

New report finds measures including sub-strategic nuclear forces can help strengthen Britain's existing nuclear deterrent against adversaries

- New research shows how Britain can once again become a sub-strategic nuclear power
- Britain should move from isolated, poorly signalled tripwires, to a nuclear cobweb network underpinning its deterrence
- Primer recommends strengthening F-35A capabilities, reintroducing nuclear gravity warheads, and formalising Australia mutual defence pact

The latest paper from the Council on Geostrategy's Strategic Defence Unit calls for Britain to rebuild itself as a sub-strategic nuclear power by merging its existing nuclear posture with new measures to deter adversaries such as Russia and the People's Republic of China.

The Primer suggests Britain should move beyond the 'tripwires' of a small conventional force with the UK military deployment to Estonia through NATO, and outlines a new nuclear cobweb strategy, better linked to both the sea-based Trident deterrent and future sub-strategic sovereign capabilities.

This proposed strategy includes purchasing a dozen more nuclear-capable F-35A airframes as part of the upcoming Defence Investment Plan to maximise Britain's Euro-Atlantic deterrent effect. This is on top of the 12 already ordered, building on recent announcements and the Strategic Defence Review earlier this year.

This also includes the deployment of four F-35A platforms, including engines, to NATO's eastern flank and through the Baltic Air Policing Mission. The analysis finds that the infrastructure is already in place for this at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, currently used by the US and other NATO allies.

Another option to improve Britain's nuclear cobweb is exploring the potential for a nuclear-armed Tempest given its size, though US resistance may pose a challenge, with Japan part of GCAP. Designing a new UK sovereign nuclear gravity bomb could be the solution, similar to WE.177.

Britain could also re-allow the American B61-12 to be kept in secure facilities, positioning these nuclear gravity warheads where they can establish immediate deterrence given the threat, while reinforcing general deterrence over the long-term. Similarly, the research calls for an evaluation of how the US Navy's nuclear

sea-launched cruise missiles programme could contribute to boosting deterrence capability.

The paper also proposes making Australia a full defence treaty ally with Britain and America, building on AUKUS to develop a shared mutual defence pact similar to the NATO Article Five obligations. The same could also be done with Japan, developed from GCAP.

Robert Clark, Visiting Fellow at the Council on Geostrategy and Research Fellow at the Yorktown Institute, said:

‘The UK’s current deterrent postures have not adapted to the more aggressive and unpredictable geopolitical situation which the country now finds itself in.’

‘The conventional military deterrent of limited forward-deployed troops and the nuclear deterrence by punishment should now be intrinsically linked via the conventional posture in Europe through to a new nuclear cobweb strategy.’

‘Crucially, this evolving nuclear posture should be communicated better to treaty and non-treaty allies, as well as adversaries, alike.’

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. The Council on Geostrategy was launched on the 2nd March 2021. More information can be found on our [website](#), including our [mission statement](#).
2. The Council on Geostrategy has an [Advisory Board](#) of 16 individuals with experience in politics, the military, diplomacy and academia.

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