

The Foreign Policy Centre

Submission to the Strategic Defence Review

September 2024

Introduction

- The Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) is an independent and non-partisan international affairs think tank based in the United Kingdom (UK).¹ Following an invitation to submit evidence to the Strategic Defence Review (SDR), the FPC engaged with members of our network to gather their insights. This submission is not a comprehensive analysis of all the issues facing UK defence today, but seeks to present relevant expertise and perspectives shared by members of the FPC network in September 2024 and from previous research and analysis.
- In this critical period of ongoing war in East Central Europe, as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the UK must remain firmly committed not just to providing substantial support to Ukraine (hardware, training, encouraging support from other allies), but be open to learning from Ukrainians in all relevant areas from disinformation to direct combat, including innovative and adaptive use of new technologies.
- In the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the UK has an opportunity to lead a 'coalition of the willing' to give Ukraine what it needs over the long term to manage the Russian threat. As part of this, the UK needs to demonstrate a clear understanding of the principle of deterrence. There is a risk, in the current context that Russia through its threats, including nuclear threats, manages to deter rather than be deterred. That has allowed Russia to exploit concerns in the international community about the dangers of escalation and constrained others to be shaped by 'red lines' imposed by Moscow.
- It is essential in this highly complex security environment to adopt a comprehensive and cross-departmental approach to the extensive challenges the UK faces. This approach should be rooted in, and based firmly on, our alliances and the synergies we achieve through coalitions of the willing. Siloed approaches must be avoided and defence issues tackled with a wider lens to provide a defence strategy that is comprehensive, robust and responds to the increasingly varied as well as often interlinked nature of the threats to our security.

Recommendations for the UK Government

- Create and follow a UK-EU security pact, as outlined in the Labour 2024 manifesto, to be able to face security threats as soon as possible.
- Refocus efforts on UK defence diplomacy to reduce tension and build cooperation between countries.

¹ The Foreign Policy Centre publishes independent research and provides an open and accessible space for the exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience, so that the voices of experts and advocates can be heard and acted upon (fpc.org.uk).

- Prepare for external threats whether they are conventional (ground, air and sea) or non-conventional (cyber, espionage and potential nuclear attack).
- Participate in European security through existing alliances. Support the defence of the Euro-Atlantic area through cooperation with NATO and other partners.
- Develop new, flexible and independent security alliances to deal with emerging threats.
- Support the European Union in developing a new strategy towards the Black Sea.²
- Approach defence with a wider, cross departmental lens to ensure a comprehensive and robust defence strategy is adopted so that actors utilising varied tactics can be challenged. This could be through the establishment of a governmental body, with a previous example being the Defending Democracy taskforce.
- Bolster the UK defence industrial base and tech innovation - a need exemplified by the lessons learnt responding to Russia's war in Ukraine.³
- Examine the possibility of a separable European military pillar within NATO as a matter of urgency in the circumstance that Trump is elected as president of the United States.

Proposition 1: Describe the strategic, threat, and operational context for UK Defence 2024-2050.

Uncertainty about the future US approach to defence and the impact on NATO

- A major uncertainty in the strategic context for UK defence is whether the commitment by the United States (US) to Europe will continue in a manner that aligns with the UK's interests.⁴ The approach that the US takes will be influenced by the outcome of the Presidential elections taking place in November 2024.⁵ If former US president Donald Trump is re-elected, it seems likely that there will be a situation in which the American president does not share the UK's fundamental belief in the need to defend Ukraine against Russia. Dr Andrew Gawthorpe, lecturer in history and international studies at Leiden University and expert on the US, noted that with a Trump win there is also a high likelihood that the US commitment to a rules-based order will be reduced, which will create uncertainty for institutions such as NATO.⁶
- Nicholas Williams, former NATO Head of Operations for Afghanistan and Iraq, and Simon Lunn, former Secretary General of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, have argued that in light of a

² Victoria Vdovychenko in comments to FPC, September 2024

³ Andrew Gawthorpe, in comments to FPC, September 2024

⁴ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁵ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁶ Gawthorpe, September 2024

potential Trump presidency, the idea of a separable European military pillar within NATO should be examined as a matter of urgency.⁷

- Uncertainty about a future US policy approach, and its impact on the UK, are not only driven by the possible outcome of the presidential election.⁸ Gawthorpe pointed to long-term pressures such as fiscal constraints creating uncertainty about spending commitments; a US desire to rebalance its priorities toward the Indo-Pacific region; and increasing policy isolationism as factors that will influence the US defence approach.⁹

The UK's relationship with Europe

- There has been a lack of shared strategy on defence at the European Union (EU), with no EU Security and Defence Committee; European weapons manufacturers responding to the individual needs of states' defence ministries; a lack of funding, no coordinated planning; and no real single market for defence industries.¹⁰ EU stockpiles also remain low and manufacturing capacities are not used fully because there are no state-provided contracts for weapons production.¹¹
- Despite these challenges, Nina Kuryata, Ukraine and Defence Editor at Tortoise, shared that altering the defence relationship to ensure closer collaboration on defence between the UK and EU will be important so that the UK is not treated as a 'third party' by the EU. Once the recently-appointed EU Defence and Security Commissioner begins working, the UK should engage to explore possibilities for a common EU-UK defence strategy so that defence capacities in Europe can be strengthened and lessen the dependence on the joint NATO position.¹² This is particularly necessary given the changing geopolitical priorities of the US.¹³ A closer working relationship with Joint Expeditionary Force partners is also crucial.¹⁴
- Kuryata also recommended that, despite the UK no longer being part of the EU, a functional scheme of military collaboration with European allies should be installed. This would include: a single UK-EU market for defence; military personnel joint drills; weapons compatibility checks; intelligence data exchange; common resistance to cyber threats; and resistance to espionage.¹⁵
- Furthermore, Victoria Vdovychenko, Joint Programme Leader, Future of Ukraine Programme, Centre for Geopolitics, University of Cambridge, stated that given the leading role the UK has

⁷ Nicholas Williams and Simon Lunn in comments to FPC, September 2024. Nicholas Williams and Simon Lunn in comments to FPC, September 2024. Comments derived and distilled from different policy briefs

<https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/natos-revival-of-collective-defence-and-the-challenge-of-national-commitments/> ; <https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/the-challenge-of-russian-dual-capable-missiles/> ; <https://www.ambassadorllp.com/ap-insights/nato---russia-is-there-a-future>

⁸ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁹ Gawthorpe, September 2024

¹⁰ Nina Kuryata in comments to FPC, September 2024; Paula Soler & Jack Schickler, Euro News, 'What will the EU's defence industry commissioner do?', August 2024 <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/08/01/what-will-the-eus-defence-industry-commissioner-do>

¹¹ Kuryata, September 2024

¹² Kuryata, September 2024

¹³ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁴ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁵ Kuryata, September 2024

taken in the maritime coalition for Ukraine and its maritime domain experience, the UK could support the EU in developing a new Black Sea strategy.¹⁶

The threat of Russia for the UK, Europe and NATO

- Russia poses a threat to global defence and security and the implications of a loss in Ukraine is a paramount defence threat for the UK. Kuryata shared that the risk of conflict spilling over Ukraine's western border is high and if Ukraine is defeated, it is understood that this risk would likely become inevitable.¹⁷ Professor Justin Bronk, writing for the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), has outlined that Russia may invade a NATO country within the next 3-5 years if Ukraine is defeated and the US does not commit to defending Europe.¹⁸
- Russia's medium and short-range dual capable missiles present a multi-faceted threat to UK defence. Russia's missile capacity challenges the credibility of NATO's strategy of deterrence and defence, in which the UK plays a central role with both nuclear and conventional capabilities.¹⁹
- In a conventional role, Russian missiles are particularly threatening to those UK forces deployed in NATO's regional defence plans and to their potential reinforcement.²⁰ This conventional threat requires a focus by all NATO members on the development of capabilities for air defence.²¹ The threat also poses the question of the need for the eventual development of similar ground-launched counter capabilities in support of the recent US-German decision to deploy conventional long-range ground-launched capabilities in Europe on a periodic basis.²²
- The nuclear threat posed by these missiles has led to calls for a strengthening of NATO's nuclear posture of which the UK independent deterrent is an important component.²³ The UK could consider contributing to the further strengthening of NATO's nuclear posture by playing a greater role in NATO's nuclear DCA force, (dual capable aircraft of 5 allies carrying US warheads).²⁴ The UK could also take the lead in pressing for an arms control approach to the problem of ground launched long range capabilities in Europe.²⁵
- Vdovychenko underlined that a Russian victory would grant Russia significant leverage over global grain prices, thereby generating inflationary pressures in the UK.²⁶ Before the onset of the war in Ukraine, Russia accounted for approximately 17% of global grain exports, making it the largest exporter, while Ukraine contributed around 10%, ranking as the fifth-largest exporter.²⁷ A

¹⁶ Victoria Vdovychenko in comments to FPC, September 2024

¹⁷ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁸ Kuryata, September 2024; Justin Bronk, RUSI, 'Regenerating the UK's Airpower Edge Within NATO', 2024 <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/regenerating-uks-airpower-edge-within-nato>

¹⁹ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

²⁰ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

²¹ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

²² Williams and Lunn, September 2024

²³ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

²⁴ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

²⁵ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

²⁶ Vdovychenko, September 2024

²⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, How Ukraine Overcame Russia's Grain Blockade, February 2024 <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-ukraine-overcame-russias-grain-blockade>; Vox EU, Rebalancing the scales: The need for tariffs on Russian Grain, June 2024 <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/rebalancing-scales-need-tariffs-russian-grain#:~:text=We%20analysed%20exports%20of%20grains,vividly%20illustrates%20Russia's%20market%20dominance>

Russian-dominated outcome would effectively grant control over 27% of the world's wheat trade, a position that would enable Russia to manipulate prices which would likely result in considerable inflation for UK consumers.²⁸ If Russia were to establish control over Ukraine's grain exports, it would possess a highly destabilising tool over the European economy, with the UK being particularly vulnerable to inflationary impacts.²⁹ Consequently, there are strong macroeconomic imperatives, in addition to geopolitical considerations, for supporting Ukraine's victory.³⁰

Destabilising regional actors and their cooperation

- Beyond Russia, the defence threat context is dominated by regional powers that oppose the rules-based order and UK security interests: China, Iran and North Korea.³¹ These countries increasingly cooperate on points of shared interest, for example materially supporting Russia by providing armed drones, missiles and munitions for use in Ukraine.³²
- These regional powers also cooperate through their increasing engagement in 'minilateral' groupings such as BRICS.³³ China was a founding member of BRICS alongside Brazil, Russia and India, and Iran has also become a member.³⁴ Russia currently holds the BRICS presidency and the next BRICS summit is scheduled to take place in Kazan, Russia in October.³⁵ Despite these developments, Gawthorpe argued that their alliances are fragile and they do not have core shared interests; each antagonises its neighbours and creates a regional counter-balancing coalition.³⁶
- However, coalitions can also provide support to the UK in pursuit of its goals. For example there has been provision of Patriot missiles to Ukraine by Japan.³⁷ Gawthorpe suggested that a strong narrative in defence of the rules-based order can encourage such cross-regional cooperation.³⁸

Complex operational context

- The operational context for defence is incredibly complex with a number of factors at play. The ongoing war in Ukraine marks the alarming return to the continent of high intensity conventional conflict.³⁹ Force protection has also become much more challenging, particularly due to the

²⁸ Vdovychenko, September 2024

²⁹ Vdovychenko, September 2024

³⁰ Vdovychenko, September 2024

³¹ Gawthorpe, September 2024

³² Gawthorpe, September 2024

³³ More information about the emergence of new 'minilateral' groupings can be found in evidence submitted by the FPC to the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry 'International relations within the multilateral system', <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/128572/pdf/>

³⁴ BBC News, Brics: What is the group and which countries have joined?, 1 February 2024 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-66525474>

³⁵ Foreign Affairs, The Battle for BRICS, September 2024 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russia/battle-brics>

³⁶ Gawthorpe, September 2024; Kuryata, September 2024

³⁷ Gawthorpe, September 2024; BBC News, Japan to send Patriot missiles to US which may aid Ukraine, 22 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-67798740>

³⁸ Gawthorpe, September 2024

³⁹ Gawthorpe, September 2024

adversary strike capabilities of unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UAVs) which results in high attrition rates for ground forces.⁴⁰

- Unmanned systems, in conjunction with emerging technologies, are assuming an increasingly significant role in the conflict in Ukraine.⁴¹ Vdovychenko explained that the stalemate along the frontlines has elevated the importance of deep strike capabilities.⁴² High-precision weaponry, such as the American HIMARS rockets; UK/French Stormshadow/Scalp-ER missiles; and Russian Kalibr/Kh-101/Kh-51 missiles, have played pivotal roles at various stages of the war.⁴³ Nevertheless, Vdovychenko outlined that there is a growing trend towards the use of relatively low-cost, mass-produced one-way attack drones which are gradually replacing these more sophisticated and costly systems.⁴⁴ Additionally, she said that big data analytics and artificial intelligence are proving to be important auxiliary tools in this context.⁴⁵ These technological advancements are likely to benefit Ukraine, given the leading position of Ukraine's allies in these domains relative to Russia's allies.⁴⁶
- Critically, there is a new and destabilising nuclear arms race and the possibility of concurrent nuclear crises in different parts of the world.⁴⁷ The New START Treaty which entered into force in 2011 will expire on 4 February 2026.⁴⁸ The expiration of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty in 2019 has also raised the possibility of a destabilising arms race in Europe, as shown by the recently-announced deployment of US intermediate-range missiles to Germany and Russia's announcement of a response.⁴⁹ In this context, China is engaging in a rapid nuclear build-up, increasing its stock of nuclear warheads faster than any other country, and Iran is reportedly close to the production of its own nuclear bomb.⁵⁰

National security impacts of a failure to address corruption in the UK

- The UK, particularly London, remains a hub for the facilitation of international financial crime and corruption.⁵¹ The ability of actors from adversarial states to harbour illicit finance in the UK has not only allowed autocratic states to entrench their power at home, but also undermine our defence and national security. However, there remains a failure on the part of the UK government to properly implement transparency and anti-corruption initiatives.⁵²

⁴⁰ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁴¹ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁴² Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁴³ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁴⁴ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁴⁵ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁴⁶ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁴⁷ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁴⁸ Gawthorpe, September 2024; U.S. Department of State, New START Treaty, <https://www.state.gov/new-start/>

⁴⁹ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁵⁰ Gawthorpe, September 2024; Kuryata, September 2024.

⁵¹ The Foreign Policy Centre, Unsafe for Scrutiny, December 2020 <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/unsafe-for-scrutiny-12-2020-publication/>

⁵² The APPG on Anti-Corruption & Responsible Tax and the APPG on Fair Business Banking, Economic Crime Manifesto II: Four principles for pragmatic reform to drive out dirty money, 2024, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e4a7793b0171c0e2321f308/t/661f6e0c78996a3bfb182177/1713335822981/Economic+Crime+Manifesto+2024+Digital.pdf>

- Russia is the most obvious example of illicit finance being harboured in the UK with damaging impacts, particularly in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament had raised this issue in its 2020 Russia Report:
 - *"Russian influence in the UK is 'the new normal', and there are a lot of Russians with very close links to Putin who are well integrated into the UK business and social scene, and accepted because of their wealth. This level of integration – in 'Londongrad' in particular".⁵³*
 - *"The links of the Russian elite to the UK – especially where this involves business and investment – provide access to UK companies and political figures, and thereby a means for broad Russian influence in the UK."⁵⁴*
 - *"There is an obvious inherent tension between the Government's prosperity agenda and the need to protect national security. To a certain extent, this cannot be untangled and the priority now must be to mitigate the risk, and ensure that where hostile activity is uncovered, the proper tools exist to tackle it at source and to challenge the impunity of Putin-linked elites. It is notable, for example, that a number of Members of the House of Lords have business interests linked to Russia, or work directly for major Russian companies linked to the Russian state – these relationships should be carefully scrutinised, given the potential for the Russian state to exploit them".⁵⁵*
- Policymakers should closely examine issues relating to financial crime and corruption as part of an array of national security and defence threats in the UK, with their inclusion in the SDR report a key step in continuing to bridge the gap between illicit finance and defence challenges.

Transnational repression as a threat to UK defence and security

- Another threat that may not be traditionally considered as a UK defence issue is the challenge of transnational repression. Currently, "authoritarian actors, including powerful authoritarian states, can remotely surveil, threaten and harass individuals inside the United Kingdom" however there is a gap in legislation and policy to protect victims.⁵⁶
- Transnational repression is not only a violation of the individual rights of those targeted, but is a modern national security threat in which we often see authoritarian or adversarial states operate within the UK from across borders. This threat has been acknowledged, but there has so far been little coherent strategy to address it. For example, the Defending Democracy Taskforce, established under the last government in November 2022, listed transnational repression as one of the threats facing the UK upon which it would focus, alongside: foreign interference in our elections and electoral processes; disinformation; physical and cyber threats to our democratic institutions and those who represent them; as well as foreign interference in public office,

⁵³ Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) of Parliament, Russia Report, July 2020 https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/CCS207_CCS0221966010-001_Russia-Report-v02-Web_Accessible.pdf

⁵⁴ ISC, Russia Report, July 2020.

⁵⁵ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, Russia Report Press Notice, July 2020 https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20200721_Russia_Press_Notice.pdf

⁵⁶ Dr Andrew Chubb for the Foreign Policy Centre, Meeting the Challenge of Transnational Human Rights Violations in the UK: The case for a Transnational Rights Protection Office, September 2023 <https://fpc.org.uk/meeting-the-challenge-of-transnational-human-rights-violations-in-the-uk-the-case-for-a-transnational-rights-protection-office/>

political parties and universities.⁵⁷ At the start of 2024, the Joint Select Committee on National Security Strategy started an inquiry into 'Defending Democracy', including an assessment of the taskforce, but was dissolved due to the July 2024 General Election.⁵⁸

- Last year, the International Security and Defence Committee raised similar issues in its China report:
 - *"The UK's tradition of political tolerance has meant that many foreign dissidents have made their homes here over the years and this has often prompted the hostile interest of foreign intelligence services. This is particularly true also in the case of China, given its focus on muting criticism of the CCP and dissuading challenge to China's territorial claims."*⁵⁹
 - *"In terms of interference, China oversteps the boundary and crosses the line from exerting influence – a legitimate course of action – into interference, in the pursuit of its interests and values at the expense of those of the UK."*⁶⁰
 - *"In order to control the narrative of debate, China exerts influence over institutions by leveraging fees and funding, over individual UK academics through inducements and intimidation, over Chinese students by monitoring and controlling, and over think tanks through coercion".*⁶¹
- Awareness of new and modern threats is essential for better understanding how our adversaries use different, often covert, tactics to undermine UK defence and prepare appropriately.

Proposition 2: Propose, in order of priority, the roles UK Defence must be capable of fulfilling 2024- 2040.

- Defence of homeland and UK economy and society across all domains, from external threats. This includes conventional threats (ground, air and sea) and non-conventional (cyber, espionage and potential nuclear attack).⁶² Preparation for external threats shows UK readiness to both the UK public and wider world.
- Collaborate with the European Union and other international partners to continue to persuade the US of the critical importance of achieving a Ukrainian victory.⁶³ While the specific strategy can be implemented in phases or adapted according to the evolving situation and available resources, the overarching objective must remain clearly defined and unwavering.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Gov.UK, Press Release, Ministerial Taskforce meets to tackle state threats to UK democracy, November 2022 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministerial-taskforce-meets-to-tackle-state-threats-to-uk-democracy>

⁵⁸ Joint Select Committee on National Security Strategy, Defending Democracy Inquiry, <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8131/defending-democracy/>

⁵⁹ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, China Report, July 2023 <https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ISC-China.pdf>

⁶⁰ ISC China Report, July 2023

⁶¹ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, Press Notice https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ISC-China_Press-Release.pdf

⁶² Gawthorpe, September 2024; Kuryata, September 2024

⁶³ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁶⁴ Vdovychenko, September 2024

- Support the defence of the Euro-Atlantic area in cooperation with NATO and partners further-afield.⁶⁵ Given emerging threats and obstacles, create new, flexible and independent security alliances.⁶⁶
- Participate in European specific security initiatives through existing and new alliances. This could include troop involvement; cooperation on technology and providing military aid where it is needed; and collaboration in a military industry and defence single market.⁶⁷
- Support allies and partners in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific to uphold the rules-based order.⁶⁸
- Approach defence with a wider - cross departmental - lens to ensure that a UK defence strategy is comprehensive and robust enough to respond to the increasingly varied - as well as often interlinked - nature of the threats to our security.⁶⁹

Proposition 3: Propose in order of priority what defence capability (as a function, not defined as equipment or organisation) UK Defence requires to deliver the roles required of it 2024-2050. This should distinguish between:

- ***The capability required for enduring, standing commitments and tasks, or to be held at high readiness.***
- ***The capability required on mobilisation in times of crisis***

Capability required for enduring, standing commitments and tasks, or to be held at high readiness

- Develop the UK's strategic programme. Build four more nuclear submarines, replace old and produce new nuclear warheads, and upgrade submarine patrols.⁷⁰
- Increase the UK's fighter jets fleet, either with F-35 jets or new Tempest aircraft model.⁷¹
- Develop UK air defence systems, protect strategic objects and ensure the nuclear alert system and defence.⁷²
- Input significant investment in the defence industrial base, particularly in surge capacity and technological innovation.⁷³
- In Eastern Europe, focus on high-value capabilities that add value to NATO force posture. It is not fiscally feasible for the UK to field more than a division on the Eastern flank. The attrition rate of

⁶⁵ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁶⁶ Kuryata, September 2024

⁶⁷ Kuryata, September 2024

⁶⁸ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁶⁹ Susan Coughtrie in comments to FPC, September 2024

⁷⁰ Kuryata, September 2024

⁷¹ Kuryata, September 2024

⁷² Kuryata, September 2024

⁷³ Gawthorpe, September 2024

such units in contemporary conflict is high and the fiscal environment does not support the generation of large capabilities. The UK can best contribute by focusing on long-range strike; air; air defence; Command, Control, Communications, Computers Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR); maritime; and drones.⁷⁴

- The UK should prioritise aerial and maritime forces with a focus on Europe (potentially in the Black Sea) and, as a secondary concern, the Middle East. Given fiscal constraints, Indo-Pacific ambitions should be limited, with a focus on cost-effectiveness.⁷⁵

Capability required on mobilisation in times of crisis

- Increase the army headcount; provide reservists' training regularly; and improve the call-up system used in the case of emergency.⁷⁶
- Critical infrastructure is needed. For example energy infrastructure; ports; railway junctions; logistic pathways and hubs; strategic enterprises; and hospitals.⁷⁷
- The UK must also focus on saving civilian lives through proper evacuation routes; children's protection; education system functioning; and hospitals for civilians.⁷⁸
- The UK should have an ability to surge its production of key munitions (artillery, long-range strike) and platforms (air defence, UAVs).⁷⁹
- The UK must also have an ability to surge the generation of land combat power. This is based on the assumption that there would be greater fiscal flexibility during a crisis.⁸⁰

Proposition 6: Describe how the current support to Ukraine is integrated into UK Defence programmes and activities and propose measures in priority order to sustain and enhance this support to at least 2027 and beyond.

- Kuryata stated that support to Ukraine is crucially important for the UK and the whole European continent. It is clear that, if Ukraine loses the war, Russia will not stop and will test NATO by invading one or more member countries in Eastern Europe.⁸¹ For the defence of Europe and the UK, Russia must be stopped in Ukraine as early as possible.⁸² The focus cannot only be on stopping Russian military action, but rather ensuring an outcome which resolutely discourages Russia from taking any further action, in Ukraine or beyond.

⁷⁴ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁷⁵ Gawthorpe, September 2024; Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁷⁶ Kuryata, September 2024

⁷⁷ Kuryata, September 2024

⁷⁸ Kuryata, September 2024

⁷⁹ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁸⁰ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁸¹ Kuryata, September 2024

⁸² Kuryata, September 2024

- Kuryata highlighted that the UK was often the first country to provide Ukraine with military assistance that went beyond the usual parameters of military aid. This includes the provision of 18 Challenger-2 tanks and Storm Shadow missiles. However, Kuryata also stated that UK aid to Ukraine has been qualitative rather than quantitative in value and only scratches the surface when the pace of war on the battlefield is rapid. She argued that, moving forward, the UK must continue to expand its assistance with Ukraine, including the provision of new kinds of military support that can change the situation on the battlefield.⁸³ In these efforts, the UK should be willing to learn from Ukrainians in all relevant areas, including innovative and adaptive use of new technologies.
- Moving forward, there are a number of steps that the UK can take to sustain and enhance its support to Ukraine. The UK must produce enough weapons for three core purposes: to be able to defend itself; to participate in European security programmes; and to supply Ukraine with enough weaponry to stop the Russian army in Ukraine, rather than in the EU or UK.⁸⁴
- The UK should continue training for the Ukrainian military contingent; share experience between the military command; as well as intelligence data with Ukraine and other allies in Europe.⁸⁵
- At the outset of the conflict, the Black Sea appeared to be a highly perilous region with limited strategic opportunities for Ukraine.⁸⁶ However, with significant support from the UK, Ukraine has achieved remarkable successes in the Black Sea, including the sinking of Russian warships and the execution of commando operations along the Russian-occupied coast.⁸⁷ Vdovychenko emphasised the importance of capitalising on strategic opportunities in the Black Sea and said that Ukraine, supported by proactive allies, should undertake a series of actions:
 - Deploy "smart" naval mines in the waters surrounding the primary Russian naval base at Novorossiysk to immobilise the remaining elements of the Russian fleet.
 - Intensify commando, rocket, and drone strikes launched from the sea against military targets along the littoral zone to disrupt Russian operations.
 - Target and destroy the Kerch Bridge to disrupt both the east-west rail and road logistics as well as the north-south maritime traffic from the Sea of Azov.
 - Prepare to engage in a "tanker war" should Russia retaliate against Ukrainian grain exports, ensuring Ukraine's ability to maintain the flow of its vital exports despite potential escalations.

⁸³ Kuryata, September 2024

⁸⁴ Kuryata, September 2024

⁸⁵ Kuryata, September 2024

⁸⁶ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁸⁷ Vdovychenko, September 2024

Proposition 23: Propose how UK Defence can build relationships with allies, partners, and alliances as a strategic strength for the UK.

Refocusing on defence diplomacy

- Given the complex conflict environment, Christopher Langton, Head of Independent Conflict and Research Analysis, proposed that different military approaches are required. He suggested that a refocus on defence diplomacy, which aims to reduce tension by building cooperation and understanding between countries, is needed.⁸⁸
- Refocusing on defence diplomacy will not mean a replication of previous efforts, including the NATO 'Partnership for Peace Programme' and individual NATO member states' initiatives which were central in supporting post-soviet states to rebuild and modernise after their independence.⁸⁹
- The UK's first priority is defence of the homeland of the Euro-Atlantic area. However, allies and partners beyond this region still bring added value.⁹⁰ Defence diplomacy is a way of engaging with these partners, alongside military exchanges, exercises and the provision of training. All of these efforts can build strategic defence for the UK.⁹¹ Newly established defence diplomacy efforts could be developed in an un-uniformed way to assist marginal allies such as former soviet states and Slavic countries such as Serbia; countries in East and South-Asia; and to countries in Africa.⁹²
- Despite cultural and geographical boundaries, militaries do share a common culture which enables greater cooperation and understanding to develop.⁹³ This means that defence diplomacy most likely begins with a better prospect of success than through mainstream political contact.⁹⁴
- To strengthen such defence diplomatic efforts, second track initiatives supported by NGOs could be useful.⁹⁵ These could look similar to the work done on the UK-China Summit that was organised under the auspices of Saferworld in 2010, for example.⁹⁶
- When looking for ways to expand UK defence diplomacy, Vdovychenko stated that the priority should be the newly proposed track of the British-Polish-Ukrainian trilateral pact.⁹⁷ Established as recently as February 2022, this initiative holds significant potential for enhancing regional defence collaboration and could serve as a catalyst for strengthening security partnerships in the region.⁹⁸

⁸⁸ Christopher Langton in comments to FPC, September 2024

⁸⁹ Langton, September 2024; NATO, Partnership for Peace Programme, June 2024
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm

⁹⁰ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁹¹ Gawthorpe, September 2024

⁹² Langton, September 2024

⁹³ Langton, September 2024

⁹⁴ Langton, September 2024

⁹⁵ Langton, September 2024

⁹⁶ Langton, September 2024; Saferworld, UK-China Summit, November 2010 <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/486-uk-china-summit>

⁹⁷ Vdovychenko, September 2024

⁹⁸ Vdovychenko, September 2024

Enhancing collaboration, forging new alliances and building independence

- The UK should continue to support and invest in NATO, however it should also identify different military, defence and security alliances that it can pursue.⁹⁹ The UK should also be more independent in decision-making regarding its own security and its security within the European continent.¹⁰⁰
- Kuryata emphasised the importance of increasing military collaboration with other countries on the European continent. This is particularly important for those countries that share a border with Russia, including Ukraine and Finland.¹⁰¹ This cooperation should be achieved through common military drills, mutual commitments and military aid in times of crisis.¹⁰²
- The UK must continue its strategic partnership with the US, including through NATO and the Australia-UK-US (AUKUS) agreement.¹⁰³ At the same time, the UK must become more independent in terms of weapons production and the development of military technologies.¹⁰⁴

Committing to NATO, reviving collective defence and advancing national commitments

- NATO remains the only international institution that can protect its members, including the UK, from the destabilising threat of Russian aggression.¹⁰⁵ The UK's emphasis in NATO should be deterrence based on an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces.¹⁰⁶ However, the search for arms control and confidence building measures should not be neglected and should be pursued when the conditions are right.¹⁰⁷
- NATO's collective defence was inactive during the period in which the alliance focused on stabilisation operations, such as those in Afghanistan. Williams and Lunn state that collective defence must be rebuilt.¹⁰⁸
- NATO's regional plans were approved at a 2023 summit in Vilnius.¹⁰⁹ The approval marked the most important step taken by NATO toward reconstituting a fully-fledged collective defence for the first time in over 30 years.¹¹⁰ The regional plans for defending Allied territory are demanding and complex and will take years to implement.¹¹¹ This means that NATO, as in the Cold War period, will once again expect precise force commitments and a sustained and sustainable support from its members, including notably the UK.¹¹²

⁹⁹ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁰⁰ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁰¹ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁰² Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁰³ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁰⁴ Kuryata, September 2024

¹⁰⁵ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹⁰⁶ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹⁰⁷ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹⁰⁸ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹⁰⁹ NATO, Vilnius Summit Communique, July 2023 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm

¹¹⁰ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹¹¹ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹¹² Williams and Lunn, September 2024

- Williams and Lunn anticipate that the regional plans will almost certainly cost NATO members more than the current pledge to spend 2% of GDP on defence, let alone 2.5% of GDP, which many now believe is necessary.¹¹³ Some allies will fall short.¹¹⁴
- The true costs of implementing NATO's regional defence plans, both nationally and collectively, should be identified.¹¹⁵ It will be important for public and parliamentary confidence to measure the growth in NATO's capability, which will certainly happen, despite some allies falling short of their 2% GDP pledge.¹¹⁶

This submission was prepared by Alice Copland, FPC Policy and Parliamentary Affairs Manager, with input from FPC Director Susan Coughtrie and FPC Senior Advisor Craig Oliphant (former diplomat and previously Head of the FCDO's Eastern Research Group). The submission was prepared with thanks to the contributions from Dr Andrew Gawthorpe (lecturer in history and international studies at Leiden University and expert on the US); Nina Kuryata (Ukraine and Defence Editor at Tortoise); Christopher Langton (Head of Independent Conflict and Research Analysis); Simon Lunn (former Secretary General of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and Senior Fellow at the European Leadership Network); Nicholas Williams (former NATO Head of Operations for Afghanistan and Iraq and Senior Associate Fellow at the European Leadership Network); and Victoria Vdovychenko (Joint Programme Leader, Future of Ukraine Programme, Centre for Geopolitics, University of Cambridge). The views expressed in the submission are those of the authors as cited.

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¹¹³ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹¹⁴ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹¹⁵ Williams and Lunn, September 2024

¹¹⁶ Williams and Lunn, September 2024