of détente in the mid-1970s. The United States remained cautious about NATO assuming too much of a central

53 The Future of NATO: A Pragmatic View, 1 November 1967, *Lyndon Baines Johnson Papers, 1963-1969*

role in East-West diplomacy but Nixon did suggest, as an alternative, that it could instead place greater emphasis on environmental issues, such as population control and pollution.

Once again, the UK sought to mediate between US and European concerns in a way that would ensure NATO remained effective and cohesive. This strategy was described in a joint memorandum of March 1969 by the Labour Defence Secretary Denis Healey and Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart. Above all, there was a recognition of the need to "reaffirm the requirement for a strong Alliance; their solidarity in the face of any threat; the continuing determination of every member to make an appropriate contribution to the mutual effort of defence and deterrence at all levels." It was understood that the existing strategy of massive retaliation needed to change due to the fact that the major nuclear powers had begun to obtain "virtually invulnerable second strike capabilities." A primarily defensive strategy – one that hoped to repel any aggression without further escalation – was seen as an increasingly risky one. It was clear that there could be circumstances in which a nuclear response to aggression would be neither appropriate nor credible. Recent events in Czechoslovakia provided an example of such a scenario. The conclusions of the memorandum outlined the basis for the UK's approach to NATO for the next decade:

- The "basic objective must be to secure a stable and continuing US involvement on this side of the Atlantic … We should take suitable opportunities to point out to the Americans that substantial withdrawals may have consequences, at least under present circumstances, as damaging in the long run to their interests as to ours."
- The UK "must agree with the Americans on a rationale for keeping their forces, both conventional and nuclear, in Europe … We should support them in urging the qualitative improvements [in European conventional defence] which would enable the strategy … to be carried out with greater confidence."
- Above all, "Evidence that Europe is taking its defence seriously is likely to be the most persuasive argument of all with the Americans."[54]

During the next decade of NATO's existence, despite the move towards détente in the early 1970s, confidence in the overall military strength of the Western Alliance versus the Warsaw Pact began to diminish. In short, the Soviet Union was deemed to be outspending NATO on both conventional defence and military modernisation.

As NATO's thirtieth anniversary approached, some of these issues came to a head at the May 1978 Washington Summit, where concerns about the disproportionate increase in Soviet military spending dominated discussion. It was agreed that efforts to reduce tensions between East and West and to discourage the use of force could be successfully pursued in the context of a stable military balance.

54 Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee, "NATO 20th Anniversary Meeting, 10-11 April", reproduced in *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians: History Note No. 18, 2010, pp. 92-107.

For the UK, the first and most important goal was to prevent any sort of rift. As the government declared in a specially-prepared pamphlet celebrating NATO's birthday, seeing NATO unravel would have so many side effects on British grand strategy that the prospect must be resisted at all costs. "British defence policy is based on the North Atlantic Alliance: NATO is the keystone of Britain's own security. Britain's defence efforts are concentrated on NATO, in areas where they can best contribute to the strength of the Alliance and so to its own security."

Reflecting on the last three decades, it was clear that the core NATO mission had changed since its inception. By 1979, the core purpose of NATO remained the same: to "deter aggression and expansionism through military preparedness and political solidarity, and if necessary to resist armed attack against any member nation." This could, so far, be judged a success in that peace had been maintained in the North Atlantic area. The basis of this remained deterrence, but this had evolved into a "flexible response" that moved beyond the initial idea of "massive retaliation." Towards this end, the UK had been an advocate for the development of conventional defence capabilities within the Alliance, in order to reduce the dependence on strategic and tactical nuclear weapons. "The danger in allowing the conventional balance to grow unchecked is that it would lower the nuclear threshold and therefore make the deterrent strategy less credible."

It was still the case that the Soviets spent far more on defence than any other NATO partner – about 11-13% of gross national expenditure, estimated to have increased 4% per year in real terms between 1973 and 1977 – including new submarines and aircraft carriers, tanks and missiles, and heavily armed attack-helicopters and bombers. This did not mean that NATO needed to match the Soviet Union "man for man, system for system"; rather it mean that NATO's collective forces needed to be "adequate to conduct a stalwart conventional defence against any potential aggression." At the 1977 London Summit, NATO agreed an immediate programme for short-term measures in anti-armour defence, war reserve munitions and readiness and a Long-Term Defence Programme for force improvements in priority areas. This was boosted by the fact that a majority of members responded positively to calls for an increase of 3% in defence spending.

The other main function of the Alliance after 1979 was the maintenance of a peaceful order in Europe, underpinned by security guarantees. Following on from the efforts of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in the first half of the decade, renewed prospects of détente opened up new possibilities. It was thus that the Alliance was also increasingly dedicated to the "search for more stable and co-operative relationships throughout Europe, in which the underlying political issues can be resolved."

In other words, NATO had been repurposed to play a more constructive role in the cooling of the Cold War. To be clear, the organisation's role in this effort was not so much through conventional diplomacy but in "practical and verifiable measures of disarmament and arms control." This was an aspect of East-West relations in which NATO had been increasingly involved in recent years, establishing a series of measures that saw

cooperation with the Warsaw Pact: the Four Power Agreement on Berlin; the US-Soviet Strategic Arms Limitation talks (SALT); US, French and British Agreement with the Soviet Union on the Prevention of Accidental Nuclear War; ongoing talks between the US, UK and Soviet Union on a comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction negotiations (MBFR); and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). Each of these measures reflected a "search for détente" even if progress was "slow and uneven."[55]

Rather than seeing defence spending and diplomatic détente as somehow decoupled, the British government was an advocate for a broader strategy of "peace through strength" (or, more precisely, "adequate strength"). "The map of Europe might have looked very different had the Alliance not been created," it was reasoned. "However, it is important for the Western democracies to sustain the effort required to maintain modern and effective armed forces in peacetime." This idea was particularly embedded in the approach of the Labour government of Jim Callaghan, from 1974 to 1979. By 1978, the United Kingdom was spending 4.7% of GDP on defence, a proportion only exceeded by the US.[56]

And yet, once again, unexpected international developments – notably the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 – changed the course of events. Under President Jimmy Carter, the US urged a firm response, withdrew the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty from the Senate (SALT II), introduced sanctions, boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympics and called for a concomitant increase in military spending. This was supported by the British government and the West Germans but opposed by the French who were concerned about the breakdown of détente. The election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 and Ronald Reagan as President in 1980 saw Britain move more firmly into the orbit of the United States. While the UK still sought to mediate between American and European concerns, and Anglo-American tensions were seen over a number of issues, Thatcher was generally supportive of Reagan's harder line in the 1980s. The tight arms control regimen of the 1970s gave way to a surge in US military spending and Reagan's more assertive response to what he called the "evil empire". NATO provided a strong basis of strength and reassurance in Europe as an unexpected opening in relations between the Soviet Union and the United States emerged in the 1980s.

55 *Britain and NATO: Thirty Years of Collective Defence*, 1979, copy in PREM 19/2787, UK National Archives, Kew.

56 *Britain and NATO: Thirty Years of Collective Defence*, 1979

NATO After the Cold War

A combination of heightened American pressure, developments within the Soviet leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev from 1985, and changing dynamics within the Eastern bloc was to alter the shape of the Cold War. As the Prime Minister's foreign policy advisor from 1984 to 1992, Percy Cradock later recalled that NATO provided the ballast for the unexpected improvement in relations between the West and Moscow over the second half of the 1980s. In previous decades, it was not so much the risk of an actual Soviet attack, "though in prudence this could never be discounted" but the danger that, without "vigilance and constancy on our part and that of our allies," Soviet military strength could cast a shadow into the rest of Europe that undermined the resilience and health of Western democracies. By the 1980s, of course, the weaknesses of the Soviet economy and the low quality of life within it were well-known among many Western analysts. But there remained the "balancing fact that this creaking base supported the apparatus of a serious military threat."[57]

With this understanding, the pillars of a new relationship were painstakingly constructed. The signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in Washington in December 1987 was one of the first notable breakthroughs. This was followed by the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. As the Iron Curtain descended, so anti-Communist movements took control in Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The end of the Cold War raised first order questions about the future of NATO in America and Europe as the organisation approached its fortieth anniversary. While the collapse of the Soviet Union represented a victory for the Western Alliance, it was also the case that the dynamism of Gorbachev's foreign policy caught NATO rather off guard. Moscow's willingness to disarm and withdraw from significant portions of its former areas of control led to pressure on NATO to show similar flexibility. The UK—and Margaret Thatcher in particular—was concerned that any hurried downgrading of NATO capabilities or presence in Europe would likely destabilise the continent at a crucial juncture. This led to warnings about engaging in a "competitive striptease" with Moscow before the balance of power on the continent took a tangible shape and before questions such as the unification of Germany had been addressed.[58]

The basic contours of NATO's post-Cold War strategy were put in place over the course of two summits in May and December 1989. The UK, in particular, was concerned about the potential of a drawdown of US force levels in Europe and also urged a greater role for NATO in preserving

57 Percy Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London, 1999), pp. 88-9.

58 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, p. 141.

European democracy and human rights. In 1990, the UK Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd warned that it would be "deeply unhistorical to suppose our peoples will from now on live in such total absolute security and that there is no need for collective defence." Turning back to the original treaty, he argued that NATO was "more than a product of the Cold War," given that it expressed a broader commitment to "freedom, democracy and the rule of law" – none of which, he pointed out, would be guaranteed in the 1990s. [59]

When Ernest Bevin had led the way during the formation of NATO fifty years prior, he had framed it as a "spiritual union" of the West. Through all its ructions in the intervening decades, a sense of a shared Western identity had kept the Alliance together. But how cohesive would that idea of the West be without the Soviet threat to bind it together? In the absence of a unifying cause, would there be a more conventional assertion of national interests?

A particular concern for the UK was that an unravelling of NATO would also undercut the core principle of collective defence, which had been so vital to European security in the decades after the Second World War. With an eye to the first half of the twentieth century, officials urged that the UK "must avoid a return to a situation where Europe's states seek their security in shifting coalitions." Although it had long been hoped for, the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact might prove to be a double-edged sword. It was acknowledged that the Europeans would need to take more responsibility for European defence, a move which might reduce the burden on the Americans. But a radical break from NATO now would risk undoing much of the good work of previous decades: "It will not be easy to maintain Alliance consensus. But adherence to the principles which have sustained the Alliance for 40 years did much to make possible the 1989 Revolution. Their maintenance would do much to ensure that the Revolution's benefits were not lost in future."[60]

These were the views of Michael Alexander, the UK's Permanent Representative on the North Atlantic Council, writing to Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary, in January 1990. In a lengthy memorandum, he pointed to the challenges posed by dismantling the vestiges of Soviet control in much of central and Eastern Europe and potential German unification. "A certain scepticism about the chances of progressing smoothly through the early Nineties will do the Alliance no great damage. By contrast a Panglossian approach could cause a lot of harm."

Of particular interest was Alexander's discussion of European defence cooperation outside NATO and under the auspices of the European community. The Alliance met "an essential requirement: for an integrated, multinational security structure based in and on Western Europe." At the same time, political and economic integration of the European Community implied "the maintenance of a similar degree of mutual cooperation in the defence field." In Alexander's view, "the medium sized European nation state" no longer provided "a credible economic or geo-strategic basis for a balanced defence policy: the costs, speed, range and destructive potential of modern weapons systems enforce a larger perspective." European efforts had to improve—especially as the US would begin to reduce its

59 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, p. 143.

60 Michael Alexander to Douglas Hurd, 'The Revolution of 1989: How Should the Alliance Respond?', 4 January 1990, *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians: History Note No. 18, 2010, pp. 143-150.

commitment—but there was a danger in a "premature linkage between defence and the [European] Community," as this would encourage too rapid an American withdrawal. A renewed effort on European security must be European-led but it should occur "within the [NATO] Alliance both because of the need to avoid duplication and diversion of efforts and because the necessary US commitment will only be forthcoming within the sort of structure (including an American SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander]) which the Alliance provides."

Nor was Alexander convinced by arguments that NATO, given the altered international context, should begin to conceive of itself as more of a political alliance than a military alliance. "The Alliance has, of course, always been an organisation with a political purpose. But it has been NATO's collective military capability, and the integrated military structure underpinning it, which has given that purpose substance and credibility and which has made the Alliance unique." It was "courting disillusion to suppose that one can sustain the Alliance's authority by enhancing its evident importance as a forum for consultation while running down its military function."[61]

It was in this exchange that one gets the clearest exposition of the UK's grand strategic approach to European defence since the end of the Cold War. In summary, as Alexander framed it:

- America would inevitably invest less in European security after the end of the Cold War and Europe must take greater responsibility for its defence.
- On its own, the individual European nation state could only do a limited amount in the field of defence, due to the costs involved.
- The lessons of history confirmed that there was a strong case for collective security that predated and should outlast the Cold War.
- That the fall of the Soviet Union did not imply the end to all security challenges in Europe and that others were likely to emerge on the horizon.
- That even more positive peaceful developments in Europe (such as European economic integration) did not negate the need for security.
- That the political and military role of NATO was inseparable and that it was illogical to presume that one could be emphasised in place of the other.
- That there was no successor organisation to NATO and that keeping the Americans involved in European security meant keeping NATO and preserving the American leadership role in the organisation.[62]

Going forward into the 1990s, then, it was recognised that considerable political effort was necessary in order to ensure a shared consensus within the Alliance. For one, it was hoped that there might be some yield in bringing France more squarely back within the Alliance in the near future. Still, the challenges facing the Alliance – with much talk of

61 Michael Alexander to Douglas Hurd, 'The Revolution of 1989: How Should the Alliance Respond?', 4 January 1990

62 Ibid.

"whither NATO" – were likely to accumulate. In the UK's view, despite the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe was facing its most crucial decade since the 1940s. The opportunities were great but so were the risks. A new vision of Europe as a Continent "whole and free" was unlikely to come about on its own, Alexander warned, and the required effort would "stretch our adaptability and creativity to the limit." Nonetheless, it was felt that NATO "enshrines principles – notably the central importance of binding, multi-national security commitments which are embodied in appropriate military structures – that we must preserve."[63]

In a way that is eerily reminiscent of today, maintaining public support was identified as a key challenge facing NATO in the future:

> *The need has been identified some time ago for capitals to begin re-educating the public about the rationale for the Alliance's existence. The basic arguments – that the Soviet Union is a long-term problem, that the threat may have diminished but the risk of war has not been eliminated, that no dependable alternative to the Alliance and its deterrent strategy is in prospect – are clear enough. But there has been little evidence of a concerted effort to use them. It must be doubted whether in most countries such an effort will occur …*

In the absence of any concerted political campaign in defence of NATO, Alexander mooted, it might occur that "external events" would make the argument by default.[64]

By 1992, Margaret Thatcher's outgoing foreign policy advisor, Percy Cradock, identified political, military and economic strains between the United States and Europe as the foreign policy issue most likely to challenge the next government. Western security was in a state of flux. What would be NATO's function now that large parts of the threat that had bound it together had dissipated? Cradock concluded that "we must preserve NATO as the only real defence in Europe and the crucial defence link with the Americans."[65]

The formal dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 did indeed create a more fluid situation in central, Eastern and Southern Europe than did the uneasy stasis of the Cold War years. While the process of German reunification was given most attention, the challenges of maintaining peace, stability and security on the continent—and especially in the Balkans—were more acute. The greatest single factor here was the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, which manifested itself in a series of interconnected violent conflicts between competing ethnic and national groups across the 1990s.

Another consideration here was the failure of the "international community" – a phrase which became *de rigueur* in the 1990s – to secure a negotiated peace that would stabilise the situation in the former Yugoslavia. Returning to one of the earlier themes of this report, NATO assumed an increasingly important role over the course of the decade—initially as a support to the United Nations and then eventually in place of it, once the UN became deadlocked. In 1991, the UN imposed an arms embargo

63 Michael Alexander to Douglas Hurd, 'The Revolution of 1989: How Should the Alliance Respond?', 4 January 1990

64 Ibid.

65 Percy Cradock, *In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major* (London, 1999), p. 192

and a no-fly zone over Bosnia Herzegovina which was enforced and monitored by NATO. In 1993, the UN named a number of regions in the former Yugoslavia 'UN safe spaces' which, once again, NATO policed through airstrikes. The Srebrenica massacre of July 1995 underscored the inadequacy of the existing safeguarding approach with UN peacekeeping troops seemingly unable to take preventative measures. The following month, following the shelling of a market place in Sarajevo, NATO and the United Nations Protection Force launched a joint operation against Bosnian Serb military installations. This set the basis for the Dayton Peace Accords and the first large-scale peace-keeping operation of NATO under a UN Security Council Resolution.[66]

Still, it seemed the idea of a "spiritual union" of the West was hard to sustain. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, the Australian foreign policy intellectual Owen Harries raised a number of questions about the future of NATO. In his view, the end of the Cold War had diminished the sense of solidarity that had been foisted upon the West by the threat from the Soviet Union. He was responding to the argument of William Pfaff, the American foreign policy writer, that the West should act through NATO – "the true Great Power in Europe today" – to expand into the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Harries objected to this idea, suggesting that:

> *such proposals for what amounts to a new NATO are based on a most questionable premise: that "the West" continues to exist as a political and military entity. Over the last half century or so, most of us have come to think of "the West" as a given, a natural presence and one that is here to stay. It is a way of thinking that is not only wrong in itself, but is virtually certain to lead to mistaken policies. The sooner we discard it the better. The political "West" is not a natural construct but a highly artificial one. It took the presence of a life-threatening, overtly hostile "East" to bring it into existence and to maintain its unity. It is extremely doubtful whether it can now survive the disappearance of that enemy.*

Some of Harries' warnings about the dangers of NATO expansion in this era seem prescient in hindsight. He warned that the proposal lacked a focus on Russian interests as well as a recommendation for the role that the country might play within Eastern Europe. By this token, NATO was "simply to take over responsibility for the stability of a region that has been in Russia's sphere of influence for centuries." Moreover, the idea of an enlarged and expanded role overestimated the extent of convergence of perceived interests within NATO. "Despite claims to the contrary, NATO does not remotely resemble a great power, with well-defined interests over a range of issues and a well-developed will of its own," wrote Harries, "Each major European power has its own interests and concerns … To insist on joint intervention in such a case would only create friction where none previously existed." Thus, he warned, an effort to save NATO by finding a new role for the Alliance might unintentionally lead to the organisation's demise.[67]

With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that NATO's expansion has had unintended consequences. In December 2017, George Washington

66 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, pp. 161-7.

67 Owen Harries, 'The Collapse of 'The West', *Foreign Affairs*, September-October, 1993. Available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/southeastern-europe/1993-09-01/collapse-west

University's National Security Archive released a tranche of diplomatic documents from the early 1990s that demonstrate how this process strained US-Russian relations under Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, leaving legacy issues with which we are dealing today.

These include former CIA Director Robert Gates's criticism of "pressing ahead with expansion of NATO eastward [in the 1990s], when Gorbachev and others were led to believe that wouldn't happen." The documents also shine light on Britain's role in this process, with the Conservative government of John Major also making promises that NATO expansion would not take place. In March 1991, as reported in the diary of the British ambassador to Moscow, Major told Gorbachev, "We are not talking about the strengthening of NATO." On another occasion, when Marshal Dmitri Yazov, then Soviet Defence Minister, asked about the interest expressed by a number of former Soviet states in NATO membership, Major reassured him, "Nothing of the sort will happen."[68]

It is important to note, however, that while some Western leaders provided assurances against expansion, many countries falling within the traditional Soviet sphere of influence encouraged NATO in this process, seeing a closer relationship with the West as an opportunity for increased security and prosperity. The January 1994 "Partnership for Peace" initiative—a programme led by the United States—further opened the door to such expansion. Yet once again, European support for this was crucial. In 1994, a Defence White Paper in France called for greater French re-engagement in NATO on both the Atlantic Council and Military Committee. In May 1995, NATO held an exercise on French soil for the first time since 1965. By December 1995, President Chirac decided to re-establish full integration into the military command.[69]

The return of war in the former Yugoslavia—this time in Kosovo in 1998-9—was to see NATO take an even more proactive role, ultimately engaging in a military intervention without a specific UN Security Council resolution authorising the use of force. After a September 1998 Security Council Resolution which ordered Serbian forces to desist from what was seen as the use of excessive force against civilians in Kosovo, NATO threatened punitive action to enforce it. When a new Serbian offensive was launched in early 1999—a move which broke the terms of previous agreements—the North Atlantic Council condemned the action as a "flagrant violation of international humanitarian law." On 23 March, after failed attempts to secure a ceasefire settlement, NATO authorised an air campaign in Kosovo and Serbia – Operation Allied Force – on the grounds that it was the only way to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe. This led to a rupture with the Russians who argued that the act was in violation of the UN charter. The British Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, was particularly influential in insisting that the air campaign would be followed by a NATO-led humanitarian mission and peace-keeping force on the ground, in order to ensure safe passage for refugees.[70]

68 'NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard', National Security Archive, 12 December 2017. Available at: https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early

69 Report by Hubert Védrine to the President of the Republic, *The consequences of France's return to NATO's integrated military command, on the future of transatlantic relations, and the outlook for the Europe of defence*, 14 November 2012, p. 4

70 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, pp. 161-7

According to Lord Robertson, then Defence Secretary and subsequently NATO Secretary-General, the operation was not only justified on its own terms, but it also gave purpose and focus to the Alliance in the twenty-first century:

> *NATO enters the 21st Century in very good shape. The Alliance took in three new members who are now well established as Allies, and the door is open for further invitations. We have built solid institutions for co-operation with Russia and Ukraine. The Partnership for Peace and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council have provided a framework within which every country in Europe can work together to solve security challenges. We have taken on two major missions in the Balkans, to help bring peace and lasting stability to an area that has, for too long, enjoyed neither. We are addressing the increasing challenges of proliferation. We are improving our military capabilities, to be better able to handle the range of possible operations in the future. And the Alliance remains the principal forum through which Europe and North America demonstrate their common security interests, and uphold their common values. Altogether, a broad record of achievement in building peace and security.* [71]

At the same time, Robertson also acknowledged significant challenges on the horizon. The rupture with Russia over Kosovo was perhaps the most profound of these. "For there to be a true Euro-Atlantic Community, we simply must build a solid relationship between NATO and Russia," he warned. The accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to NATO in 1999 caused further difficulties with Moscow. There was much greater opposition to further plans of expansion involving Romania, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Macedonia and Albania.

Second, foreshadowing another concern that has been revived today, was the danger of either *decoupling* European and Atlantic security as the European project of political and economic integration gathered pace, or *replicating* and therefore undermining NATO functions. As Robertson argued, "It only makes sense that NATO and EU defence planning must be coordinated, to ensure that our forces are structured and equipped to conduct the full range of missions they might be assigned: NATO and EU missions, not "either-or." Our security must remain indivisible. For this was required a "dose of realism" combined with "goodwill."[72]

This followed the position outlined in 1998 by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, in response to the Saint-Malo Declaration of that year which – in response to the Kosovo conflict – had sought to advance the creation of a European security and defence policy, including an autonomous European military force. While welcoming the move, Albright set out basic conditions for such ventures so that they would not undercut NATO. These became known as the "three D's."

- No discrimination against non-EU NATO member states
- No duplication of existing NATO capabilities

71 Lord Robertson, 'NATO in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities', 10 March 2000. Available at: https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2000/s000310a.htm

72 Ibid.

- No decoupling of the US and Canada from the security of Europe.[73]

Beyond that, the perceived success of the Kosovo operations led some to believe that there might be a model for future humanitarian interventions, particularly in instances when the UN was deadlocked. This, of course, would give NATO a renewed purpose for the twenty-first century, but at the same time, it was also likely to provoke controversy and opposition both outside and within the Western Alliance. This provided the backdrop to the NATO summit of April 1999 which took place at the same time as the Kosovo intervention. It was reaffirmed that collective defence would remain the core function of NATO and yet more consideration was given to potential future peace keeping operations—namely "conflict prevention" and "crisis management"—as part of an expanded role for the organisation. Priority was also given to the need to adapt to a changing security environment, with more attention focused on dealing with ethnic conflicts, civil wars and state collapse, as well as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.[74]

As NATO reached its fiftieth anniversary in 1999, Tony Blair went so far as to argue that assuming a leading role in major atrocity prevention could provide an additional mission for NATO beyond collective security. "Colleagues, I am younger than NATO," he stated, "NATO was founded after the last World War in which my father fought for the values of decency and civilisation. And I know that, without NATO, Europe and the world would have been a less secure and peaceful place. My generation owe a lot to the vision and courage of NATO's founders." In addition to this pride in the past, however, Blair argued that the role that NATO had performed in Kosovo could become a precedent for future humanitarian interventions: "We cannot and we will not stand by and allow a policy of genocide to succeed. Reversing the hideous policy of ethnic cleansing is the best anniversary memorial NATO could have …. We must ensure that NATO has the military capabilities and the flexible, modern structures it needs for a new century … [while] upholding of our values of peace, liberty and justice."[75]

Ultimately, the Al Qaeda attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 were to test both the foundational principle of NATO and the new role that some envisaged in the late 1990s in pursuit of, as Blair had put it, "values of peace, liberty and justice." This prompted the one and only occasion in which Article 5 has been invoked in the history of NATO, leading to the Alliance's involvement in the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan. For the rest of the decade, the threats from terrorism and non-state actors loomed ever larger in the priorities of the organisation, overtaking the vexed question of further NATO expansion.

At a major summit in Lisbon in November 2010, NATO adopted a new "Strategic Concept," in response to a report by a working group chaired by now former US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. It was presented as the most important strategic concept since 1949, and it articulated three core tasks for NATO going forward. These included: a continued commitment

73 'Madeleine Albright Press Conference, 8 December 1998', NATO website. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/su/natohq/opinions_26018.htm?selectedLocale=en

74 *Britain in NATO: The First Six Decades*, pp. 166-7.

75 'Madeleine Albright Press Conference, 8 December 1998'

to collective defence under the terms of Article 5; a new focus on crisis management to address the "full spectrum of crises"; and cooperative security through non-NATO partnerships dealing with issues such as arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. At the summit, it was declared that the EU was a "strategic partner for NATO" and acknowledged "the importance of a stronger and capable Europe of Defence."

Today, the most important issue at hand is the re-emergence of Russia as a disruptive and revanchist power on the European continent. The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing Russian-backed insurgency in eastern Ukraine are stark examples of a Russian government which, by flouting longstanding international law as well as a number of the international agreements of the post-Cold War era, seeks to revise the European order. Vladimir Putin has lamented the fall of the Soviet Union as one of the worst geopolitical catastrophes of the twentieth century, while Russian officials have expressed open aversion to the extension of NATO beyond Poland. Given the chance, it is likely that they would move militarily to reclaim the Baltic states along with other Eastern European countries into their traditional sphere of influence.

As Admiral the Right Honourable Lord Alan West of Spithead outlined in a paper for Policy Exchange in March 2018, the picture is a concerning one: "In the last few years, we have seen a growing number of challenges from Moscow to international law and the type of behaviour that is designed to threaten and undermine those within the NATO Alliance. The list is long and forms part of a pattern that cannot be ignored: incursions into Donbas and Crimea, cyber-attacks, election interference, political assassinations inside and outside Russia, incursions into sovereign airspace and territorial waters of other countries (including the UK), and attempts to undermine critical national infrastructure such as undersea cables. The use of chemical weapons on the streets of Britain is an alarming escalation."[76]

The importance of NATO to British national security and international influence over the last seven decades cannot be overstated. The achievement of preventing a return to international anarchy after the Second World War was of immense historical importance. The United Nations provided an important framework for cooperation, but NATO provided the security guarantee that the League of Nations had lacked in the interwar years. That is why, in historical and political terms, the UK is the nation which is most invested in the health and robustness of the NATO Alliance. The prize of collective security was hard won by those who had understood the catastrophe that befell much of the world when it was absent. We forget this lesson at our peril.

76 John Bew, 'In Defence of Collective Security: The Skripal affair and the vital importance of 'collective security' as the foundation of British national defence', Policy Exchange, March 2018. Available at: https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/In-defence-of-collective-security.pdf

Beyond NATO?

There is no realistic successor to NATO today. None of the alternatives to the organisation currently being considered have sufficient political will behind them to make them realisable. Yet that does not mean they should not be taken seriously, fully assessed and firmly rebutted. The UK needs to follow these discussions, inside the United States and Europe, more closely. This is because the alternatives to NATO that are beginning to gain traction – from a swiftly constructed US-Russia détente to an EU army – are particularly problematic for British national interests.

One of the most interesting American attempts to envisage a future beyond NATO comes in the form of a small book, written by Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution in Washington. *Beyond NATO: A Security Architecture for Eastern Europe* advocates a dramatic shift in Western policy. O'Hanlon argues that any discussion of further NATO enlargement should end, and the countries in the "broken-up arc" on NATO's borders – from Finland and Sweden in the north to Serbia and Cyprus in the south – should instead declare "permanent neutrality". The book was reported to be on Boris Johnson's desk in the Foreign Office in January 2018.[77] Others have openly discussed the potential for a détente 2.0,[78] based on a major rapprochement between Washington DC and Moscow, now perhaps on the basis of a major summit between presidents Putin and Trump.

Some sort of refinement or revision of the Atlantic security compact is almost unavoidable over the next decade. The fundamental question for the UK is whether this process will strengthen or weaken NATO. As it stands, America's historic self-interest in the defence and stability of Western Europe is a saving grace for NATO. However much it wants to prioritise the Indo-Pacific theatre, the US is highly unlikely to proceed in a way that dismantles the security architecture that it has created in Europe and which continues to give it significant leverage. It is not immediately obvious that President Trump is convinced of the long-term strategic rationale for NATO.[79] And yet, the extent to which this view is held across the US national security establishment mitigates against the possibility of some sort of revolution in the American approach to US national security. It is true that Trump has shown little hesitation in challenging establishment and conventional thinking about what is in America's national interest. Going so far as to seek to move beyond NATO would set him more firmly against the US military and the Pentagon than on any issue so far.

In this respect, the presence in the Trump administration of figures such as Wess Mitchell, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, is significant. Mitchell is the co-author of a 2016 book, with Jakub

77 Jack Blanchard, 'Politico London Playbook: Donald ducks out--Being reshuffled--Boozing with Bojo', Politico, 12 January 2018. Available at: https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/london-playbook/politico-london-playbook-donald-ducks-out-being-reshuffled-boozing-with-bojo/

78 Jeffrey Tayler, 'The time is ripe for detente, 2.0', *The Atlantic*, 8 August 2016. Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/08/obama-putin-nato-russia-trump/494894/

79 Brendan Simms, and Charlie Laderman, *Donald Trump: The Making of a Worldview* (I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2017)

J. Grygiel, *The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerable Allies, and the Crisis of American Power*, which argues the importance of maintaining a strong, credible network of American alliances on the peripheries of the three "revisionist" regional powers: Russia, China and Iran.[80] Citing this work in a speech at Policy Exchange in 2017, former US National Security Advisor, H.R. McMaster, used it to support the case for "forward positioning of forces" in Europe, deployed in a NATO capacity, on the grounds that "deterrence by denial is what is effective."[81]

This underlying strategic logic, based on a reappraisal of US national interests, should be harnessed to NATO's benefit. Despite the rhetoric that it sometimes resorts to, the Trump administration has provided a huge cash injection for its military response to Russian activities through the Pentagon's European Reassurance Initiative (recently renamed the European Deterrence Initiative, or EDI). In President Trump's first year of office the funding increased by 41% to $4.8 billion, and the second year is seeing a 35% increase taking the total EDI budget to $6.5 billion.[82] New American forces pouring into Eastern Europe include a Combat Aviation Brigade based in Latvia, Poland and Romania, with dozens of helicopters and 2,200 personnel, while the US Army continues to build up a pre-positioned division-set of military equipment across the Alliance's eastern flank. Additionally, Washington is actively considering deploying a new permanent US brigade combat team in Poland.

There is a danger, of course, in NATO's advocates taking too much comfort in this continued evidence of US military leadership in Europe. These American moves are entirely consistent with the strategic calculus and the American interest outlined above; whether NATO itself is indispensable to a longer-term approach is not so certain. One potential scenario that requires more attention is one in which the United States loosens its ties to the North Atlantic Alliance, but retains its regional engagement in Eastern Europe. Indeed, some of the current US military effort on the eastern flank (which constitutes the overwhelming majority of "NATO deterrence" of Russia) has been mediated through close bilateral relationships in partnership with local allies. Existing American "strategic partnerships" with countries like Poland or Romania have the potential to create a parallel framework for bilateral military cooperation that in practice is fully aligned with NATO but technically can function without it.

Could a regional US policy for Eastern Europe emerge in the near future, perhaps diverging from the West-European "caucus" within the Alliance? Judging by President Trump's first visit to Europe in 2017, which began in Warsaw, an unfolding of this alternative NATO future is a possibility over the next decade. It has long been feared that a US estrangement from NATO would mean an American exit from Europe. Yet if a third way is possible through a separate US commitment to Eastern Europe, what would that mean for NATO and for UK policy? As with other alternative scenarios, it is likely that the damage done to the overall cohesiveness of the Western Alliance would hurt NATO – leaving the UK with an uncomfortable dilemma between holding on to the old Alliance system, or attempting to

80 Jakub J. Grygiel, *The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerable Allies, and the Crisis of American Power* (Princeton University Press, 2017)

81 H.R. McMaster, 'Future threats and their implications for U.S. military strategy', Lecture at Policy Exchange, 25 January 2017. Available at: https://policyexchange.org.uk/event/future-threats-and-their-implications-for-u-s-military-strategy/

82 Jen Judson, 'Army's FY19 budget growing by 8 percent to fill readiness gaps, gradually grow force', *Defence News*, 11 February 2018. Available at: https://www.defensenews.com/land/2018/02/12/armys-fy19-budget-growing-by-8-percent-to-fill-readiness-gaps-gradually-grow-force/

follow the American lead by working over the head of France and Germany in Eastern and Southern Europe.

In June 2018, Wess Mitchell made a speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington DC which offered a more detailed exposition of the administration's positon. *The Atlantic* summarised it under the headline "Trump is choosing Eastern Europe" and highlighted the fact that "Mitchell effectively announced a pivot in America's Europe policy away from Western Europe and toward the East … and the South.[83] In his remarks, Mitchell also referred back to President Trump's 2017 Warsaw speech, in which he spoke in defence of the Western Alliance: "there is nothing like this community of nations. The world has never known anything like it. We must have the desire and the courage to preserve it in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it."

On this basis, Mitchell underscored the administration's "crystal clear" commitment to NATO and Article 5 in particular as the "bedrock of Western defense". He referred to the fact that the US had put more real resources into the defence of Europe since January 2017. On the other side of this, however, was the outline of a new contract that the US expected from its European allies as a price for this commitment. America needed its allies to do the following:

- "Fulfil their pledges, made at Wales and reiterated at the Brussels Leaders Meeting, to commit to submit plans for spending 2 percent of GDP on defense and 20 percent of budgets on major equipment by 2024.
- Get NATO more squarely into the counter-terrorism business and increase CT cooperation between NATO and the EU.
- Accept a greater burden for operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Western Balkans and North Africa.
- Keep the European Union's pledge to strengthen military mobility."[84]

In conclusion, Mitchell stated that each part of the Western Alliance needed to honour its responsibilities. "We must accept ours, and Europe must accept its own. The days are over when the West could—in Lord Salisbury's phrase, 'float lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a diplomatic boat-hook to avoid collisions.' We must view the defense of the democratic West not as something that will succeed automatically because of the "end of history" or "arc of history" but as something that requires our conscious, dedicated effort, and the sacrifice of our societies, to ensure."[85]

For European members of the NATO Alliance concerned by the attitude of President Trump, Wess Mitchell's speech should be read carefully. As the fullest and most detailed statement of the administration's position, it confirms that the US is not, for the moment, looking beyond NATO for some sort of new security architecture. But that should not be an excuse for complacency. A number of new dimensions have been inserted into America's attitude to NATO that require a proactive response on behalf of other NATO allies.

83 Thomas Wright, 'Trump is choosing Eastern Europe', *The Atlantic*, 6 June 2018. Available at: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/trump-is-choosing-eastern-europe/562130/

84 A. Wess Mitchell, 'Anchoring the Western Alliance', Speech at the Heritage Foundation, 6 June 2018. Available at: https://ge.usembassy.gov/assistant-secretary-of-the-bureau-of-european-and-eurasian-affairs-a-wess-mitchells-speech-at-the-heritage-foundation-as-prepared-june-6/

85 Ibid.

First and most obvious is the fact that the US is demanding that its interpretation of the spirit of the NATO contract is honoured. Thus, Mitchell evoked the preamble of the original Washington Treaty that "The Parties to the Treaty… are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law." But he also repeated the familiar warning that "Europeans cannot expect Americans to care more about their security than they do." Second, the desire to "anchor" Western security in Europe has been given added urgency by the US's growing concern about a new age of great power competition. The challenges posed by Russia and Iran were highlighted by Mitchell but the rise of China looms larger in the calculus of the administration than any other issue. The overriding goal is not to *abandon* European security, but to put it on a firmer and (from Washington's perspective) more judicious footing, so that attention can be turned elsewhere.[86]

While most attention has focused on the challenges to the internal cohesion of NATO coming from the Trump administration, there are intra-European dynamics that need to be given more consideration. No discussion about NATO's future can be complete without addressing the Alliance's growing EU "problem". From the beginning in the 1940s, the post-war Western Alliance in Europe was based on a de facto division of labour. To put it crudely: NATO's responsibility was defence and strategy, while European governments' mission was supposed to be economic development and providing a prosperous democratic base for collective defence. In the intervening period, one of these two components has undergone a radical organic transformation, while the other has not. The European Community has evolved, in the form of the European Union, to a full-spectrum federal political project, with its own, separate, defence and foreign policy ambitions, and aspirations towards its own "global strategy".

At the heart of this dynamic is Brussels' avowed pursuit of what it calls "strategic autonomy" from the United States. Those who urge the EU to adopt a more expansive role in the world have often expressed this in terms of desire for European emancipation from American influence. Specifically, the intention is to pull away from the "diktats" of Washington, as EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker put it in a speech in Passau in 2015.[87] The logic of the EU federalist project is incompatible with any sort of external dependency upon NATO or, by default, the United States. Quite simply, the EU's focus on creating a parallel EU defence structure distracts from efforts to buttress NATO at just the moment when it requires full and undiluted attention from the European members of the Alliance.

Until recently, Brussels' stated policy position was that EU defence would be realised "within NATO". Brexit has changed much of this calculus in the EU. With British resistance (almost) out of the way, some EU leaders are now discussing schemes of European defence integration and openly raise the prospect of a creating an EU army. A recent manifestation of this sentiment can be seen in the 2017 Munich Security Conference Report. This called on EU members to "set aside" concerns that investing

86 A. Wess Mitchell, 'Anchoring the Western Alliance'

87 'Participation of Jean-Claude Juncker, to the debate entitled "Euro, Russia, Refugees – The future of the European Union" in Passau, Germany', European Commission, 8 October 2015. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I109691. See also 'Turning point? EU Commission head says relations with Russia 'must be improved,' US 'can't dictate'', Russia Today, 9 October 2015. Available at: https://www.rt.com/news/318074-eu-russia-relations-improve-juncker/

in EU defence schemes would divert resources away from NATO, on the grounds that it was now time for "Brussels' clout in the world" to be "top of the menu".[88]

The achievement of true European "strategic autonomy" would depend upon the possession of strategic nuclear deterrence. With Britain leaving the EU, the only nuclear strike capability in Europe belongs to France. In the wake of Donald Trump's election to the American presidency the idea of an independent EU nuclear deterrent was aired, including proposals for a German atomic bomb.[89] In this image of post-NATO European security, according to the American foreign policy writer Michael Mandelbaum, "European members would face an unwelcome choice between Russian dominance and German nuclear weapons".[90] On the one hand, this underscores one of the central points of this paper – that the successor plans to NATO require huge leaps into the unknown. On the other hand, it also shows that certain taboos on highly sensitive topics in European security are breaking down, in a way that threatens to undermine NATO.

There are two further troubling signs for NATO that will be of particular concern to the UK. The first is the increasing friction over future security cooperation between the European and British sides in the context of the Brexit negotiations. A recent breakdown in talks over continued UK participation in the Galileo global navigation satellite system, with the EU side effectively treating Britain like a hostile state and blocking its access to the project, is an extremely worrisome development in security relations between key NATO members.[91] Britain has been a leading player in the Galileo programme from its inception, with British companies heavily involved in developing the most sensitive parts of the system, namely the security and encryption modules. The UK government had been clear in a technical note on the subject issued on 24 May 2018 that "any gap in UK involvement in the design and development of Galileo and PRS [the encrypted, military-grade navigation signal], whereby UK is unable to manufacture components or assure those manufactured by Member States at any point, will constitute an irreparable security risk."[92]

The fact that the EU side moved to block UK companies from the new round of industrial contracting for the satellite system, despite UK warnings of "irreparable" damage to Britain's ability to continue in the programme, is likely to force Britain to exit Galileo and develop its own separate satellite navigation system. What is most troubling is that this move by the EU has come in the wake of Prime Minister Theresa May's September 2017 commitment to an "unconditional [UK] support" for European security. The EU's decision-making over Galileo seems to show that this principle is not fully shared by the remaining members of the EU.

The second troubling sign for NATO arising from developments within Europe is the continued fragmentation of European security into separate projects. Aside from EU's multiplicity of initiatives under the banner of European Defence Integration – from the Common Defence and Security Policy to the newest package of "Defence Union" decisions, including the launching of Permanent Structured Cooperation, or Pesco – the number

88 John Bew and Gabriel Elefteriu, 'The UK and the Western Alliance: NATO in the new era of realpolitik', Policy Exchange, March 2017. Available at: https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-UK-and-the-Western-alliance-NATO-in-the-new-era-of-realpolitik.pdf

89 'Europeans Debate Nuclear Self-Defense after Trump Win', *Spiegel* Online, 9 December 2016. Available at: http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/europe-responds-to-trump-win-with-nuclear-deterrent-debate-a-1125186.html

90 Michael Mandelbaum, 'Pay up, Europe: What Trump gets right about NATO'

91 Oliver Wright and Bruno Waterfield, 'Satellite deal ban for firms from 'hostile state' Britain', *The Times*, 14 June 2018. Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/satellite-deal-ban-for-firms-from-hostile-state-britain-83wn2720k

92 Policy paper: 'Technical note on UK's participation in Galileo', HM Government, 24 May 2018

of bilateral and multilateral mini-military cooperation projects among European countries continues to grow.

At the time of writing, the UK is leading two of the most successful of these – the Joint Expeditionary Force with north European and Baltic allies, and the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force with France – but there are also EU Battlegroups (including a separate Visegrad battlegroup), the Eurocorps (including a Franco-German brigade), a joint Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian brigade,[93] and a German-led structure based on the "framework nation concept" that includes formations from the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Romania.[94] The most recent defence cooperation agreements signed in Europe include one between UK and Poland[95] and one between Sweden, Finland and Germany.[96]

In addition to these frameworks and projects in the defence area, there are a number of separate diplomatic and political coordination formats including the Weimar Triangle, the Visegrad Group, the Bucharest Nine, the Three Seas Initiative, NorDefCo[97] and Central European Defence Cooperation.[98] The most important recent development of this type is President Macron's proposal for a European Intervention Initiative, a multinational force established outside of EU structures that is also open to British participation (and was "activated" at the end of June 2018). This patchwork of military cooperation agreements and diplomatic formats in Europe – which have been mushrooming since the Cold War – could be construed as a return to an older continental tradition of European states seeking security in shifting coalitions. This is precisely the situation that Michael Alexander warned against in his January 1990 memorandum to Douglas Hurd on the post-Cold War future of NATO.

All this suggests that the UK will have to examine its previous position of "constructive ambiguity" on EU-led defence initiatives. In the past, this has meant encouraging moves towards increased activity on defence (though steering clear of an EU army or European Planning Headquarters) – both as a positive step towards burden-sharing and as a way that allowed the UK to continue to bid for defence contracts. In the context of today's shifting terrain, and in the wake of the Galileo fallout, the UK is best served by ensuring NATO remains the bedrock of European security. It is mostly through NATO that Britain can continue to play a constructive leadership role in European affairs after exiting the EU, though there is every reason to preserve and maintain bilateral instruments such as the 2010 Lancaster House Treaty with France.

This is not about being a spoiler of EU initiatives but recognising some hard facts. The first is that the UK has the largest defence budget in Europe. The second is that there are some in the EU who want to cut Britain out of some European initiatives. The third is that there is little sign that Germany, as the EU's wealthiest nation, is particularly enthusiastic about spending more on defence. In fact, Britain and France together account for half of NATO European spending.

Looking beyond the challenges posed by Brexit, EU defence and President Trump, NATO has many other additional advantages for the UK as

93 'LITPOLUKRBRIG: From an idea to the creation', LITPOLUKRBRIG website, undated. Available at: http://litpolukrbrig.wp.mil.pl/en/91.html

94 'Germany, Romania and the Czech Republic deepen defence ties', NATO website, 15 February 2017. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_141113.htm

95 Press release: 'PM announces landmark new package of defence and security cooperation with Poland', UK Prime Minister's Office, 21 December 2017. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-landmark-new-package-of-defence-and-security-cooperation-with-poland

96 'Finland and Sweden took part in the NATO Defence Ministers' Meeting', Mission of Finland to NATO, 29 June 2017. Available at: http://www.finlandnato.org/public/default.aspx?contentid=363954&nodeid=39170&contentlan=2&culture=en-US

97 Nordic Defence Cooperation

98 'Central Europe accentuates its defense cooperation and some countries are rearming', *Visegrád Post*, 5 April 2018. Available at: https://visegradpost.com/en/2018/04/05/central-europe-accentuates-its-defense-cooperation-and-some-countries-are-rearming/

it seeks to ensure its own security and to play a more expansive global role. The first and most obvious is in adapting to the changing military balance between NATO and Russia in Europe. Russian rearmament creates a long-term problem. The newest Russian State Armament Programme, signed into law last December, is funded to a level of 19 trillion roubles or £237 billion (in current prices) until 2027. This is equivalent to £520 billion (at 2016 PPP exchange rates) when the difference in purchasing power between the UK and Russian economies is taken into account. By this metric, the value of Russia's military spending is almost three times higher than Britain's own £180 billion defence equipment plan over the same period.[99]

Another consideration is the emerging Russia-China "strategic partnership", most recently reaffirmed by presidents Xi and Putin at the recent Quindao summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The long-term effects of the growth of Chinese influence in Europe have yet to be fully digested by NATO, let alone by its member states. But the development of a collective stance on certain issues – such as economic aggression or IP theft – is likely to be a helpful resort.

The requirements of military modernisation are also better addressed in an alliance context. In recent years, two entire new military operational domains, cyber and space, have appeared alongside sea, land and air. The complexity of this five-domain battlespace is further complicated by new technologies, such as A.I., robotics and hypersonics. Added to this are "hybrid" tactics, known variously as "non-linear", "4th generation" or, as the latest Russian military thinking calls it, "new-type" war. An effective response to this type of cross-domain coercion[100] requires the sharing of knowledge, information and technology among trusted partners. A multiform, multi-level, geographically-dispersed alliance like NATO is vital to that task.

99 'The Defence Equipment Plan 2017', Ministry of Defence, 31 January 2018. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677999/20180125-EP17_Final.pdf

100 Dmitry Adamsky, 'Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy', *Proliferation Papers* 54, IFRI Security Studies Center, November 2015. Available at: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf

More than a Mediator: The UK and NATO going forward

Notwithstanding the current ructions within the Atlantic Alliance, it would be misleading to expect some sort of "switch off" moment at which NATO suddenly becomes defunct. The danger, instead, is a gradual erosion of the Alliance's credibility caused by increasing political dislocation and further de-linking of American and European security concerns. The historical records suggest that the UK stands to lose much by any such fragmentation.

Efforts to modernise and improve NATO's tactical efficiency – or work towards a new doctrine – are vital to the organisation's future. The UK has contributed to some progress on these fronts since 2015. The first stage was the Strategic Defence and Security Review of that year and the commitment to maintain defence spending at a minimum of 2% of GDP. The second was to seek a leadership role in NATO's revived "deterrence and defence" policy. Heading one of the Enhanced Forward Presence deployments in Estonia and contributing to other new operations – such as air patrols from Romania over the Black Sea – are welcome examples of proactivity. The NATO summit of July is expected to focus on a new Atlantic Command and a new European Logistics Command – both of which the UK can play an important role in. Cyber, counter-terrorism and hybrid threats are also areas on which there is likely to be some progress made, along with a greater emphasis on the protection of women and women's rights in conflict situations.[101] The government's own three priorities have been identified as "burden sharing, modernisation and redoubling our resolve".[102]

To be clear, however, NATO is not facing a military but a political crisis. It therefore requires more sustained political attention in order to ensure its future viability. As Winston Churchill once said, as quoted by Wess Mitchell in his recent speech on NATO, "arms—instrumentalities—are not sufficient; we must add to them the power of ideas."[103]

In a time in which the Alliance has become strained, what can the UK do to reinforce the transatlantic bond? More action on burden-sharing is one obvious answer; mediating between Europe and US is another. When it comes to the broader politics of NATO – the types of issues of *purpose* and *spirit* dealt with by Ernest Bevin – fortune favours the bold. Both a sense of collective identity and shared narrative have been central to the organisation's longevity.[104] For that reason, a re-imagining of the organisation's purpose – likely to play well with the current US president – should not be left off the table as NATO's seventieth birthday approaches. For example, could Britain find ways to "update" the NATO treaty with a sort of "Article 5 for non-

101 NATO Debate Pack, before House of Commons NATO debate on Tuesday, 5 June 2018, House of Commons Library, p. 2.

102 Speech by Baroness Goldie, Debate on NATO Summit, 26 June 2018, Hansard, vol. 792, no. 159, pp. 108-112.

103 A. Wess Mitchell, 'Anchoring the Western Alliance'

104 Michael C. Williams and Iver B. Neumann, "From Alliance to Security Community: NATO, Russia, and the Power of Identity", *Millennium*, vol. 29, issue 2 (June 2000), pp. 357-87

Article 5 situations" such as a cyber-attack or below-threshold "hybrid" activities in frontline NATO states? Another potential role for the UK is to promote a prudent balance between territorial defence and expeditionary capability in NATO's posture, and a clearer division of labour (to deal with challenges arising from the Alliance's southern neighbourhood from the Middle East to North and sub-Saharan Africa).

One need not succumb to gloomy predictions of NATO's decline. NATO is a resilient organisation that today draws on seventy years of deepening links between its key members' military establishments, and of convergent strategic views between their political establishments. The strong support it enjoys in the US Congress, for example, was reaffirmed last year. On 27 June 2017, the US House of Representatives endorsed by an overwhelming margin (423 to 4 votes) a bipartisan resolution reaffirming the commitment of the United States to NATO's Article 5.[105]

In narrow military terms, one can also say, with some confidence, that NATO is in relatively good shape. The sense of vulnerability caused by the Russian incursion into Ukraine has led to positive actions being taken in defence of the Baltic states. There has been greater recognition of the need to counter new Russian hybrid tactics. For all Russia's efforts at rearmament in recent years, the collective sum of Western military power remains far superior to Moscow's. Although it was unintended, a recent demonstration of overwhelming Western technological superiority took place in the joint American, French and British strike on Syria in April 2018. The full significance of this episode escaped wider attention. This operation saw 105 allied missiles, launched from seven different types of platforms (from ships to submarines to aircraft) and from three different geographical locations (East Mediterranean, Red Sea and the Gulf). This delivered all 105 missiles on target within a time-window of two minutes, and with high precision – despite the variety of flight paths and flight profiles. Concern about Russia's growing conventional capabilities is justified – and even more so regarding its unconventional modes of warfare – but this should not obscure the enduring advantages enjoyed by NATO's cutting-edge militaries.

Alongside this, the investment in US missile defence facilities located in Romania and Poland suggest that the American military will not leave Europe, or Eastern Europe at least, anytime soon. These are permanent Aegis Ashore installations that represent an enduring commitment; unlike rotational forces that move in and out of allied countries on a rolling basis, the US missile defence deployments are fixed and a decision to dismantle them would effectively collapse America's deterrent credibility. On the contrary, the fact that the Trump administration is considering adding an army brigade combat team to its permanent commitment in Poland indicates that, if anything, the US is "digging in" rather than looking for a way out of its European position.

A sense of historical perspective is also needed. As the Alliance creaks under the pressure of transatlantic political strife, we should remember that NATO survived three even greater crises in its history: Suez in 1956,

105 John Bew and Gabriel Elefteriu, 'US House of Representatives reaffirms bipartisan commitment to NATO's Article 5: Could the UK Parliament follow suit?', Policy Exchange, 9 July 2017. Available at: https://policyexchange.org.uk/us-house-of-representatives-reaffirms-bipartisan-commitment-to-natos-article-5-could-the-uk-parliament-follow-suit/

the French withdrawal from the NATO command chain in 1966, and the 2003 Iraq War. The latter was an especially testing time for NATO, but the Alliance survived. There are echoes of the same concerns today. The Pew Global Attitudes survey recorded roughly similar levels of public opinion favourability towards the United States in Germany, France, Britain and Poland in 2004 after the start of the Iraq War as in 2017 after the election of Donald Trump. In 2004, in the four countries just mentioned, favourable attitudes to the US stood at 38%, 43%, 58% and 68%; in 2017, they were at 35%, 46%, 50% and 73% respectively.[106] While over the past year European views of Donald Trump's America have undoubtedly plunged even lower, historical evidence suggests that public attitudes can change over time and confidence can be restored.

Finally, the UK should not simply aim to act as a mediator (between the US and Europe) but as a thought leader and a creative force in the future of the organisation, willing to invest in proportion to the historical value of the organisation. Given the current fractiousness within the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, perhaps now is not the most conducive moment for any attempt to revive the mission of Ernest Bevin – seeking to relay the grounds for the "spiritual union" for the West. Likewise, given the shifting priorities of NATO's most important members, talk of further expansion (beyond honouring existing commitments and timetables, such as that involving Macedonia) should be set aside. What is most important, in the context of making the case for NATO today, is to ensure the underlying, long-range strategic interests of the United States and Europe remain aligned to as high a degree as possible. This is a matter of consolidation and conservation, in the first instance, but it also demands an injection of creativity and proactivity – a rediscovery of historical purpose – in the UK's approach to a vital instrument of defence and influence overseas. If NATO did not exist, it would be in the overriding interest of the UK to try to create it.

106 Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, Jacob Poushter and Janell Fetterolf, 'U.S. Image Suffers as Publics Around World Question Trump's Leadership', Pew Research Center, 26 June 2017. Available at: http://www.pewglobal.org/interactives/us-image/