



Council on  
Geostrategy

*Report*

Strategic Advantage Cell

No. 2024/32

September 2024

# What allies want: Appraising Britain's defence relationships

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*New geostrategic thinking for a more competitive age*

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## Foreword

In recent years, alliances and strategic relationships have come to the forefront of British foreign and defence policy. As revisionist powers such as Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) challenge the international order, aligning free and open countries behind a common purpose has become more important. Britain's approach to Russia's war of conquest against Ukraine has shown what can be achieved when the nation settles on a decisive response. From enhancing its partnership with Ukraine to organising coalitions to push for greater allied support for Kyiv, the United Kingdom has revitalised a series of relationships.

Ditto with AUKUS and enhanced defence relations with Japan, Britain has reconnected itself with a plethora of Indo-Pacific countries. Australia and Japan see in our country a close and reliable partner to shape the international order in a way which favours freedom and openness.

As the threat from the PRC and Russia and their regional associates, Iran and North Korea, grows, other countries are looking to His Majesty's (HM) Government for assistance and support. For this reason, we need to know what these allies and partners want from Britain, as well as how we can support them. But more than that, we need to know how we can work with them to make our alliances and partnerships stronger and more resilient.

This timely new Report from the Council on Geostrategy by William Freer and Dr Alexander Lanoszka explores what British allies and partners seek from HM Government in terms of their defence relationships and what the United Kingdom can provide for them. The paper also examines how Britain can instrumentalise its allies and partners as it simultaneously supports them, not least to catalyse strategic advantage across British defence policy.

This Report continues the pioneering work of the Council on Geostrategy's Strategic Advantage Cell, set up to determine how Britain can induce 'strategic advantage' and enhance its international position in the 21st century. Its findings should be helpful to the Defence Review



Team charged with appraising British defences, and its findings and recommendations will be useful to a wider readership.

## **The Rt. Hon. The Lord Spellar**

*Shadow Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (2010–2015)*

*Minister of State for the Armed Forces (1999–2001)*

*Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Defence (1997–1999)*



## Executive summary

- Barring an almost century of ‘splendid isolation’ at its geopolitical apex, the United Kingdom (UK) has been adept at forming and managing alliances to serve its interests. In the 21st century, Britain is enmeshed in a collection of formal alliances and strategic arrangements which help His Majesty’s (HM) Government to amplify the nation’s ability to achieve its objectives, multiply and accelerate its efforts, and extend its geostrategic reach. Alliances and partnerships are a crucial tool for catalysing national power to achieve goals which would be far more difficult (or even unachievable) if attempted alone. In other words, they are a way of inducing ‘strategic advantage’.
- The Council on Geostrategy conducted a survey of UK-based politicians, officials and experts involved in foreign and defence affairs which formed the basis of a Primer entitled ‘Who are Britain’s most important allies?’. This survey is the foundation for selecting the countries included in this Report. In the Euro-Atlantic space, the most significant allies and partners were identified as: the United States (US); Canada; Ukraine; France; Germany; Italy; Poland; Norway; and the Baltic states. In the Indo-Pacific, Australia, Japan, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Taiwan were selected as the most noteworthy partners.
- For each of the countries, this Report summarises the most important and most recent bilateral defence developments and how the UK fits into the broader national security objectives of its allies and partners, including a summary of the three most important defence objectives each has when engaging with Britain.
- Despite underinvestment in defence capabilities in recent years, the UK is still a strongly desired partner and the broad defence expertise and capabilities which Britain possesses will be in high demand well into the 2030s.



- In sum, most allies and partners' desires can be grouped into four categories, which HM Government can leverage for strategic advantage:
  - **An extended nuclear deterrent:** Besides deterring the most extreme threats to British interests, the UK's nuclear deterrent is a robust umbrella HM Government can offer allies, and potentially even key partners, under which to shelter. Few democracies possess nuclear weapons and even fewer are willing to extend their deterrent over others as Britain does. As the world becomes more volatile, this will become even more important to the UK's allies – particularly as a second centre of nuclear decision making in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
  - **Conventional forces with the ability to project power:** Although the British Armed Forces have been 'hollowed out' in recent years because of inadequate investment, allies and partners often cite the strength and experience of British forces as of high value. These forces help bring additional mass; more importantly, they bring an array of specialist capabilities many allies and partners do not themselves possess, particularly power projection capabilities and strategic enablers. However, within a constrained defence budget, Britain will face a challenge in maintaining a 'full spectrum' of capabilities, and it should explore serious questions about the benefits of a more focused force posture. Any such focused force should aim to lean into the UK's strengths with the goal of minimising duplication and maximising complementation with the armed forces of allies and partners (within the national interest).
  - **Military technological expertise:** The scientific and technological edge of the UK's defence sector, especially the aerospace and maritime domains, attracts British allies and partners. In particular, many allies and partners are eager for Britain to support their involvement in AUKUS



Pillar II, capitalising on the strong integration between the UK and US military-technological spheres.

- **Buying foreign equipment:** Although in relative terms Britain now invests historically low levels in defence (despite plans to increase expenditure), it is still one of the largest defence spenders in the world. Many allies want the UK to procure defence equipment from them to bolster their own defence industries.
- Of course, Britain cannot support every defence request of its allies and partners – and sometimes this may not serve the national interest. Supporting allies and partners should never be seen as an end in and of itself. To maximise strategic advantage, HM Government should seek also to *instrumentalise* its allies and partners to secure national objectives. Providing allies and partners with what they want should always be done with an eye to strengthening the cohesion and power of the alliance or partnership in question, as well as national geopolitical and geoeconomic objectives.
- Moving forward, HM Government should:
  - Conduct a deeper appraisal of allies and partners as part of the SDR and establish an ‘Alliances Unit’ to help manage the vast network of British defence partnerships;
  - Bind defence relations between free and open countries closer together, particularly across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres, and to push for greater levels of assistance for Ukraine;
  - Improve interoperability and interchangeability between allies and partners;
  - Increase investment in defence to at least 2.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), taking into consideration: the increasingly volatile geopolitical situation; the importance allies and partners place on their defence relations with the UK; and the need to modernise and regenerate the British Armed Forces after years of underinvestment.





## 1.0 Introduction

*[The United Kingdom] can navigate the demands of this new era...It has the potential for unparalleled partnerships and alliances. The country can thrive and restore its reputation as a net contributor to global security and development if it renews its alliances and recovers its self-confidence. It can once again choose to rise to today's generational challenges and navigate a new path, drawing from the best of its past.<sup>1</sup>*

Those are the words of David Lammy, now Foreign Secretary, while outlining his prospective approach to foreign policy in *Foreign Affairs* shortly before the 2024 General Election. Save for a brief interlude during the apex of British power in the 19th century – the era of so-called ‘splendid isolation’ – alliances have been central to British statecraft. Alliances can entangle and empower a country in equal measure and historically the United Kingdom (UK) has been well practised in the art of creating and managing them.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps most famously, under the leadership of Ernest Bevin (then Foreign Secretary), Britain was central to founding the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), widely seen as the most successful military alliance in history.

Due to increasing competition and confrontation between the major powers, the 2021 Integrated Review and its 2023 ‘refresh’ emphasised the need to energise existing alliances and create new arrangements to secure British interests more effectively.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, His Majesty’s (HM) Government’s efforts past and present have enmeshed the UK in a web of formal alliances and other strategic relationships, including bilateral, minilateral and multilateral agreements. Such arrangements can **amplify** a nation’s ability to achieve its objectives, **multiply** and **accelerate** its efforts, and **extend** its geostrategic reach. These are the four types of catalysts identified by the Council on Geostrategy as the methods through which a state can generate strategic advantage. Strategic advantage was first introduced

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<sup>1</sup> David Lammy, ‘The Case for Progressive Realism: Why Britain Must Chart a New Global Course’, *Foreign Affairs*, 17/04/2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Elefteriu, ‘Why alliances matter’, Council on Geostrategy, 20/12/2023, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world’, Cabinet Office (UK), 07/03/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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by the Integrated Review and then expanded with the Integrated Review Refresh (IRR). Building on this, the Council on Geostrategy further developed the idea and defined strategic advantage as ‘the ability to induce catalysts to help secure, more efficiently and effectively, national objectives.’<sup>4</sup> In other words, alliances are a crucial tool for generating strategic advantage.

This is particularly necessary in periods of geopolitical volatility, such as today, as no country wields unlimited power or can focus on everywhere all at once. The UK of the 2020s is a country with global interests and although it retains an enviable set of coercive and persuasive power attributes – including its nuclear arsenal, conventional power projection capabilities, a strong scientific and technological base, and a large economy – HM Government faces limits on what it can achieve alone.

In fact, such considerations are what led to the end of Britain’s splendid isolation with the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902. A relative decline in British power in the late 19th century led to a rethink of the UK’s approach to alliances. When the announcement came under criticism, Lord Cranborne, then Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, explained how a potential alliance with Japan would serve Britain’s interests and how its contents had been carefully considered. In his words: ‘we are not international knights-errant who are going to make binding agreements because of the good looks of any Power.’<sup>5</sup>

With a new government in power in Westminster, a Strategic Defence Review (SDR) underway, and growing calls for a ‘stock take’ of the UK’s key relationships, this Report looks at what Britain’s key allies and partners want from their defence relationship with the UK.<sup>6</sup> Understanding what these states value the most about their defence relationship with Britain and how they hope it will develop in the future is a core component for informing HM Government’s own approach to managing its alliances and strategic relations.

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<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Elefteriu, William Freer, and James Rogers, ‘What is strategic advantage’, Council on Geostrategy, 23/11/2023, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Hansard: Volume 102: debated on Thursday 13 February 1902: Anglo-Japanese Agreement’, House of Commons, 13/02/1902, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Reimagining Defence and Security: New Capabilities for New Challenges’, Tony Blair Institute, 11/06/2024, <https://www.institute.global/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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## 1.1 Methodological approach

The British allies and partners in this Report were identified from a review of those countries given most prominence in the Integrated Review Refresh (IRR) of 2023 and through a survey of UK-based politicians, officials and experts involved in foreign and defence affairs. This survey formed the basis of the Primer entitled ‘Who are Britain’s most important allies?’, which provides an overview, and analysis, of which countries – and alliances – the UK considers as its most important.<sup>7</sup> Not only did this paper identify Britain’s most important allies today, but it also looked forward to 2030, to track how perceptions of allies and alliances are changing (See: tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1: Britain’s most important allies and partners in 2024<sup>8</sup>**

Rank	Score	Ally/Partner
1	499	United States
2	416	France
3	408	Ukraine
4	388	Australia
5	381	Poland
6	369	Germany
7	360	Japan
8	359	Norway
9	309	Italy
10	297	Canada
11	297	Estonia
12	294	India
13	289	Saudi Arabia
14	285	South Korea
15	272	Taiwan

<sup>7</sup> William D. James, ‘Who are Britain’s most important allies and partners?’, Council on Geostrategy, 29/07/2024, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>8</sup> Scores are based on the following survey response scale: ‘1 = Trivial’, 2 = ‘Marginal’, 3 = ‘Significant’, 4 = ‘Crucial’, or 5 = ‘Paramount’.



**Table 2: Britain's most important allies and partners by 2030<sup>9</sup>**

	Rank	Score	Ally/Partner
–	1	539	United States
▲ 2	2	501	Australia
▼ 1	3	462	France
▲ 3	4	456	Japan
–	5	452	Poland
▼ 3	6	441	Ukraine
▼ 1	7	421	Germany
–	8	392	Norway
▲ 3	9	366	India
▲ 1	10	335	Estonia
▲ 3	11	331	South Korea
▼ 3	12	324	Italy
▲ 2	13	323	Taiwan
▼ 4	14	320	Canada
▼ 2	15	296	Saudi Arabia

This survey is the starting point for this Report, which identifies how Britain's allies and partners view their defence relationships with the UK and what they seek to gain. As such, this study draws on, where they exist, the national security, defence and strategic reviews and white papers, as well as key statements from government and military figures, recent bilateral agreements, readouts from bilateral meetings or events, and interviews with political advisors and defence attaches at high commissions and embassies in London.

This Report takes a broad view of defence relations. Included within this scope are not only the views an ally or partner has on defence capabilities, but also on the defence industrial and defence technology elements of relations, as well as conceptual elements such as threat perceptions and approaches to grand strategy which will inform their views on defence relations with the UK. From the existing literature, it was clear that British allies and partners are interested in

<sup>9</sup> Scores are based on applying the following survey response scale to the scores in Table 1: 2 = 'Far more important', 1 = 'More important', 0 = 'Same', -1 = 'Less important', and -2 = 'Far less important'.



four dimensions of their relations with the UK: the nuclear deterrent the Royal Navy provides, conventional British military power, British technical and industrial capability, and the size of the British defence market. While each ally or partner has not been broken down in accordance with this classification, it forms the framework for analysis.

Within this broad view, however, the study remains grounded in reality. For example, allies and partners may seek things HM Government is unable to provide. No doubt, some allies and partners would like Britain to buy more from their defence suppliers, even when the UK has its own domestic industry or procures from established suppliers overseas. Therefore, our analysis is centred on what an ally or partner wants of the UK that could in turn elicit a policy response from decision makers in London. In some cases this will include actions which might not be wholly in British interests. However, awareness of these issues is still useful to HM Government in leveraging the desires of an ally in the pursuit of British objectives.



## 2.0 Key allies and partners

The first few days, weeks, and months of a new government help provide an overview of the relationships it sees as the most important. On assuming office on 24th June 2024, the earliest phone calls to other leaders made by Sir Keir Starmer, Prime Minister, and the initial visits made by the defence and foreign secretaries, have largely corroborated the survey data provided in ‘Who are Britain’s most important allies’ and has shown a strong sense of continuity with those given most prominence in the IRR. Section 2.1 outlines what allies and partners in the Euro-Atlantic region want from their defence relationship with the UK and section 2.2 does the same for allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

### *2.1 Euro-Atlantic allies and partners*

The Euro-Atlantic is central to British foreign and defence policy. Britain has left the European Union (EU), but relations with European allies have remained strong, particularly in the military realm where both bilateral collaboration and NATO continue to be essential to deter, and if needed defeat, adversaries. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has spurred new impetus from like-minded nations in the Euro-Atlantic to work together to deter common adversaries and rebuild defence industrial capacity. Despite recent events and even though the world is very different from when NATO was founded, the unity of national security interests between Europe and North America remain the fulcrum of Euro-Atlantic security.

#### **2.1.1 United States (US)**

US strategic statements consistently describe the UK as one of the most significant American allies, matching British thinking about the US (the most mentioned country in the IRR after Ukraine and France).<sup>10</sup> The 2022 ‘National Security Strategy’ (NSS) refers to Britain seven times, more mentions than received by Japan, France, or Germany.

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<sup>10</sup> Integrated Review Refresh, Cabinet Office (UK), 03/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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Washington, DC continues to regard London as one of its most like-minded allies in view of its support for economic openness and liberal democracy, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic space.

The US has now recalibrated its international strategy away from the 'Global War on Terror' towards great power competition. A key part of this process is to encourage the network of US alliances to do the same and to pick up some of the burden of defending the free and open order. Both sides of the political spectrum in the US want allies, including the UK, to spend more on defence – there have even been some suggestions coming from the US that the NATO spending target should be 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rather than 2%.<sup>11</sup>

As the US attaches greater priority to the Indo-Pacific, Washington, DC welcomes British actions to buttress NATO, not least with its own nuclear deterrent and efforts to support Ukraine. Beyond deterring Russia, America often wants the UK to participate in its military actions, in part to share some of the burden but also in part to make those actions seem of a less unilateral nature. This is because Britain is viewed as one of the few American allies with the means *and* will to take military action. Even with the unique level of interoperability between British and American forces, the US wants to see even greater levels of commonality in equipment and munitions used. This stems from the great value Washington, DC has found in the fact that Britain produces many of the components and subsystems used in US equipment – building overall capacity and resilience.

Another US ally (and close UK partner), Japan, takes this a step further in co-developing and co-producing much US equipment which further adds to overall production capacity and enables the backfilling of US munitions stocks. The American decision to help establish AUKUS is testament to the value-added that British naval technology exerts on US Indo-Pacific strategy and Washington, DC's desire to support London's attempts at enabling other allies to develop greater military capabilities. Britain's array of overseas military facilities also serve American interests, in particular the facilities in the British Indian Ocean Territory; this is something America wants to see continue amidst concerns over the future status of the territory.

The US military is facing overstretch. To take one example, redeployments in August 2024 to deter Iran left no US carrier strike

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<sup>11</sup> Tony Diver, 'Trump considering new 3 per cent Nato defence spending target', *The Telegraph*, 03/05/2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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group in the Western Pacific.<sup>12</sup> There are different American schools of thought as to how best to leverage allies and partners to resolve these problems.<sup>13</sup> On land, although the US values any additional mass the British Army can provide, what America values the most is the expeditionary nature of the British Army, something no other US ally can provide without significant American assistance. In the air, the US values the strategic enablers that the UK possesses, including strategic and tactical airlift and intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities (Britain is the only other nation with Rivet Joint aircraft for example). Nevertheless, the US has concerns about the mass and firepower of Royal Air Force (RAF) combat air, as well as the dwindling number of strategic enablers (i.e., assets used for strategic transport, reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, and other tasks key to the deployment, sustainment and use of military force).

At sea, in light of the growing naval threats facing the US Navy, Washington greatly values the additional vessels the Royal Navy can provide (HMS Duncan recently provided air defence cover for a US Amphibious Group in the Mediterranean) as well as specialist expertise (such as in mine warfare).<sup>14</sup> However serious worries abound regarding the size and availability of the Royal Navy's forces. Opinions in the US will vary, but in general most Americans want to see the UK focus on power projection capabilities and strategic enablers, either to allow America to move their own assets from Europe to the Indo-Pacific or to take up some of the slack beyond Europe. But most US policymakers agree that Britain has allowed its armed forces (particularly in the air and maritime domains) to wither to the point it can no longer provide adequate support in the highest intensity operations.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ken Moriyasu, 'U.S. sends another carrier from Asia to Middle East, widening Pacific gap', 07/08/2024, *Asia Nikkei*, <https://asia.nikkei.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>13</sup> For example see Elbridge Colby's (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Strategy and Force Development under Donald Trump's presidency) comments that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a European problem and that the UK should take a 'Britain first' approach. Tony Diver, 'Ukraine war is Europe's problem, Trump ally tells Labour', *The Telegraph*, 09/07/2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>14</sup> Tom Sharpe, 'US and British warships assemble off the coast as Israel-Hezbollah crisis mounts', *Daily Telegraph*, 30/07/2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>15</sup> Hal Brands, 'Dealing with Allies in Decline: Alliance Management and US Strategy in an era of Global Power', Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 25/04/2017, <https://csbaonline.org/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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## **Top three US defence priorities for the UK**

1. Encourage HM Government to boost defence investment to improve the ability of the British Armed Forces to share the burden in collective deterrence and combat operations, especially in the Euro-Atlantic area;
2. Ensure British support for AUKUS (both Pillar I and II) to support Australian acquisition of nuclear powered attack submarines (SSNs) and to share development and procurement costs of future military capabilities;
3. Guarantee British provision of UK overseas military facilities, in particular in the British Indian Ocean Territory.

### **2.1.2 Canada**

Canada and the UK have extensive links, not least since Canada was a former dominion, remains a member of the Commonwealth, and retains the British monarch as its head of state. These close ties notwithstanding, Canada accords much more importance to the US than it does to the UK for both its security and prosperity, as in the case of continental defence through the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD). Moreover, geographical proximity and the sheer size of the US market make Canada much more economically oriented to its south. Yet, in the wake of the first Trump presidency and considering the potential for a second, Canada recognises that putting too many eggs in the basket of the US relationship does run risks.<sup>16</sup>

The UK is arguably Canada's closest ally beyond the US. When Canada articulated its defence policy in 2017, the resulting document 'Strong, Secure, Engaged' (SSE) referenced Britain three times, each time in a multilateral context, be it NATO or Five Eyes. In the 2024 policy update to SSE, titled 'Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence' the UK is discussed in regards to Five Eyes, but what is noteworthy is that the type of cooperation specified is not in intelligence sharing. Rather, Canada highlights its desire to cooperate with the UK on 'undersea, advanced cyber, quantum, artificial

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<sup>16</sup> Roland Paris, 'Canada braces for the possible return of Donald Trump', Chatham House, 26/01/2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



intelligence, hypersonic, and electronic warfare capabilities.<sup>17</sup> These military-scientific vectors of cooperation are intentionally suggestive of the projects that AUKUS Pillar II covers.

Canada is keen to be as involved in AUKUS as it can – preferably as a member of the minilateral itself, but at least on an ad hoc project-by-project basis. It is thus eager for Britain to do what it can to facilitate this.<sup>18</sup> Connectedly, Canada would desire investment in the extraction of its vast reserves of critical minerals, many of which are crucial to developing and building the AUKUS technologies. Made acute by AUKUS, the general feeling in Canada is that it may not necessarily be the case that the UK is less important, but that it has become less important to Britain.

With average global temperatures on the rise, the Arctic is an area of growing concern for Ottawa. Canada has a keen interest in Arctic security, but its ability to project power in the region is limited as a result of historical underinvestment in the Canadian Armed Forces and the inherent difficulties of operating that far north (far from Canada's population centres in the south of the country). Canada would welcome more British involvement in the Arctic, especially in light of US focus elsewhere such as the Western Pacific. Several areas for collaboration in Arctic security have been raised including developing sensory systems that could increase allied situational awareness in the Arctic given heightened Russian military activity and Chinese interest.

### **Top three Canadian defence priorities for the UK**

1. Secure British support for Canadian involvement in AUKUS Pillar II to the fullest extent possible;
2. Achieve a larger British military presence in the Arctic and for the UK to invest more in Arctic capabilities;
3. Encourage the UK to support the competitiveness of Canadian defence firms, either through importing Canadian manufactured defence products or support the research and development of Canadian defence companies through joint programmes.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence', Department of National Defence (Canada), 08/04/2024, <https://www.canada.ca/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>18</sup> See: Paul T. Mitchell, 'Canada's exclusion from the AUKUS security pact reveals a failing national defence policy,' *The Conversation*, 23/09/2021, <https://theconversation.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



## 2.1.3 Ukraine

Relations between the UK and Ukraine have burgeoned since 2014 based on Kyiv's search for international support for its sovereignty against Russian aggression and for deeper ties with free and open nations. The UK was one of the few countries to offer meaningful support after the Russian invasion in 2014, through Operation ORBITAL, freedom of navigation operations and the supply of military equipment pre-February 2022. Since February 2022, relations deepened further; the British-led Operation INTERFLEX has trained more than 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers.<sup>19</sup> In January 2024, the UK became the first country to issue a bilateral security commitment to Ukraine, and surveys of weapons deliveries reveal HM Government to be one of the top providers of military assistance to Ukraine.

Ukrainian policy statements recognise the partnership with the UK and its importance. Ukraine's 2020 National Security Strategy puts Britain second only to the US as a country with which it intends to pursue 'comprehensive cooperation'.<sup>20</sup> The bilateral 2020 Political, Free Trade and Strategic Partnership Agreement signalled Ukraine's ambition to align more with the UK as a leading nation among free and open countries.<sup>21</sup> Article 99 of the 2021 Foreign Policy Strategy affirms the strategic importance of Ukraine's relations with Britain, observing that the UK is an 'influential state outside the EU' as well as a 'strategic partner that plays an important role in the formation and preservation of international solidarity in support of the state sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine'.<sup>22</sup>

Unsurprisingly, since February 2022 and the full-scale Russian invasion – which aimed at turning Ukraine into a vassal state – there has been a renewed sense of urgency in Kyiv in garnering support,

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<sup>19</sup> '30,000 Ukrainian recruits trained in largest UK military training effort since Second World War', Ministry of Defence, 10/11/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>20</sup> 'Decree of the President of Ukraine On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine of September 14, 2020', Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 16/09/2020, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>21</sup> 'UK-Ukraine political, free trade and strategic partnership agreement', Department for International Trade, 09/11/2020, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>22</sup> 'Стратегія зовнішньої політики України' ['Strategy of Ukraine's foreign policy'], Ради національної безпеки і оборони України [National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine], 26/08/2021, <https://bit.ly/3zz4vdm> (checked: 26/09/2024). For more on the UK-Ukrainian relationship, see Alexander Lanoszka, James Rogers, and Hannah Shelest, 'Deepening British-Ukrainian relations in a more competitive era,' *Council on Geostrategy*, 20 July 2022, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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primarily militarily but also for its longer term goals of integration with the Euro-Atlantic structures, namely NATO and the EU. In the short-term, Kyiv desires as much military support from the UK as possible and for the authority of Britain's voice in pressuring less enthusiastic allies. The priorities for this being artillery ammunition, long-range weapons (and the ability to use them in Russia), large-numbers of drones, air and missile defences, equipment for mechanised and armoured formations, and training. Kyiv's desire for London to do even more than it already has is in part informed by the unpredictability of Washington, DC's ability (or will) to maintain its current levels of support in the future. A lower priority, but still something of much significance that interests Ukraine, is support in rebuilding the country once Russia has been defeated.

### **Top three Ukrainian defence priorities for the UK**

1. Secure further and continued British military aid – without restrictions on use – to defeat Russia;
2. Achieve stronger British guarantees for the future security of Ukraine, in particular HM Government's support for Ukrainian membership of NATO;
3. Obtain British assistance for building up Ukraine's domestic defence production.

### **2.1.4 France**

Of all NATO allies, even more than the US, France receives the most references in the IRR. However, as far as official documents are concerned, the admiration is not reciprocated. France's 2022 National Security Review cites the UK only once, with the singular reference being in the context of implementing 'balanced relations supported by regular and intensive defence and security dialogue'. Britain, and especially its close relations with the US, complicates France's long-term objective of driving Europe to attain strategic autonomy.<sup>23</sup> The 2021 Defence Update barely mentions the UK, and really only in

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<sup>23</sup> National Strategic Review 2022, General Secretariat of Defence and National Security (France), 11/2022, <https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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reference to a NATO initiative called ‘E12’ which is aimed at ‘establishing a common strategic culture.’<sup>24</sup>

The bilateral relationship can appear testy. The Brexit negotiations produced some heated exchanges between the two countries and the manner in which AUKUS was unveiled angered France.<sup>25</sup> Yet, functional cooperation at all levels between the two allies has often evaded political disagreements. On the tenth anniversary of the Lancaster House Treaties in 2020, France declared that it ‘fully intends to pursue a structuring bilateral defence cooperation in all areas over the coming years: operational, capability, industrial and nuclear.’<sup>26</sup> Those treaties, among other things, established the UK–France Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, promoted collaborative nuclear stockpile stewardship, and furthered their defence industrial cooperation, as in the case of long-range missiles.<sup>27</sup> Since the signing of the Lancaster House treaties, military to military relationships have flourished, particularly at the operational level, deepened even further with the 2023 UK–France Sandhurst Summit.<sup>28</sup>

UK–France defence industrial cooperation is constrained by the emerging EU defence industrial ecosystem which is largely closed to third countries and by Paris’ tough stance on getting preferential terms for its defence firms in any collaborative projects. From a French perspective, in a perfect world Britain would support France’s ambitious plans for European defence autonomy, but this is not an issue where the two would ever find much agreement. The same applies to the complex mix of competition and collaboration between British and French defence firms, where the two allies have a mixed record based on the recurring need to match differing requirements (this is not always the case but there are plenty of examples, such as the decision to part ways on the Horizon/Type 45 class destroyer) and disagreements over sharing costs. More broadly, both countries have accorded greater

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Strategic Update 2021,’ Ministry of the Armed Forces (France), 04/02/2021, <https://archives.defense.gouv.fr/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>25</sup> Mark Landler and Constant Méheut, ‘After Years of Bickering, Britain and France Look for a New Start’, *The New York Times*, 10/03/2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>26</sup> ‘The Lancaster House Treaties: 10 years of Franco–British defence partnership’, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 02/11/2020, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>27</sup> Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, Cabinet Office, 23/03/2023, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>28</sup> UK–France Joint Leaders’ Declaration’, 10 Downing Street, 10/03/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



importance to the Indo-Pacific, where France wants to work with Britain to assure maritime security; both countries recently agreed to coordinate carrier strike group deployments to the region.<sup>29</sup>

## **Top three French defence priorities for the UK**

1. Obtain British support for French aims to generate European strategic autonomy in the defence domain;
2. Secure British participation in joint defence projects with terms as favourable to French defence firms as possible;
3. Deepen the already well established operational relationship between the British and French armed forces.

### **2.1.5 Germany**

Germany released its first ever ‘National Security Strategy’ (German NSS) in 2023. A compromise document reflecting differences in opinion among the three political parties that make up the country’s governing coalition. The UK received zero mention, though neither did Poland or any of the Baltic countries – where Germany has modest military deployments.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, France and the US received three and five mentions, respectively. As such, the German NSS has been subject to criticism for its vagueness and thinness.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the contents of that document, Germany values the British contributions to European security.<sup>32</sup> Both the UK and Germany are European leaders in the provision of military assistance to Ukraine, though the current government in Berlin is more cautious of escalation.

While British-German relations were extensive during the Cold War – courtesy of the presence of the British Army of the Rhine – Britain pulled out most of its 20,000-personnel-strong military forces from Germany by 2020, opting to retain only an army headquarters and

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<sup>29</sup> George Allison, ‘Britain and France to coordinate aircraft carrier deployments’, *UK Defence Journal*, 10/03/2023, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>30</sup> National Security Strategy: Integrated Security for Germany, Federal Government (Germany), 05/07/2023, <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>31</sup> See: Ben Schreer, ‘Germany’s First-Ever National Security Strategy’, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 20/06/2023, <https://www.iiss.org/>; ‘Big Ask: Is Germany’s National Security Strategy Adequate?’, *Britain’s World*, 30/06/2023, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with German official, conducted by the author on 26/06/2024.





some forward-deployed equipment. As Russia has become more aggressive and unpredictable, Germany has sought British Army deployments and the storage of forward deployed equipment to Central Europe in Sennelager.<sup>33</sup>

Berlin is interested in enhancing technical and functional defence cooperation of the sort seen in the British-French Lancaster House treaties of 2010.<sup>34</sup> However, despite several meetings between the British and German governments, neither Berlin nor London really know the specific details of what they would want out of such an arrangement. There are some likely areas of overlapping interests. For example, the value of using the same equipment, particularly in terms of interchangeability when operating together and in reducing unit (and development) costs, are powerful drivers. German interests here would likely fall under missile defence collaboration (Germany is the lead in the European Sky Shield Initiative), mechanised/armoured land forces equipment, munition production, and collaboration in deep strike capabilities.<sup>35</sup> In deepening ties, Germany's interests would be in opportunities for strengthening the competitiveness of its defence firms, particularly in their share of the European market.

### **Top three German defence priorities for the UK**

1. Encourage British procurement of German military equipment;
2. Maintain British support for German and European security, in particular through a credible extended strategic nuclear deterrence over NATO;
3. Secure British collaboration on key projects on defence issues most important to German security concerns, primarily defence industrial capacity, integrated air and missile defence, and enhanced deep strike capabilities.

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<sup>33</sup> Laura Hughes, 'British Armoured Division Returns to Germany', *Financial Times*, 25/11/2021, <https://www.ft.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>34</sup> 'Joint Declaration on Enhanced Defence Cooperation between Germany and the United Kingdom', Ministry of Defence, 24/07/2024, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



## 2.1.6 Italy

The closeness of UK–Italy relations is often overlooked. Italy’s 2022 ‘Chief of Defence: Strategic Concept’ cites the UK as many times as it does France and Germany (i.e., three times, compared with two mentions for the US). The Concept describes Italy’s relationship with Britain as ‘historic and solid’ and acknowledges the AUKUS agreement for its part in the ‘evolving...power relations’ in the Indo–Pacific.<sup>36</sup> Italy and the UK signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2023 to improve their bilateral cooperation. They also signed a Statement of Intent that focused on enhancing their defence linkages.<sup>37</sup> To this effect, Britain and Italy, along with Japan, established the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), to replace the Eurofighter Typhoon in service in both the Royal and Italian air forces (and the Mitsubishi F–2 in Japan) with a sixth-generation fighter.<sup>38</sup>

Italy’s primary interests lie in the security of NATO’s southern flank, but it is also looking to extend its presence into the Indo–Pacific.<sup>39</sup> Given that the UK, through its bases in Gibraltar and Cyprus, also has a strong interest in Mediterranean security, Rome sees in London an ally for maintaining NATO’s geostrategic attention to this theatre in light of other pressing concerns (such as Russian activity in or near the high north, the Baltic, and Ukraine). Italy thus wants to develop ‘joint initiatives’ with Britain to ensure the rest of NATO remains engaged.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Chief of Defence Strategic Concept’, Ministry of Defence (Italy), 09/09/2022, <https://www.difesa.it/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>37</sup> ‘Memorandum of understanding between the UK and Italy’, 10 Downing Street, 27/03/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>38</sup> ‘PM announces new international coalition to develop the next generation of combat aircraft’, 10 Downing Street, 09/12/2022, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>39</sup> Alessio Patalano, ‘Italy: The Globally Connected Mediterranean Power?’, Royal United Services Institute, 01/08/2024, <https://www.rusi.org/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>40</sup> ‘Chief of Defence Strategic Concept’, 09/09/2022, <https://www.difesa.it/> (checked: 26/09/2024).





## Top three Italian defence priorities for the UK

1. Secure continued British political and financial support for GCAP;
2. Obtain British collaboration in Italian efforts to bolster Mediterranean security, not least by ensuring that NATO does not ignore its southern flank;
3. Facilitate greater cooperation on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

### 2.1.7 Poland

Having been a major supporter of NATO enlargement, Britain has had strong ties with Poland since the latter broke free of communism and became a liberal democracy. Warsaw regretted the withdrawal of Britain from the EU as Poland and Britain are much more Atlanticist in their geopolitical orientation than France and Germany. Poland saw in the UK an ally which could help balance against Berlin and Paris within EU structures and keep European defence partners focused on the threat of Russian aggression (which up until February 2022, many in Central/Western Europe did not believe was real). Polish policy documents tend not to mention countries other than the US (e.g., as in the 2020 ‘National Security Conception’).<sup>41</sup>

Poland’s primary concern, as a frontline NATO member, is the security of NATO’s eastern flank. It highly values the contribution to NATO security of the UK’s nuclear deterrent, particularly due to fears that the US may become less committed to Europe, but is concerned about the tactical nuclear weapons gap – weapons that it has offered to host.<sup>42</sup> Poland is working hard to build up its armed forces; a key part of which is to develop sovereign defence industrial capability. This area is where Warsaw is keen for British collaboration to build on the UK–Poland Treaty on Defence and Security Cooperation (2018).<sup>43</sup> Already it has acquired, or plans to produce variants of, various weapons from British suppliers.

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<sup>41</sup> ‘National Security Strategy Of The Republic Of Poland’, National Security Bureau (Poland), 11/05/2020, <https://www.bbn.gov.pl/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>42</sup> ‘Poland’s leader says his country is ready to host NATO members’ nuclear weapons to counter Russia’, *Associated Press*, 22/04/2024, <https://apnews.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>43</sup> ‘UK/Poland: Treaty on Defence and Security Cooperation’, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 09/05/2018, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



Poland has agreed to procure three *Miecznik* (Type 31) class frigates which are being built in cooperation with Babcock. In what became the largest commercial agreement between the two countries, Poland procured British co-produced missiles and launcher systems, *SkySabre*, to augment its air defences.<sup>44</sup> However, the main thrust of Poland's military programme is the generation of two new mechanised divisions: this demands large numbers of tanks, armoured infantry vehicles and mobile tube and rocket artillery, none of which it currently looks to the UK for. As one of Ukraine's staunchest advocates, Poland has considered shooting down Russian missiles over Ukraine, and is interested in working with other strong supporters (such as the UK) in encouraging others to do more.<sup>45</sup>

### **Top three Polish defence priorities for the UK**

1. Ensure British support for the maintenance of a credible extended strategic nuclear deterrent through NATO;
2. Obtain additional British support and encourage London to push others to do more in aiding the Ukrainian defence against Russia;
3. Encourage Britain to invest in expeditionary forces, primarily land and air, to protect NATO's eastern flank both to complement (e.g., command, logistic and specialist capabilities) and to add to the mass of Poland's growing armed forces.

## **2.1.8 Norway**

Norway and the UK have deep defence ties forged during the Second World War and strengthened through shared Cold War interest in deterring the Soviet Union along NATO's northern flank. Although the threat was much reduced with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been rebuilding the capabilities and readiness of its Northern Fleet. In 2024, in reaction to the heightened threat of Russian aggression, the Norwegian Government announced 'The Norwegian Defence Pledge:

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<sup>44</sup> Andrew Chuter, 'British, Polish firms sign \$5 billion deal for Poland's air defence,' *Defense News*, 8 November 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/> (checked: 16/07/2024).

<sup>45</sup> Adam Easton, 'Poland considers downing Russian missiles over Ukraine', *BBC News*, 12/07/2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



Long Term Defence Plan 2025–36’.<sup>46</sup> The plan outlined increased defence spending with primary goals built around expanding and modernising maritime capabilities (heavily focused on anti-submarine warfare), improving situational awareness in the high north, strengthening air and missile defence capabilities, and building up the size of the Norwegian land forces.

Norway has long aimed to attract British interest in Nordic security, most recently through the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), and through the establishment of Camp Viking in 2023 as a training and forward operating hub. The Norwegians are interested in the UK’s Type 26 class frigate design for their new class of five frigates – but there remain issues with British shipyard capacity and Oslo’s timelines.<sup>47</sup> In improving situational awareness in the high north, Norway is keen on collaborating with close allies, such as the UK, to procure ‘long-range drones with sensors and systems for monitoring maritime areas of interest’ as well as satellites. Given the growing viability of the Northern Sea Route, Norway is, like the UK, acutely aware of the increasing connectivity between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres. Welcoming the UK’s Indo-Pacific ‘tilt’, Norway will provide two vessels for the deployment of the Royal Navy’s Carrier Strike Group in 2025 – including a replenishment oiler based on the Tide class, also in service with the UK).<sup>48</sup>

### **Top three Norwegian defence priorities for the UK**

1. Deepen collaboration with the UK on anti-submarine warfare capabilities, including frigate commonality and regular joint exercises;
2. Encourage the UK to invest further in its Arctic capabilities, particularly situational awareness, either jointly or in a complementary manner;
3. Attract and facilitate additional British interest and military presence in the Nordic and Baltic regions.

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<sup>46</sup> ‘The Norwegian Defence Pledge: Long Term Defence Plan 2025–36’, Ministry of Defence (Norway), 05/04/2024, <https://www.regjeringen.no/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>47</sup> ‘The Saga of Norway and the Type 26’, *Thin Pinstriped Line*, 16/04/2024, <https://thinpinstripedline.blogspot.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>48</sup> ‘Norway to join UK Navy deployment to Indo-Pacific next year’, Ministry of Defence, 06/08/2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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## 2.1.9 Baltic States

Since Britain supported Estonia's and Latvia's independence in 1918, the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have looked to London as a major European ally.<sup>49</sup> Due to their geopolitical location, the UK has cultivated close relations with them since the Soviet collapse.<sup>50</sup> Estonia's relations with Britain are particularly close, due to the British leadership of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the country. Tallinn's key concern is Russian aggression, especially because of Estonia's geography and its delicate demographic balance. Estonia's 'National defence development plan 2017-2026' outlines how the nation intends to raise military readiness. Facilitating collective defence is a pillar of Estonian defence planning; in theory, Tallinn would like as many allied forces present as Estonia can host. More practically, within the plan, the areas Estonia would be most interested in cooperation with the UK, beyond what is already being done, is in cyber and maritime (especially mine-countermeasures and seabed warfare) capabilities.<sup>51</sup> Latvia and Lithuania, like Estonia, are equally concerned about Russia's intentions and so look to the UK to do more to bolster their security, including British support for the Baltic Air Policing Mission and in building up broader resilience against coercive Russian behaviour.<sup>52</sup>

### Top three Baltic defence priorities for the UK

1. Uphold continued British support for NATO's forward defence posture and the JEF to extend deterrence;
2. Secure additional British assistance for Ukraine's defence against Russian aggression;
3. Obtain UK support for countermeasures against Russian interference, particularly underwater and cyber.

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<sup>49</sup> Tomas Jermalavicius and Alice Billon-Galland, 'British Power in Baltic Weather: The UK's Role in Nordic-Baltic Security and UK-Estonia Defence Cooperation', International Centre for Defence and Security, 07/07/2023, <https://icds.ee/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>50</sup> Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, Cabinet Office, 23/03/2023, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>51</sup> 'National defence development plan 2017-2026', Ministry of Defence (Estonia), No date, <https://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>52</sup> 'Joint Declaration of cooperation between the UK and Latvia', Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 06/12/2021, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



## 2.2 Indo-Pacific partners

The Indo-Pacific has been a growing area of interest for the UK over the past decade. Although Britain never fully withdrew from ‘East of Suez’, the current level of military, economic, and diplomatic engagement in the region is now the most extensive it has been since ‘withdrawal’ in 1971.<sup>53</sup> The 2021 Integrated Review outlined how the UK would ‘tilt’ towards the Indo-Pacific, and although the IRR reiterated that the Euro-Atlantic remained the priority, it built on the 2021 review by establishing the Indo-Pacific as a ‘permanent pillar’ of Britain’s international policy.<sup>54</sup> What shape this policy will take under the new Labour government remains to be seen, but within a month of the General Election, Lammy visited India, and attended the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers’ meeting.<sup>55</sup> This contributes to the flurry of activity marking Britain’s relations with Indo-Pacific allies and partners in recent years, driven as much by those countries’ desire to enmesh the UK in the region as Britain’s own push for deeper engagement.

### 2.2.1 Australia

Britain and Australia’s historically close bilateral ties waned during the Cold War as the UK focused on confronting the Soviet threat in the Euro-Atlantic. The ‘Five Eyes’ and the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) endured as key vectors of cooperation throughout that period and thereafter.<sup>56</sup> Since the signing of the security and defence agreement between the two countries in 2013, however, UK-Australia relations have resurged.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Geoffrey Till, ‘The return to globalism: The Royal Navy east of Suez, 1975–2003’, Greg Kennedy (ed.) *British Naval Strategy East of Suez, 1900–2000* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2005)

<sup>54</sup> Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world, Cabinet Office, 13/03/2023, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Economic ties with Southeast Asia strengthened as Foreign Secretary makes first visit to Indo-Pacific’, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 25/07/2024, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>56</sup> Patrick Triglavcanin, ‘How Australia “positions” the United Kingdom’, Council on Geostrategy, 07/12/2023, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>57</sup> See: ‘Treaty between the UK and Australia for Defence and Security Cooperation: Perth, 18 January 2013’, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 11/04/2013, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



Australia believes that it now faces the ‘most challenging circumstances’ in its region for decades.<sup>58</sup> It has responded by investing significantly more in defence, while shifting towards an ‘integrated, focused force’ designed to deter threats from its northern neighbourhood.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, Canberra sees the UK’s renewed focus on the Indo-Pacific in a positive light. In the words of Penny Wong, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, ‘Australia welcomes the many ways – both in words and in deeds – that the UK’s Indo-Pacific “tilt” has progressed.’<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Britain is the only European country mentioned in Australia’s 2023 ‘Defence Strategic Review’ (DSR) and the one mentioned the most in the 2024 ‘National Defence Strategy’ (NDS). The NDS makes some effort to stress the links between the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific, albeit emphasising Australia’s regional focus.

Through AUKUS, Australia seeks to draw the UK closer. With Pillar I, Australia will secure the support of Britain and the US to acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), which will culminate in a joint UK–Australian submarine class.<sup>61</sup> It will also facilitate the deployment and rotation of Royal Navy nuclear attack submarines to Fleet Base West, as well as the deployment of Australian personnel to British submarines. With Pillar II, the three partners will collaborate on several emerging disruptive technologies; there were four original workstreams covering cyber, AI, quantum, and undersea developments, though these have since expanded to ten workstreams.<sup>62</sup>

Given internal constraints, Canberra pursues closer alignment between the British and Australian defence industrial and technological bases. The Royal Australian Navy selected a modified version of the Royal Navy’s Type 26 class frigate design in 2018, which offers additional synergies with the US given that American defence firms will supply many of the weapons and components. Both elements aid in Australia’s new focus on deterring the People’s Republic of China

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<sup>58</sup> ‘National Defence: Defence Strategic Review’, Australian Government, 26/04/2023, <https://www.defence.gov.au/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>59</sup> ‘National Defence Strategy’, Australian Government, 17/04/2024, <https://www.defence.gov.au/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>60</sup> Penny Wong, Speech: ‘An enduring partnership in an era of change’, Minister for Foreign Affairs (Australia), 31/01/2023, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>61</sup> Claire Mills, ‘AUKUS submarine (SSN-A) programme’, House of Commons Library, 07/03/2024, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>62</sup> Louisa Brooke-Holland, ‘AUKUS pillar 2: Advanced military capabilities’, House of Commons Library, 08/04/2024, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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(PRC), although Australian strategic documents are careful not to state this directly, instead referring to deterring ‘any’ actor. A persistent British military presence in the region helps complicate decision making in Beijing and closer collaboration with the British defence industrial base helps accelerate, and reduce the costs of, the improvement of Australia’s military (especially naval) capabilities. The more defence cooperation and joint operations grow, the more Canberra will desire commonality in other areas, with the NDS highlighting long-range strike, integrated air and missile defence, and improved space and cyber capabilities as priorities over the coming years, besides the focus on submarines.

### **Top three Australian defence priorities for the UK**

1. Ensure the UK remains devoted to the success of AUKUS Pillar I centred on the transfer of British SSN expertise and rotational Royal Navy SSN deployments, and Pillar II centred on the development of a suite of next generation military capabilities;
2. Secure a more permanent British military presence, primarily naval power but to an extent also air power, in the Indo-Pacific to support Australia's strategy of deterrence by denial;
3. Convince the UK to develop closer defence ties with other Indo-Pacific powers committed to maintaining a free and open order.

### **2.2.2 Japan**

Relations between the UK and Japan in the Cold War and the early part of the 21st century were amicable, but limited. However, with the rise of the PRC as a military power, Japan has undergone a geopolitical renaissance in the 21st century.<sup>63</sup>

A key element of this renaissance has been Tokyo’s desire to push UK-Japan relations to new heights: Britain is now Japan’s most significant European partner, likened by some strategists to a ‘quasi-ally’.<sup>64</sup> In May 2023, the two nations signed the Hiroshima Accord. This agreement includes a mutual consultation clause should

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew L. Oros, *Japan’s Security Renaissance: New policies and politics for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Philip Shetler-Jones, ‘A new type of Britain-Japan Alliance’, Council on Geostrategy, 09/03/2021, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



either party suffer attack from a foreign power, the closest two countries can come to a formal defence guarantee without entering into a formal alliance.<sup>65</sup> This accord built on the January 2023 Reciprocal Access Agreement which will ‘facilitate the implementation of military cooperation between both countries’.<sup>66</sup> The same year, the UK and Japan, in addition to Italy, formally signed into treaty GCAP to develop a next generation aircraft, with service entry set for 2035.<sup>67</sup>

Japan mentions the UK extensively throughout its 500+ page ‘Defence of Japan 2023’ strategy. The emphasis is on Britain’s growing presence in the Indo-Pacific and on a deepening military-technological relationship, of which GCAP is the centre-piece. Anglo-Japanese cooperation on space, cyber, and missile technology is also developing. Given this deepening collaboration and Tokyo’s similar relations in the military-technology realm with the US, Japan is reported to be interested in joining AUKUS (Pillar II).<sup>68</sup> In addition, the UK hosts three defence attaches from Japan, the only European country to do so.<sup>69</sup>

Japan’s strategic focus is on promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific, but it is keen to stress its awareness of the interconnectedness between the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific. Yoko Kamikawa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan, has stated that ‘Japan has considered that the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific are inseparable’.<sup>70</sup> Consistent with this thinking, Japan will pursue closer bonds between like-minded countries across the two regions. For its part, Tokyo is the fourth largest provider of aid (when looking at combined military, economic and humanitarian assistance) to Ukraine.<sup>71</sup> It also took the significant step of changing historically strict arms export rules to send Patriot air defence missiles to the US, enabling the US to send more of its own missiles to Ukraine.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> ‘The Hiroshima Accord: An enhanced UK-Japan global strategic partnership’, 10 Downing Street, 18/05/2023, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Laura Chung, ‘Japan signals interest in AUKUS defence tech partnership’, AJ Bell, 06/04/2024, <https://www.ajbell.co.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>69</sup> ‘Defence of Japan 2023’, Ministry of Defence (Japan), 04/09/2023, <https://www.mod.go.jp/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>70</sup> ‘Press Conference by Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko’, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), 19/01/2024, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>71</sup> Ukraine Support Tracker, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, No date, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>72</sup> Mariko Oi, ‘Japan to send Patriot missiles to US which may aid Ukraine’, BBC News, 22/12/2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).





Japan recognises the UK's focus is on the Euro-Atlantic but welcomes an enhanced British presence in the Indo-Pacific – militarily, politically, and economically.<sup>73</sup> Japan seeks to continue this process in the future, and is keen in particular on closer relations with NATO.

### **Top three Japanese defence priorities for the UK**

1. Ensure Britain's continued support, both political and financial, for GCAP;
2. Obtain a stronger and more permanent British military presence in the Indo-Pacific, especially east of Malacca;
3. Gain British support for Japanese involvement in Pillar II of AUKUS and closer relations with NATO.

### **2.2.3 India**

Relations between the UK and India are complex, informed by a colonial past as well as continued cultural and political ties. New Delhi forged a firm 'non-aligned' path during the Cold War, and despite warming relations between India and the 'West' since the end of the Cold War, the UK has not featured particularly highly in Indian priorities.

India's current approach to its international strategy (which informs what it wants from the UK) stems from two key concepts. The first is 'SAGAR', which means 'ocean' in multiple Indian languages, but also constitutes the acronym for 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'. This concept envisages 'a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region...built on a rules-based international order'.<sup>74</sup> New Delhi is concerned at the pace of the PRC's naval buildup and growing presence in the Indian Ocean, in addition to a deterioration of the stability of the maritime environment (as seen in the Red Sea). In delivering SAGAR, India has welcomed an increased Royal Navy presence in the region; a Logistics Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 2023, and in 2024 Littoral Response Group (South) visited India.<sup>75</sup> Further developments appear desired, albeit likely at a cautious

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with a Japanese official, conducted by one of the authors on 10/06/2024.

<sup>74</sup> 'Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 97', Ministry of External Affairs (India), 07/12/2023, <https://sansad.in/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>75</sup> 'UK Royal Navy vessels arrive in Chennai on landmark visit', British High Commission New Delhi, 27/03/2024, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



pace; in 2025 the Carrier Strike Group deployment will visit and operate with Indian forces.<sup>76</sup> One complicating factor in UK-India relations is New Delhi's support for the Mauritian claim to the British Indian Ocean Territory. It is unclear to what extent this is a genuinely desired outcome or rather an opportunity to build India's diplomatic capital among developing countries, especially those surrounding the Indian Ocean.

The second concept is '*Atmanirbhar Bharat*' or self-reliant India. This concept is pertinent to the defence sector, where New Delhi aims to 'encourage indigenous design, development and manufacture of defence equipment'.<sup>77</sup> Traditionally, India has leaned on Russia for defence equipment, but since 2008 the US and France now account for over 20%. *Atmanirbhar Bharat* will reinforce this direction of travel away from overreliance on Russia.<sup>78</sup> There is interest in the UK's air and maritime defence industry expertise as outlined in the '2030 Roadmap for India-UK future relations', in which both countries aim to establish a portfolio of collaborative projects.<sup>79</sup> Significant hurdles will remain, however, including India's continued close military relationship with Russia and its stringent protectionist policies.

### Top three Indian defence priorities for the UK

1. Encourage British support for India's objective of a stable Indian Ocean through a larger British naval presence to help maintain freedom of the seas, particularly in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea;
2. Secure the transfer of UK military technology to India to bolster India's domestic defence firms, in particular Britain's expertise in combat air related technology;
3. Acquire British support for Indian territorial disputes along India's northern borders.

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<sup>76</sup> 'UK plans to deploy Spearhead Carrier Strike Group to Indian Ocean Region in 2025', Ministry of Defence, 10/01/2024, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>77</sup> 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Initiative in Defence Production', Ministry of Defence (India), 01/04/2022, <https://pib.gov.in/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>78</sup> 'India-US: Major Arms Transfers and Military Exercises', Congressional Research Service (US), 30/05/2024, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>79</sup> '2030 Roadmap for India-UK future relations', 10 Downing Street, 04/05/2021, <https://www.gov.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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## 2.2.4 South Korea

South Korea's primary concern is the peace, stability, and prosperity of the Korean peninsula.<sup>80</sup> The UK has strong (but not total) commitments to help defend South Korea from renewed aggression by Pyongyang through the Joint Declaration Concerning the Korean Armistice (1953). In recent years, though, South Korea has been expanding its outlook to beyond the Korean peninsula. It wants to 'broaden its foreign policy horizons...and increase its involvement in international affairs and contribution to the global agenda'.<sup>81</sup>

South Korea's interests centre around upholding the 'rules-based international order' and promoting and facilitating defence exports (for South Korea's growing defence firms). Seoul envisages further opportunities to build naval logistics vessels for the UK (the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's Tide class tankers were built in South Korean dockyards), as well as a suite of potential equipment for the British Army. Hanwha, a South Korean company, was disappointed that the British Army's Mobile Fires Programme did not go through competitive tender such that its K9 Thunder could not compete with the German Boxer 155mm variant.<sup>82</sup>

South Korea is keen to deepen defence ties and support a growing British military presence in the Indo-Pacific – to bolster deterrence and to aid in maintaining sanctions against North Korea – as part of wider efforts to cultivate ties between like-minded partners in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.<sup>83</sup> To this end, the recent Downing Street Accord established 'a new South Korea-UK Foreign and Defence Ministerial 2+2 Meeting that will enhance cooperation in addressing regional and global challenges', only the third such arrangement for Seoul (the others being with the US and Australia). South Korea is also interested in any opportunities for involvement in AUKUS: in Pillar II to further improve the competitiveness of its defence firms, and also in Pillar I as

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<sup>80</sup> 'Defence White Paper 2022', Ministry of National Defence (South Korea), 02/2023, <https://www.mnd.go.kr/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> John Jill, 'Analysis: K9 artillery stalled, but not stopped by British Army rejection', *Army Technology*, 08/05/2024, <https://www.army-technology.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>83</sup> 'Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region', The Government of the Republic of Korea, 02/01/2023, <https://www.mofa.go.kr/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



South Korea has nascent ambitions to develop nuclear powered submarines.<sup>84</sup>

### Top three South Korean defence priorities for the UK

1. Secure further UK procurement of military and logistical equipment from South Korean companies;
2. Obtain British support for any level of South Korean involvement in AUKUS;
3. Encourage the UK to establish a more permanent naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, not least to uphold sanctions against North Korea.

## 2.2.5 Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia describes itself as ‘one of Britain’s closest allies’.<sup>85</sup> Riyadh and London structure their relations on containing Iranian influence in the Middle East, and defence exports. It is a relationship built on interests rather than values, but it remains an extremely close one. Britain is the second largest provider of military equipment to Saudi Arabia (behind the US).<sup>86</sup> In the future, Riyadh will seek to deepen defence ties, but there is a growing sense of frustration. In 2018, an agreement worth £5 billion for the sale of 48 Eurofighter Typhoons was agreed, but Germany blocked the deal for several years.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, Saudi Arabia’s desire to join the GCAP programme, as hinted at in the statement of intent for partnering feasibility study on combat air (2023), has been blocked by Japan.<sup>88</sup> Should setbacks continue, Saudi Arabia may explore options other than the UK for its defence needs.

In 2024, the two nations outlined next steps, focusing on ‘land-based systems including air defence capabilities and armoured

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<sup>84</sup> Jina Kim, ‘AUKUS two years on: South Korea’s view’, Perth USAsia Centre, 13/09/2023, <https://perthusasia.edu.au/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>85</sup> ‘Saudi Relations with United Kingdom’, Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the United Kingdom, No date, <https://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>86</sup> Louisa Brooke-Holland and Ben Smith, ‘Briefing Paper Number 08425: UK arms exports to Saudi Arabia: Q&A’, House of Commons Library, 29/01/2021, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>87</sup> Arion McNicoll, ‘Why is the UK pushing Germany on fighter jets for Saudi Arabia?’, *The Week*, 27/09/2023, <https://theweek.com/politics/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>88</sup> Jasper Jolly, ‘Saudis ask to join UK, Italy and Japan’s joint air combat programme’, *The Guardian*, 11/08/2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



vehicles, and uncrewed aerial systems along with complex weapons including precision-guided missiles'.<sup>89</sup> A key change for the future is Saudi Arabia's wish to onshore the production of much of the equipment it tends to import, with its 2030 vision stating 'we plan to manufacture half of our military needs...to create more job[s]...and keep more resources in our country'.<sup>90</sup> This strategy serves the country's wider goal of creating a more balanced economy to prepare for a world where oil demand declines.

### **Top three Saudi Arabian defence priorities for the UK**

1. Secure additional procurements of British arms, which have come under scrutiny or faced blockages from within the UK in recent years;
2. Push for the offshoring of defence production by British firms from the UK into Saudi Arabia;
3. Support a greater British military presence in the Middle East to help deter Iran and its proxies.

### **2.2.6 Taiwan**

Taiwan's relations with the UK are complicated because HM Government does not recognise the country as a sovereign state. Despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations – Britain closed its consulate in Taiwan in 1972 and subsequently exchanged ambassadors with the PRC – there is a 'strong unofficial relationship'.<sup>91</sup> Taipei's main goals focus on boosting its international standing and maintaining a military capable of deterring, and in *extremis* defeating, an attempt by the PRC to take the island by force. Accordingly, Taiwan desires any support it can get for joining multilateral institutions (such as the CPTPP now that the UK is a member) and the import of military equipment or, if that is not possible, support for its domestic military industry. The next few years will see Taiwan focus on developing long-range precision firepower; shore-based mobile anti-ship

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<sup>89</sup> 'Key step for UK-Saudi defence relationship', Ministry of Defence, 05/02/2024 <https://www.gov.uk/government/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>90</sup> 'Vision 2030: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', Government of Saudi Arabia, 21/11/2017, <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>91</sup> John Curtis, 'Taiwan: History, Politics, and UK Relations', House of Commons Library, 28/03/2024, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



missiles; minelaying capabilities; a new light class of frigates; and a new generation of submarines.<sup>92</sup> British submarine expertise has already been sought and acquired for the latest generation of Taiwanese submarines.<sup>93</sup>

### Top three Taiwanese defence priorities for the UK

1. Encourage British contributions towards deterring PRC attempts to seize control of Taiwan by force, primarily through a more permanent and more powerful Indo-Pacific presence;
2. Explore the sharing of British defence expertise and technology on capabilities relevant to a cross-strait conflict, particularly maritime (submersible) and missile technologies;
3. Push for more formal relations with the UK, particularly in how they support/enable the above two priorities.

## 2.3 Other notable countries

The UK's network of alliances and partnerships is vast, and not all countries could be covered by this report. But of those not covered, several key ones stand out as needing mention. In the Nordic area, NATO's new members **Sweden** and **Finland** (whose security Britain assured during the joining process) seek greater British participation in Northern European security. The **Netherlands** has an interest in working together on expeditionary capabilities through the Joint Amphibious Force, although plans to procure jointly amphibious naval vessels fell through. **Spain** would like to see Britain utilise Spanish shipbuilding capacity more. Keeping to the Euro-Atlantic but beyond Europe, **Guyana** worries about Venezuelan intent and looks to London to help deter any aggression. Others in the Caribbean, such as **Jamaica** and **Belize**, desire Royal Navy assets to bolster local maritime stability.

Beyond the largest or most significant Indo-Pacific countries, the UK has numerous additional relationships. **Singapore**, **Malaysia**, and **New Zealand**, along with Australia and Britain, are part of the FPDA

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<sup>92</sup> 'ROC National Defence Report 2023', Ministry of National Defence (Taiwan), 15/09/2023, <https://www.mnd.gov.tw/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Macaskill and Elizabeth Piper, 'Exclusive: UK approves increased submarine-related exports to Taiwan, risking angering China', *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).



security arrangement and the UK also has a permanent naval logistics facility in Singapore. **Oman** is one of Britain's closest military partners; Muscat is a regular purchaser of military equipment from the UK, supports desert training for British forces and is now hosting a large 'defence hub' for the UK at Duqm. **Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)** are business and military partners, also keen on limiting Iranian power. **Kenya** has traditionally been one of the UK's most important partners in Africa, hosting a British training facility, but the relationship is being complicated by growing Chinese influence. Finally, **Brunei** has long sought British support through the deployment of a battalion of Gurkhas from the British Army, where the jungle serves as a valuable training destination for British forces.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> 'The British Army in Brunei', The British Army, No date, <https://www.army.mod.uk/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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### 3.0 Strategic advantage: British capabilities

In a time of increasing geopolitical competition, British allies and partners are turning to the UK for support. This gives HM Government leverage. With one of the world's most advanced and complex large economies, Britain has a plethora of defence-related capabilities at its disposal: a nuclear deterrent; robust conventional forces with the ability to project power; military-technological expertise; and the ability to leverage its defence market for political and economic gain.

#### 3.1 *British capabilities*

##### 3.1.1 Nuclear arsenal

Britain's nuclear deterrent is a powerful tool. The credibility of the continuous at sea deterrent (CASD) is central to the UK's national security. Though this deterrent does not necessarily prevent grey zone provocations, Britain's nuclear arsenal provides HM Government with the ability to deter the most severe threats from adversaries – in particular, nuclear intimidation.

- **Extended deterrence:** The UK's nuclear arsenal is one of the key reasons many seek to ally or even partner with Britain. CASD contributes to British global influence – particularly as a nuclear custodian of NATO. Britain's willingness to forward-deploy forces to create extended deterrence is a key element of this. As the world becomes more volatile, the influence which comes from the UK's nuclear arsenal will grow. In particular, the US (and European allies) appreciate the significance of the British nuclear deterrent in creating a second centre of nuclear decision-making within NATO, multiplying the alliance's ability to deter aggressors. These concerns factor into the thinking of most NATO members and even some non-NATO members, which are keen to secure British support. This is especially the case when a second superpower – the PRC – may be emerging in the Indo-Pacific, whose intentions are often unclear or even





aggressive. However this will come with resource implications both on CASD and on the ability for the UK to make its extended deterrence credible via additional forward-deployed forces.

### 3.1.2 Conventional forces

Although they have been ‘hollowed out’ in recent years due to inadequate investment, much of Britain’s influence comes from the strength and experience of its armed forces. They help bring additional mass to allies, but more importantly they bring an array of specialist capabilities many allies do not themselves possess.

- **Power projection:** Only a small handful of allies have the capacity to project power in a meaningful way. These capabilities include expeditionary land forces, the ability to deploy powerful naval assets such as carrier strike groups and SSNs, and the wherewithal to obtain air superiority and/or launch airstrikes far from home; and the logistics and enablers needed to underpin all these. While the UK still possesses a number of such capabilities, some have come under increasing strain. These means provide a centre of gravity for willing allies to align around with additional mass, with the most recent example being the addition of Dutch (and the promise of Norwegian) warships to pack out the Royal Navy’s Carrier Strike Group in 2021–2022 (or 2025).
- **Experience and training capabilities:** The British Armed Forces are one of the few globally to have recent combat experience across the land, air, and sea domains (Operation HERRICK in Afghanistan, Operation SHADER over Iraq and Syria, and recent operations around the Red Sea, for example). This experience is valuable and many allies seek to share in the UK’s experience. In addition to sharing this experience, the British Armed Forces have recognised expertise when it comes to training programmes. This has value in shaping the training of allies, in particular Operations ORBITAL and INTERFLEX have allowed for the rapid training of a large number of Ukrainian personnel.
- **Presence:** The presence of the British Armed Forces, though they can only be in so many places at once, in or close to the territory



of allies, helps provide both nuclear and conventional deterrence and is highly sought after. Allies across NATO's eastern flank desire greater British presence, but so too do key partners further afield including some in the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the Indo-Pacific. In addition to the role presence plays in deterrence and defence diplomacy, the UK's ability to respond quickly to conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations is an additional, and often highly sought, capability.

- **Mass:** The mass of the British Armed Forces by almost all measures has been on the decline due to sustained underinvestment. Yet, the added mass Britain can bring to add to that of allies is always valuable and should not be allowed to dwindle further still. This value is particularly the case as the UK is seen as a reliable partner with a long-standing record of having the political will to use force when necessary.

### 3.1.3 Military-technological expertise

This expertise cuts across multiple military domains, but naval, and aerospace expertise in particular is highly coveted. To name but a few examples, ejector seats, aircraft engines, submarine nuclear reactors, and innovative automation systems in warships. UK designed and manufactured parts in addition to 'finished' products are also present in many multinational defence procurement efforts, for example over 20% of the value of each F-35 Lightning II Joint Combat Aircraft (all variants) built comes from British companies.<sup>95</sup> Many countries are now interested in what Britain can do to get them involved in AUKUS Pillar II projects to take advantage of the high level of integration between the UK and US military-technological ecospheres, presenting HM Government with a useful lever.

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<sup>95</sup> 'F-35 value to UK "significantly higher" than before, Lockheed Martin', *Janes*, 25/01/2024, <https://www.janes.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024).

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### 3.1.4 Potential market for foreign defence equipment

Several allies want to see more British procurements of their defence equipment or in some cases at least for the UK co-produce to produce it. Britain still has one of the world's largest defence budgets and allies want to bolster their own defence industry (much as the UK wants to boost its own defence exports). Notable examples include the US, Germany, Italy, and France, but also Sweden, Norway, South Korea, Spain, Canada and Israel. Some allies have identified and sought to fill gaps, notably in land warfare (such as artillery systems and armoured fighting vehicles) and shipbuilding capacity.

### 3.2 Geographic dispersion

There are geostrategic variances in what allies want from Britain. In general, allies along NATO's eastern flank would prefer the UK focus on being able to deploy large-scale ground combat formations (at the brigade or even division level) and help provide strategic enablers in the air and land domains. Allies along NATO's northern and southern flanks would prefer Britain to focus on naval power, including amphibious capabilities. In the Indo-Pacific, key partners want to see a greater British naval presence to bolster efforts maintaining stability in the region ranging from support in constabulary work to freedom of navigation patrols, to the pulsed deployment of carrier strike groups and littoral response forces.

Clearly, however, the UK cannot do everything all its allies would like it to. Hard questions will need to be asked about Britain's ability to maintain a 'full spectrum' of capabilities within a constrained defence budget and where it should focus efforts based on trade-offs between its own interests and complimenting the capabilities of particular allies. An additional challenge is that most allies desire increased commonality in defence equipment (in addition to the already extensive interoperability and standardisation, for the most part due to NATO). Yet, different allies operate different equipment and the UK will face choices in managing the optimal mix between sovereign equipment, consortium approaches, and importing (or co-developing and co-producing) from others.

Throughout history, the most successful alliances have been those built on the political cohesion of common aims, and this will



continue to hold true – hence why it is crucial for HM Government to understand the aims of key allies and partners.<sup>96</sup> But supporting allies and partners should not be seen as an end in and of itself. To maximise strategic advantage, HM Government should also seek to *instrumentalise* its allies and partners to secure national interests. This may prove diplomatically difficult, but not impossible. Indeed, to generate maximum effect, the two should go hand-in-hand. Any alliance or partnership depends on its strongest or most determined members, of which, due to its size and resolve, the UK is almost inevitably one. Providing allies and partners with what they want should always be done with an eye to strengthening the cohesion and power of the alliance or partnership in question, as well as the geopolitical and geoeconomic objectives of HM Government.

Instrumentalising allies and partners is key to securing strategic advantage; by empowering them to strengthen an alliance or partnership, the UK can reduce its own defence burden. If HM Government can manage the trade-offs across geographic theatres, the impact can be further multiplied for strategic effect. If the new government wishes to lean further into its doctrine of progressive realism, it will need to consider how it can encourage allies and partners to work for its progressive ends. Key to this will be Britain's ability to use its military hand of cards well.

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<sup>96</sup> Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray (ed.), *Grand Strategy and Military Alliances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 4.

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## 4.0 Conclusion

This Report has outlined what the UK's most significant defence relations want from London and has provided an overview of what capabilities Britain brings to the table that matter to them most. It has also argued that the ability to instrumentalise allies and partners in the pursuit of HM Government's objectives will be vital to securing national interests in a more volatile era. Through combining the findings and the arguments of this report, several key policy recommendations emerge, outlined below, for how Britain can best manage and use its vast network of defence relations to secure strategic advantage.

### 4.1 Policy recommendations

To strengthen Britain's offer to allies and partners – and conversely, its ability to convene and align them behind its interests – HM Government should:

1. **Appraise the UK's alliances and partnerships within the context of the ongoing SDR.** A core feature of the SDR should be to provide a stocktake of Britain's current allies and partners through the lens of defence, including areas of overlapping and diverging interests. Additionally, potential new allies and partners should be identified and assessed based on how they might support British defence interests.
2. **Establish an 'Alliances Unit',** which cuts across the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Defence, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. As Britain's complex web of alliances and partnerships grows and deepens, a single body with oversight of the whole picture would be of great benefit. In addition to providing oversight, the Alliances Unit should provide regular assessment of the UK's allies and partners and potential new allies and partners, as well as how British assets might be used to convince them to support HM Government's objectives.
3. **Increase defence expenditure to a level more suitable to an environment defined by renewed geopolitical competition and**



**confrontation between the major powers.** The UK's nuclear deterrent and the strength of its conventional forces are widely cited by allies as core reasons behind their desire for strong bilateral ties. But there are concerns Britain's armed forces have been hollowed out since 2010 due to a legacy of insufficient defence spending and a force posture ill-designed for geopolitical competition. Ensuring the credibility of the nuclear deterrent and modernising and regenerating conventional forces are an immediate priority. Without a significant increase in defence spending (i.e., at least 2.5% of GDP) Britain's conventional force design will need to be much more focused. The SDR will face a difficult dilemma of competing priorities and should carefully consider where and how additional investment might make the UK a stronger and more desirable ally, particularly in how certain capabilities might complement those of existing or potential partners.

4. **Continue to bind together defence relations between free and open countries.** Allies do not have to be like-minded, but these kinds of alliances invariably are deeper and longer-lasting. The free and open international order is under increasing strain and is ultimately upheld by the hard power of military capabilities. Deepening the ties that bond like-minded partners together will help multiply their ability to deter, and if needed defeat, threats and build prosperity. Due to a combination of factors (history, geography, language, institutions, and diplomatic and military capabilities) the UK is well positioned to provide a lead on these efforts.
5. **Establish and lead a vanguard of supporters of Ukraine.** For too long, support for Ukraine has moved at too slow a pace, ostensibly for the sake of NATO unity. But Ukrainian defeat presents a greater threat to NATO unity than supporting Ukraine at a pace not all allies are comfortable with. The UK should lead a coalition of the most ardent supporters for Ukraine to do as much as they can from their own resources; encourage other allies to do more; and source as much equipment and ammunition as they can from third parties, building on the Tallinn Pledge and Czech ammunition initiatives.



6. **Review of the current and desired level of interchangeability with allies.** Interoperability (the degree to which British forces and military equipment can operate alongside allied forces and equipment) has long been a feature of UK defence planning. Interchangeability (the degree to which personnel and equipment can be exchanged with other militaries), is growing in importance – Annex 1 shows which equipment used by the UK is used by other countries. To a large extent, NATO standardisation helps with interchangeability but the sheer demand for equipment and munitions Ukraine has needed to defend itself highlights how interchangeability will become even more vital in the future. The SDR should evaluate the current level of interchangeability, with whom, and determine a strategy which can drive the most value for the British Armed Forces.





## Annex 1: The countries with which the UK shares the most military equipment

**Table 1: Major pieces of military equipment in use across the British Armed Forces used by other countries<sup>97</sup>**

N.B. Equipment due to retire in the next few years or solely used by the UK is excluded from the table; Ukraine was also excluded from the list as recent military aid would skew the results. Though this is a crude measure, as numbers in service will vary heavily across equipment types and components and supply chains for individual pieces of equipment involve an array of countries and there are different variants of some of the equipment in the table. For example, warships, in particular, could have been broken down to include engines, combat management systems, point defence weapons and radars for the purposes of measuring interchangeability. For the sake of brevity, we decided against this option. The approach we take below provides a useful snapshot of the current level of interchangeability of the British Armed Forces with allies and partners, or areas where the UK is an outlier and shares a piece of equipment with only one or two other nations (such as the Challenger 2 main battle tank).

Equipment	Type	Other users
<b>Royal Air Force and Army Air Corps</b>		
Eurofighter Typhoon	Multi-role fighter	Austria, Germany, Italy, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain
F-35 Lightning II	Multi-role fighter	Australia (A), Belgium (A), Canada (A), Denmark (A), Finland (A), Germany (A), Greece (A), Israel (A), Italy (A & B), Japan (A & B), Netherlands (A), Norway (A), Poland (A), South Korea (A & potentially B), Singapore (A & B), Switzerland (A), US (A, B, & C)
E-7 Wedgetail	AEW+C	Australia, South Korea, Turkey, US
P-8 Poseidon	Maritime patrol	Australia, Canada, Germany, India, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, US

<sup>97</sup> Various sources used including: 'World Air Forces: 2024', *Flight International*, 14/12/2023, <https://www.flightglobal.com/> (checked: 26/09/2024); Alex Pape (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships 2023-24* (London: Jane's Information Group, 2023); and *The Military Balance: 2024*, *International Institute for Strategic Studies* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2024).



RC-135 Rivet Joint	SIGINT	US
Airbus A330	Tanker	Australia, Brazil, Canada, , Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, UAE
C-17 Globemaster	Transport	Australia, Canada, India, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, US
Airbus A400M	Transport	Germany, France, Spain, Turkey, Belgium, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Kazakhstan, Indonesia
CH-47 Chinook	Heavy lift helicopter	Australia, Canada, Taiwan, Egypt, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Morocco, Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Tukey, UAE
BAE Hawk	Trainer	Australia, Bahrain, Finland, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, UAE, US
AH-64 Apache	Attack helicopter	Australia, Egypt, Greece, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, UAE, US
MQ-9B Protector RG1	ISR/Strike drone	Belgium, Canada, Greece, India, UAE, Taiwan, Morocco
<b>Royal Navy</b>		
Type 23	Frigate	Chile
Type 31	Frigate	Poland, Indonesia,
Type 26	Frigate	Australia, Canada
River class	Offshore Patrol Vessel	Brazil, Thailand
Bay class	Landing Ship	Australia
Tide class	Tanker	Norway
Wildcat	Helicopter	South Korea, Philippines
Merlin	Helicopter	Algeria, Canada, Denmark, Indonesia,



		Italy, Japan, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan
<b>Army (heavy equipment)</b>		
Challenger 2 and 3	Main Battle Tank	Oman
Boxer	Armoured Fighting Vehicle	Australia, Germany, Lithuania, Netherlands, Qatar
Cougar (Mastiff, Ridgeback and Wolfhound)	Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle (MRAP)	Denmark, Iraq, Poland, US
L118 105mm gun	Light artillery	Bahrain, Bosnia, Brazil, Ireland, Kenya, Morocco, New Zealand, Oman, Portugal, Spain, Thailand, UAE, US
Archer	SPG	Sweden
M270 Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS)	Rocket Artillery	Bahrain, Egypt, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Turkey, US
Oshkosh	Heavy Equipment Transporter	Egypt, Greece, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, UAE, US
Medium Tactical Vehicle Replacement (MTVR)	Tanker	Egypt, Greece, Iraq, US
Rheinmetall MAN Military Vehicles (RMMV)	Truck	Australia, Austria, Colombia, Denmark, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Kuwait, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, US, Vietnam
M3	Amphibious rig	Germany, Indonesia, Latvia, Taiwan, Singapore, Slovakia, South Korea, Sweden
Titan, Terrier, Trojan, Challenger Armoured Repair and Recovery Vehicle (CRAAV)	Challenger based armoured engineering vehicles	Oman
<b>Missiles</b>		



Next-generation Light Anti-tank Weapon (NLAW)	Anti-tank missile	Finland, France, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sweden, Switzerland
Javelin	Anti-tank missile	Australia, Bahrain, Estonia, France, Georgia, Indonesia, Ireland, Jordan, Lithuania, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Turkey, UAE, US
Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS)	Surface-to-surface rocket	Australia, Bahrain, Croatia, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Singapore, UAE, US
Martlet	Lightweight multi-role missile	Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan
Starstreak	Short-range Surface-to-Air Missile	South Africa, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia
AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM)	Long-range air-to-air missile	Australia, Belgium, Bahrain, Canada, Chile, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, US
AIM-132 Advanced Short Range Air-to-Air Missile (ASRAAM)	Short-range air-to-air missile	India
Joint Air-to-Ground Missile (JAGM)	Air-to-surface missile	Netherlands, Poland, US
Brimstone	Air-to-surface and surface-to-surface missile	Germany, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia
Meteor	Long-range air-to-air missile	Brazil, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Qatar, Spain, Sweden
Storm Shadow	Air-launched cruise missile	Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, India, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE



Common Anti-air Modular Missile (CAMP) also known as Sky Sabre and Sea Ceptor	Surface-to-Air Missile	Brazil, Canada, Chile, Poland, Italy, New Zealand, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sweden
Aster Missile within the Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS) also known as Sea Viper	Surface-to-Air Missile	Egypt, France, Italy, Saudi Arabia
Naval Strike Missile	Anti-ship/land attack	Australia, Germany, Latvia, Malaysia, Norway, Poland, Spain, Romania, US
Sea Venom	Anti-ship missile	France
Tomahawk	Surface-to-surface and anti-ship missile	Australia, Japan, US
Trident II	Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile	US

**Table 2: List of countries by number of appearances in Table 1 (excluding those with less than five appearances)**

Number of appearances	Country
20	US
17	Australia
16	Saudi Arabia
13	Germany, UAE
12	Indonesia
11	Poland
10	Canada, Italy, Greece, Qatar, South Korea
9	France, India, Japan
8	Norway, Oman, Singapore, Spain
7	Egypt, Netherlands, Taiwan



6	Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Turkey, Thailand
5	Brazil, Denmark, Israel, Finland, New Zealand



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## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank their colleagues at the Council on Geostrategy, as well as the external reviewers consulted for this paper. In addition they would like to thank the representatives of High Commissions and Embassies in London who provided their time for interviews.



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The Council on Geostrategy is an independent non-profit organisation situated in the heart of Westminster. We focus on an international environment increasingly defined by geopolitical competition and the environmental crisis.

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## Notes

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ISBN: 978-1-914441-85-1

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