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Extended deterrence: From ‘tripwires’ to ‘cobwebs’

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Since the end of the Cold War, the United Kingdom’s (UK) nuclear deterrent has been reduced to a ‘barebones’ level. This has left Britain unprepared to respond effectively to provocation by nuclear adversaries in an increasingly volatile world.
- Meanwhile, the British Armed Forces have resumed a number of commitments to deny Russia access to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation’s (NATO) territory in Northern and Eastern Europe – known as ‘tripwire’ forces.
- To deter adversaries more effectively, the UK should move towards a ‘cobweb’ deterrence strategy, merging its existing posture with new measures – such as sub-strategic nuclear forces – to reduce the ability of adversaries to exploit gaps in the escalatory ladder.

Deterrence does not work in a political or military vacuum – it works in specific ways against specific potential aggressors. As the unclassified public version of the United States' (US) 2018 Nuclear Posture Review put it, there is no 'one size fits all' for deterrence.[1] The requirements for effective deterrence vary, given the need to address the unique perceptions, goals, interests, strengths, strategies and vulnerabilities of different potential adversaries.

His Majesty's (HM) Government's Strategic Defence Review (SDR), published in June 2025, represents a generational shift in British nuclear thinking. It attempts to begin to reassert nuclear deterrence towards the United Kingdom's (UK) adversaries, while reassuring allies – both in Europe and North America – that Britain remains a reliable nuclear custodian of the Euro-Atlantic region.[2]

Among the SDR's recommendations was an aspiration for greater UK participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) nuclear sharing mission. This raised several key questions about Britain's nuclear posture, including about the potential to allow forward-deployed US nuclear weapons to return to the UK, and whether HM Government is considering expanding Britain's nuclear arsenal to include sub-strategic nuclear weapons, in order to complement the sea-based Trident strategic deterrent.

The nuclear aspect of the SDR built upon the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh (IRR), which increased the UK's nuclear warhead cap from 225 to 260 in light of growing nuclear proliferation from both Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC).[3] However, forward-deployed American weapons, and an expansion of Britain's own deterrent, would represent a further leap in the UK's nuclear posture. The subsequent announcement made by Sir Keir Starmer, Prime Minister, to procure 12 nuclear-capable F-35A Lightning II Joint Combat Aircraft was intrinsically linked to the SDR's ambition to secure 'enhanced UK participation in NATO's nuclear mission',[4] representing an additional shift in Britain's strategic doctrine and capability set. Armed with B61-12 thermonuclear gravity bombs, the F-35A platform offers the UK a broader nuclear capability than it previously had.

These shifts rightly reflect the changing geopolitical environment. In March 2023, the Kremlin was unmoved by any NATO attempts at signalling while it transferred tactical nuclear warheads to its client state Belarus, just as it has not demurred from fantasising about inflicting nuclear Armageddon on rivals such as Britain. Similarly, the PRC remains undeterred from making regular incursions into Taiwan's airspace: in just 48 hours in early August 2025, 111 aircraft of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the armed forces of the PRC, were detected operating around the island, with 85 crossing the Median Line and entering Taiwan's Air

[1] 'Nuclear Posture Review', US Department of War, 02/2018, https://fas.org/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[2] 'The Strategic Defence Review 2025 – Making Britain safer: secure at home, strong abroad', Ministry of Defence, 02/06/2025, https://www.gov.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[3] 'Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world', Cabinet Office, 13/03/2023, https://www.gov.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[4] 'UK to purchase F-35As and join NATO nuclear mission as Government steps up national security and delivers defence dividend', 10 Downing Street, 24/06/2025, https://www.gov.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).

Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ).[5] Meanwhile, Russia and the PRC are continuing to modernise and expand their nuclear arsenals at a time when their strategic interests are converging faster than before, particularly in exploiting the Arctic, rare earth mineral extraction and sanctions evasion – all of which pose risks to the UK's national interests.

Against this international geopolitical backdrop, Britain has found itself in a muddled position over the last three decades, simultaneously reducing its nuclear payloads – first in the 1990s, ending nuclear depth charges and gravity bombs, then again in 2010 and 2015, reducing Trident warhead numbers – while at the same time increasing its conventional military posture across Europe, despite reducing its overall conventional posture, and simultaneously taking on further (albeit modest) commitments in the Indo-Pacific.

This incoherency between its nuclear and conventional postures has left the UK more vulnerable in the context of growing Russian and Chinese assertiveness and cooperation coupled with a declining US focus on Europe. The SDR begins to correct some of these errors, but more thinking is needed on the following two points:

1. How Britain's forward-deployed conventional forces are 'connected' to Trident; and
2. How the UK signals its preparedness to fight, in the event that its forward presence, particularly in Eastern Europe, is challenged.

To achieve these two missing links in Britain's nuclear posture, this Primer makes the case for building on the SDR by reinforcing the UK's nuclear deterrent in the Euro-Atlantic, and taking a leadership role in NATO deterrence – particularly in Eastern Europe – while (where able) supplementing American leadership in the Indo-Pacific. A nuclear-confident Britain should now embrace a risk-positive deterrent posture, with more robust stress-testing and clearer signalling to adversaries and allies alike, in order to reassert the UK's leadership in relation to nuclear deterrence, fit for the less predictable geostrategic environment.

History of the British deterrent

Since the end of the Cold War, Britain's commitment has been a 'barebones' deterrent, similar to the maxim of Kenneth Waltz that 'more is not better if less is enough'.[6] This thinking helps to explain key decisions made in 1994 and 1998 by

[5] Ian Ellis, Post on X, 09/08/2025, https://x.com/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[6] Kenneth Waltz, 'The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better: Introduction', *The Adelphi Papers*, 21:171 (1981).

successive governments to relinquish nuclear depth charges and gravity bombs, thus ending the UK's separate sub-strategic nuclear capability. The strategic deterrent – commonly known as 'Trident' – was subsequently renewed, but its payload was simultaneously reduced for Successor (based on the Dreadnought class of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines) from 16 missiles to 12, thus creating a less potent British nuclear deterrent. Given Russian and especially recent Chinese nuclear modernisation, this decision looks questionable, based as it is on the assumption that nuclear war would become less likely in the aftermath of the Cold War.

The IRR and SDR tried to amend these reductions in capability, again using Waltz's principle of 'more is not better if less is enough'.[7] The UK's nuclear enterprise is already expected to cost £15 billion this Parliament,[8] so HM Government will need to work within the Treasury's financial envelope, potentially restricting further developments.

Broadly, there are four main forms of deterrence: denial, punishment, direct, and extended. There is also general versus immediate deterrence, which adds additional layers of strategic thinking in order to impose a desired effect upon a potential adversary. Britain is unique among European NATO members in that it embraces denial, punishment and extended forms of deterrence, while France in practice only maintains direct (national) deterrence.

Deterrence by denial seeks to deter an action by making it unlikely to succeed, thus denying a potential aggressor confidence in attaining its objective. The British Armed Forces deploying in Northern and Eastern Europe is an example of the UK's deterrence by denial posture. While demonstrating to Russia that there would be a multinational response to a military incursion into NATO territory, the battlegroups' presence makes a swift Russian victory less likely.

Previous research has found that deterrence by denial using conventional forces is best achieved by the presence of heavy ground forces, as opposed to light ground forces, or air or maritime forces.[9] Therefore, while the British Army's Operation CABRIT comprises one armoured battlegroup – a numerically modest, though strategically significant, deployment – a full armoured brigade would help the UK not only to sustain, but to reinforce its conventional deterrent in Northern and Eastern Europe. A full armoured brigade comprising a full tank regiment, not merely a squadron, would also send a strong political message both to allies and adversaries.

Deterrence by punishment threatens severe penalties if an attack – such as nuclear escalation – occurs, significantly raising the cost of such an attack. Most denial strategies, such as placing military capabilities directly in the probable path

[7] Kenneth Waltz, 'The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better: Introduction', *The Adelphi Papers*, 21:171 (1981).
[8] '1,500 jobs created at UK nuclear weapons headquarters as sector boasts above average wages', Ministry of Defence, 19/06/2025, https://www.gov.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[9] Bryan Frederick et al., 'Understanding the Deterrent Impact of Overseas US Forces', RAND Corporation, 04/02/2020, https://www.rand.org/ (checked: 30/10/2025).

of an aggressor, for example, are inherently more reliable than punishment strategies, as they are evident to witness. On the other hand, an aggressor may doubt a defender's willingness to impose extreme punishments, or its willingness to receive punishment in kind.

Direct (national) deterrence occurs when a state tries to prevent attacks on its own territory, while extended deterrence involves discouraging attacks on allies or partners. Britain maintains its direct deterrence largely through its Continuous At-Sea Deterrent (CASD) – i.e., Trident – but also extends this posture to cover European NATO allies, i.e., through extended deterrence, in a way that France does not. France's nuclear forces are explicitly designed to deter attacks on French territory, i.e., their primary mission is direct (national) deterrence.[10]

Finally, there is also general versus immediate deterrence. General deterrence is usually part of a long-term strategy, such as American forces stationed in South Korea, whereas immediate deterrence often occurs during a crisis, and as such is harder to measure and implement. Part of the goal of general deterrence is to reduce the need for immediate deterrence – to create deterrent and dissuasion effects which become so ingrained that hesitation to attack becomes habitual by a potential adversary.

The UK's military deployment to Estonia, under NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) framework (the so-called 'tripwires'), serves both deterrence by denial (denying vital ground in Estonia to a possible Russian incursion) and ultimately – although very poorly communicated – by punishment (an attack on British and NATO forces would likely trigger a collective NATO response, leading to escalatory attacks). As noted, however, the UK's commitment to the EFP could be significantly reinforced by upgrading its armoured battlegroup to a full armoured brigade. As the geopolitical situation has deteriorated since the EFP was conceived ten years ago, so too should its constituent parts be upgraded to meet the threat posed now.

Bridging the mismatch: From tripwires to cobwebs

Britain's current deterrent postures – the EFP battlegroups and Trident – have not adapted to the more aggressive and unpredictable geopolitical situation in which the country now finds itself. The uplift in warheads stemming from the IRR and the SDR's aspiration to partake in NATO's nuclear sharing mission are each good places to begin bridging this gap in capability.

However, the UK should now think about moving past 'tripwires' of a small conventional force, and towards nuclear 'cobwebs', with deterrence by punishment

[10] Claire Mills, 'The French Nuclear Deterrent', House of Commons Library, 07/10/2020, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).

at the heart of a newly communicated, higher-risk force posture spread across regions explicitly linked to the national interest.

The British-led presence in Estonia – an armoured battlegroup of approximately 1,000 personnel with French, Danish and Estonian components – is often referred to as a 'tripwire' deterrent. However, tripwires are by nature invisible, which is not what a forward-deployed posture should be. Instead, to have a deterrent impact, such a force should be visible, high-risk and, ultimately, clearly linked back to the tripwire's explosive charge – deterrence by punishment.

Fundamentally, the tripwire of conventional forces is connected to the collective response of escalation – a factor of the EFP which is rarely communicated or signalled either to adversaries or allies, thus becoming hopelessly weak. The UK should now consider how better to communicate this intrinsic link between its conventional deterrence by denial strategy in Estonia (and, likewise, other forward-deployed force elements) to its willingness and capacity to inflict punishment (escalatory attacks) in the event of aggression.

When the four 1,000-strong EFP battlegroups were established in 2016, the Russian threat was potential incursions into the Baltic states in a similar sub-threshold manner as demonstrated in eastern Ukraine in 2014. By 2025, the threat to Eastern European NATO and non-NATO states alike has intensified in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour, and may intensify further in the event of a Ukrainian defeat.

Thus, given that the geopolitical situation has changed since the EFP was established nine years ago – and with it the threat markedly increased – Britain should now consider a range of broader general deterrence policies in Northern and Eastern Europe which better align the conventional with the nuclear postures. This would ultimately reduce the need to enact immediate deterrence during the onset of a potential crisis over the coming decade.

Furthermore, better coherence between conventional and non-conventional deterrence postures, signalling and bolder risk appetites should now be considered to strengthen British and NATO deterrence against an evolving backdrop of uncertainty, risk, nuclear signalling by adversaries, and further challenges.

This is where the UK can think about how to leverage its newly announced commitment to procure the F-35A Lightning II Joint Combat Aircraft, in large part to bridge this mismatch – developing from isolated, poorly signalled tripwires – to nuclear cobwebs underpinning deterrence by punishment, better communicated to nuclear-posturing adversaries. This can also be done while reassuring allies that Britain is the only reliable nuclear-armed NATO power which extends its nuclear cobwebs to denial, punishment and extended forms of deterrence to NATO allies.

The F-35A announcement came only weeks after the SDR alluded to the need of a 'sub-strategic' capability to deter battlefield escalation while complementing Trident. It allows for the return of an air-based UK sub-strategic nuclear role, strengthening Britain's nuclear deterrent in several meaningful ways, and, crucially,

provides a vital link between deterrence by denial using conventional forces and deterrence by punishment undergirded by Trident.

Underpinning conventional deterrence, the F-35A will also play a key part in the Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD) offensive counter-air and deep precision strike capability, projecting force at range from the UK to nullify threats before they are launched.

Meanwhile, Britain's commitment to NATO's nuclear sharing mission will be enhanced should HM Government make the F-35A available to NATO's Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) nuclear mission, able to fly the mission in a crisis. While there will be over 400 F-35A platforms, not all will be DCA compatible. Therefore, having 12 nuclear-armed UK airframes will compound NATO's Euro-Atlantic nuclear deterrence even more.

However, to achieve all this, the aircraft must be deployed. Only 12 initial airframes will burden training and deployment cycles and crew alike. HM Government should now consider prioritising an additional dozen airframes in the forthcoming Defence Investment Plan if it wishes to maximise their effectiveness as a deterrent in the Euro-Atlantic area. While it could be argued that this will come at a cost for the Royal Navy's carrier strike force, both Italy and Japan, for example, operate mixed fleets without issues. As long as enough F-35Bs are available for the carriers, this will not pose a problem.

Crucially, the Ministry of Defence's decision not to retrofit the Voyager fleet with boom refuelling systems for the F-35A limits its range advantage, which is critical for deep strike or B61-12 missions. Without a sovereign air-to-air refuelling capability, the programme relies on allies, burdens NATO partners, erodes Britain's operational independence and ultimately undermines deterrence. The refuelling system should be reconsidered urgently.

The future of British deterrence

In achieving a better coherency between the armed forces' conventional deterrent posture – the EFP and forward-deployed 'tripwires' – and a new nuclear 'cobweb' strategy – including nuclear deterrence by punishment – the F-35A decision should be viewed as a crucial first step. Forward-deployed and nuclear-armed F-35As allow for the creation of the nuclear cobweb, intrinsically linking current and future force postures to achieve a strengthened deterrence while allowing for greater nuclear flexibility should HM Government choose to pursue it. This would help Britain to rebuild the 'muscle memory' – both operationally and institutionally – of what it means to be a sub-strategic nuclear power, having voluntarily abandoned this position approximately 30 years ago.

In particular, reinforcing the nuclear cobweb theory is an option for the UK to allow the US to forward base B61-12 gravity warheads back in Britain, establishing immediate deterrence while reinforcing general deterrence. Similarly, immediate, general and extended deterrence can all be strengthened by a semi-regular forward-deployed contingent of four F-35A platforms to NATO's eastern flank, as well as through the Baltic Air Policing Mission.

Infrastructure is already in place to host F-35As across NATO's Baltic air corridor, as France routinely deploys nuclear-capable Rafales to Šiauliai in Lithuania, in addition to both the Italian and Dutch air forces deploying their F-35As to Ämari in Estonia. Malbork Air Base in Poland also hosts Italian and Dutch F-35As.[11] Closer to British shores, Italy has deployed its F-35As to patrol Keflavík Air Base in Iceland.[12] This could also be a vital role for the UK's new F-35A programme; maintaining deterrence by punishment in the vital 'Northern Gap' between Greenland and Norway – an increasingly important region to British national interests given the proliferation of Russian submarine activity in the area.

Further complementing a nuclear cobweb are available options for more sovereign sub-strategic capabilities around Tempest, the UK's next-generation stealth/fighter jet, and also around the Royal Navy's future submarine fleet. Intended to replace the Eurofighter Typhoon, Tempest is due to be in frontline service by 2035, but currently, very little by way of its loadout has been confirmed. Incorporating several new technologies, including deep learning Artificial Intelligence (AI), the ability to fly uncrewed swarming drones, directed energy weapons and hypersonic missiles have all been suggested, but so far there is little in the way of it potentially being nuclear-armed like the F-35A. Being 13 feet longer and 19 feet wider than a Typhoon gives Tempest options for a larger payload while still increasing range and remaining undetectable. Creating two parallel systems is naturally unnecessary duplication, but retaining next-generation capabilities while potentially being nuclear-armed will add further lethality to what will remain a modest fleet by platform numbers.

There would be inherent challenges in pursuing a nuclear-armed Tempest programme. As a partner member in the Global Combat Aircraft Programme (GCAP) – the trilateral partnership responsible for producing Tempest – Japan would likely be refused dual-key arrangements by the US should the UK wish to deploy B61-12 gravity bombs. One option to mitigate this would be for Britain to reintroduce a new sovereign UK-designed bomb similar to the WE.177 nuclear gravity bomb, which was decommissioned in 1998.

Alternatively, a new weapon could be built, likely utilising the warhead operational for Trident in a reduced yield form. These options would strongly complement the initial limited F-35A programme, which will be constrained due to

[11] 'Italy demonstrates fifth-generation integration into NATO air policing in Poland', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 15/02/2024, https://ac.nato.int/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[12] Giovanni Colla, 'Behind the scenes on Italy's third F-35A rotation in Iceland', *Key Aero*, 03/08/2022, https://www.key.aero/ (checked: 30/10/2025).

having only 12 airframes to fulfil meaningful gaps in capability, while broadening nuclear deterrence. A nuclear-armed option for Tempest would reinforce the nuclear cobweb for the next half a century, while ideally adding platform numbers for the F-35A over the coming years.

Similarly, a sovereign sub-strategic nuclear capability could be achieved when thinking ahead into the next decade, with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles for both the soon-to-be reinforced seven Astute class attack submarines and the projected 12 SSN-AUKUS class – their replacements from the late 2030s.[13] From 2027, a rotation of up to five British and American submarines will support the defence of Australian waters, as part of AUKUS plans which will see UK and US nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) make longer-term deployments to Australia.

While currently operating conventionally armed Tomahawk cruise missiles, these could be upgraded to nuclear-tipped Sea-Launched Cruise Missiles (SLCM-N). The US Navy is currently developing the SLCM-N programme, and is aiming for operational capability by 2034.[14] The US Department of War and US Congress (which authorised its budget) view the weapon as providing regional nuclear deterrent options, and it is seen as a vital component of modernising the American nuclear arsenal, particularly for deployment on fast-attack submarines.[15]

The effect of potentially nuclear-armed upcoming joint SSN deployments between the Royal Navy and the US Navy should serve as a catalyst for thought on how Britain can supplement American deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Despite the UK-Australia Defence and Security Cooperation Agreement providing a framework for a Status of Forces Agreement and a formal framework for consulting on issues of regional security,[16] Britain and Australia do not share a mutual defence clause.

This could be a weakness in the broader Indo-Pacific theatre, especially considering the importance of AUKUS to the UK. HM Government should begin considering how the upcoming SSN deployments can better increase deterrence against regional adversaries, supplementing American leadership while providing a further layer to Britain's nuclear cobweb for the next three decades, as geopolitical flashpoints will inevitably continue across the region.

Finally, when examining how the future of the UK's deterrence could evolve, thought should be given to differences between deterrence under treaty obligations (i.e., with NATO partners) and more general deterrence. In particular, the case of Australia being a non-treaty partner requires greater thinking and signalling on how Britain can support American deterrence alongside Australia, especially as

[13] 'UK to expand submarine programme in response to Strategic Defence Review', Ministry of Defence, 01/06/2025, https://www.gov.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[14] Anya Fink, 'Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N)', United States Congress, 19/09/2025, https://www.congress.gov/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[15] Robert Soofer, 'The US is building a nuclear sea-launched cruise missile. Congress must make sure it's built right', Atlantic Council, 03/04/2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[16] 'UK/Australia: Agreement for Defence and Security Cooperation', Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 22/01/2025, https://www.gov.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).

national security and industrial strategies converge further with AUKUS, while remaining mindful of Australia's views on nuclear weapons (although these may change should its national security situation deteriorate).[17] The UK's relationship with Japan warrants similar thinking, as Britain seeks closer defence industrial relations through programmes such as GCAP, as well as military relations with the Japan Self-Defence Forces.

Other than sub-threshold attacks, NATO deterrence has held for now. But were the UK and its Euro-Atlantic allies and partners to allow Ukraine to fall, or emerge strategically and territorially weaker, would an emboldened Russia move to test NATO deterrence and resolve more broadly, above the threshold for conflict? Doubling down in certain areas on general deterrence – and linking this more coherently to a new British nuclear cobweb combining the Dreadnought class, a future nuclear-armed SSN fleet, and the strategic deployment of F-35As as part of the UK's contribution to NATO's nuclear sharing mission – could better alleviate the risks posed by adversaries, including Russia and the PRC. Britain's adversaries are increasingly stress-testing the deterrent resolve of the UK and its allies and partners, especially non-NATO treaty partners and particularly Moldova, Japan and Taiwan.

Conclusion

The evolving and increasingly unpredictable geostrategic environment in both the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific requires closer appraisal of Britain's deterrent posture. The current mismatch between the conventional military deterrent of limited forward-deployed troops and nuclear deterrence by punishment should now be intrinsically linked via the UK's conventional posture in Europe through to a new nuclear cobweb strategy, better linked both to Trident and future sub-strategic sovereign capabilities. Crucially, this evolving nuclear posture should be communicated better to treaty and non-treaty allies alike, as well as adversaries.

Recommendations

In order to achieve better symmetry between current deterrent postures, HM Government should consider the following recommendations to build upon the work of the SDR and subsequent announcements:

1. **Increase from the current planned 12 training wing F-35A airframes to 24:** This should be the initial aim, with an ambition to reach 36 by 2045-2050,

[17] 'Nuclear Weapons', Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, No date, https://www.dfat.gov.au/ (checked: 30/10/2025).

given ongoing issues in the Technology Refresh 3 (TR-3) programme.[18] Increased numbers will make meeting the aspiration of joining NATO's nuclear sharing mission a more credible reality. An additional 12 airframes would allow for greater deployment cycles as part of the Baltic Air Policing Mission, providing a forward-deployed, credible deterrent by punishment to Eastern Europe, complementing the conventionally armed Typhoons on rotation and the British Army's EFP.

2. **Negotiate the forward basing of four F-35A platforms:** This could be done in three-month cycles once a year to İncirlik Air Base in Turkey, which is already used by the US and NATO allies. With growing instability and aggression in the Black Sea region, and with a possible UK deployment to the area in the coming year, this would provide additional nuclear deterrence to protect British troops and interests, and those of NATO allies.

3. **Consider reintroducing a UK-designed nuclear gravity bomb:** This could be similar to the WE.177, which would provide Britain with a sovereign sub-strategic capability for the Tempest programme, complementing the F-35A platforms. In the long term, HM Government should consider developing a dual-use stand-off capability with allies, especially those which may be interested in hosting British sub-strategic nuclear armed aircraft.

4. **Re-allow American forward-deployed B61-12 bombs:** These should be kept in secure storage facilities within the UK. This would help to burden-share the US nuclear deterrent with NATO allies.

5. **Consider learning from the US Navy's SLCM-N programme, and how this could provide further sub-strategic nuclear capability:** This should be done in regard to the Royal Navy's SSN fleet and leadership in the 'Atlantic Bastion' strategy for NATO,[19] in addition to supporting American nuclear deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

6. **Begin discussions with Australia and the US on collective defence:** Given the worsening geopolitical environment in the Indo-Pacific, is there any reason why Britain and Australia should not have a security arrangement similar to that between Canberra and Washington? Similar conversations could also be held with Japan in the context of GCAP.

[18] 'US watchdog warns of growing risks to F-35 programme', *Navy Lookout*, 04/09/2025, https://www.navylookout.com/ (checked: 30/10/2025).
[19] 'The Strategic Defence Review 2025 — Making Britain safer: secure at home, strong abroad', Ministry of Defence, 02/06/2025, https://www.gov.uk/ (checked: 30/10/2025).

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