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Defence Committee

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**Adjusting to
new realities:
rebalancing the UK-
US partnership**

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International Relations and Defence Committee

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Committee staff

The staff who worked on this inquiry were Jennifer Martin-Kohlmorgen (Clerk), Priscilla Tomaz (Second Clerk), Isabella Antinozzi (Policy Analyst), Steph Coulter (Policy Analyst) and Robert Jones (Committee Operations Officer).

Contact details

All correspondence should be addressed to the International Relations and Defence Committee, Committee Office, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW. Telephone 020 7219 7412. Email

hlintlrelations@parliament.uk

Social media

You can follow the Committee on its LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/international-relations-and-defence-committee/>

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Q in footnotes refers to a question in oral evidence.

SUMMARY

Since the Second World War, the UK has viewed the United States as its closest and most valuable ally. Decades of deep cooperation—across defence, intelligence, trade, and a shared commitment to a rules-based international order—have underpinned the relationship. A distinctive partnership was formed based not just on collaboration but rooted in a cultural ease that stems from shared language, history and values.

And yet, the relationship is under greater strain today than at any point since the Second World War. The second Trump administration has shaken long-held certainties: the threatening behaviour towards a NATO ally over Greenland, the introduction of tariffs, the withdrawal from key multilateral frameworks, the absence of consultation ahead of recent US strikes in Iran, and an unpredictable and, at times, antagonistic diplomatic style, are forcing UK policymakers to confront uncomfortable questions about the future of the relationship.

At the same time, we believe that this administration's actions are in great part rooted in trends that began some time ago, and will endure in the years ahead, irrespective of who sits in the Oval Office. The once easy cultural bonds between Britain and America are beginning to fray due to generational change—the fading of shared experiences of the Second World War and the Cold War—as well as hostile rhetoric from segments of the US political class who view Europe as weak. Moreover, China's rise as a geopolitical competitor, a related pivot towards burden sharing on European security, growing resentment of globalisation, a recourse to economic nationalism, and a polarised domestic climate, are trends that will shape US foreign policy for the next decade.

The UK must reframe its relationship with the US and adopt a more balanced approach to hedge against a less dependable ally whose strategic priorities are shifting. This does not mean that it should jettison relations with a country that should and will remain a critical ally. But it does mean banishing the sentimental illusion that the relationship is somehow “special” or destined to endure in perpetuity. Political priorities in the US will give rise to a relationship that, while still close, will be far more transactional and interest-based than previously. The UK must respond by strengthening alternative partnerships and rebuild its own capacity to act without US support where this is feasible and in its interest.

Defence has long formed the cornerstone of the UK-US relationship. While the depth of collaboration between both countries and the technological advantages conferred have been of huge benefit to UK security, they have also fostered a dependency culture that has led to the atrophy of UK capabilities—and which has contributed to a substantial decline in UK credibility in Washington over successive administrations. Relative to GDP, the UK spends far less on defence than the US and relies on US support for a suite of conventional capabilities and, crucially, its nuclear deterrent. With the US preparing to undergo a process of burden shifting on European security, the UK must invest in its own sovereign capabilities, assume a greater leadership role within NATO and work with European partners to develop the means required to collectively deter Russian aggression. This demands the development of a credible plan—still absent—to meet the UK's increased defence spending commitments, alongside the accelerated implementation of the recommendations set out in the UK's Strategic Defence Review.

On foreign policy, the gulf between the UK and US on the relevance of the rules-based international order has widened under this Trump administration. The UK is committed to international law and multilateral responses to problems requiring collective action. However, US policy is increasingly influenced by a public yearning to prioritise national interests ahead of global ones. Even if future administrations are not as antagonistic to the multilateral order as the current one, they will likely still face public demands to reduce America's global commitments and take a more transactional approach to international organisations. The UK cannot assume that the US will retain its position as steward of the global order. It must therefore work with like-minded partners to buttress a rules-based system on which its own security and prosperity depend.

Economic ties, too, are being severely tested by the re-emergence of economic nationalism in the US. In recent years, tariffs, export controls, industrial subsidies and supply chain re-shoring have become bipartisan hallmarks of US economic policy, marking a departure from long-standing commitments to free trade and market-driven solutions. Differences on China and regulatory standards will add further friction. This does not preclude a continued close trade relationship but requires the UK to recalibrate its approach. A more balanced UK trade strategy, with wider international diversification with our European partners and beyond, would provide greater resilience against US volatility and continued deployment of protectionist trade tools. The UK Government has made a start on this process by seeking new agreements with the EU, including one on sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

Recognising these challenges does not imply advocating for a drastic decoupling with the US—indeed, such course would leave the UK less safe and prosperous. Despite headwinds from the US, there are opportunities for collaboration. Military interoperability (through both NATO and bilaterally), economic co-operation (especially on advanced technologies) and cultural and academic exchanges remain vital and should be pursued with vigour by the Government. Yet the UK must guard against the risks of overreliance. It must pursue a dual course—collaborating with the US where interests align, while bolstering relationships with other partners and enhancing its own strategic autonomy.

Ultimately, a UK that is stronger, more strategically autonomous and resilient will be the surest foundation for a more balanced transatlantic partnership—one that consistently advances and protects the UK's national interest.

Adjusting to new realities: rebalancing the UK-US partnership

CHAPTER 1: THE CASE FOR RE-ASSESSING THE UK-US RELATIONSHIP

1. The UK-US relationship is often described as “special”, a term first coined by Winston Churchill during World War II. It is regarded as distinctive among US alliances due to shared language and legal systems, cultural affinity, and a history of cooperation in defence and intelligence that had its origins in the Second World War, then developed during the Cold War, and has endured beyond it. However, there is also asymmetry baked into it by virtue of the size of the US economy, population and military might. Despite this asymmetry, both sides have historically benefited strategically and economically from the depth of the relationship.
2. The central question for the UK is not whether the relationship is “special”, but whether it continues to advance UK interests. Regardless of the label one chooses to attach to it, the UK-US relationship spans multiple areas of cooperation that have created a dense network of connections binding the two countries closely together. The intelligence partnership—anchored in the Five Eyes alliance¹ and the UKUSA signals-intelligence agreement—sits alongside an extensive defence relationship. This has seen multiple joint military engagements, including in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and the Balkans. The UK also relies on the US for many of its defence inputs, while providing niche capabilities in return, including access to its network of overseas bases. The economic relationship is similarly substantial—the US is the UK’s second largest trading partner after the EU, accounting for 21% of UK trade. Cultural and academic ties add further depth, with the US serving as the largest market for UK cultural exports, and both countries maintaining a long tradition of academic exchange and collaborative research.
3. However, there are strains affecting the relationship. The Biden administration’s rapid exit from Afghanistan, against UK advice, exposed the limits of UK influence over US decision-making. At the same time, an active debate within the US about its future global role and willingness to underwrite European security is creating uncertainty for NATO and the UK. US policy towards China has become more assertive and is inserting friction into the relationship. Strategic differences over the approach to Russia have also emerged. Contrasting approaches to tech regulation and online harms are an additional source of strain. US domestic arguments on freedom of speech, diversity and inclusion and migration have started to spill over into the US’ foreign policy approach, contributing to further tension. Finally, demographic change is making it less likely that future US generations will retain an automatic sense of affinity with the UK that was rooted in the shared experiences of the Second World War and Cold War.

¹ The Five Eyes Alliance is an international intelligence-sharing network comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with roots in the Second World War.

4. These dynamics were apparent or emerging when we started to hear oral evidence in March 2025 and already provided fertile ground for our inquiry. What we could not have foreseen, however, was how certain actions of the Trump administration and its threats towards Greenland and Canada in particular, would raise tensions and erode trust in the US, prompting questions about the ongoing value of the relationship and whether the UK should ‘de-risk’ from the US. Trust was further damaged when the President made disparaging comments about NATO and suggested that allied and British troops had avoided the front line in Afghanistan.² These developments have reinforced the need for a timely re-assessment of the relationship, and how the UK should balance maintaining a close relationship while avoiding over-dependence on a partner that has become less reliable.

Impact of the conflict in Iran on the report

5. On 28 February 2026, as we were in the process of finalising our report, the US and Israel launched joint strikes against a variety of military and political targets in Iran, which included targeted airstrikes that killed Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior regime figures. This followed a significant US military build-up in the Persian Gulf and failed negotiations about the future of Iranian nuclear weapons capabilities. Iran has retaliated by launching its own strikes against Israel and Gulf states, as well as closing the Strait of Hormuz, which has led to a global energy shock.³
6. With the conflict in Iran ongoing, we agreed to postpone publication of this report to take some evidence on what the early stages of the conflict told us about the state of UK-US relations. The UK Government’s refusal to allow the US to use its bases at the start of the conflict and its subsequent decision to limit their use to defensive purposes, have drawn the ire of President Trump, who has vocally criticised the Prime Minister over his perceived unwillingness to work more closely with the US.⁴ Despite the personal attacks, events in Iran reinforced the evidence we had already received—that the second Trump administration is prone to acting unilaterally and is prepared to use force without feeling compelled to build international consensus or engage with international institutions.
7. We note, however, that the report text was agreed by the Committee on 15 April 2026 and therefore events subsequent to it will not be reflected in the published report.

How this report is organised

8. A central aim of our inquiry was to identify the long-term trends influencing US policy and that matter to the UK. The evidence we collected points to five key trends, which we outline in Chapter 2. They should provide a more stable basis for navigating the relationship than focusing on the

2 We note that the UK suffered the highest number of fatalities in Afghanistan after the US. 457 UK armed forces personnel died while on deployment, with 405 deaths due to hostile military action. While the US had the highest absolute numbers, the UK (and Canada) faced higher casualty rates relative to their deployment numbers. See also: House of Commons Library, *Afghanistan statistics: UK deaths, casualties, mission costs and refugees*, [CBP 9298](#), December 2024 and The Watson School of International and Public Affairs, *The Costs of War to United States Allies Since 9/11*, 12 May 2021.

3 House of Commons Library, *US/Israel-Iran conflict 2026*, [Number 10521](#), 31 March 2026

4 BBC News, [Trump says Starmer is ‘not Winston Churchill’ over Iran strikes](#), 3 March 2026; Sky News, [Starmer denies U-turn claims after giving go-ahead for US to use UK military for strikes on Iran](#), 2 March 2026

latest political developments and presidential pronouncements. Chapters 3 to 6 examine the UK–US relationship through the lenses of defence and intelligence, foreign policy, the economy, and cultural, academic and research cooperation. While they necessarily refer to recent actions taken by the current US administration, their primary purpose is to tease out the longterm trends shaping the relationship, recognising that in some cases it is not yet clear which developments under the current administration may prove enduring. The long-term trends identified in those chapters are those that have been collated and presented in Chapter 2.

Our inquiry

9. We launched our inquiry in January 2025, inviting written evidence before commencing our programme of oral evidence sessions in March of that year. We received 37 written evidence submissions and held 23 oral evidence sessions with former ambassadors and government officials, academics and think tankers, ex-service personnel, journalists, and international lawyers. Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and the Overseas Territories, provided evidence on behalf of the UK Government. We are very grateful to all who contributed.
10. In January 2026 a Committee delegation visited Washington DC and met with US government officials, US legislators, policy experts, defence industry representatives, officials at the British Embassy and the Embassy of Canada, and other key stakeholders.⁵ We are grateful to all those who gave up their time to meet us, and for the support provided by the British Embassy in assembling the visit programme.

5 House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, *US Inquiry: Visit to Washington DC*, 13 February 2026

CHAPTER 2: LONG-TERM US TRENDS AFFECTING THE RELATIONSHIP

11. The arrival of the second Trump administration has prompted widespread introspection about the nature of the UK-US relationship in the context of a presidency that is increasingly transactional, unilateral and nationalist in character.⁶ However, over the course of our inquiry, we have received evidence indicating that there are five long-term trends that will underpin US policy in years to come. We recognise that the future is inherently unpredictable and that exactly how each of these trends will manifest themselves will depend on the ideological outlook of future US administrations, as well as the personal traits of the President. Nonetheless, we believe that the combined effects of these trends will considerably alter the economic, security and foreign policy foundations of the UK-US relationship and require careful consideration and navigation by UK policymakers.

Trend 1: China as a dominant organising priority

12. Geostrategic competition with China was highlighted throughout the evidence as a dominant priority for the US. In recent years, China has rapidly risen to become a near-economic peer to the United States and has demonstrated its ability to compete on the development of advanced technologies that will have major bearing on the future of economics and war.⁷ Its control over a sizeable portion of the global supply of critical minerals, increasingly assertive behaviour in the South China Sea and stated goal of annexing Taiwan in the near future have helped deliver a belief in US foreign policy circles on ensuring pre-eminence in this emerging great power competition.⁸
13. This view on China transcends party lines—both Democratic and Republican lawmakers are hawkish on China’s rise and supportive of assertive action to counter it.⁹ Moreover, the US plans to assign greater geopolitical attention to China are longstanding and can be rooted in the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia”.¹⁰ While differing on a range of policy areas, there was a degree of continuity between the Trump and Biden administrations on using tariffs and export controls to prevent China achieving technological and economic parity with the US.¹¹

Trend 2: Burden-shifting on European security

14. We heard that the US is in the process of encouraging Europe to take on more responsibility for regional security.¹² The primary driving force behind this recalibration is a consensus around the geopolitical challenge posed by China and the need to re-allocate American resources accordingly.¹³

6 [QQ 45](#) (Prof Monica Toft), [46](#) (Prof Donald Abelson), [96](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan)

7 [QQ 43](#) (Anton La Guardia), [91](#) (Charles Lichfield), [103](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan). Written evidence from Council on Geostrategy ([FRU0035](#))

8 [QQ 88](#) (Dr Francesca Ghiretti), [231](#) (Peter Rough); Written evidence from Dr Eliot Winter ([FRU0005](#))

9 [QQ 6](#) (Sir David Manning), [42](#) (Gerard Baker, Edward Luce), [103](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan). The Committee also heard that, while the establishment US position on China is hawkish, there are divisions within the Republican Party over China policy. While one group of Republicans reflect the general foreign policy trend, there is another group which are more sceptical of extensive global commitments and may be more inclined to make deals with China. [Q 122](#) (Ivo Daalder)

10 Written evidence from Dr Zeno Leoni ([FRU0012](#)) and Council on Geostrategy ([FRU0035](#))

11 [QQ 85](#) (Charles Lichfield), [103](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan)

12 [QQ 166](#) (Lauren Speranza), [231](#) (Tara Varma and Peter Rough)

13 [QQ 42](#) (Gerard Baker), [168](#) (Franklin Miller), [184](#) (Dr Sophy Antrobus)

Witnesses also cited US concerns about security “freeloading” by Europeans as animating the American desire to shift the burden of protecting Europe onto regional allies.¹⁴ The recently-published US National Security Strategy has crystallised these demands, arguing that Europe must “stand on its own feet” and take “primary responsibility for its own defense”.¹⁵

15. While the Trump administration’s approach to promoting European autonomy has been both abrupt and abrasive, we heard that the American demands for greater European security independence are not new and have been a persistent, if lower-level, source of tension over a number of decades.¹⁶ We also heard that the process of “burden shifting” will endure regardless of administration, as decisions of this magnitude cannot be easily reversed and because future administrations will not wish to underwrite European security to the same extent as previously.¹⁷ As such, it is highly unlikely that the US will maintain or restore its historic levels of support for NATO and European defence in the future.

Trend 3: Scepticism towards global commitments and multilateralism

16. The post-Cold War era was one in which the US maintained its position as steward of the international rules-based order and took on an expansive role in seeking to spread democratic capitalism globally. This involved the US underpinning multilateral institutions, promoting international economic development and adopting a “policing” role in global conflicts.
17. We heard of growing scepticism amongst the US public about its continued performance of this role.¹⁸ Deindustrialisation and the long-term impacts of the Global Financial Crisis have fostered a sense that America is not benefitting from a globalised and multilateral world.¹⁹ There are concerns that money being spent abroad, including on costly “forever wars” could be better used at home.²⁰ Witnesses noted that this recourse to a less globalised foreign policy that prioritises American interests is part of a longer tradition in American political thought.²¹

14 [QQ 18](#) (Greg Swenson), [18](#) (Jennifer Ewing)

15 White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025

16 [QQ 3](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [49](#) (Prof Donald Abelson), [251](#) (Prof Sir Lawrence Freedman). However, we also heard that the US has historically been supportive of greater burden sharing but still wished to maintain some degree of control over European defence policy [Q 43](#) (Gerard Baker)

17 [QQ 166](#) (Lauren Speranza), [251](#) (Lord McDonald of Salford), [251](#) (Prof Sir Lawrence Freedman). While some Democrats have been vocal in opposition to the Trump Administration’s transactional approach to NATO, we heard that there has been a shift away from European security and towards China that is “embedded... in the American strategic view”. It is plausible that a future Democratic administration will take a more constructive approach to NATO but unlikely that it would elect to support European security to anything like the same degree that the US has done previously.

18 Written evidence from Chatham House ([FRU0026](#)). Ivo Daalder, former US Permanent Representative to NATO, noted that opinion polling demonstrates that US public opinion is generally in favour of multilateralism and international cooperation. However, he noted that foreign policy issues are of low salience to the average US voter and that domestic issues generally take priority. Rep Jim Himes, Democratic Congressman for Connecticut’s 4th District, made a similar point about the low salience of foreign policy in the decisions of voters. [Q 121](#) (Ivo Daalder), [150](#) (Rep Jim Himes)

19 [QQ 61](#) (Daniel Mullaney), [107](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan). Written evidence from Ben Bland and Dr William Matthews ([FRU0025](#)), Chatham House ([FRU0026](#)) and BritishAmerican Business ([FRU0034](#))

20 [QQ 17](#) (Jennifer Ewing), [42](#) (Gerard Baker), [107](#) (Pro Charles Kupchan), [150](#) (Rep Jim Himes)

21 [QQ 1](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [227](#) (Peter Rough)

Trend 4: The rise of economic nationalism

18. There is an increasing sentiment across the US that its historic position as the leading proponent of an international economic order based on free trade has facilitated relative American economic decline (especially in relation to China), whilst also hollowing out America's industrial base.²²
19. This sentiment has led to a rise in economic nationalism. Recent US administrations have pursued policies designed to re-shore jobs for American workers and preserve US technological supremacy, particularly vis-à-vis China. There is also increasing evidence to suggest that the US is prepared to leverage its market size and use tariffs and other protectionist tools to achieve foreign policy or security aims. Evidence to the Committee highlighted an expansive use of export controls, investment screening, friend-shoring and subsidies to preserve US technological leadership—especially in semiconductors, AI and advanced defence technologies. We heard that US tariffs towards China and expectations of allies to align with the US on countering Chinese technological dominance are now a permanent feature of US trade policy, rather than a temporary or administration-specific posture.²³

Trend 5: Political and cultural polarisation

20. America remains deeply polarised on a suite of political and cultural issues. We heard evidence that America is “fundamentally divided” between two groups of voters whose opinions are increasingly divergent.²⁴ Divisions are particularly evident in areas such as free speech, immigration and the ‘culture wars’, and have been brought into sharp relief during the first year of the second Trump administration.
21. This high degree of polarisation will make engaging with the US more challenging. There is an expectation that the political “pendulum” will swing repeatedly between administrations with divergent views on cultural issues and globalisation, which will make it difficult to develop confidence in the consistency of US policy development.²⁵ Witnesses expressed concerns that cost cutting initiatives and politically motivated staffing decisions may result in core institutions in defence, foreign policy and intelligence losing vital expertise or being regarded as less trustworthy.²⁶ There is also evidence that the current administration is linking its foreign policy to its domestic political agenda, with the recent National Security Strategy stating an explicit aim for the US to help Europe arrest a perceived demographic and cultural crisis.²⁷

The conflict in Iran—not necessarily a departure from these trends

22. The onset of large-scale US military operations in Iran may appear to challenge some of these trends. However, we do not believe that the conflict alters the broad thematic assessment we have made.
23. Competition with China, together with US energy independence, means that US interests are increasingly focused elsewhere and will propel the US

22 [QQ 14](#) (Dame Karen Pierce), [40](#) (Gerard Baker), [61](#) (Daniel Mullaney)

23 [QQ 61](#) (Sam Lowe), [62](#) (Daniel Mullaney), [85](#) (Charles Lichfield), [103](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan). Written evidence from Chatham House ([FRU0026](#))

24 [Q 47](#) (Prof Donald Abelson)

25 [QQ 110](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan), [148](#) (Rep Jim Himes)

26 [QQ 29](#) (Dr Kori Schake), [44](#) (Edward Luce), [47](#) (Prof Monica Toft), [198](#) (Hon John O Brennan)

27 [Q 227](#) (Tara Varma)

to continue to reorient itself away from the Middle East.²⁸ Added to this, public approval ratings for US military action in Iran are low—lower than for previous US conflicts—confirming the generalised public desire to avoid costly military engagements.²⁹

24. We also heard that the initial operation was a distinct example of the way the Trump administration uses power—deploying vast and overwhelming military force in the hope of bringing enemies to the negotiating table.³⁰ It therefore represents less of a fundamental shift in long-term US strategy, and more a peculiarly Trumpian endeavour.
25. ***UK policy towards the US must be grounded in a sober analysis of the underlying long-term trends that are influencing US policy and affecting its relationship with the UK—a relationship whose depth and resilience extend well beyond the statements of any individual President or Prime Minister.***
26. ***The Government can no longer assume that the US will continue to guarantee European security or uphold the rules-based international order. Nor can the UK rely on historic goodwill and cultural affinity to sustain the relationship in an increasingly transactional context. The UK must therefore be hard-headed and realistic about the challenges posed by a changing US and adjust. The chapters that follow outline our specific recommendations in the areas of defence, intelligence, foreign policy, the economy, academic exchanges and research, and culture.***

28 [Q 252](#) (Laurel Rapp)

29 The New York Times, [Unlike Past U.S. Conflicts, Iran Attack Is Opposed by Most Americans](#), 10 March 2026

30 [Q 252](#) (Laurel Rapp)

CHAPTER 3: THE DEFENCE AND INTELLIGENCE RELATIONSHIP

Overview of depth of cooperation

27. Witnesses to the Committee widely described UK-US defence cooperation as extremely strong and as the bedrock of the wider relationship. There was broad acceptance that the countries enjoy a degree of military and intelligence interoperability that goes far beyond relationships with other allies.³¹
28. The UK-US defence and security relationship has its roots in the Second World War. The issuing of the Atlantic Charter—a joint declaration by President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill which outlined a shared vision for a post-war order—and the entry of the US into the war in 1941, signified the onset of a close intelligence and defence relationship. Throughout the remainder of the war, both partners engaged in close collaboration on wartime strategy, nuclear weapons development and post-war planning. This wartime alliance, underpinned by shared values and a common threat perception, endured into the post-war era, with both sides working as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to deter the Soviet threat. Notwithstanding high-profile moments of strain (most prominently the Suez Crisis and the Vietnam War) the UK and US have been steadfast allies in military conflict since World War Two, and their military and intelligence operations have become deeply integrated.³²
29. The contemporary UK-US defence and security relationship is characterised by close collaboration on conventional capability development, intelligence operations, nuclear deterrence, military planning and alliance building.³³ The UK and US militaries train and prepare extensively together and there are close bilateral relationships between their Armed Forces. Underpinning this collaboration is a shared commitment to Euro-Atlantic security. Both countries have historically been steadfast in their support for NATO, with the US assuming an “ironclad commitment” to leadership and the UK functioning as a leading European participant in the alliance.³⁴ They also regularly participate in multilateral exercises designed to improve combat readiness, either as part of NATO commitments or through other bespoke groupings of countries.³⁵
30. The UK and US intelligence services enjoy exceptionally close bilateral relations. UK-US intelligence links are built on the foundation of mutual trust established during the Second World War and a culture of collaboration remains deeply embedded in the security services on both sides of the Atlantic.³⁶ Alongside traditional intelligence operations, cybersecurity has emerged as a fertile ground for bilateral collaboration.³⁷ Both countries also participate in the Five Eyes intelligence sharing partnership, alongside

31 [QQ 1](#) (Dame Karen Pierce), [3](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald), [26](#) (Dr Kori Schake), [145](#) (Rep Jim Himes), [162](#) (Lauren Speranza), [164](#) (Franklin Miller)

32 Institute for Government, *The US-UK special relationship*, 26 February 2025; RAND, *Britain and America: Why so special?*, 9 July 2024

33 [Q 164](#) (Franklin Miller)

34 [QQ 166](#) (Lauren Speranza), [167](#) (Franklin Miller)

35 Ministry of Defence, *Press release: UK to hold joint military exercises with US and Japan to boost security and strengthen defence ties*, 11 April 2024

36 [Q 197](#) (Prof Sir David Omand, Hon John O Brennan)

37 [Q 204](#) (Dr Daffyd Townley)

Australia, Canada and New Zealand, which is widely considered the world's pre-eminent intelligence network.³⁸

31. UK-US nuclear collaboration is grounded in the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement, which established terms for the exchange of nuclear materials, technology and information and the 1963 Polaris Sales Agreement, which facilitated the sale of Polaris submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) to the UK.³⁹ Since the Agreement, the UK has purchased nuclear weapons delivery technology from the US, whilst maintaining domestic responsibility for the development of submarines and warheads. The MDA has historically been renewed every ten years but was renewed indefinitely in 2024.⁴⁰
32. Defence trade between the two countries is strong. According to the recently published Strategic Defence Review, the UK's Foreign Military Sales portfolio with the US is valued at more than \$18.6 billion.⁴¹ The US is the UK's second largest market for UK arms exports, accounting for approximately 14% of UK exports between 2021 and 2025.⁴²
33. The UK maintains a number of large-scale military installations in its overseas territories, designed to support global military operations. Prominent bases include those in the UK Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) in Cyprus, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, and the joint base on Diego Garcia.⁴³ The US retains a presence in UK bases in Oman, Ascension Island and the SBAs (amongst others) which provide a valuable platform for it to pursue its security interests globally.⁴⁴
34. Dame Karen Pierce, former British Ambassador to the US, stated that defence and intelligence formed the "bedrock" of the UK-US relationship and described the UK as a "day one, night one ally" when it comes to tackling shared threats.⁴⁵ Franklin Miller, Principal at the Scowcroft Group and former Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense, noted that the collaboration across the "full ecosystem" of defence and security policy (including nuclear, cybersecurity, space, weapons development and intelligence) is something the US only has with the UK.⁴⁶ Lauren Speranza, Fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis, noted that the "United Kingdom clearly remains the United States' closest ally", describing how the defence relationship between the two countries "is rooted in shared history, strategic culture, common values, language and threat perceptions". She described the direct linkages between military and civilian staff, the depth and frankness of bilateral communication and a long history of shared evolution and adaptation as evidence of the uniqueness of the relationship.⁴⁷ ADS Group

38 UK Defence Journal, *The Five Eyes—The Intelligence Alliance of the Anglosphere*, 14 April 2020

39 The Polaris Sales Agreement was amended in 1982 to facilitate the sale of Trident SLBMs to the UK. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, [HC 114](#), 18 March 2010

40 [Q 11](#) (Dame Karen Pierce); House of Lords International Agreements Committee, *Scrutiny of International Agreements: Amendment to the UK-US Agreement for Cooperation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence* (2nd Report, Session 2024–26, HL Paper 20)

41 Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: Making Britain Safer: secure at home, strong abroad*, 2 June 2025

42 Qatar ranked first with 31%. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2025*, March 2026

43 Ministry of Defence, *Integrated Global Defence Network*, 2 September 2025

44 [Q 1](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott)

45 [Q 1](#) (Dame Karen Pierce)

46 [Q 164](#) (Franklin Miller)

47 [Q 162](#) (Lauren Speranza)

described the close interlinkages between the UK and US defence industries, noting “highly integrated supply chains, research partnerships, and enduring bilateral treaties that go beyond typical alliances”.⁴⁸

35. On intelligence, witnesses widely praised the levels of trust and depth of integration between UK and US institutions, with the relationship considered to be globally unparalleled.⁴⁹ The Honourable John O. Brennan, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, highlighted the “extent, depth and sensitivity” of UK-US intelligence cooperation, claiming that “I had no qualms whatever about sharing our most sensitive secrets with my British counterparts”.⁵⁰
36. Witnesses drew a distinction between the UK-US relationship at the political level and at the official level. We heard that the current period is one marked by acute turbulence at the political level.⁵¹ However, we also heard that relationships at the official level—between military, intelligence and diplomatic experts—are more resilient in the face of political disagreements, with deeply embedded professional ties that continue to function effectively.⁵² During our visit to Washington DC, we were told repeatedly that the depth of UK–US defence and intelligence collaboration was particularly resilient to political fluctuations, and that the UK, for example, continues to be regarded as the United States’ “number one partner” in defence industrial cooperation.⁵³
37. **While at times there is turbulence at the political level, at the official level, the UK-US relationship on defence and intelligence is extremely close and acts as a bedrock for the wider bilateral relationship. Collaboration and integration are comprehensive across a broad spectrum of policy, with deep bilateral relations evident in defence planning, military operations, intelligence and technology development.**

Dependence—the flipside to close cooperation

38. Despite this clear proximity, there was an enduring concern across witness testimony that the UK is overly dependent on the US, relying on the US for military technology and requiring its support to execute military operations.⁵⁴ Sir David Manning, former British Ambassador to the US, stated that there was a “completely different dimension of dependence” with the US compared to other UK international relationships, while Evie Aspinall, Director of the British Foreign Policy Group, stated that “we are heavily reliant on the US when it comes to military”.⁵⁵ Dr Leslie Vinjamuri, then Director of the US

48 Written evidence from ADS Group ([FRU0011](#))

49 [Q 5](#) (Dame Karen Pierce), [38](#) (Gerard Baker)

50 [Q 197](#) (Hon John O Brennan)

51 [QQ 1](#) (Sir David Manning and Sir Nigel Sheinwald), [31](#) (Dr Leslie Vinjamuri), [45](#) (Prof Monica Toft), [249](#) (Laurel Rapp)

52 [QQ 1](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [5](#) (Dame Karen Pierce), [197](#) (Hon John O Brennan), [249](#) (Laurel Rapp). House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, *US Inquiry: Visit to Washington DC*, 13 February 2026

53 House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, *US Inquiry: Visit to Washington DC*, 13 February 2026

54 [QQ 171](#) (Lauren Speranza), [188](#) (Dr Justin Bronk). Written evidence from Prof Andrew M Dorman and Prof David Hastings Dunn ([FRU0018](#))

55 [Q 3](#) (Sir David Manning), [97](#) (Evie Aspinall). Aspinall also mentioned trade and soft power as areas of reliance.

and the Americas programme at Chatham House, noted the tension between guarding the UK-US relationship while reducing dependence.⁵⁶

Box 1: UK defence spending commitments

As a NATO member, the UK is committed to spending at least 2% of GDP on defence per annum. NATO estimates indicate that the UK spent 2.4% of GDP on defence in 2025.

In February 2025, the Government committed to an increase in defence spending, pledging to spend 2.5% of GDP on defence by 2027. At the NATO summit in June 2025, the UK pledged to spend 5% of GDP on national security, which includes 3.5% on defence and 1.5% on wider resilience and security. The Government claimed it would meet this target by 2035.⁵⁷

After returning from the Munich Security Conference in February 2026, Prime Minister Keir Starmer stated that the UK needs to “go faster” in raising military spending, with reports indicating that the Government may seek to increase defence spending again before the end of this parliament.⁵⁸ However, in February 2026, the Financial Times reported that UK defence expenditure is expected to be lower as a share of GDP in 2027/28 than it is currently.⁵⁹

39. Witnesses addressed the consequences of UK dependence. One common theme was that overreliance on the US had allowed the UK’s independent capabilities to atrophy. Sir David Manning noted that the UK’s reliance on America for military support created an “alibi mentality” and that we assume the Americans can “bail us out”.⁶⁰ Dr Justin Bronk, Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, stated that the previous assumption in the UK that “Americans will come in and save the day” can no longer be relied upon and that the UK would struggle to execute a large-scale military operation (akin to the 1982 Falklands War) without US support.⁶¹
40. A related core concern was that UK overreliance left it exposed to political volatility in the US. We heard that alterations in US strategy under the current US administration have brought UK dependencies into sharp relief.⁶² While witnesses differed on the extent to which UK-US relations were ruptured or merely disrupted, there was a widespread recognition that strategic hedging, through greater domestic industrial capacity and alternative international partnerships, was a necessity (see below).
41. We heard about specific areas in which the UK’s reliance was most felt. There was a clear recognition that the UK is highly dependent on the US for the delivery of core space capabilities, with Dr Peter L Hays, Professorial Lecturer at the George Washington University, noting the reliance on the US government for space-based capabilities such as, Position, Navigation and Timing (PNT) and missile defence, and reliance on private sector operator

56 [Q 32](#) (Dr Leslie Vinjamuri). She is also a Professor of International Relations at SOAS, University of London.

57 Institute for Fiscal Studies, *UK defence spending: composition, commitments and challenges*, 26 September 2025; House of Commons Library, *UK defence spending*, [CBP 8175](#) 10 October 2025

58 Financial Times, *Keir Starmer says Britain needs to ‘go faster’ on defence spending*, 16 February 2026

59 Financial Times, *UK military spending set to account for smaller share of GDP in 2027–28*, 25 February 2026

60 [Q 1](#) (Sir David Manning)

61 Specifically, Bronk argued that “in a scenario along the lines of the Falklands... we would have a great deal of trouble in establishing any air superiority at all”. [QQ 186](#) and [192](#) (Justin Bronk)

62 Written evidence from Prof Andrew M Dorman and Prof David Hastings Dunn ([FRU0018](#))

SpaceX for launch procurement.⁶³ Dr Bronk noted that the UK relied on the US for munitions supplies and access to electronic warfare assistance. He also noted that, in a future conflict, the UK (and European NATO more widely) could not overcome Russian ground-based air defences without US support.⁶⁴ Peter Rough, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center on Europe and Eurasia at the Hudson Institute, noted European reliance on the US for precision-guided munitions, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), heavy lift capability and air defences.⁶⁵

42. Particular attention was paid to the UK's reliance on the US for the continued operation of its nuclear deterrent.⁶⁶ Witnesses noted that, while the UK's deterrent is operationally independent, the UK relies on the US for the missiles required to deliver nuclear payloads and for system maintenance, a situation which will continue as the UK updates its deterrent in coming decades.⁶⁷ Dr Suzanne Doyle, Lecturer at the University of East Anglia, stated that "no other nuclear state depends, to the same degree, on the patronage of another for its advanced nuclear weapons capability", adding that the US has historically used this leverage to influence UK policy.⁶⁸ A scenario in which the US decided to end its collaboration on nuclear weapons with the UK would place the UK's deterrent at long-term risk and would raise questions about the US' willingness to use its nuclear arsenal to protect allies and maintain deterrence.⁶⁹
43. While these warnings were stark, the Committee also heard that UK-US relationship was in a suitably robust position that there should be no immediate concerns about denial of access to core nuclear capabilities. Sir David stated that he saw "no reason... to panic" when it came to a breakdown in nuclear cooperation, but that the UK must begin to consider such eventualities given the disposition of the Trump administration.⁷⁰ Mr Miller argued that a decision by the US to discontinue support for Trident would represent "a huge and fundamental break" in an incredibly deep military relationship based on shared interests and a need to deter Russian nuclear weapons use.⁷¹
44. Several witnesses told us that the UK needed to increase defence spending and develop sovereign capabilities, both as a bulwark against overreliance on the US and to allow the UK to make larger contributions to NATO and shared UK-US endeavours.⁷² Sir David and Sir Peter Westmacott (also a former British Ambassador to the US) stated that the UK's military capabilities had pointedly diminished in recent decades, with the latter claiming the UK needed to "raise our game" when it comes to defence.⁷³ Ms Speranza noted that the war in Ukraine had demonstrated the UK's weaknesses in munitions production and argued that it would be a "smart decision" for the UK to invest more in its domestic industrial base.⁷⁴ Dr Bronk claimed that

63 [Q 210](#) (Dr Peter L Hays)

64 [QQ 186](#) and [194](#) (Dr Justin Bronk)

65 [Q 231](#) (Peter Rough)

66 [QQ 1](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [11](#) (Sir David Manning), [42](#) (Edward Luce), [43](#) (Gerard Baker)

67 [Q 46](#) (Prof Monica Toft). Written evidence from Eliot Wilson ([FRU0028](#))

68 Written evidence from Dr Suzanne Doyle ([FRU0024](#))

69 [Q 46](#) (Prof Monica Toft); Written evidence from Dr Lauren Sukin ([FRU0016](#)) and Prof Andrew M Dorman and Prof David Hastings Dunn ([FRU0018](#))

70 [Q 11](#) (Sir David Manning)

71 [Q 170](#) (Franklin Miller)

72 [QQ 38](#) (Edward Luce), [99](#) (Evie Aspinall), [180](#) (Sophia Gaston)

73 [QQ 3](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [4](#) (Sir David Manning)

74 [Q 171](#) (Lauren Speranza)

the UK must focus on “filling in as many gaps as possible as fast as possible” to reduce dependence on the US and work towards a European-led NATO.⁷⁵

45. **The UK’s military relationship with the US is markedly uneven. This is a result of the difference in the size of their economies but also reflects the consequences of strategic decisions made in the UK over several decades. The UK relies on the US for conventional, space and nuclear capabilities and typically operates militarily only with US support. This institutionalised dependence on the US military sits alongside the reality of the UK’s diminished hard power, which leaves the UK particularly vulnerable to political shifts in the US.**
46. **While there is no imminent threat of the US denying UK access to core capabilities, the changing complexion of US foreign and defence policy means the current degree of UK reliance is no longer tenable.**
47. *Part of the answer to this challenge lies in the UK accelerating its defence spending. At the NATO summit in 2025, the Government made a commitment to increase UK defence spending to 5% of GDP. The Government should provide a clear, costed pathway to achieving this objective.*
48. *The UK Government should also redouble its efforts to strengthen the defence industrial base to support the development of sovereign capability. The recommendations made in the Strategic Defence Review recognise UK dependencies and lay out a roadmap towards greater sovereign capability. These should be pursued urgently.*
49. *The Government must prioritise the publication and timely implementation of the Defence Investment Plan to deliver on the recommendations set out in the UK’s Strategic Defence Review.*

Strategic divergence

50. One of the core pillars that has historically underpinned UK-US strategic cooperation is a shared understanding of the geopolitical environment and an agreement about the nature of collective security threats.⁷⁶ Sir Nigel Sheinwald, former British Ambassador to the US, described how both the UK and US have traditionally shared a “broadly similar worldview based on power and the willingness to intervene internationally”.⁷⁷ This shared analysis of geopolitical threats and the appropriate form of intervention has resulted in both countries typically engaging in military conflicts together.⁷⁸
51. However, Sir Nigel also suggested that this shared understanding of the geopolitical environment was being put under increasing strain.⁷⁹ Whilst there was disagreement over the extent of strategic divergence between the UK and US, witnesses widely agreed that there have been notable long-term and short-term changes in the US’ strategic outlook which are pulling it away from the UK’s positions.⁸⁰

75 [Q 188](#) (Dr Justin Bronk)

76 [Q 162](#) (Lauren Speranza)

77 [Q 3](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald)

78 [QQ 1](#) (Dame Karen Pierce, Sir Peter Westmacott), [101](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan)

79 [Q 6](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald)

80 For disagreement, see [QQ 6](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald), [7](#) (Dame Karen Pierce)

China and the Indo-Pacific

52. We heard that the pivot towards a greater focus on China and the Indo-Pacific was a trend in US policy that had strong bipartisan roots (see Chapter 2). This strategic shift has major implications for the UK.
53. While the US sees China as an “existential threat”, the UK (and European allies) take a different view.⁸¹ The Strategic Defence Review describes China as a “sophisticated and persistent challenge” (but not as a “threat”), with Sir David describing the UK’s high-level policy approach as “co-operate where you can, with your eyes open, but you also have to contest and confront where you think you must” (though others noted the UK’s China policy was not yet fully defined).⁸² Ben Bland and Dr William Matthews from Chatham House noted that, unlike the US, the UK is not in a position to compete with China for global pre-eminence and that China does not pose a direct military threat to the UK, which means that the UK can adopt a more constructive approach to engagement.⁸³ As evidenced through the Prime Minister’s recent visit to China, the Government clearly sees considerable economic upside in future engagement.⁸⁴
54. We heard of divisions within the current US administration about the UK’s role in the Indo-Pacific, with some figures wishing for a strong British presence and others stating a preference for the UK to focus on European defence.⁸⁵ Ms Speranza stated that a future administration may seek to encourage closer UK-US cooperation on Indo-Pacific security, as was the case under the Biden administration, and this would mean the UK would have to “maintain some level of flexibility to adapt to different approaches”.⁸⁶ Bland and Dr Matthews noted the UK’s own trade and security interests in the region and called for the UK to reject any US demands for a “division of labour” whereby the UK and European allies neglected the Indo-Pacific in favour of a narrow focus on European security.⁸⁷ Sir David argued that the UK must forge its own path on China policy, as the Trump administration could rapidly pivot towards a more benign approach, which would leave the UK in a disadvantageous position.⁸⁸
55. Professor Charles Kupchan, Professor of International Affairs at Georgetown University, spoke of a nascent “axis of autocracies” composed of China, Iran, North Korea and Russia, the countering of which may offer opportunities for strategic alignment between the UK and US.⁸⁹ We heard concerns that the increasingly close ties between China and Russia especially will be a major feature of Western security planning in the future, due to the increased integration of military systems and the potential for co-ordinated attacks in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific.⁹⁰ Evie Aspinall described the need for

81 [QQ 77](#) (Dmitry Grozoubinski), [103](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan), [104](#) (Evie Aspinall)

82 [QQ 6](#) (Sir David Manning), [104](#) (Evie Aspinall). Written evidence from Council on Geostrategy ([FRU0035](#)). Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: Making Britain Safer: secure at home, strong abroad*, 2 June 2025

83 Written evidence from Ben Bland and Dr William Matthews ([FRU0025](#))

84 Prime Minister’s Office, *Press release: Billions in exports and investment deals secured as PM concludes visit to China*, 30 January 2026

85 [Q 227](#) (Tara Varma) and written evidence from Council on Geostrategy ([FRU0035](#))

86 [Q 168](#) (Lauren Speranza)

87 There are 11 members of the Commonwealth, including 5 UK realms, among the Pacific nations. Written evidence from Ben Bland and Dr William Matthews ([FRU0025](#))

88 [Q 6](#) (Sir David Manning)

89 [QQ 106](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan), [107](#) (Evie Aspinall)

90 [QQ 168](#) (Franklin Miller), [188](#) (Dr Justin Bronk)

Western states to attempt to drive Russia and China apart, but noted that there would be difficulties in achieving a co-ordinated US and European response on this front, given divergences on which state represents the more severe threat.⁹¹

56. ***While Euro-Atlantic security should remain a UK priority, the UK should continue to engage with the US and other partners in the Indo-Pacific region on shared interests.***
57. **The US’ increasing focus on great power competition with China raises strategic dilemmas for the UK. The UK Government has sought to develop more cooperative engagement with China, cognisant of the economic opportunities this may bring. However, such an approach may bring it into tension with a bipartisan US consensus on curtailing China’s economic, technological and military rise.**
58. ***The UK Government must develop a China strategy that clearly addresses the balance between seeking economic engagement and addressing security concerns. Both opportunities for cooperation and any red lines can then be communicated to US administrations.***

Russia, Ukraine and European security

59. As outlined in Chapter 2, one of the core shifts in the US’ strategic worldview is a downgrading of European security as a core national priority. This creates challenges for the UK. The Government considers Russia to be the primary national security threat faced by the UK. The Strategic Defence Review described Russia as an “immediate and pressing threat”, and that the Russian invasion of Ukraine demonstrated its “willingness to use military force, inflict harm on civilians and threaten the use of nuclear weapons” in Europe.⁹² Prime Minister Keir Starmer reiterated this position at the Munich Security Conference in 2026, warning of the potential for Russian aggression against the NATO alliance by the end of the decade.⁹³ Witnesses noted that the UK’s view of Russia as an “existential threat” diverged from the US, which increasingly perceives Russia to be a threat largely to European security.⁹⁴
60. Gerard Baker, Editor-at-Large at the Wall Street Journal, noted that many on the right of US politics consider Russia to be a “better defender and protector of traditional cultural values” than the US’ Western allies.⁹⁵ We heard evidence that suggested that President Trump possessed an intuitive preference for dealing with autocratic “strongmen”, which has led him to take a more benign view of Russia and its President, Vladimir Putin.⁹⁶ Conversely, representatives from Republicans Overseas argued that a more

91 [Q 106](#) (Evie Aspinall)

92 Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: Making Britain Safer: secure at home, strong abroad*, 2 June 2025

93 Sir Keir Starmer, Prime Minister, *Prime Minister’s speech during the Munich Security Conference: 14 February*, 14 February 2026

94 [QQ 105](#) (Evie Aspinall), [228](#) (Tara Varma). The recently-published US National Defence Strategy also makes this point, arguing that “Russia will remain a persistent but manageable threat to NATO’s eastern members for the foreseeable future” and that the “US will continue to play a vital role in NATO itself, even as we calibrate US force posture and activities in the European theater to better account for the Russian threat to American interests”: US Department of War, *2026 National Defence Strategy*, 23 January 2026

95 [Q 37](#) (Gerard Baker)

96 [QQ 50](#) (Prof Monica Toft), [105](#) (Evie Aspinall)

pragmatic approach to Russian engagement was more likely to yield positive results than the approach of previous administrations.⁹⁷

61. The divergence between the UK and US on Russia and European security is starkly manifest when it comes to the war in Ukraine.⁹⁸ Sir David noted that the Trump administration has no real ideological investment in the defence of Ukraine, and instead saw only opportunities for the expansion of US national interest and high-profile dealmaking.⁹⁹ Ms Speranza noted that, while the UK and US share an interest in ending the conflict, US actions in Ukraine, such as pausing security and intelligence assistance, have diverged considerably from UK preferences.¹⁰⁰ The Trump administration's recent decision to undertake unilateral peace talks with Vladimir Putin is another indication that the US is diverging from European allies on the future of Ukraine.¹⁰¹
62. **There is increasing strategic divergence between the UK and US on the nature of the Russian threat. For the UK, Russia is the primary threat to its national security and poses an imminent challenge, whereas the US increasingly sees Russia as a regional threat that is of lower strategic import than China. This divergence is demonstrated through the increasing distance between UK and US positions on the war in Ukraine.**
63. *Future UK policymaking on Russia and security in Eastern Europe and the High North should no longer take US support in conventional deterrence as given. As the US shifts attention and resources toward the Indo-Pacific and competition with China, it increasingly expects Europe, including the UK, to take primary responsibility for deterring Russia. The UK and European allies must work towards ensuring the collective capacity to deter and, if necessary, repel Russian aggression.*

NATO and European defence integration

64. The shifting US analysis of European security dynamics underpins the increasingly assertive positions taken by the current administration towards NATO. The Trump administration has been steadfast in its demands for NATO states to increase military spending, with the aim to increase European autonomy and allow for American resources to be reallocated.¹⁰² While the speed and assertiveness of US policy may be rooted in a particular scepticism towards NATO's trajectory within the current US administration, the Committee also heard evidence that recent developments represent a fundamental change in US policy towards NATO, which has become more transactional and will demand greater European leadership in the organisation.¹⁰³ The recent NATO decision to redistribute leadership from three of the alliance's Joint Force Commands (JFC) to European states indicates that this process is already underway.¹⁰⁴

97 [QQ 19](#) (Jennifer Ewing and Greg Swenson)

98 [QQ 1](#) (Sir David Manning), [101](#) (Evie Aspinall)

99 [QQ 1](#), [7](#) (Sir David Manning)

100 Ms Speranza also noted that "Over time, though, we have seen some initiatives restart on the US side. This is an area that will require constant dialogue as US policy evolves." [Q 163](#) (Lauren Speranza)

101 BBC News, [Trump's call with Putin exposes shifting ground on Ukraine peace talks](#), 19 May 2025

102 [QQ 98](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan), [166](#) (Lauren Speranza)

103 [QQ 126](#) (Ivo Daalder), [166](#) (Lauren Speranza)

104 UK Defence Journal, [European allies take over NATO joint force commands](#), 10 February 2026

65. While successive US administrations have long aspired to undergo a process of “burden shifting” to Europe on matters of continental security, Tara Varma, Managing Director of Strategic Foresight and Director at The German Marshall Fund of the United States, expressed concern that this could turn into “burden dumping”, with the US stepping back from European security commitments in a manner that forces Europe to take total responsibility for its security with limited time to adapt.¹⁰⁵ Mr Rough noted that there may be a misalignment in timelines between European rearmament and the need for the US to respond to crises in the Indo-Pacific, which may entail a faster process of “burden shifting” than European NATO powers are currently prepared for.¹⁰⁶
66. Witnesses also expressed doubt over the future of US security guarantees under NATO Article 5.¹⁰⁷ Ms Aspinall expressed concern that the current US administration would not support Estonia (a NATO ally) should Russia decide to invade.¹⁰⁸ Dr Schake argued that we are facing “the end of the American security guarantees”, claiming that the Trump administration has destabilised them for the foreseeable future.¹⁰⁹ However, Rep Jim Himes, Democratic Congressman for Connecticut’s 4th District, asserted that claims the US would not live up to Article 5 obligations were “extremely fringe” and were rooted in President Trump’s political style as opposed to actual US policy.¹¹⁰ Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, claimed that the US administration “have been very clear about their commitment to NATO and their commitment to Article 5”.¹¹¹
67. Others stressed the enduring importance of NATO to US security. Mr Miller noted that the joint provision of US and UK nuclear capability made deterrence of Russian nuclear use much more comprehensive.¹¹² In this context, we also note a recent joint letter signed by eight former American ambassadors to NATO and eight former American supreme commanders in Europe, which stated that NATO is “the cornerstone of United States national security” and allowed the US to project power “in ways that would be impossible—or prohibitively expensive—to achieve on its own”.¹¹³
68. Given the US retreat from European security commitments, several witnesses saw greater cooperation with European partners and a pivot towards a more Europeanised NATO as political priorities for the UK.¹¹⁴ We note that this should also include greater collaboration with Canada. Given the altered US approach to NATO and European security, Sir Nigel, Sir David and Sir Peter all recognised the imperative for greater UK engagement with European partners on security.¹¹⁵ Sir Nigel argued that closer UK engagement with

105 [Q 231](#) (Tara Varma)

106 [Q 231](#) (Peter Rough)

107 Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty states that an attack on one NATO member should be considered an attack against them all.

108 [Q 101](#) (Evie Aspinall)

109 [Q 30](#) (Dr Kori Schake)

110 [Q 152](#) (Rep Jim Himes)

111 [Q 221](#) (Stephen Doughty MP)

112 [Q 164](#) (Franklin Miller)

113 The New York Times, [NATO Remains Vital to US Security, Ex-Ambassadors and Generals Say](#), 12 Feb 2026

114 [QQ 42](#) (Edward Luce, Anton La Guardia), [98](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan), [102](#) (Evie Aspinall), [229](#) (Tara Varma)

115 [QQ 9](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald), [10](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [11](#) (Sir David Manning)

Europe on defence procurement and hardware should be viewed favourably in the US, as it would facilitate greater European capability and autonomy.¹¹⁶ Professor Andrew Dorman and Professor David Hastings-Dunn, of King’s College London and University of Birmingham respectively, argued that the UK needs to rapidly move towards greater defence integration with European allies, including pursuing nuclear integration with France.¹¹⁷ Edward Luce, US National Editor at the Financial Times, argued that European countries needed to both “step-up” defence spending but also increase “self-reliance in terms of sourcing defence equipment”.¹¹⁸

69. Others noted the challenges associated with European defence integration. Ms Aspinall warned against seeing any future UK-EU defence cooperation as easy, noting the divergent interests of member states which have resulted in delays in action on Ukraine.¹¹⁹ The UK’s inability to negotiate inclusion in the EU’s new €150 billion defence fund, Security Action for Europe (SAFE), demonstrates that, even following a political reset, UK-EU wrangling over participation in EU programmes will remain a challenge.¹²⁰
70. Moreover, witnesses noted that any UK diversification away from US reliance and towards European integration would necessarily have to be a gradual process. There are core military capabilities, such as long-range precision strike and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), which cannot be replaced overnight and require long term collaboration with the US.¹²¹ Sam Lowe, Partner at Flint Global, stated that “you cannot de-risk from US defence overnight”, claiming that such a process would have to occur over a 10-year period.¹²² Sir Nigel Sheinwald argued that, while the UK should not seek complete independence from the US, it should seek to diversify its security arrangements over a five-to-ten year period, with US support essential in the short term.¹²³
71. There were also calls for the UK to lead on the process of NATO ‘Europeanisation’. We heard that there was now an increased expectation that the UK should take on a leadership role in NATO, which would involve rallying European allies to take action on continental security issues.¹²⁴ Mr Miller noted that “the US expects the UK to be the leader among the European nations in NATO because of its experience and expertise in military affairs”.¹²⁵ Ms Aspinall warned that the UK would need to increase defence spending should it wish to take on a greater leadership role in NATO.¹²⁶
72. We were told that, the UK has historically acted as a bridge between Washington and Brussels—building on its membership of the EU and its special relationship with the US to exert influence. However, we also heard

116 [Q 9](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald)

117 Written evidence Prof Andrew M Dorman and Prof David Hastings Dunn ([FRU0018](#)). In July 2025, the UK and France made a joint declaration committing to deepened collaboration between the two countries on nuclear deterrence, research and co-ordination. House of Commons Library, [UK relations with France](#), 12 January 2026

118 [Q 38](#) (Edward Luce)

119 [Q 102](#) (Evie Aspinall)

120 Chatham House, [The UK will not join the EU’s new defence fund. Can the UK–EU security reset still succeed?](#), 15 December 2025

121 [Q 171](#) (Lauren Speranza)

122 [Q 67](#) (Sam Lowe)

123 [Q 12](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald)

124 [Q 167](#) (Lauren Speranza)

125 [Q 167](#) (Franklin Miller)

126 [Q 99](#) (Evie Aspinall)

that post-Brexit the UK risked being perceived in Washington as a less valuable partner because it could no longer fulfil that role, requiring the US to engage more directly with European partners and, in some cases, bypass the UK altogether.¹²⁷ On our visit to the US, we heard a similar message from several interlocutors in Washington.¹²⁸

73. ***Through its leadership on Ukraine, the UK is well-placed to take on a wider leadership role in European security. Re-centring its efforts on Europe should also enhance the UK's strategic importance to the US by restoring its role as a transatlantic bridge to Europe—a position weakened after Brexit.***
74. ***The UK should lead on a concentrated move towards greater European leadership in NATO. The Government should continue its strong engagement with NATO partners in Europe and Canada to increase defence spending, interoperability and warfighting readiness. This must be a matter of priority, as there are no guarantees that the “burden shifting” process on NATO will be gradual.***
75. ***The UK Government should continue to explore and, where appropriate, pursue opportunities for European defence cooperation. We therefore recommend the UK continues to negotiate a mutually beneficial agreement on defence procurement.***

Iran

76. Even before recent events, witnesses noted the potential for UK-US divergence on Iran policy. The first Trump administration rejected diplomatic efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear weapons development by withdrawing the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was agreed between Iran, the UK, China, France, Germany, Russia and the US in 2015.¹²⁹ We heard that, while the UK and US both consider Iran to be a threat, the current US administration possessed a more assertive approach, as evidenced by its participation in Israeli airstrikes against Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025 (the first time the US had ever struck Iran on its own soil).¹³⁰
77. The recent onset of large-scale conflict in Iran has shone a light on this divergence in approach. The early stages of the conflict have involved joint US-Israeli airstrikes against military and political targets in Iran. The UK Government has clearly stated that it will not participate in offensive actions and is providing the US with access to UK bases to “specific and limited” defensive operations only (after a short delay at the beginning of the conflict where use of UK bases was not permitted).¹³¹ One witness, Lord McDonald of Salford, former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, welcomed the UK's decision not to participate in offensive military operations but argued that the UK could have been more forthcoming in allowing the US access to UK bases (though

127 [QQ 41](#) (Edward Luce) and [149](#) (Rep Jim Himes)

128 House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, *US Inquiry: Visit to Washington DC*, 13 February 2026

129 Written evidence from London Politica ([FRU0008](#)) and BritishAmerican Business ([FRU0034](#)). House of Commons Library, *What is the status of Iran's nuclear programme and the JCPOA?*, [CPB 9870](#), 8 October 2024

130 [QQ 7](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [122](#) (Ivo Daalder), [240](#) (Prof Marc Weller)

131 Prime Minister's Office, *Summary of the UK Government legal position: The legality of defensive action in respect of Iranian regional attacks*, 1 March 2026

we note there are complex legal considerations the Government would have had to weigh up).¹³²

78. Laurel Rapp, Director of the US and North America Programme at Chatham House, told us that “the US and the UK have a very similar assessment of the threat that Iran presents to the world” including agreement about the challenges posed by the Iranian nuclear programme, its ballistic missile development and its funding of regional proxy actors. However, she noted that “there is a stark disagreement on how to deal with this challenge” and that the UK is more supportive of a multilateral approach to Iran and favours using diplomacy and international sanctions to address its threat.¹³³ Witnesses noted that the Iran conflict further underscored the need for the UK to diversify from its current position of reliance on the US.¹³⁴
79. **While the UK and the US share a similar assessment of the threat Iran poses to liberal democracies, there is a sharp divergence in their respective approaches to addressing this challenge. Recent US actions in Iran demonstrate that the current administration does not view the use of force as a measure of last resort, but as simply another tool in its foreign policy arsenal. This differs significantly from the UK’s position, which has focused on a negotiated settlement for curtailing Iran’s nuclear weapons ambitions.**

Politicisation of intelligence

80. While the UK-US intelligence relationship was widely considered to be robust, especially at the official level, we received evidence which indicated that there may be political challenges to collaboration in years to come. Sir David expressed concerns that some of the Trump administration’s appointees to key intelligence roles could erode the foundation of trust that underpins intelligence collaboration.¹³⁵ We also heard that excessively political directives and appointments from the US government could undermine the professionalism and trust that is essential to the joint intelligence relationship.¹³⁶ Hon John O Brennan noted “perturbations” in US intelligence agencies as a result of appointees who did not possess experience in intelligence and expressed a note of caution about the potential for the integrity of intelligence work to come into conflict with the priorities of political leadership.¹³⁷
81. Senior ex-intelligence officials from both sides of the Atlantic expressed a cautious hope that the professional ethic of intelligence agencies in the US would be able to weather political challenges faced over the course of the Trump administration.¹³⁸ Dr Daffyd Townley, Senior Teaching Fellow at the University of Portsmouth, stated that, while long-term trends are difficult to predict, in the short term, “the common denominators in terms of the threats that we have, will keep us together”.¹³⁹ Dame Karen argued that the foundations of the intelligence relationship were strong enough to weather political turmoil, while Mr Baker claimed that US officials value the UK-

132 [Q 247](#) (Lord McDonald of Salford)

133 [Q 250](#) (Laurel Rapp)

134 [Q 254](#) (Laurel Rapp, Lord McDonald of Salford, Prof Sir Lawrence Freedman)

135 [Q 5](#) (Sir David Manning)

136 [Q 5](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Sir Peter Westmacott)

137 [Q 198](#) (Hon John O Brennan)

138 [Q 199](#) (Prof Sir David Omand, Hon. John O. Brennan)

139 [Q 200](#) (Dr Daffyd Townley)

US intelligence relationship to an extent that would make it difficult for the Trump administration to jeopardise it.¹⁴⁰ Dr Schake noted that bureaucratic cuts in the US, including to the intelligence services, could increase the UK's contribution to the relationship by accentuating the importance of UK-based intelligence in US decision-making.¹⁴¹

82. **The deep relationship on intelligence cooperation has experienced challenges due to political appointments made by the Trump administration. There are concerns that excessive politicisation of US intelligence could undermine the trust that underpins UK-US intelligence relations. However, there is scope for cautious optimism that the US intelligence agencies will be able to weather political challenges and maintain close ties with the UK.**
83. *Nevertheless, the Government should ensure that UK intelligence agencies undertake the necessary planning required to mitigate against a scenario in which political directives render the US a less reliable partner.*

Managing emerging opportunities

84. While we heard of several challenges to the UK-US defence and security relationship and the need for greater autonomy in UK defence policy, witnesses were clear that continued close engagement remained both desirable and necessary.
85. We heard broad support for the UK adopting a twin track approach to defence through the maintenance of close ties with the US, while pivoting towards investments in sovereign capability and greater European engagement. Professor Andrew Dorman and Professor David Hastings Dunn advised that the UK should “seek to keep the US as committed as possible to the support of its existing defence, security and intelligence partnerships to buy time to develop alternative arrangements”.¹⁴² We heard that strategic diversification should not entail an abandonment of the incredibly valuable defence ties the UK has with the US—Dr Vinjamuri referred to the choice between the US and Europe as “false and unmakeable”, while Sir Peter claimed that it was not “either/or” but “both/and”.¹⁴³
86. Witnesses drew attention to areas of alignment that would create space for future cooperation. Both countries are in agreement on the necessity of improving warfighting readiness and lethality, as well as recognising the need to strengthen defence industrial bases and modernise procurement processes. There is also a shared desire to develop innovative military technology that can deter enemy aggression and deliver operational advantage during conflict.¹⁴⁴ However, witnesses noted that a more transactional US approach to the UK-US relationship underlines the importance of the UK contributing to projects that have demonstrable impact on US national interests.¹⁴⁵ We need to be more practically useful and add value to the US role.

140 [QQ 5](#) (Dame Karen Pierce), [38](#) (Gerard Baker)

141 [Q 28](#) (Dr Kori Schake)

142 Written evidence from Prof Andrew M Dorman and Prof David Hastings Dunn ([FRU0018](#))

143 [Q 12](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [32](#) (Dr Leslie Vinjamuri)

144 [Q 163](#) (Lauren Speranza), [177](#) (Sophia Gaston)

145 [QQ 4](#) (Sir David Manning), [45](#) (Prof Monica Toft)

87. Throughout our inquiry, we focused on three core areas in which continued UK-US cooperation is vital to ensure shared defence interests are met: the AUKUS submarine programme; the F-35 fighter programme; and shared endeavours in space. These areas of collaboration will need to be well managed to ensure that the UK-US security relationship remains robust. They also offer instructive insights into the actions the UK must take to ensure it is considered a reliable partner in any future joint programmes.
88. **While there is clearly an imperative for the UK to strategically hedge through the development of sovereign capabilities and engagement with European partners, witnesses were clear that the UK should maintain close links with the US on existing defence programmes and future areas of shared interest.**
89. *The UK should adopt a twin-track approach to defence collaboration, engaging with the US on shared interests and existing programmes, while also hedging against US volatility through increased sovereign capability and cooperation with European allies. The notion that the UK must choose between the US and Europe on security is false and any policies that follow this logic are likely to make the UK less secure.*

AUKUS

90. In September 2021, Australia, the UK and the US announced the AUKUS partnership.¹⁴⁶ The trilateral security partnership is built around two key pillars. The first involves the shared design and development of new nuclear-powered submarines, known as SSN-AUKUS, for the Royal Australian Navy and British Royal Navy, and the second promises shared technological collaboration in the development of a series of advanced military technologies, including AI, cyber, undersea and hypersonic capabilities. While official announcements on AUKUS do not mention China, the agreement is widely seen to reflect partner states' wishes to deter aggressive Chinese behaviour in the Indo-Pacific. For the UK, strengthening its ageing submarine fleet also holds the prospect of strengthening deterrence in the Euro-Atlantic.¹⁴⁷
91. Four years after its announcement, AUKUS remains politically controversial—Australian politics is divided over its cost and strategic imperative, while the programme was subject to a high-profile review by the US Department of War in 2025.¹⁴⁸ The review concluded that the AUKUS partnership should be continued, and the political leadership of each partner state has endorsed it in recent months.¹⁴⁹
92. Several witnesses cited AUKUS as a positive development in the UK-US security relationship, citing a range of potential benefits including increased Indo-Pacific deterrence, greater trilateral alignment in defence innovation

146 House of Lords International Agreements Committee, *The AUKUS Naval Nuclear Propulsion Cooperation Agreement* (3rd Report, Session 2024–26, HL Paper 21)

147 Ministry of Defence, *UK “All In” on AUKUS submarine and tech delivery as partnership powers full steam ahead*, 10 December 2025

148 ABC News, *Why the AUKUS deal is still a controversial and perplexing issue for most Australians*, 11 February 2025; The AUKUS announcement was also controversial as it meant Australia reneged on a deal with France to produce 12 diesel-electric submarines; Financial Times, *Australia to pay \$600mn to French defence company edged out by Aukus*, 11 June 2022

149 Financial Times, *UK says Aukus pact must now focus on delivery after US review*, 10 December 2025

and the provision of a high number of skilled jobs in each member state.¹⁵⁰ Sophia Gaston, Senior Research Fellow at King’s College London, argued that AUKUS was designed to provide a “mutual capability uplift” across three highly integrated partners and argued that recent geopolitical events, including the War in Ukraine and an increasing Chinese threat, had enhanced its strategic rationale. She also noted the potential of AUKUS to reduce structural barriers to collaboration on defence innovation, such as export controls, security clearances and classifications and thus create an environment for more organic cooperation between partner states.¹⁵¹

93. However, we heard of challenges to the delivery of AUKUS. With regards to Pillar I, there are concerns that the US’ submarine industrial base does not possess the capacity to produce enough Virginia-class submarines to satisfy both US and Australian government demand, as well as concerns about Australia’s ability to deliver on its industrial commitments, due to its lack of experience and established heritage in SSN development.¹⁵² Ms Gaston also noted concerns about the UK’s ability to deliver on the production of SSN-AUKUS, citing “fundamental problems around productivity, delivery and workforce” as barriers. She also noted that the project had become “bogged down with internal bureaucracy” and required more focus at the political level, across each partner state, to drive delivery.¹⁵³
94. On Pillar II, several witnesses welcomed the UK and Australia’s exemptions from US Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), which resulted from the AUKUS partnership, but are not limited to it.¹⁵⁴ TheCityUK told the Committee that ITAR exemptions “remove[d] a significant regulatory barrier to the cooperation and collaboration required to meet the goals of the AUKUS partnership”.¹⁵⁵
95. Ms Gaston noted that more changes were required to unlock the potential of Pillar II. She claimed that Pillar II remained “amorphously defined” and was currently not delivering shared capability at the speed that was envisaged when the agreement was made. She asserted the need for Pillar II to focus on a limited number of projects “that are properly funded and are given adequate political and institutional attention in order to succeed”.¹⁵⁶ On our visit to Washington DC, we heard that UK collaboration on AUKUS is viewed positively and that the UK should work to ensure ITAR exemptions are being taken advantage of.¹⁵⁷
96. **The AUKUS partnership provides a useful vehicle for the UK to reinforce unity and signal to the US that it is prepared to join in efforts to deter China in the Indo-Pacific, with related benefits in the Euro-Atlantic region.**

150 [QQ 11](#) (Dame Karen Pierce), [152](#) (Rep Jim Himes), [177](#) (Sophia Gaston). Written evidence from London Politica ([FRU0008](#)), ADS Group ([FRU0011](#)), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([FRU0014](#)), TheCityUK ([FRU0022](#)) and BritishAmerican Business ([FRU0034](#))

151 [QQ 174](#) and [177](#) (Sophia Gaston)

152 [Q 178](#) (Sophia Gaston). House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, *US Inquiry: Visit to Washington DC*, 13 February 2026

153 [QQ 177](#) and [178](#) (Sophia Gaston)

154 ITAR are complex export control rules designed to protect sensitive US military technology. [Q 173](#) (Sophia Gaston), written evidence from ADS Group ([FRU0011](#)) and BritishAmerican Business ([FRU0034](#))

155 Written evidence from TheCityUK ([FRU0022](#))

156 [QQ 178](#) and [179](#) (Sophia Gaston)

157 House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, *US Inquiry: Visit to Washington DC*, 13 February 2026

97. **Aside from continuing its collaboration with the US, participation also represents a practical opportunity for the UK to accelerate its advanced technical know-how and development of hard capabilities. While the project retains much potential, there are concerns that the UK's submarine industrial base is not robust enough to ensure timely delivery and that Pillar II collaboration on advanced capabilities requires increased political focus and funding streams to succeed.**
98. ***The UK must deliver on its AUKUS commitments. The UK Government must demonstrate delivery credibility and industrial robustness to reassure the US of its credibility as a reliable partner in the AUKUS project and that SSN-AUKUS is a priority for the UK. It must also seek to work with the US and Australia towards a defined Pillar II process that is backed with funding and political focus, and which will allow academia and industry to take advantage of new opportunities for trilateral defence innovation.***

F-35 programme

99. The F35 programme constitutes a central pillar of contemporary UK–US defence cooperation. Not only is the programme crucial to the relationship, but it is also of enormous strategic importance to the UK. The Committee heard that despite high costs, the F-35 provides a capability that is superior to anything else available in Europe.¹⁵⁸ As a leading partner in the programme—15% of each F-35 plane by value is made in the UK—it contributes expertise and manufacturing capability, with related benefits for UK jobs and the wider economy.¹⁵⁹

Box 2: F-35 Overview

Led by the US, the F-35 programme centres on the development of the F-35 Lightning II, a fifth-generation multirole stealth fighter aircraft. Renowned for its combination of stealth, advanced sensing, and sophisticated data-sharing capabilities, the F-35 is designed not merely as a standalone platform but as a force multiplier, enhancing the effectiveness of other military assets across air, maritime, space, surface, and ground domains.¹⁶⁰ There are eight core partner nations in the F-35 programme (including the UK), each of which contributes with industrial capacity, technical expertise and financial development. The US is the dominant actor in the programme, however, accounting for 80% of total aircraft orders.¹⁶¹

There are two core types of F-35 aircraft—the F-35A and F-35B. The differences between variants largely concerns how they take-off. F-35As are designed for conventional take off and F-35Bs are designed for short take-off and vertical landing (which makes them appropriate for aircraft carrier use).¹⁶²

100. The UK has committed to procuring 138 F-35 aircraft in total but has only procured 48 to date. Last year, the Government announced an additional commitment to order 12 F-35As and 15 F-35Bs, with a total projected UK

158 [Q 185](#) (Justin Bronk)

159 Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review: Making Britain Safer: secure at home, strong abroad*, 2 June 2025

160 Lockheed Martin, *Products: F35 Lightning II*, 2025

161 National Audit Office, *The UK's F-35 Capability*, 11 July 2025

162 Defence Street, *F-35A vs F-35B vs F-35C: What are the Differences Technology Between F-35A, F-35B and F-35C*, 24 September 2023

fleet of 74.¹⁶³ The official target of 138 aircraft remains in place but there is no approved timetable or funding for the remaining aircraft.¹⁶⁴

101. Dr Sophy Antrobus, Co-Director of the Freeman Air and Space Institute at King’s College London told us that the UK is the second most influential partner country on project steering groups, after the US.¹⁶⁵ Dr Bronk noted the UK’s “tier 1” partner status during the development phase of the project, which he claimed emerged as a result of the UK’s ability to bring “unique technology expertise and IP to the programme”, as well as its initial commitment to buy more aircraft than other partner states.¹⁶⁶ On our visit to Washington DC we heard from the defence industry that the F-35 programme would not be what it is without the UK as a key partner.¹⁶⁷
102. In June 2025, the UK Government stated an intention to join NATO’s airborne nuclear mission through the purchase of nuclear-capable F-35As (joining Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Turkey and Belgium as part of this mission).¹⁶⁸ This was described by Antrobus as a “significant commitment in terms of burden sharing with the US” and one that will entail substantial degrees of co-ordination in years to come.¹⁶⁹ Dr Bronk noted that, beyond allowing the UK to participate in nuclear missions, the F-35A was a cost-effective option that provided superior conventional weapons options to the F-35B and allowed for greater interoperability with European and American partners.¹⁷⁰
103. However, there are challenges associated with the programme. Other countries, such as Australia, Italy and Japan, have purchased more F-35s than the UK, with Dr Bronk citing a risk that Australia, which currently has 72 F-35s and flies them more often than the UK, is “significantly competing with the UK for the most preferred partner spot”.¹⁷¹ He also argued that the US saw it as regrettable that the UK had purchased so few and did not possess the weapons systems required to maximise capability.¹⁷² Dr Antrobus argued that UK vacillation over purchase numbers and preferences had dented US trust in the UK’s commitment to the programme and she argued for political stability in order numbers in the future.¹⁷³
104. **The UK has been a valuable partner in the F-35 programme, contributing technological expertise and industrial capacity to drive the project forward. However, the UK’s failure to deliver on its initial order commitments has somewhat dented its reputation as a partner in the US.**

163 The total number of F-35s committed for purchase is 75, but the expected fleet is 74. This is because one of the UK’s F-35 jets crashed in the Mediterranean in 2021. UK Defence Journal, [UK expects 75th F-35 delivery by end of 2033](#), 5 January 2026

164 National Audit Office, [The UK’s F-35 capability](#), 11 July 2025

165 [Q 182](#) (Dr Sophy Antrobus)

166 [Q 182](#) (Dr Justin Bronk)

167 House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee, [US Inquiry: Visit to Washington DC](#), 13 February 2026

168 Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release: UK to purchase F-35As and join NATO nuclear mission as Government steps up national security and delivers defence dividend](#), 24 June 2025

169 [Q 129](#) (Dr Sophy Antrobus)

170 [Q 193](#) (Dr Justin Bronk)

171 [Q 182](#) (Dr Justin Bronk)

172 [Q 190](#) (Dr Justin Bronk)

173 [Q 189](#) (Dr Sophy Antrobus)

105. *When participating in joint capability programmes with the US in the future, the UK should be mindful of the need for stability in its order numbers and provide clarity about the UK's long-term commitment.*

Space capabilities

106. The UK and the US have a long-standing record of cooperation in space, encompassing both governmental and commercial partnerships. Cooperation dates back to the early stages of the US national security space programme in the 1960s, when both countries began to recognise the strategic significance of outer space for intelligence collection, missile early warning, and global communications.¹⁷⁴
107. The early alignment between the UK and US on space has endured to the present day. The UK is the US' closest ally when it comes to collaboration on space capabilities, with the UK providing a range of technical, geographical and personnel support to the US, which is by far the senior contributor in the partnership in terms of both investment and capability. Dr Peter L Hays, of the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University, described the unique contributions made by the UK to US space security, characterising the UK as the most important allied contributor in this regard. He cited early-warning radar site at RAF Fylingdales and intelligence processing centre at RAF Molesworth, as well as personnel exchanges, policy guidance and participation in exercises as examples of the UK's contributions.¹⁷⁵ James Black, European Lead for Space at RAND Europe, argued that, while the UK possesses fewer sovereign capabilities than countries such as France (with most of the UK's investment tied up in its Skynet satellite communications platform), it is far more integrated in the US space defence ecosystem, noting that the two most recent leaders of UK Space Command have also held senior positions within the US space system.¹⁷⁶ As outlined in paragraph 41, the UK is reliant on the US for the provision of core space capabilities such as Position, Navigation and Timing, orbital launch and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR).¹⁷⁷
108. While noting general UK-US divergence on the relative threats posed by China and Russia, Black stated that there was a shared understanding of the threat landscape in space. He noted that terrestrial geography does not have as much bearing on threat assessment in space, and that the UK and US (alongside other allies) faced similar challenges in the form of "co-orbital threats, cyberattacks, jamming [and] anti-satellite missiles".¹⁷⁸
109. Black highlighted that both the Biden and Trump administrations have been vocal about enhanced UK contributions to space security and increased integration. However, he cited the bureaucratic complexity of the US military space enterprise, regulatory de-alignment and information sharing as barriers to further cooperation on the US side, and funding and delivery as challenges on the UK's end.¹⁷⁹ Dr Hays encouraged the UK to work closely with the US to identify niche mission areas in which the US would welcome

174 UK Engagement with Space Committee, *Inquiry into UK Engagement with Space*, 9 June 2025, [Q 142](#) (Dr John B Sheldon)

175 [Q 208](#) (Dr Peter L Hays)

176 [Q 208](#) (James Black)

177 [Q 210](#) (Dr Peter L Hays and James Black)

178 [Q 209](#) (James Black)

179 [Q 212](#) and [213](#) (James Black)

UK leadership, which may include areas such as environmental monitoring, space weather and space situational awareness.¹⁸⁰

110. **The UK and US share a close relationship when it comes to the operation of space-based defence capabilities, and a similar analysis of the threat environment in space. The UK makes niche but tangible contributions to the US space programme and in return receives access to core US-owned ISR and PNT capabilities. The US is supportive of the UK making further contributions to the relationship, though this will require increased investment and political focus.**
111. *Where possible, the UK must seek to develop sovereign space capabilities that can be used to contribute to bilateral US projects and NATO's space programme. The UK should work closely with the US to determine areas in which the UK possesses the technological capacity to add value and should continue its close engagement in identifying and preparing for threats to space-based infrastructure.*
112. *Overall, an increasingly transactional UK-US defence relationship will require the UK to be meticulous in its approach to delivering commitments on shared partnerships. Prioritising industrial robustness, ensuring reliability on order commitments, and developing complementary sovereign capabilities are necessary requirements for the success of future UK-US defence projects.*

180 [Q 213](#) (Dr Peter L Hays)

CHAPTER 4: THE FOREIGN POLICY RELATIONSHIP

From convergence to growing divergence

113. Historically, the UK-US foreign policy relationship has been marked by shared interests, such as securing the Euro-Atlantic, countering Iran's influence in the Middle East and managing competition from China. The strength of the foreign policy relationship between the UK and the US has led to collaboration in military action, such as in Korea, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. While there have been individual cases where the UK and the US did not see eye-to-eye on foreign policy—for instance, during the Suez Crisis or on Vietnam—the relationship was not fundamentally disrupted.
114. The strong convergence in foreign policy interests between the two countries can be traced back to World War Two, after which the US became a guarantor of peace in Europe and pioneered the institutions and rules which became the foundations of the rules-based international order. The establishment of the United Nations (UN) and the Bretton Woods financial system brought both countries together behind a shared agenda that considered multilateral engagement as a vehicle for increased international security and global prosperity.¹⁸¹ Both countries are permanent members of the UN Security Council, as well as sharing membership of influential international groupings such as the G7 and G20, which they often use as fora for cooperation and advancing shared foreign policy goals. Until recently, shared foreign policy interests also extended to international commitments, such as reducing CO2 emissions, respecting international law and financing international development.¹⁸²
115. However, there has been growing scepticism in the US towards its role as 'the world's policeman'. Witnesses told us that "strategic overreach" into costly wars in the Middle East and US security guarantees abroad led to a "primal scream" by the American public, with many feeling that global interventionism had diverted resources away from domestic public goods and services.¹⁸³ Greg Swenson, Chair of Republicans Overseas UK, reflected that there was a growing sense of injustice that international commitments benefitted countries such as the UK to create "free healthcare and a bloated welfare state on our [American] backs".¹⁸⁴ The effects of de-industrialisation and US increasing national debt, in particular, were cited as compounding dissatisfaction towards the US' role in the international system as Americans called for the US government to prioritise issues closer to home.¹⁸⁵ According to Sir Peter Westmacott, former British Ambassador to the US, this isolationist and protectionist sentiment is not new, but "has always been part of the psyche" of American culture, with its tendrils also seen in the First and Second World Wars.¹⁸⁶
116. Yet, this trend has accelerated under President Trump's second term, and been taken in new directions. In little over a year, his administration has

181 [Q 118](#) (Ivo Daalder)

182 Department for International Development, [Press release: Global development: UK and US renew aid partnership](#), 14 March 2012; Prime Minister's Office, [Press release: PM call with President Biden: 26 March 2021](#), 26 March 2021

183 [QQ 150](#) (Rep Jim Himes) and [107](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan)

184 [Q 18](#) (Greg Swenson)

185 [QQ 27](#) (Dr Kori Schake) and [107](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan)

186 [Q 1](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott)

stepped up the US' strategic pivot away from European security in favour of the Western Hemisphere and competition with China; rescinded US leadership of several multilateral institutions and international commitments by withdrawing funding and membership; taken actions inconsistent with international law in Venezuela; launched air strikes on Iran without consultation; and challenged historical alliances through military and economic coercion, including against Greenland and Canada. President Trump has, as one witness put it, “turbocharged the disruption of the international order”.¹⁸⁷

117. While the strategic pivot way from European security is a more permanent trend, it is unclear the extent to which other Trump actions, such as the withdrawal from specific international organisations, will be a more permanent feature of US foreign policy. Nevertheless, the actions of the current administration have led to divergence between the UK and the US on key issues—such as the value of alliances, the rules-based international order, international development, the tackling of climate change and global health challenges. The long-term implications of these developments, however, are not yet fully understood.¹⁸⁸

Loss of trust: a lasting consequence of President Trump's unilateralism

118. One enduring legacy of the Trump administration's actions could be loss of trust in the US, which would be difficult for future administrations to restore. Ivo Daalder, former US Permanent Representative to NATO, explained that “every relationship is based on trust”, and following US withdrawal from the system it has upheld for the last 80 years, “that trust is gone”.¹⁸⁹ US retrenchment from Europe and actions against historic allies, such as Canada and Greenland, has led countries to seek independence from US security as the US is seen as an unreliable ally. Speaking even before Trump's recent threats against Greenland, Mr Daalder assessed that countries will “tak[e] their measure, and they will move on”, creating a world without US leadership of the international system.¹⁹⁰ This has only been accentuated by the US' lack of consultation with European and other allies ahead of the recent US-Israeli strikes on Iran. Dr Kori Schake, Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign and Defence Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, told us that the US administration is “breaking things that it is going to take at least a generation to rebuild”.¹⁹¹ Professor Monica Toft, Professor of International Politics at Tufts University, noted with concern the “degree to which we are going to be able to rebuild [transnational trust] in future”.¹⁹²
119. Even if President Trump's policies and approach are reversed by a future administration, Mr Daalder told us, “it will be a weaker and a less trusted United States” that will re-enter the global system.¹⁹³

187 [QQ 126](#) (Anthony Dworkin), [48](#) (Prof Donald Abelson), [228](#) (Tara Varma), [235](#) (Prof Michael Schmitt, Prof Marc Weller)

188 [QQ 1](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [41](#) (Edward Luce), [31](#) (Dr Leslie Vinjamuri)

189 [Q 120](#) (Ivo Daalder). Daalder is also Senior Fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs

190 [Q 126](#) (Ivo Daalder)

191 [Q 30](#) (Dr Kori Schake)

192 [Q 46](#) (Prof Monica Toft)

193 [Q 120](#) (Ivo Daalder) and written evidence from Dr Ben Bland and Dr William Matthews ([FRU0025](#))

120. **Confidence in sustained US international engagement has dissipated. It is unclear which elements of President Trump’s approach may leave an enduring legacy and shape future US policy, and this presents a strategic challenge for the UK.**
121. *The Government will need to hedge against potential US political volatility by developing a strategic posture that assumes significant uncertainty in US engagement. While maintaining collaboration with the US where possible, it will need to diversify its partnerships to reduce exposure to abrupt shifts in US policy.*

Strategic implications of the US pivoting away from European security

122. As set out in paragraphs 14–15 above, in the light of US retrenchment from Europe, witnesses told the Committee that the UK will need to balance its relationship with the US and the EU and avoid being drawn into ‘false choice’ scenarios.¹⁹⁴ Given the Russian threat to Europe we heard of the imperative for the UK to diversify partnerships for its own security and, in particular, strengthen ties with European countries.¹⁹⁵
123. The UK Prime Minister has been vocal in rejecting suggestions that the UK should choose between closer ties to the US and to the EU.¹⁹⁶ Witnesses were widely supportive of the Government’s approach of balancing both and avoiding a false choice.¹⁹⁷
124. Nonetheless, the Committee received evidence that this approach would not be without risks. UK adoption of the EU’s regulatory standards, for instance, could undermine transatlantic cooperation.¹⁹⁸ Sir David Manning, former British Ambassador to the US, also told the Committee that it was still uncertain how the US administration would respond to increased UK cooperation with the EU, considering “MAGA sympathy for the populists in Europe”. Despite these challenges, he agreed that balancing the UK’s relationship with the EU and the US was the correct approach.¹⁹⁹
125. To maintain this balancing act, Sir Peter explained that it was up to the UK to present its growing relationship with Europe as a benefit to US interests. He told us that “if [the US] wants the European Union to have economic growth and to do more in shouldering the burden for NATO—we need to have economic growth and closer relations with European neighbours for that to work”.²⁰⁰
126. **UK interests cannot be met by pursuing an either/or approach to its relationship with the US and Europe. The UK Government must pursue good relations with the US administration where possible, whilst resetting its relationship with Europe and the EU on matters of shared interest.**
127. *The UK Government should continue to make the case that closer UK-EU ties are connected to stronger cooperation on European*

194 [QQ 12](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott) and [32](#) (Dr Leslie Vinjamuri)

195 [QQ 31](#) (Dr Leslie Vinjamuri), [12](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Sir Peter Westmacott)

196 BBC, *Starmor: UK does not need to choose between US and EU*, 2 December 2024

197 [QQ 9](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald), [12](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott), [43](#) (Gerard Baker)

198 Written evidence from London Politica ([FRU0008](#))

199 [Q 11](#) (Sir David Manning)

200 [Q 10](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott)

security and thus will help deliver the broader US aim of greater European burden-sharing.

President Trump's retreat from the rules-based international order

128. The rules-based international order is broadly understood to mean the system of political, legal and economic rules and institutions established following the Second World War to help manage relations between states, promote prosperity and prevent future conflict. The UK, as a mid-sized power—albeit one with capabilities and a diplomatic network that amplify its influence—has benefitted from an international system that is predictable and based on rules that apply equally to all, rather than the exercise of arbitrary power.²⁰¹ Any unravelling of the rules-based international order therefore carries major risk for the UK.
129. President Trump has retreated from this order in two main ways: through the US' withdrawal from international organisations, and by taking actions that are inconsistent with international law.

Retreat from international organisations

130. In 2025, the Trump administration launched a sweeping review of all international bodies to which the US contributes, as well as all treaties and conventions to which it is a party. Following this, the administration withheld funding from multiple organisations, including the UN Secretariat, and in January 2026 the US withdrew from 66 international organisations, programmes and initiatives, describing them as “wasteful, ineffective, or harmful”.²⁰² While previous US administrations have at times withdrawn funding or US membership, such actions were confined to specific agreements or organisations (for example, George W Bush's ‘unsigned’ of the Rome Statute establishing the ICC and Ronald Reagan's withdrawal from UNESCO). What distinguishes the current administration's approach from that taken by earlier ones, including the previous Trump administration, is the unprecedented scale with which the US is disengaging from the international architecture.
131. Witnesses told the Committee that President Trump views multilateral engagement solely through the lens of immediate US national interests, stepping back when these do not align.²⁰³ This shift has also driven a preference for bilateral and ‘mini-lateral’ cooperation, with rapid engagement in smaller groupings such as the Quad²⁰⁴ and individual dealings with BRICS members rather than the bloc as a whole.²⁰⁵ Dr Schake described this as reflecting a belief that such flexible arrangements “work well”.²⁰⁶
132. Examples of organisations and agreements the US has withdrawn from include those addressing global challenges, such as climate change (the Paris Agreement, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the

201 [QQ 10](#) (Sir David Manning) and [100](#) (Prof Charles Kupchan)

202 US Department of State, *Withdrawal from Wasteful, Ineffective, or Harmful International Organizations*, 7 January 2026.

203 [Q 10](#) (Sir David Manning)

204 An informal strategic partnership comprising the US, Japan, India and Australia.

205 [QQ 13](#) (Dame Karen Pierce) and [28](#) (Dr Kori Schake)

206 [Q 28](#) (Dr Kori Schake)

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)²⁰⁷ and global health (World Health Organization).²⁰⁸ Some are facing fiscal pressures as a result.²⁰⁹ Lack of funding to combat urgent and essential global challenges presents potential challenges for UK national security. Gaps in funding for the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, for example, can increase global health risks and place strain on the UK public health system if not tackled quickly at source.²¹⁰

133. Yet, we heard that the US still maintains an interest in participating in and collaborating through some international institutions where they intersect with US interests. For example, the Trump administration, as part of its re-focus of UN funding towards peace and security, signed a \$2 billion humanitarian funding agreement with the UN in December 2025 to support global relief programmes.²¹¹ Witnesses also told us that the current US administration still sees value in cooperation on the stability of the financial system and economic development. For instance, the US is still engaged with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund because of the role of the dollar in these institutions and their impact on US competition with China.²¹² Gideon Rabinowitz, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Bond, noted that continued US engagement with some institutions gives the UK the opportunity to advocate for greater investment in areas of shared interest from within.²¹³
134. Even where the US has withdrawn from international organisations, we heard evidence that this does not signal total US disengagement from cooperation on global challenges. Despite leaving the World Health Organization, for instance, Dame Karen Pierce told us that the US administration is still able to participate in different ventures outside multilateral organisations, and dialogue between the UK and the US on global health and pandemic issues will continue regardless.²¹⁴ We note that although there are opportunities for collaboration outside traditional frameworks, the lack of any consultation by the US ahead of its joint strikes with Israel on Iran demonstrates the difficulties of engaging with a US administration that does not prioritise seeking allied consensus.
135. The ‘Board of Peace’, a President Trump-led initiative to co-ordinate Gaza’s reconstruction,²¹⁵ is one example where the US continues to engage on international issues with a smaller group of participants, albeit outside of what the Trump administration would regard as constraining and inflexible UN structures. It is too early to tell whether the work of the Board of Peace

207 The White House, *Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements*, 20 January 2025; and The White House, *Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties that Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States*, 7 January 2025

208 The White House, *Withdrawing the United States from the World Health Organization*, 20 January 2025

209 Politico, *WHO freezes hiring, restricts travel after US withdrawal*, 24 January 2025; Refugees International, *A Generational Collapse: Tracking the Toll of Trump’s Humanitarian Aid Cuts*, 5 February 2026;

210 [Q 112](#) (Gideon Rabinowitz)

211 United Nations, *US sign \$2 billion humanitarian funding agreement for 17 crisis-hit countries*, 29 December 2025

212 [QQ 115](#) (Alex Thier), [121](#) (Anthony Dworkin)

213 [Q 113](#) (Gideon Rabinowitz)

214 [QQ 10](#) and [13](#) (Dame Karen Pierce)

215 While the Board has its origins in managing the reconstruction of Gaza, its scope may expand, with Marco Rubio suggesting that it could serve as a model for other situations: US Department of State, *Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Board of Peace Event*, 19 February 2026

will complement that of the UN or serve to undermine it. To date, while 35 states have agreed to join it, no other G7 state has done so.²¹⁶

136. US calls for the reform of international institutions through narrower and more streamlined mandates, and a “back-to-basics” agenda, signal a willingness to continue global cooperation on key areas and provide an opening for collaboration.²¹⁷ At the Munich Security Conference Secretary of State Marco Rubio stated that “we don’t need to dismantle the global institutions of the old order [...] But these must be reformed. These must be rebuilt.”²¹⁸ The UK Government has shared similar views on the need for reform. This opens space for UK-US discussion on what reform should look like and greater collaboration on implementing changes that align with national interests.²¹⁹
137. We note, however, that there is currently still a lack of clarity over which areas for reform the UK would seek to prioritise. Ms Aspinall told us that the UK can find opportunities to cooperate by “picking [its] battles”—for instance, accepting that the US will not lead on climate change but pushing for further cooperation on Ukraine.²²⁰ Thus, cooperation on a case-by-case basis is still possible where UK-US interests align. Mr Thier explained that collaboration on areas of UK-US geostrategic interests could also open new areas for development collaboration. For instance, critical minerals are a development opportunity for the UK and the US to work together to combine extraction with good governance and inclusive growth rather than predation, creating positive change for areas rich in this essential resource.²²¹

Smaller groupings as a way of upholding international coalitions

138. We also heard that smaller groupings are likely to become more critical to the UK. As the US steps back from international organisations, the UK has the opportunity to identify new coalitions through which to uphold international values and standards.²²² Anthony Dworkin, Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, argued that smaller coalitions could be pursued on several areas and subjects “in a way that does not undermine the greater collective bodies but sits within them or alongside them and aligns with them”.²²³
139. In this context, Dr Leslie Vinjamuri, former Director of the US and the Americas Programme at Chatham House,²²⁴ argued that the adoption of more fluid approaches to foreign policy by “working bilaterally, transactionally and mini-laterally, looking for what works, being flexible and nimble” offers good prospects for global collaboration. Therefore, the current US shift away from the rules-based architecture is an opportunity for the reworking of how countries conduct foreign policy and achieve shared objectives.²²⁵

216 Reuters, *Explainer: What is Trump’s ‘Board of Peace’ and how have nations responded to it?*, 22 January 2026

217 [Q 121](#) (Anthony Dworkin)

218 U.S. Department of State, *Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Munich Security Conference*, 14 February 2026

219 [Q 128](#) (Anthony Dworkin)

220 [Q 101](#) (Evie Aspinall)

221 [Q 114](#) (Alex Thier)

222 [QQ 97](#) and [102](#) (Evie Aspinall)

223 [QQ 124](#) and [126](#) (Anthony Dworkin)

224 Dr Leslie Vinjamuri was also Professor of International Relations at SOAS University of London

225 [Q 28](#) (Dr Leslie Vinjamuri)

140. It was further suggested that these groups could be open to any country that “subscribes to the fundamental guiding principles of these coalitions”.²²⁶ This would require close collaboration with countries beyond those in the G7 or the EU—such as Brazil, Mexico, India, Indonesia and Turkey, while still being open to US re-engagement.²²⁷ While “sometimes uneasy partners” with different views on some key global challenges, the Committee received evidence that the UK would have to learn to navigate those differences to cooperate with a broader range of partners.²²⁸ We also note that this group of potential partners could be broadened to include other Commonwealth countries, particularly Canada and Australia.
141. Witnesses acknowledged the challenges of relying on alternative small groupings. They are more difficult to coordinate as they lack the formal structures of established international institutions.²²⁹ They also require consistent messaging to ensure they maintain their legitimacy.²³⁰ Inevitably, this “patchwork of overlapping organisations” could also create a more “fragmented and unstable” international system.²³¹
142. **Small groupings and new partnerships are becoming more important as the US withdraws from parts of the multilateral system. These formats can help the UK uphold international cooperation and advance UK influence. But they also carry risks: if poorly coordinated they may inadvertently contribute to the erosion of multilateral institutions.**
143. *A priority for the UK Government should be to engage with like-minded partners, maintaining openness to US re-engagement, but not relying on it. This could include building sustained coalitions with states such as Brazil, India, Canada and Australia, and other Commonwealth countries, Indonesia, Mexico, the Gulf countries and others that share UK interests on specific issues.*
144. *The Government should ensure that other groupings reinforce—not replace—multilateral structures by coordinating positions with UN bodies and other international institutions.*

US leadership vacuum

145. US withdrawal from the international architecture has accelerated under the current Trump administration and is opening a leadership gap. Ex-ambassador Daalder told the Committee that “a number of countries have an outsized responsibility to take over American leadership” and will be under “extraordinary obligations” to lead in an unprecedented way.²³² These countries include not just the UK, but also countries of the European Union, Canada, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, India and Brazil. This view was echoed in a written evidence submission from Chatham House.²³³

226 [QQ 124](#) (Anthony Dworkin) and written evidence from Dr Cecilia Corsini, Prof Dr Bernhard Reinsberg and Dr Giuseppe Zaccaria ([FRU0017](#))

227 [Q 129](#) (Anthony Dworkin)

228 Written evidence from Dr Ben Bland and Dr William Matthews ([FRU0025](#))

229 [Q 102](#) (Evie Aspinall)

230 [Q 97](#) (Evie Aspinall)

231 [Q 126](#) (Anthony Dworkin)

232 [QQ 120](#) and [127](#) (Ivo Daalder)

233 Written evidence from Chatham House ([FRU0026](#))

146. Ms Aspinall warned that without US leadership, international institutions may be reformed in ways that undermine UK interests.²³⁴ In particular, Mr Daalder told the Committee that US retreat from international institutions is leading China to expand its influence over them. This is already evident through increased Chinese activity in multilateral fora such as the UN and leadership in the BRICS, and could have consequences for how reform takes shape under collaboration with China.²³⁵ We received evidence from academics noting that China will seek to embed Chinese policy aims into the UN, particularly Beijing’s Global Initiatives, as an alternative to the US-led order.²³⁶ Anthony Dworkin told the Committee that, in this “transitional period” of US retrenchment, countries would have to balance promoting their own visions of global governance and accommodating competing worldviews.²³⁷
147. ***US retrenchment from global commitments is creating leadership vacuums that adversarial states may exploit. To guard against this, the UK Government should conduct a cross-government assessment to map areas where US retreat creates risks to UK security and prosperity, and prioritise those where UK interests are most at risk.***

Retreat from international law

148. President Trump’s administration has also taken positions that undermine international law. In January 2026, he stated publicly that he “doesn’t need international law” and is constrained only by his “own morality”.²³⁸ This rhetoric was echoed in US threats toward Greenland, including allusions to the unlawful use of force to acquire territory belonging to a NATO ally.²³⁹ These statements were made in the midst of military actions in and around Venezuela: between 2025 and February 2026, US operations against alleged drugtransporting vessels in the Caribbean and Pacific killed 133 individuals,²⁴⁰ and on 3 January 2026 the US launched a military attack that killed at least 40 people and resulted in the detention of President Nicolás Maduro and his extraction to the US to stand trial.²⁴¹ Legal experts we spoke to were unanimous in their assessment that these actions violated international law, including the prohibition on the use of force and the prohibition against interference in the internal affairs of a foreign state.²⁴² Following the Venezuela operation, the Trump administration announced that the US would “run” the country indefinitely through selected officials,²⁴³ a move described by Professor Marc Weller, Programme Director of the International Law Programme at Chatham House, as lacking any legal justification.²⁴⁴
149. Professor Weller also explained that previous US administrations had, in certain instances, undermined international law by violating the prohibition on the use of force to advance their national interests.²⁴⁵ Yet, both he and

234 [Q 97](#) (Evie Aspinall)

235 [QQ 125](#) and [128](#) (Ivo Daalder)

236 Written evidence from Dr Ben Bland and Dr William Matthews ([FRU0025](#))

237 [Q 127](#) (Anthony Dworkin)

238 The New York Times, *Trump said his global power was limited only by his ‘own morality’*, 8 January 2026

239 Just Security, *The Insurmountable Legal Obstacles to U.S. Acquisition of Greenland*, 22 January 2026

240 The Guardian, *US strikes second alleged drug boat in a week, bringing death toll to 133*, 14 February 2026

241 The New York Times, *Venezuelan Official Says at Least 40 People Were Killed in U.S. Attack*, 4 January 2026

242 [Q 235](#) (Prof Michael Schmitt and Prof Marc Weller)

243 BBC, *Who is running Venezuela and what are Trump’s oil plans?*, 3 January 2026

244 [Q 237](#) (Prof Marc Weller)

245 [Q 240](#) (Prof Marc Weller)

Professor Michael Schmitt, Professor of International Law at the University of Reading, argued that the administration's actions in Venezuela represent an escalation of a longterm pattern of US breaches of international law, but are also unprecedented. This, it was suggested, is because the administration has abandoned any pretence of compliance with international law and its actions are rooted in a mistaken belief that “force works”, bolstered by technological advances that have reduced the costs of US intervention.²⁴⁶

150. The wider ramifications could be significant. Professor Schmitt warned that this approach carries the risk of imitation by other states, which could further destabilise the international system and undermine UK interests.²⁴⁷ Professor Weller explained that should US violations of international law be emulated by other states such as Russia and China, as well as medium powers such as India, Pakistan and Nigeria, the international system could become increasingly unstable. Without appropriate protection for states, whether large or small, the UK's foreign policy interests would be intrinsically disrupted as the world reverts to 19th century great-power competition, with its own borders or that of its allies under threat.²⁴⁸
151. Witnesses told the Committee that condemnation of the US military operation in Venezuela by the international community has been “extraordinarily weak” which, in the UK's case, they attributed to the UK's dependence on the US.²⁴⁹ Both Professor Weller and Professor Schmitt criticised the UK Government for not condemning the US operation.²⁵⁰ Professor Weller told us that this is a dangerous development as the only corrective mechanism of international law in these circumstances is for the international community to identify violations and condemn them, which did not happen following the US attack on Venezuela.²⁵¹ Professor Schmitt argued that because of the UK's relationship with the US, “its voice will be more important than that of any other country”.²⁵² However, he also cautioned that should the UK stand up to US violations of international law in future, it must be prepared to “hedge [its] bets” to avoid political fallout, which could be a serious risk for the UK.²⁵³
152. Professor Weller pointed out that the UK Government had been more decisive in condemning recent US threats towards Greenland as unlawful. As threats move closer to the European continent, he argued that there may already be an “evolution of political thinking” regarding at what stage the UK would defend the international legal system.²⁵⁴
153. There was some divergence of views on whether current US approaches to international law represent a long-term trend. Professor Schmitt told the Committee that the US administration would not change its approach for the next three years, but had a more optimistic outlook for the future.²⁵⁵ Professor Weller predicted that US abandonment of international law as a

246 [Q 240](#) (Prof Marc Weller, Prof Michael Schmitt); Foreign Affairs Committee, What can we learn from Venezuela?, 3 February 2026, [Q 26](#) (Prof Dill)

247 [Q 240](#) (Prof Michael Schmitt)

248 [QQ 240–243](#) (Prof Marc Weller)

249 [Q 236](#) (Prof Michael Schmitt)

250 [Q 236](#) (Prof Marc Weller and Prof Michael Schmitt)

251 [Q 236](#) (Prof Marc Weller)

252 [Q 236](#) (Prof Michael Schmitt)

253 [Q 243](#) (Prof Michael Schmitt)

254 [Q 236](#) (Prof Marc Weller)

255 [Q 242](#) (Prof Michael Schmitt)

constraint to its power “is a fairly permanent development” that successor administrations will continue in some way.²⁵⁶

Box 3: The Iran conflict and international law

The UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force against another state unless authorised by the UN Security Council or conducted in self-defence.²⁵⁷ The US has couched its justification of the conflict in the language of self-defence, with Mike Waltz, the US Ambassador to the UN, submitting a letter to the UN Security Council stating that the US operation represented “necessary and proportionate actions in exercise of the inherent right of self-defence as reflected in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations”.²⁵⁸ President Trump has also claimed that Iran posed an “imminent threat” to the US, which would provide the basis for anticipatory defensive measures under international law.²⁵⁹

While we did not take direct evidence on the legality of US actions in Iran, we note that most international legal experts (including those who had previously given evidence to the Committee) believe that the justification of self-defence does not apply in this instance, as the US provided very little evidence that indicated that an Iranian attack on the US or Israel was imminent.²⁶⁰ However, some senior UK-based lawyers have argued that the attacks could be considered a legal pursuit of US and Israeli self-defence.²⁶¹

The UK’s approach to the conflict has sought to straddle two goals: supporting the US (and regional allies) and satisfying the UK’s international legal commitments. The Government has provided the US with permission to utilise UK bases in the conflict, provided that the attacks it launches from them are used for limited defensive purposes (to target Iranian missile facilities which are being used against regional allies or shipping in the Strait of Hormuz).²⁶² This position, grounded in legal justification, has drawn strong criticism from President Trump, underscoring the difficulties the UK faces in seeking to uphold international law while dealing with an administration that does not wish to be constrained by it.²⁶³ The UK Government has not explicitly stated that US actions have breached international law.

256 [Q 242](#) (Prof Marc Weller)

257 United Nations, [United Nations Charter](#), 1945

258 Lawfare, [U.S. Submits Article 51 Letter on ‘Operation Epic Fury’ to UNSC](#), 17 March 2026. See also [Q 263](#) (Laurel Rapp)

259 [Q 249](#) (Prof Sir Lawrence Freedman)

260 BBC News, [International law experts allege violations in Iran war](#), 3 April 2026; Chatham House, [With Iran attacks, President Trump is making the use of force the new normal—and casting aside international law](#), 4 March 2026; Just Security, [Expert Q&A: Are U.S. Threats or Use of Force Against Iran Lawful?](#), 21 February 2026

261 Baron David Wolfson KC (@DXW_KC), [X post on 1 March 2026](#); DW, [Iran war: Will Europe’s split on US strikes backfire?](#), 2 March 2026

262 Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release: Statement on the conflict in the Middle East](#), 20 March 2026

263 BBC News, [Trump says Starmer is ‘not Winston Churchill’ over Iran strikes](#), 3 March 2026

Witnesses to the Committee discussed the long-term impacts of the conflict on the international legal framework. Lord McDonald of Salford, former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, described it as a “watershed” moment for international law as the US “at least temporarily, is withdrawing”. He noted the perils of such a situation, arguing that “there is no credible law without effective enforcement, and on the international stage there is no effective enforcement without the United States”.²⁶⁴ Laurel Rapp, Director of the US and North America Programme at Chatham House, argued that the US approach to international law is inconsistent with past practice and the practices of many other countries in the world. She also argued that the US’ approach raises profound questions about the future of the global order.²⁶⁵

154. ***The UK Government should remain steadfast in upholding the UK’s international legal obligations and demonstrate adherence, even in the face of a US retreat from international law compliance.***

Withdrawal from the international aid architecture

155. Under the second Trump administration, the US has dismantled its aid architecture through the shutdown of USAID and cut funding across the board. Given that the US has been the world’s largest development donor in real terms, this is having considerable impacts—estimates suggest that nearly 80% of previously active aid programmes supported by the US have been affected.²⁶⁶ Gideon Rabinowitz told the Committee that countries such as Nigeria and Pakistan have already reported that services for tuberculosis community outreach and the tracking and identification of cases will be restricted due to US funding cuts.²⁶⁷ This is happening against a wider backdrop of lower development spending, including the UK’s own aid budget reduction to 0.3% of GNI. Overall, the OECD projects that official development assistance in 2027 will fall to 2020 levels.²⁶⁸
156. Alex Thier, former executive director at the Overseas Development Institute, noted that the “urgency and violence” of US development funding withdrawal has potentially “destroy[ed] trust and relationships on the ground”, and that partners will be wary of future US support.²⁶⁹ Future US administrations may therefore struggle to rebuild their reputation as a reliable partner in humanitarian and development spaces. According to Ms Aspinall, this is problematic for the UK Government because UK-US partnerships in these sectors cannot be delivered without trust that the US will uphold its commitments.²⁷⁰
157. A weakened aid system has strategic consequences for the UK, particularly in relation to Africa, given that the continent’s stability is linked to UK security and economic interests. Ms Aspinall also highlighted that US withdrawal may create a leadership and funding vacuum which could be filled by China and/or Russia.²⁷¹ We were told that at the 2024 Forum on China–Africa

264 [QQ 245](#) and [248](#) (Lord McDonald of Salford)

265 [Q 248](#) (Laurel Rapp)

266 [Q 111](#) (Alex Thier)

267 [Q 112](#) (Gideon Rabinowitz)

268 OECD, *Cuts in official development assistance*, 26 June 2025

269 [Q 112](#) (Alex Thier)

270 [Q 101](#) (Evie Aspinall)

271 [Q108](#) (Evie Aspinall); see also written evidence from Anthony Silberfeld ([FRU0015](#))

Cooperation, China had expanded its commitments, pledging \$51 billion over three years in loans and traditional aid.²⁷²

158. In this context, and given the UK's aid budget cut to 0.3% of GNI, the UK has few options but to use its limited resources efficiently and to prioritise specific areas of concern to minimise the erosion of development gains to date.²⁷³ Ms Aspinall told us that the UK should think about “what our collective offer is” for the humanitarian and international development sectors, with the aim of moving towards equitable partnerships and development-focused initiatives.²⁷⁴ Mr Thier argued that the UK should prioritise programmes based on “political imperatives and effectiveness”. Girls’ education, for instance, is mentioned as “one of the most profoundly long-term investments that can be made to get a high return”, and which has been a long-term priority for the UK (and from which the US is currently stepping back). Witnesses further identified that areas such as higher education, the rule of law and the governance agenda could be prioritised.²⁷⁵
159. The Committee received evidence from Chatham House suggesting that the UK consider working with a broader range of allies and partners to overcome limited budgets. Olivia O’Sullivan, Programme Director of the UK in the World Programme at Chatham House, wrote to us that the UK could amplify the effectiveness of aid by seeking aligned or complementary humanitarian and development priorities with the EU. The UK could also work with Gulf countries, who are increasingly joining humanitarian efforts, to devote funding to regional crises.²⁷⁶
160. We also heard that the UK should engage in “development diplomacy” as a means of maintaining humanitarian and international development concerns on the agenda of international organisations. Mr Thier told the Committee that remaining a “voice at the table” can encourage other countries to engage in these areas and maintain the UK’s reputation as an advocate for development and humanitarian issues.²⁷⁷
161. **The closure of USAID and US aid cuts have left development funding gaps that have already had an impact on donor countries and joint development projects. With a reduced aid budget of 0.3% GNI, the UK Government’s capacity to fill US funding gaps is limited, requiring focused intervention and new partnerships.**
162. *The UK Government should therefore urgently assess funding gaps created by US withdrawal to identify priorities and mandates on areas of expertise and long-term impact, such as humanitarian aid, climate change, girls’ education and good governance.*
163. *The UK Government should continue to collaborate with the US on international development where possible, but it should also focus on working with other established and emerging donors (including the Gulf states) to develop more resilient collective funding frameworks.*

272 Written evidence from Chatham House ([FRU0026](#))

273 Written evidence from Dr Cecilia Corsini, Prof Dr Bernhard Reinsberg and Dr Giuseppe Zaccaria ([FRU0017](#))

274 [Q 108](#) (Evie Aspinall)

275 [QQ 108](#) (Evie Aspinall) and [113](#) (Alex Thier)

276 Written evidence from Chatham House ([FRU0026](#))

277 [Q 113](#) (Alex Thier)

CHAPTER 5: THE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIP

164. Since the Second World War, UK-US trade philosophies have been closely aligned on market-driven principles, investment flows, and access to strategic technology as drivers of economic prosperity. Daniel Mullaney, former US trade negotiator, linked the depth of the trade relationship to broader ties between the UK and the US, noting that:

“Without any trade agreement whatsoever, and including during the entire period of the UK’s membership of the EU, we have had very significant trade and investment integration between the United States and the UK. That goes beyond the pragmatism of the moment and speaks to special historical and cultural links, as well as political links and shared values such as transparency and good governance, which are not things that the United States shares with every country in the world.”²⁷⁸

165. The US ranks as the UK’s second largest trading partner after the EU for both goods and services.²⁷⁹ In 2024, UK goods exports to the US were valued at over £59 billion, accounting for 16% of total UK goods exports.²⁸⁰ This made the US the UK’s largest national export destination for goods, seven percentage points ahead of Germany, the second-largest national market.²⁸¹

166. While goods trade is substantial, services dominate the UK–US trading relationship. In 2024, UK services exports to the US totalled £137 billion—more than double the value of goods exports—accounting for 27% of all UK service exports.²⁸²

Box 4: UK top goods and services exports to the US in 2024

UK goods exports to the US are concentrated in a number of high-value manufacturing and technology-intensive sectors. In 2024, the largest export categories were cars (£8.3 billion), medicinal and pharmaceutical products (£7.2 billion), intermediate mechanical power generators (£5.2 billion), capital scientific instruments (£2.4 billion) and aircraft (£2.2 billion). These figures, however, understate the UK’s overall contribution to the US market, as they do not capture indirect exports—UK-produced components exported to third countries and incorporated into goods ultimately sold in the US. The Bank of England has estimated that the value of these indirect exports could be as high as £20 billion.

The two leading service categories were ‘other business services’ such as business and management consulting, and public relations services (£61.2 billion), followed by financial services (£28.4 billion). Financial services to the US accounted for almost a third of the UK’s total financial services exports in 2024.

Source: ONS, *UK trade with the United States: 2024*, 25 April 2025

278 Q 67 (Daniel Mullaney)

279 Although the EU is the UK’s largest export market when considered as a bloc. Department for Business and Trade, *Trade and investment core statistics book*, 20 March 2026

280 Office for National Statistics, *UK Trade with the United States*, 25 April 2025

281 Department for Business and Trade, *Trade and Investment Factsheets: Germany*, 26 March 2026

282 Office for National Statistics, *UK total trade: all countries, seasonally adjusted*, 23 January 2026

167. The UK–US economic relationship is further underpinned by two-way foreign direct investment (FDI). In 2024, the US remained the largest destination for UK outward FDI, with total UK investment stock in the US standing at £529.9 billion, equivalent to 28.5% of all UK outward FDI. The US was also the largest source of inward FDI into the UK, with US investment stock reaching £604.3 billion, equivalent to about 15% of all US outward FDI. Around 30% of the UK’s total inward FDI stock comes from the US. This makes the US by far the UK’s largest foreign investor and highlights the importance of investment flows alongside trade.²⁸³ In terms of both inward and outward FDI, the UK ranks among the top three US partners.²⁸⁴
168. Although witnesses described the closeness of the UK-US trade relationship and its importance to the UK, they also noted the asymmetry between the countries. Professor Michael Gasiorek, Professor of Economics at Sussex University, explained that while the US accounts for around 21% of total UK trade in goods and services, the UK represents only around 3% of total US trade. He emphasised that this asymmetry matters because it affects negotiating leverage, exposure to shocks and the consequences of policy change, even when the absolute scale of trade is large.²⁸⁵
169. He identified aerospace, pharmaceuticals, financial services and professional business services as the core areas of shared economic interest, reflecting both trade flows and investment patterns. These sectors, he argued, benefit from regulatory familiarity, long-standing commercial ties and accumulated trust, making them relatively resilient compared to more politically sensitive areas such as agriculture.²⁸⁶ Similarly, Mr Mullaney and Sam Lowe, Partner at Flint Global, both pointed to high-value manufacturing and technology-linked sectors as areas of shared interest on which both sides compete globally but are also mutually invested through supply chains and corporate integration.²⁸⁷

Sources of friction and future risk

170. Across the evidence, witnesses identified a set of interlinked challenges shaping the UK-US economic relationship. Central among these was the persistence of US protectionism—particularly the use of tariffs and national security instruments—but also diverging approaches to China, different regulatory regimes, and the ‘unfinished’ nature of the Economic Prosperity Deal.²⁸⁸

A more protectionist, security-led, and unilateral US trade policy

171. Mullaney identified three broad long-term trends in US trade policy:²⁸⁹

283 Department for Business and Trade, *Trade and Investment Factsheets: United States*, 26 March 2026; Statista, *Direct investment position of the United States in the United Kingdom from 2000 to 2024*, 3 March 2026

284 US Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Direct Investment by Country and Industry, 2024*, 22 July 2025

285 [Q 68](#) (Prof Michael Gasiorek)

286 [QQ 69](#) and [71](#) (Prof Michael Gasiorek)

287 [Q 67](#) (Daniel Mullaney)

288 See, for example, [Q 54](#) (Sam Lowe), [Q 61](#) (Daniel Mullaney), [Q 64](#) (Sam Lowe and Daniel Mullaney), [Q 85](#) (Charles Lichfield).

289 [Q 61](#) (Daniel Mullaney)

- (1) scepticism over “pure liberalised trade” being able to deliver prosperity and a recognition that certain “guardrails” are needed to protect domestic communities and workers
 - (2) a perception that WTO rules and other norms are unable to meet current challenges, including those posed by non-market economies, climate change and the digital revolution
 - (3) scepticism over non-market economies fitting into the global trading system
172. These point to the US taking a more protectionist and unilateral approach to trade in the years ahead. There was consensus among witnesses that higher tariffs have become an enduring element of US trade policy, with tariffs used as a tool to pursue specific objectives (even if deployed more or less bluntly, depending on the administration). They cited the tariffs imposed on China by the previous Trump administration and retained by the Biden administration as evidence of this shift.²⁹⁰ Dr Leslie Vinjamuri, then Director of the US and the Americas programme at Chatham House, explained that the US can afford to be more protectionist because the size of its internal market makes it less dependent on trade.²⁹¹
173. Nicholas Westcott, Professor of Practice in Diplomacy at SOAS University of London, explained that US trade policy has shifted from free exchange to “equal exchange”, with trade increasingly viewed through the lens of power and spheres of influence.²⁹² Although witnesses shared the view that the current Trump administration was more willing to take unilateral action, Mullaney had a more positive outlook, noting that the core value “which is that it is better to work with allies on our common objectives than not, is also an enduring trend”.²⁹³
174. Witnesses noted some of the consequences of this trend. Sectoral tariffs were identified as a continuing and potentially expanding risk. Mr Lowe cited the impact of US tariffs on steel and aluminium, while Dmitry Grozoubinski, former Australian trade negotiator and founder of ExplainTrade, warned that additional sectors—such as pharmaceuticals—could be targeted through Section 232 investigations,²⁹⁴ potentially even where a deal has been reached or a lowering of tariffs is being discussed.²⁹⁵ Taylor Summerfield noted the vulnerability of Scotch whisky producers to US trade measures, citing the substantial losses to exports under previous tariff regimes.²⁹⁶
175. Witnesses also highlighted the growing interlinking of trade, foreign policy and economic security, with supply chains, technology and critical inputs increasingly framed through national security lenses.²⁹⁷ In this context, Mr Lowe emphasised the US’ competition with China, predicting that “we are going to continue to see intense pressure on allies to join with the US ... to

290 [Q 61](#) (Sam Lowe), [Q 62](#) (Daniel Mullaney) and [Q 85](#) (Charles Lichfield)

291 [Q 30](#) (Prof Leslie Vinjamuri)

292 Written evidence from Nicholas Westcott ([FRU0029](#))

293 [Q 61](#) (Daniel Mullaney)

294 Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 authorises the US Department of Commerce to conduct investigations into the effects of imports on national security, which can lead to the introduction of tariffs or quotas.

295 [Q 56](#) (Sam Lowe) and [Q 69](#) (Dmitry Grozoubinski)

296 Written evidence from Taylor Summerfield ([FRU0002](#)). Also raised by Sam Lowe in [Q 54](#).

297 See, for example, [Q 61](#) (Daniel Mullaney and Sam Lowe), [Q 82](#) (Charles Lichfield), [Q 83](#) (Dr Francesca Ghiretti).

combat Chinese development and overcapacity, and the national security threats associated with it”.²⁹⁸ This was echoed by Mr Grozoubinski who set out supply-chain resilience concerns, economic security concerns and national security concerns resulting from the greater specialisation and localisation of production outside of the US.²⁹⁹

176. As US trade policy increasingly centres on countering China, differences in the UK’s approach may leave it more vulnerable to diplomatic and economic pressure from Washington.

Divergent approaches to China

177. While both countries share economic (and national) security concerns over China, their approaches differ. Charles Lichfield, Deputy Director at the Atlantic Council, framed UK policy towards China through the Integrated Review Refresh 2023 approach—protect, align and engage—defining ‘engage’ as direct engagement with China, ‘align’ as cooperation with allies to build resilience and resist coercion, and ‘protect’ as safeguarding sensitive sectors. He also noted that the UK has to be “pragmatic about its market size and its willingness to attract Chinese investment when it is into the right sectors”.³⁰⁰ This was contrasted with the US position.
178. Dr Francesca Ghiretti, Research Leader at RAND Europe, set out a fundamental distinction in how the two countries structure their economic security posture towards China. She argued that the US explicitly targets China in its economic security approach, with China singled out (alongside other countries), whereas the UK, much like other European countries, operates a “country-neutral or country-agnostic approach”. She emphasised that this does not mean China is not a major concern for the UK, but it is not “officially singled out”, which creates a different policy style and signalling environment.³⁰¹
179. Dr Ghiretti identified a second divergence that she framed as strategic intent: the US has been pursuing what she called “a containment/slowing down of technological development in China”, an agenda the UK has “not necessarily bought into”. She again linked the UK’s position to European counterparts rather than the US, suggesting that the UK may share concerns about China’s technological advancement and related risks, but does not necessarily endorse containment as an objective. She also noted a third difference, selective decoupling, arguing that the US has advanced selective decoupling in specific strategic areas under both the previous and current administrations, whereas in the UK this is less evident.³⁰²
180. She additionally highlighted divergence in diplomatic posture between what she described as the UK’s current rapprochement agenda towards China and the “almost non-existent rapprochement agenda” in the US. She argued that the UK has signalled it remains “very much open” to doing business with China, including in areas where observers might question whether there are security concerns or whether the business is positive or negative. This willingness to maintain commercial openness, she suggested, distinguishes

298 [Q 61](#) (Sam Lowe)

299 [Q 74](#) (Dmitry Grozoubinski)

300 [Q 84](#) (Charles Lichfield). Lichfield is also and C. Boyden Gray, Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council.

301 [Q 82](#) (Dr Francesca Ghiretti)

302 *Ibid.*

the UK stance from the US, and implies a different tolerance for ambiguity and risk in some sectors.³⁰³

181. Finally, witnesses noted a further layer of divergence risk: not only direct UK–China policy choices, but how UK trade diversification may be perceived in Washington through a China lens. Lichfield recounted that US officials expressed concern that the UK pursuing trade deals widely—including in south-east Asia and Latin America—could be perceived as entrenching China in UK supply chains, even if the UK’s professed goal is to build resilience and counter China through diversification. He argued that Washington may focus not just on countries but on economic actors and investment channels through which China exerts influence. This evidence implies that divergence may arise not only from UK decisions explicitly about China, but from how the US interprets UK engagement with third countries where China has a substantial economic presence.³⁰⁴
182. Dr Ghiretti highlighted in this context that supply chains on critical minerals, for example, may appear diversified, but in practice still rely heavily on China due to Chinese control of mines and processing, creating economic and potentially defence vulnerabilities. This, the trade association ADS argues, calls for proactive engagement on issues such as export control reform, regular government-industry dialogues on both sides of the Atlantic, and confidence-building measures to pre-empt disputes.³⁰⁵
183. We heard that US financial “firepower” shapes what the US expects and what it can demand from partners when China is in scope.³⁰⁶ The implication is that the UK may be pressured to align with the US—particularly where US national security framing is broader and where Washington perceives UK openness (including via third countries) as creating China-related vulnerabilities. In practical terms, a hardening US approach towards China could also generate challenges for UK industry in navigating compliance and Rules of Origin requirements.³⁰⁷

Regulatory divergence

184. Evidence indicates that a major barrier to deeper UK–US economic integration is regulatory incompatibility. While bilateral trade is extensive and investment ties are deep, witnesses repeatedly emphasised that the relationship is comparatively shallow in economic institutionalisation. The absence of a comprehensive free trade agreement, combined with differing regulatory approaches, means it functions largely through ad-hoc arrangements rather than integrated market frameworks.
185. Agriculture is the most politically sensitive form of divergence. The US generally seeks market access based on its domestic production standards, and although the UK has its own standards, it continues to operate within a regulatory ecosystem heavily aligned with EU sanitary and phytosanitary rules (and is currently working towards a sanitary and phytosanitary agreement that would embed regulatory alignment with the EU). We note that the UK Government has so far successfully managed to navigate any

303 [Q 84](#) (Dr Francesca Ghiretti)

304 [Q 91](#) (Charles Lichfield)

305 Written evidence from ADS Group ([FRU0011](#))

306 [Q 83](#) (Charles Lichfield)

307 Rules of Origin are restrictions on where a product and its components can be produced to be eligible for tariff preferences. Written evidence from ADS Group ([FRU0011](#))

false choice dilemmas by focusing on sector-specific agreements with the US.

186. Regulatory divergence also affects the digital economy. The US maintains a comparatively permissive approach to large technology platforms, whereas the UK—broadly alongside the EU—is developing stronger competition and accountability rules. Dr Andrew Sanders, Senior Lecturer in Politics at De Montfort University, anticipates US technology investment in UK innovation clusters,³⁰⁸ but the scale and nature of that investment will likely depend heavily on regulatory predictability.
187. A direct casualty of this regulatory divergence has been the US-UK tech prosperity deal announced in September 2025, and which had aimed to secure £31 billion in investment across AI, quantum, and nuclear energy. It was placed on hold in December, reportedly due to disputes over agricultural standards and, possibly, the UK’s Digital Services Tax.³⁰⁹ Even though negotiations resumed in February 2026, their scope has been limited to nuclear cooperation.³¹⁰
188. Environmental policy introduces another area of divergence driven by domestic shifts and political volatility in the US.³¹¹ A more permanent US retreat from climate commitments could create regulatory asymmetries affecting trade, investment and financial disclosure, with renewable energy investment and green finance much affected.
189. On artificial intelligence, Mr Lichfield suggested that while alignment on hardware controls is relatively straightforward and mutually reinforcing, divergence over AI use and regulation may widen, especially if US policy continues to prioritise speed and technological dominance over social or cultural safeguards. AI was presented as an opportunity for closer collaboration and a potential fault line that could test the limits of alignment, autonomy and trust in the years ahead.³¹²
190. We heard that there remains value in deepening regulatory dialogue with the US in financial services, digital trade and emerging technologies, provided cooperation does not compromise UK autonomy where interests diverge.³¹³

The Economic Prosperity Deal (EPD): an unfinished framework

191. The second Trump administration has injected a high degree of unpredictability into UK-US trade relations, even where deals have ostensibly been concluded. On 8 May 2025, the UK and US announced the general terms of an Economic Prosperity Deal (EPD), but its long-term prospects are unclear for two reasons. First, the general terms of the deal are a framework and do not yet lock in any legally binding commitments. Second, there are questions over the status of commitments already made in the context of the Supreme Court finding that President Trump lacks the authority to impose ‘reciprocal tariffs’ on countries under the International

308 Written evidence from Dr Andrew Sanders (FRU0001)

309 Financial Times, *US suspends technology deal with the UK*, 15 December 2025

310 Financial Times, *US-UK tech talks restart with focus on nuclear projects*, 25 February 2026

311 See, for example, QQ 6 (Sir Nigel Sheinwald), 102 (Prof Kupchan), 109 (Prof Kupchan and Evie Aspinall), 163 (Lauren Speranza) and written evidence from Dr Yusra Suedi (FRU0036).

312 Q 89 (Charles Lichfield). See also Q 38 (Edward Luce).

313 Written evidence from Symington W. Smith (FRU0009)

Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).³¹⁴ This led to the introduction of a new global tariff by the President. However, there is uncertainty over the level of this global tariff (currently set at 10%) because of conflicting presidential statements,³¹⁵ and questions remain over their permanence given the need for Congressional approval after 150 days.³¹⁶

192. The evidence we collected on the general terms of the EPD pre-dates the Supreme Court finding. However, the core arguments put forward by witnesses remain valid.
193. The general terms include commitments to reduce tariff and regulatory barriers across sectors such as agriculture, automotive, steel and aluminium, pharmaceuticals, digital trade, and aerospace. They also contain mutual quotas on beef and UK agreement to import 1.4 billion litres of US bioethanol tariff-free. Under the outline deal, the UK could see the 25% rate on steel, aluminium and derivative goods removed, contingent on meeting US supply chain security requirements. The UK can also export up to 100,000 passenger vehicles to the US at a 10% tariff. Pharmaceuticals can now enter the US tariff-free, in return for UK commitments to adjust domestic pricing policies. The outline deal also opens the possibility of exemptions for semiconductors and some other goods from future US tariffs. However, the 10% global tariff on most other UK goods imported into the US remains in place until 24 July 2026.³¹⁷
194. Witnesses emphasised that the general terms are only a framework, or agreement in principle, rather than a binding free trade agreement, and that much of its significance lies in what it signals about future negotiations rather than concrete commitments.³¹⁸ Mr Lichfield characterised it as “the beginning of a conversation” rather than a settled architecture, describing it as a deal that establishes a framework for future discussions, particularly on economic security, rather than locking in binding commitments.³¹⁹
195. Some witnesses implied that the lack of binding obligations in the general terms of the EPD is not a neutral drafting choice but a material risk factor, because it leaves space for future unilateral measures and for politically motivated re-interpretation. The fact that the outline for the EPD leaves crucial elements vague was identified as a key source of political and economic risk. Grozoubinski highlighted that the text indicates that the UK will offer further tariff concessions beyond what is visible but does not specify which products, how large the concessions will be, or how they will be structured.³²⁰ He argued that the absence of even an itemised product list suggested that unresolved issues may have been deferred to enable an early announcement, raising the risk that “landmines emerge once they get into the detail”. Professor Gasiorek similarly expressed concern that the framework contains

314 Supreme Court of the United States, *Learning Resources, INC., et al v Trump, President of the United States, et al*, [No. 24-1287](#), October Term, 2025

315 BBC News, [Trump’s new tariff comes into effect at lower than expected rate](#), 24 February 2026

316 The US administration is currently relying on Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to replace the IEEPA tariffs, which gives the President, under certain circumstances, temporary authority to levy tariffs capped at 15%.

317 House of Commons Library, *US trade tariffs*, [CPB 10240](#), 27 February 2026

318 [Q 69](#) (Prof Michael Gasiorek and Dmitry Grozoubinski). In a telephone interview with Sky News on 15 April 2026, President Trump also appeared to link what he saw as lack of UK support on Iran to potential changes to the EPD: Sky News, [UK ‘can’t succeed’, says Trump](#), 15 April 2026.

319 [Q 90](#) (Charles Lichfield)

320 [Q 69](#) (Dmitry Grozoubinski)

some specific elements but remains vague in key areas, which complicates scrutiny and increases uncertainty about what the UK may ultimately be asked to concede.³²¹ The agreement also introduces clauses tying the UK to US supply chain security demands, particularly concerning China, which could allow the US to suspend the deal based on its security assessments, thus adding further uncertainty.³²²

196. Witnesses were also explicit about legal and systemic risks. Lowe noted that “mini-deals” like the proposed EPD, offering selective tariff reductions, risk breaching the most-favoured-nation principle³²³ as they may fail to cover substantially all trade.³²⁴ Professor Gasiorek agreed that current violations appear mild but argued that the more serious risk would arise if the EPD evolved into selective preferential tariff liberalisation without covering “substantially all trade”, which he said would be a “serious error” for the UK Government. He stressed that while some countries have committed similar violations in the past, the EPD could create a pathway to wider WTO incompatibility if it develops into a partial preferential arrangement.³²⁵ The EPD therefore presents a risk of putting the UK in breach of its WTO obligations, especially if it develops into selective preferential tariff or quota arrangements that do not meet WTO requirements for comprehensive coverage.
197. On the positive side of the balance sheet, witnesses framed the general terms of the EPD as part of a strategic balancing act rather than a singular destination. Professor Gasiorek argued that one of the UK’s practical achievements so far is that the framework does not undermine ongoing negotiations with the EU, which he characterised as an important strategic constraint the UK had managed to preserve.³²⁶ Mr Grozoubinski reinforced that the UK had appeared to hold the line on US requests that would have moved UK regulation closer to the US and further from the EU, which he argued would have worsened EU risk perceptions and complicated border-friction negotiations.³²⁷ We note in this context that, as part of the UK-EU reset, the UK Government has agreed to pursue new agreements with the EU, including one on sanitary and phytosanitary standards, that would involve regulatory alignment with the EU.³²⁸ Mr Lichfield suggested that a comprehensive free trade agreement with the US would also inevitably collide with domestic political constraints in the UK, especially on agriculture and healthcare, and that these constraints in practice limit how far the UK can go—reducing the risk that an EPD-style arrangement pulls the UK away from EU-aligned approaches.³²⁹ In this sense, witnesses portrayed the EPD

321 [Q 69](#) (Prof Michael Gasiorek)

322 [Q 69](#) (Prof Michael Gasiorek)

323 Under Article I of the GATT, WTO members must accord any favour, advantage, privilege or immunity granted to the products of any country immediately and unconditionally to the like products of all other WTO members. This is known as the WTO’s ‘most favoured nation’ (MFN) principle. WTO members may deviate from this MFN obligation to provide preferential treatment to one or more WTO members provided they satisfy the requirements provided in Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. This Article allows for the countries to agree Free Trade Agreements, provided these agreements cover “substantially all trade” between the parties.

324 [Q 63](#) (Sam Lowe)

325 [QQ 69](#) and [72](#) (Prof Michael Gasiorek)

326 [QQ 69](#) and [76](#) (Prof Michael Gasiorek)

327 [Q 76](#) (Dmitry Grozoubinski)

328 Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [Press Release: UK-EU SPS Agreement—Information for Businesses](#), 9 March 2026

329 [Q 88](#) (Charles Lichfield)

as a tool for incremental engagement under constraints, but one whose ambiguity, economic security conditionality, and WTO exposure require careful management as negotiations proceed.

198. **The UK derives sizable benefits from its close economic relationship with the US, but this also leaves it exposed to shifts in US policy. US trade policy is moving towards a more protectionist and security-oriented model. This trajectory holds risks for the UK, especially given the importance of the US market for the UK economy and the inherent asymmetry within the relationship. Although specific approaches between administrations may vary, the underlying trend towards greater protectionism and the use of trade policy as a tool for national security is expected to continue.**
199. **There is therefore a higher probability of US unilateral trade action affecting UK sectors; a greater likelihood of “security conditionality” being attached to market access; and higher domestic costs UK businesses may face from uncertainty and compliance.**
200. **The framework for an Economic Prosperity Deal recently agreed with the US is explicitly designed to be non-binding and contains open-ended language about further tariff reductions and sectoral coverage that is contingent on US investigations and supply-chain security judgements. While it anticipates coordination on economic security and the non-market policies of third countries (i.e. China), UK interests require commitments to be more clearly defined to insulate the trade relationship from arbitrary change.**
201. *To this end, the UK Government should follow a twin-track approach. First, it should work with the US to ensure that obligations in the EPD are clearly scoped, and reject broad and ambiguous supply-chain security commitments in future agreements. Second, it should articulate a clearer strategy towards its engagement with China and commit to alignment where UK and US interests converge. These could include defining controls on dual-use high-end technologies and taking coordinated action against demonstrable non-market practices harming the UK.*
202. *Given the protectionist trend in US trade policy, the UK Government should map areas of excessive dependence on US systems, technologies or markets to help determine where greater sovereign capability or diversified partnerships are needed. A more balanced UK trade strategy—combining stronger domestic capability with wider international diversification with our European partners and beyond—would provide greater resilience against US political volatility.*
203. *As part of this, reducing border frictions with the EU should remain a strategic priority for the UK Government. The UK Government should also support firms to expand into alternative markets to help spread risks. The UK’s accession to the CPTPP provides an avenue for this.*
204. *As a mid-sized trading nation, it is in the UK’s interest that the international trading environment is stable and predictable. The*

UK Government should therefore continue to support multilateral frameworks, while seeking opportunities to encourage US participation when politically feasible.

205. ***Tariff liberalisation within the general terms of the EPD is incompatible with the WTO principle of non-discrimination. As the EPD remains only a framework, its eventual state is unclear. The UK Government should ensure that it is developed into an agreement that does not place the UK in breach of its WTO obligations. We echo the International Agreement Committee's recently issued recommendation that the UK Government should be cautious about consolidating or replicating the EPD approach, as it risks undermining the multilateral trade system on which the UK relies.***

Emerging opportunities

206. While the UK and US are competitors in certain sectors, witnesses agreed that opportunities within the UK–US relationship are real but bounded, tending to be sector-specific, incremental and contingent on political conditions.

Advanced technologies

207. One of the clearest opportunities for closer cooperation lies in the expansion of cooperation across advanced technology sectors. Both the UK and the US share global ambitions in AI, quantum computing, digital trade, space technology, cybersecurity, and nuclear innovation, making these areas fertile ground for joint development. Witnesses repeatedly noted the UK's advanced research strength and that the UK is already a partner of choice for US tech investment, receiving more than 10% of all US foreign R&D expenditure—a powerful indicator of the UK's relative weight in the American innovation ecosystem.³³⁰
208. This strong base allows for the deepening of existing relationships. Markets such as AI research and safety, quantum encryption, unmanned autonomous systems, and satellite communications are areas where the US seeks trusted allies and where political alignment strengthens commercial confidence. As both countries shift towards data-heavy, knowledge-intensive growth models, the complementarities between US scale and UK research excellence become increasingly valuable. We note, however, that this cannot be taken for granted. Negotiations on the UK-US Tech Prosperity Deal, which sought to build on that complementarity and secure greater cooperation on AI, quantum computing and frontier innovation are currently on hold due to wider regulatory disagreements (see also paras 184–190 above).

Defence industrial integration and AUKUS supply chains

209. The UK's deep defence and intelligence ties with the US create powerful economic spillovers. Defence manufacturers, aerospace firms, cyber companies, and dual-use technology enterprises all benefit from the longstanding interoperability between UK and US armed forces. The UK's

³³⁰ See, for example, [QQ 133](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith), [180](#) (Sophia Gaston), written evidence from ADS Group ([FRU0011](#)), the FCDO ([FRU0014](#)), TheCityUK ([FRU0022](#)) and the Centre for Inclusive Trade Policy ([FRU0023](#)).

global reputation in aerospace and cyber defence further reinforces its position as a preferred partner in the US military–industrial ecosystem.³³¹

210. AUKUS, in particular, is also expected to generate major new supply-chain opportunities for UK firms involved in nuclear submarine construction, components manufacturing, and advanced defence technologies. The UK’s participation in AUKUS Pillar II—focused on the development of advanced technologies—puts it at the centre of a multibillion-dollar emerging market.³³² It creates both immediate and long-term commercial openings for UK firms capable of supplying high-end components, secure digital systems, and next-generation technologies.

Supply chain re-shoring and economic security

211. A further opportunity arises from ongoing US efforts to re-shore critical supply chains, especially in semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, and critical minerals. The UK, with its strong research base, regulatory credibility, and role as a trusted ally, is well positioned to integrate into these new, secure transatlantic supply networks. Such diversification could have the added benefit of the UK building resilience into its own supply chains. Evidence indicates that critical minerals and supply-chain resilience represent a potential area for constructive UK–US cooperation, albeit one shaped by political and structural constraints, and competition. Lichfield explained that the UK “got quite close” to securing a critical minerals agreement with the US before political momentum was lost, but that there may be an opportunity for the UK when momentum returns. The likely scope would be targeted commitments (for example, on joint projects or investment cooperation) rather than a sweeping FTA-style instrument.³³³
212. The US’ hardening, security-led approach towards China, while introducing a risk for the UK (see paragraphs 12–13), also entails an opportunity for proactive engagement. There is an opportunity for UK–US cooperation focused on joint analysis, data-sharing and the mapping of vulnerabilities in sensitive supply chains, discussions on export control reform and regular government–industry dialogues on both sides of the Atlantic.³³⁴ Dr Ghiretti also explained that the US and EU are broadly aligned on the need to diversify supply chains away from excessive dependence on China, implying that UK–US collaboration in this area could be compatible with, rather than undermining, the UK’s wider European economic relationships.³³⁵

Capital, investment and payment systems

213. Finally, the evidence highlights opportunities in attracting US capital, especially in private equity, venture funding, and green finance. The US remains the world’s deepest pool of investment capital, and the UK’s legal environment, time-zone position, and reputation for regulatory stability make it an attractive destination—especially in the context of global uncertainty.

331 Written evidence from ADS Group (FRU0011), FCDO (FRU0014), Dr Elliot Winter (FRU0005), Dr Lauren Sukin (FRU0016)

332 Written evidence from Dr Michael Collins (FRU0003), London Politica (FRU0008), ADS Group (FRU0011), British Association for American Studies (BAAS) (FRU0013), FCDO (FRU0014)

333 Q 88 (Charles Lichfield)

334 Q 88 (Dr Francesca Ghiretti)

335 *Ibid.*

214. As American investors seek secure jurisdictions outside the US, particularly for long-term, technologically intensive projects, the UK is well placed to benefit. High-growth areas such as life sciences, fintech, green technologies, artificial intelligence, and aerospace consistently draw interest from American funds, giving the UK a powerful avenue for innovation-led growth.³³⁶
215. Witnesses argued that the UK remains attractive to US investors because of its legal system, financial ecosystem, research base and universities, particularly at a time when US domestic policy uncertainty may be discouraging some long-term investment.³³⁷ They suggested that the UK could position itself as a stable alternative location for firms and researchers unsettled by US policy volatility. Mr Grozoubinski, for example, noted that academics, researchers and certain technology firms are actively seeking jurisdictions that offer stability and openness, while supply-chain managers are looking for “third-party, mutually friendly vectors” as alternatives to both the US and China. He suggested that the UK is reasonably well placed to play such a role.³³⁸ He also highlighted wider opportunities: as Europe seeks to de-risk from the US, it is starting to review which parts of its financial infrastructure are over-exposed to the US. In particular, he explained that the UK has an opportunity to start offering alternatives to core US infrastructure offerings, such as Visa and Mastercard. We note that the Government has recently backed an initiative that would see UK banks establish an alternative to the Visa and Mastercard payment systems.³³⁹
216. **Collaboration with the US on advanced technologies—particularly on AI and other frontier technologies (civilian and defence)—presents opportunities for innovation-led economic growth, providing a multiplier effect for the UK.**
217. *Yet the UK should also take steps to avoid over-dependence on the US. One area of concern is the UK’s reliance on US-based technology in the provision of payment platforms. In this context, we welcome steps taken to provide alternative payment systems to Visa and Mastercard.*
218. *There are also risks as the UK’s more interventionist approach to tech regulation, both on safety and competition grounds, complicates collaboration. To retain its autonomy, the UK Government should continue to articulate its red lines clearly and set up structured dialogues to manage disputes. The UK Government will need to remain flexible as it may need to pivot at times towards sectors where cooperation is commercially attractive but less politically sensitive. These could include fintech, cybersecurity and digital trade.*
219. *The UK Government should engage in a structured UK–US programme of collaboration focused on: (1) joint analysis and data sharing, including coordinated mapping of vulnerabilities in sensitive supply chains; and (2) dialogue on export control reform,*

336 Written evidence from British Association of American Studies ([FRU0013](#)) and London Politica ([FRU0008](#))

337 See, for example, [QQ 78](#) (Dmitry Grozoubinski and Michael Gasiorek), [94](#) (Charles Lichfield), [133](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith) and written evidence from TheCityUK ([FRU0022](#))

338 [Q 78](#) (Dmitry Grozoubinski)

339 The Guardian, [UK bank bosses plan to set up Visa and Mastercard alternative amid Trump fears](#), 16 Feb 2026

ensuring that regulatory regimes support both national security objectives and commercial competitiveness.

220. *Finally, the UK has an opportunity to present itself as a stable alternative location for investors and businesses unsettled by political volatility in the US. However, it can only do so long-term if it retains its own credibility as an upholder of trade rules.*

CHAPTER 6: ACADEMIC, RESEARCH AND CULTURAL COOPERATION

Academic and research collaboration

221. The UK's strong research reputation places it in a prime position to collaborate with the US, with both countries sharing close educational and research ties. We heard that approximately 16% of UK research outputs involve US partners, amounting to over a quarter of a million publications over a five-year period. As Jamie Arrowsmith, Director at Universities UK International, put it, the US is a “partner of choice” for the UK and “really important to the UK's ambitions”. This is because it offers a research ecosystem of unparalleled scale, investing more in research and development than any other nation and hosting the highest concentration of top-tier universities in the world. In return, the UK contributes high-quality researchers who, on a per capita basis, often outperform their American counterparts in the proportion of highly cited articles. They also contribute complementary expertise and historic datasets to the partnership. In short, the academic and research relationship is one with clear benefits for both sides: while the UK excels internationally in terms of the quality of its research output, the US gives the UK the scale it needs to have global impact. On the UK side, collaboration is financially supported by UK Research and Innovation with investments of around £3 billion in partnerships with the US and Canada over 8–10 years.³⁴⁰
222. Mr Arrowsmith further explained that the relationship is based on “the familiarity of our systems, whether that is language, the academic infrastructure or the legal and democratic underpinning”.³⁴¹ UK and US interests also closely align on advanced research, with both governments identifying AI and quantum technologies as critical to economic competitiveness and national security. Government-to-government agreements have reinforced ties in these research areas: the UK and US signed a declaration on artificial intelligence research in 2020³⁴² and a joint statement on quantum information sciences in 2021³⁴³.
223. The academic and research relationship has been sustained through people-to-people links and exchange programmes. These have helped to introduce the next generation of American and British academics and students to each other's ideas and culture, reinforcing a sense of shared values.³⁴⁴ In turn, such exchanges aid mutual understanding and help to support the wider UK-US relationship. As one witness put it, “education, people-to-people links, and research are things that grease the wheels of soft power”.³⁴⁵

340 [Q 133](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith)

341 [Q 133](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith)

342 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology/ Office for Artificial Intelligence/ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport/ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, *Declaration of the United States of America and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on Cooperation in Artificial Intelligence Research and Development*, 25 September 2020

343 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, *UK-US joint statement on cooperation in quantum information sciences and technologies*, 4 November 2021

344 [QQ 52](#) (Monica Toft), [142](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith), written evidence from Dr Michael Collins ([FRU0003](#)), The Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission (MACC) ([FRU0021](#)) and the British Association for American Studies ([FRU0013](#))

345 [Q 142](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith)

224. Exchange programmes like the Marshall Scholarships Programme attract top US graduates to UK universities, fostering lifelong academic and professional ties that benefit collaboration and mutual understanding. We heard from John Raine, Chair of the Marshall Aid Commemoration, that alumni often remain engaged and connected to the UK, supporting research and philanthropy long after the completion of their course.³⁴⁶ Alumni have also gone on to serve at the highest levels of the US government and have made direct contributions to UK-US initiatives, such as the creation of AUKUS and the development of the Nobel Prize-winning AlphaFold AI model.³⁴⁷ The UK has been a beneficiary of the Fulbright Program established by the US in the immediate post-Second World War period, which has enabled academic exchanges across all disciplines. Numerous Nobel Laureates have been supported by the programme on both sides, as well as individuals who have subsequently risen to high office, such as former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.³⁴⁸ The Rhodes Scholarship, too, has promoted UK-US exchanges and counts former US President Bill Clinton among its alumni.³⁴⁹
225. More broadly, the UK currently hosts about 23,000 students from the US, many supported by US federal loans (Title IV), which bring over \$200 million into the UK economy annually. Cuts to the federal loans programme contained in the Trump administration's 'One Big Beautiful Bill' are due to take effect later this year, although their impact is still unclear.³⁵⁰
226. AUKUS Pillar II, while still in its early stages, provides a framework that has the potential to deepen the integration of UK-US research ecosystems in advanced technology areas, such as hypersonics, quantum computing and cybersecurity.
227. The Trump administration has, however, introduced several points of friction into the relationship. The volume of US education policy changes and some of the legal challenges to them, particularly at the start of his presidency, made it difficult for UK institutions and British students to keep track of and understand how the changes might impact them.³⁵¹
228. The administration's "America First" agenda and the placing of political appointees in charge of the federal research grants and loans process has led to funding cuts. Federal funding has narrowed to meet administration priorities, such as on AI, quantum technologies, nuclear research, biotechnology and chronic diseases, often at the expense of the humanities and social sciences. While their impact is yet to be felt, some witnesses expressed concern that the cuts could have a profound effect, particularly for early-career researchers who rely on federal grants and loans to fund their work.³⁵² However, since the administration's announcements, several of the spending cuts proposed have been, or are in the process of being, reversed by Congress.³⁵³

346 [Q 133](#) (John Raine)

347 [Q 159](#) (Dr Nell Breyer)

348 Written evidence from the British Association for American Studies ([FRU0013](#))

349 *Ibid.*

350 [Q 133](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith)

351 [Q 134](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith)

352 [Q 52](#) (Prof Donald Abelson and Prof Monica Toft)

353 See, for example: Science, [Congress set to reject Trump's major budget cuts to NSF, NASA, and energy science](#), 5 January 2026; Language Magazine, [UPDATE: Education Spending Cuts Reversed by Congress](#), 26 January 2026; and Times Higher Education, [US science budgets have been spared. So why is no one celebrating?](#), 9 March 2026

229. Nonetheless, underlying tensions between the White House and academia remain. The current US administration has displayed hostility towards academic freedom, targeting fields related to climate science, public health and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies.³⁵⁴ This hostility has also been projected onto the work of international partners. Letters from the US Department of Education have warned international institutions, including in the UK, that adopting DEI policies may jeopardise their status as US partners.³⁵⁵
230. Other changes introduced by this administration have included federally funded projects having to demonstrate that research cannot be conducted outside the US; restrictions on student visas and enhanced social media vetting of visa applicants.³⁵⁶ The collective effect of all these changes has been that some research projects have been paused, cancelled or restructured to exclude the US.
231. Despite the actions of this US administration, we heard that the research relationship remains fundamentally strong and will likely remain so. It will, however, need to adapt to be more aware of the risks associated with US collaboration than in the past.³⁵⁷ The UK educational and research sector should avoid complacency. Although it is difficult to predict the full effect and permanence of the Trump administration's educational policies, they are largely driven by ideological domestic shifts heightened by political polarisation. This underlying dynamic will remain and could resurface with a future administration adopting a similarly Trumpian style.
232. **The academic and research partnership remains a pillar of the bilateral relationship and is an important source of UK soft power. Collaboration with the US, in particular, helps augment UK outputs. It also fosters people-to-people links that can help sustain the UK-US relationship and insulate against political volatility.**
233. **While historically strong, this aspect of the relationship faces challenges from shifts in US policy under this Trump administration: new restrictions on DEI, reductions in federal research budgets, politicisation of grant making, and tightened visa rules have created uncertainty and could disrupt existing research partnerships or erode them over time.**
234. *In the short term, the UK will need to be more vocal in articulating tangible, reciprocal benefits of collaboration to an "America First" administration, focusing on how UK expertise advances US national interests.*
235. *It is unclear whether future administrations would adopt similar policies, but US domestic polarisation makes this a possibility. Even in the longer term, therefore, the UK must move beyond relying on historical sentiment or assumptions based on past practice. It will require more proactive management to navigate the climate*

354 [QQ 134](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith), [137](#), [139](#) (Simon Mellor), written evidence from SOAS University of London ([FRU0038](#)) and the British Association for American Studies ([FRU0013](#))

355 [Q 134](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith)

356 The Times, *British students hoping to study in US warned about online posts*, 26 June 2025

357 [Q 135](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith and John Raine) and [Q 136](#) (Jamie Arrowsmith)

of political volatility and US funding cuts that may persist beyond President Trump.

Artistic and cultural exchange

236. The US is a major market for the UK’s creative and cultural sector, strengthened by a shared language. Simon Mellor, Deputy Chief Executive at the Arts Council England, an agency that supports a wide range of creative and cultural disciplines across England, told us that “the USA, alongside France and Germany, are the biggest markets for our sector”.³⁵⁸ He also noted that arguably every single art form in this country has been heavily influenced by more than 150 years of cultural dialogue between the UK and the US.³⁵⁹
237. In particular, the UK benefits from co-productions, where US funding helps UK artists extend their reach, including by paying for tours within the UK, the US and globally. We heard that “a lot of work that audiences see in this country would not happen without that partnership” and that the UK cultural sector is further supported by an extensive fundraising presence in the US.³⁶⁰
238. Reflecting developments in the educational sector, Trump administration concerns over equality, diversity and inclusion policies, and their continued application by UK organisations, have led to nervousness among some US donors and promoters. While some promoters remain committed to presenting challenging and progressive work, current trends suggest a more negative environment for UK cultural exports to the US. Mellor warned that “if the threats, risks and challenges around the partnership with the USA do not get resolved, they will have a very significant impact on the health of our sector in this country. We will struggle to replace that in other international markets”.³⁶¹

Cultural affinity and public opinion

239. We heard evidence that the UK-US relationship is not solely predicated on a shared assessment of international politics and economics but is also rooted in a “cultural ease” that emanates from shared language, history and values.³⁶² These cultural connections lubricate the exchange of people, ideas and cultural products, and facilitate more fluid diplomatic communication.
240. We heard evidence of enduring strengths in the cultural relationship. Gerard Baker, Editor-at-Large at the Wall Street Journal, noted that the UK-US cultural affinity is more “deeply embedded... [than] any two countries that are not geographically close”, and argued that the UK and US have distinctive links across sport, the arts, education and the media.³⁶³ Sir Peter Westmacott spoke of the advantages derived from the UK’s monarchy, which is held in high esteem by many occupants of the White House.³⁶⁴ Edward Luce, US National Editor at the Financial Times, noted President Trump’s “soft spot” for the UK, describing him as an “Anglophile” due to his love of golf and

358 [Q 132](#) (Simon Mellor)

359 [Q 137](#) (Simon Mellor)

360 [Q 137](#) (Simon Mellor)

361 [Q 138](#) (Simon Mellor)

362 [Q 3](#) (Sir Nigel Sheinwald) and written evidence from Chatham House ([FRU0026](#))

363 [QQ 41](#) and [44](#) (Gerard Baker)

364 [Q 3](#) (Sir Peter Westmacott)

the Royal Family.³⁶⁵ Jennifer Ewing, Spokesperson at Republicans Overseas, mentioned President Trump’s Scottish heritage as a reason that he is “very fond of the United Kingdom”.³⁶⁶ Greg Swenson, Chair at Republicans Overseas, highlighted how the US’ founding documents are based on British documents, giving the countries a unique historical link.³⁶⁷

241. However, witnesses also noted that the historic cultural connections between the two countries are coming under strain. Dame Karen Pierce noted that demographic change in the USA would mean that “you will any longer find people with an automatic connection to Europe and the UK in the same way you would have done, say, 25 years ago”.³⁶⁸ Sir David Manning noted that cultural connections were geographically contingent, highlighting that California has closer cultural connections with Asia.³⁶⁹
242. We also heard that the current US administration has become increasingly critical of the cultural and demographic trajectory of European countries, including the UK. Representatives from Republicans Abroad cited UK approaches to free speech and energy policy as divergent from the views of the Trump administration and stated that the administration was actively concerned about the UK’s trajectory.³⁷⁰ The recently-published US National Security Strategy indicates an emerging divide between the UK and US on cultural issues, with the document containing a section on “Promoting European Greatness”, which claims that approaches taken by European states on free speech and immigration represent a “loss of national identities and self-confidence”.³⁷¹ Rep Jim Himes, Democratic Congressman for Connecticut’s 4th District, also noted that recent developments in the UK on free speech were “immensely toxic to American sensibilities”.³⁷²
243. Moreover, shifts in public opinion indicate increasing vulnerabilities in this aspect of the relationship. There are some generational differences. In the US, support is stable among older Americans, with 45–50% over 50 considering the UK to be its number one ally. Younger generations of Americans (under 30s), however, have less of an automatic connection to Europe and the UK, and are less likely to view the UK as the US’ most important partner. Younger groups of Americans also identify Canada and China as strategic partners.³⁷³
244. At the same time, in the UK, public opinion on the relationship is more closely tied to perceptions and actions of the US President, and therefore tends to change depending on who sits in the White House. Under President Trump, polls show that public opinion has grown more sceptical. According to polling by Ipsos on public attitudes on the UK-US relationship, trust in the US has fallen from 53% in 2024 to just 38% in 2025, with more Britons now distrusting (41%) than trusting (38%) it to act responsibly in the world. President Trump’s actions are also seen as more of a threat to UK national

365 [Q 37](#) (Edward Luce)

366 [Q 15](#) (Jennifer Ewing)

367 [Q 15](#) (Greg Swenson)

368 [Q 2](#) (Dame Karen Pierce)

369 [Q 4](#) (Sir David Manning)

370 [QQ 15](#) and [21](#) (Jennifer Ewing) and [23](#) (Greg Swenson)

371 White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, November 2025. See also [Q 227](#) (Tara Varma)

372 [Q 152](#) (Rep Jim Himes)

373 Written evidence from The Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission ([FRU0021](#))

security (33%) than terrorism (32%) or the rise of China (25%).³⁷⁴ There are also some generational differences. A recent YouGov poll taken in January 2026 shows that 18–24 year-olds are the cohort holding the least favourable view of the US. In this group, 78% hold an unfavourable view of the US and only 16% hold a favourable one.³⁷⁵

245. **The UK and the US have historically benefitted from a shared cultural affinity rooted in language, history and values. However, cracks are increasingly becoming evident on issues such as immigration, climate change and freedom of speech.**
246. *The UK Government, particularly in its bilateral engagements with the US, should counter narratives of UK and European decline by clearly communicating to US audiences that the UK remains a resilient, stable and successful society, contrary to some negative portrayals in US commentary. As a long-term strategy, the UK Government should support institutions that can help counter this negative narrative and promote a positive image of the UK.*
247. *In addition, public opinion shifts pose a challenge to maintaining close connections. Sustaining goodwill among younger generations, in particular, is essential for the long-term health of the relationship, which will require renewed investment in people-to-people links, academic exchanges, and creative collaboration.*

374 Ipsos Political Polling, *Ipsos UK Public opinion towards the United States*, January 2026

375 YouGov, *Where do Britons stand on Europe's relationship with the USA?*, 21 January 2026

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Long-term US trends affecting the relationship

1. *UK policy towards the US must be grounded in a sober analysis of the underlying long-term trends that are influencing US policy and affecting its relationship with the UK—a relationship whose depth and resilience extend well beyond the statements of any individual President or Prime Minister. (Paragraph 25)*
2. *The Government can no longer assume that the US will continue to guarantee European security or uphold the rules-based international order. Nor can the UK rely on historic goodwill and cultural affinity to sustain the relationship in an increasingly transactional context. The UK must therefore be hard-headed and realistic about the challenges posed by a changing US and adjust. The chapters that follow outline our specific recommendations in the areas of defence, intelligence, foreign policy, the economy, academic exchanges and research, and culture. (Paragraph 26)*

The defence and intelligence relationship

3. *While at times there is turbulence at the political level, at the official level, the UK-US relationship on defence and intelligence is extremely close and acts as a bedrock for the wider bilateral relationship. Collaboration and integration are comprehensive across a broad spectrum of policy, with deep bilateral relations evident in defence planning, military operations, intelligence and technology development. (Paragraph 37)*
4. *The UK's military relationship with the US is markedly uneven. This is a result of the difference in the size of their economies but also reflects the consequences of strategic decisions made in the UK over several decades. The UK relies on the US for conventional, space and nuclear capabilities and typically operates militarily only with US support. This institutionalised dependence on the US military sits alongside the reality of the UK's diminished hard power, which leaves the UK particularly vulnerable to political shifts in the US. (Paragraph 45)*
5. *While there is no imminent threat of the US denying UK access to core capabilities, the changing complexion of US foreign and defence policy means the current degree of UK reliance is no longer tenable. (Paragraph 46)*
6. *Part of the answer to this challenge lies in the UK accelerating its defence spending. At the NATO summit in 2025, the Government made a commitment to increase UK defence spending to 5% of GDP. The Government should provide a clear, costed pathway to achieving this objective. (Paragraph 47)*
7. *The UK Government should also redouble its efforts to strengthen the defence industrial base to support the development of sovereign capability. The recommendations made in the Strategic Defence Review recognise UK dependencies and lay out a roadmap towards greater sovereign capability. These should be pursued urgently. (Paragraph 48)*
8. *The Government must prioritise the publication and timely implementation of the Defence Investment Plan to deliver on the recommendations set out in the UK's Strategic Defence Review. (Paragraph 49)*

Strategic divergence

9. *While Euro-Atlantic security should remain a UK priority, the UK should continue to engage with the US and other partners in the Indo-Pacific region on shared interests. (Paragraph 56)*
10. The US' increasing focus on great power competition with China raises strategic dilemmas for the UK. The UK Government has sought to develop more cooperative engagement with China, cognisant of the economic opportunities this may bring. However, such an approach may bring it into tension with a bipartisan US consensus on curtailing China's economic, technological and military rise. (Paragraph 57)
11. *The UK Government must develop a China strategy that clearly addresses the balance between seeking economic engagement and addressing security concerns. Both opportunities for cooperation and any red lines can then be communicated to US administrations. (Paragraph 58)*
12. There is increasing strategic divergence between the UK and US on the nature of the Russian threat. For the UK, Russia is the primary threat to its national security and poses an imminent challenge, whereas the US increasingly sees Russia as a regional threat that is of lower strategic import than China. This divergence is demonstrated through the increasing distance between UK and US positions on the war in Ukraine. (Paragraph 62)
13. *Future UK policymaking on Russia and security in Eastern Europe and the High North should no longer take US support in conventional deterrence as given. As the US shifts attention and resources toward the Indo-Pacific and competition with China, it increasingly expects Europe, including the UK, to take primary responsibility for deterring Russia. The UK and European allies must work towards ensuring the collective capacity to deter and, if necessary, repel Russian aggression. (Paragraph 63)*
14. *Through its leadership on Ukraine, the UK is well-placed to take on a wider leadership role in European security. Re-centring its efforts on Europe should also enhance the UK's strategic importance to the US by restoring its role as a transatlantic bridge to Europe—a position weakened after Brexit. (Paragraph 73)*
15. *The UK should lead on a concentrated move towards greater European leadership in NATO. The Government should continue its strong engagement with NATO partners in Europe and Canada to increase defence spending, interoperability and warfighting readiness. This must be a matter of priority, as there are no guarantees that the "burden shifting" process on NATO will be gradual. (Paragraph 74)*
16. *The UK Government should continue to explore and, where appropriate, pursue opportunities for European defence cooperation. We therefore recommend the UK continues to negotiate a mutually beneficial agreement on defence procurement. (Paragraph 75)*
17. While the UK and the US share a similar assessment of the threat Iran poses to liberal democracies, there is a sharp divergence in their respective approaches to addressing this challenge. Recent US actions in Iran demonstrate that the current administration does not view the use of force as a measure of last resort, but as simply another tool in its foreign policy arsenal. This differs significantly from the UK's position, which has focused on a negotiated settlement for curtailing Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions. (Paragraph 79)

Politicisation of intelligence

18. The deep relationship on intelligence cooperation has experienced challenges due to political appointments made by the Trump administration. There are concerns that excessive politicisation of US intelligence could undermine the trust that underpins UK-US intelligence relations. However, there is scope for cautious optimism that the US intelligence agencies will be able to weather political challenges and maintain close ties with the UK. (Paragraph 82)
19. *Nevertheless, the Government should ensure that UK intelligence agencies undertake the necessary planning required to mitigate against a scenario in which political directives render the US a less reliable partner.* (Paragraph 83)

Managing emerging opportunities

20. While there is clearly an imperative for the UK to strategically hedge through the development of sovereign capabilities and engagement with European partners, witnesses were clear that the UK should maintain close links with the US on existing defence programmes and future areas of shared interest. (Paragraph 88)
21. *The UK should adopt a twin-track approach to defence collaboration, engaging with the US on shared interests and existing programmes, while also hedging against US volatility through increased sovereign capability and cooperation with European allies. The notion that the UK must choose between the US and Europe on security is false and any policies that follow this logic are likely to make the UK less secure.* (Paragraph 89)
22. The AUKUS partnership provides a useful vehicle for the UK to reinforce unity and signal to the US that it is prepared to join in efforts to deter China in the Indo-Pacific, with related benefits in the Euro-Atlantic region. (Paragraph 96)
23. Aside from continuing its collaboration with the US, participation also represents a practical opportunity for the UK to accelerate its advanced technical know-how and development of hard capabilities. While the project retains much potential, there are concerns that the UK's submarine industrial base is not robust enough to ensure timely delivery and that Pillar II collaboration on advanced capabilities requires increased political focus and funding streams to succeed. (Paragraph 97)
24. *The UK must deliver on its AUKUS commitments. The UK Government must demonstrate delivery credibility and industrial robustness to reassure the US of its credibility as a reliable partner in the AUKUS project and that SSN-AUKUS is a priority for the UK. It must also seek to work with the US and Australia towards a defined Pillar II process that is backed with funding and political focus, and which will allow academia and industry to take advantage of new opportunities for trilateral defence innovation.* (Paragraph 98)
25. The UK has been a valuable partner in the F-35 programme, contributing technological expertise and industrial capacity to drive the project forward. However, the UK's failure to deliver on its initial order commitments has somewhat dented its reputation as a partner in the US. (Paragraph 104)
26. *When participating in joint capability programmes with the US in the future, the UK should be mindful of the need for stability in its order numbers and provide clarity about the UK's long-term commitment.* (Paragraph 105)

27. The UK and US share a close relationship when it comes to the operation of space-based defence capabilities, and a similar analysis of the threat environment in space. The UK makes niche but tangible contributions to the US space programme and in return receives access to core US-owned ISR and PNT capabilities. The US is supportive of the UK making further contributions to the relationship, though this will require increased investment and political focus. (Paragraph 110)
28. *Where possible, the UK must seek to develop sovereign space capabilities that can be used to contribute to bilateral US projects and NATO's space programme. The UK should work closely with the US to determine areas in which the UK possesses the technological capacity to add value and should continue its close engagement in identifying and preparing for threats to space-based infrastructure.* (Paragraph 111)
29. *Overall, an increasingly transactional UK-US defence relationship will require the UK to be meticulous in its approach to delivering commitments on shared partnerships. Prioritising industrial robustness, ensuring reliability on order commitments, and developing complementary sovereign capabilities are necessary requirements for the success of future UK-US defence projects.* (Paragraph 112)

Foreign policy

30. Confidence in sustained US international engagement has dissipated. It is unclear which elements of President Trump's approach may leave an enduring legacy and shape future US policy, and this presents a strategic challenge for the UK. (Paragraph 120)
31. *The Government will need to hedge against potential US political volatility by developing a strategic posture that assumes significant uncertainty in US engagement. While maintaining collaboration with the US where possible, it will need to diversify its partnerships to reduce exposure to abrupt shifts in US policy.* (Paragraph 121)
32. UK interests cannot be met by pursuing an either/or approach to its relationship with the US and Europe. The UK Government must pursue good relations with the US administration where possible, whilst resetting its relationship with Europe and the EU on matters of shared interest. (Paragraph 126)
33. *The UK Government should continue to make the case that closer UK-EU ties are connected to stronger cooperation on European security and thus will help deliver the broader US aim of greater European burden-sharing.* (Paragraph 127)

President Trump's retreat from the rules-based international order

34. Small groupings and new partnerships are becoming more important as the US withdraws from parts of the multilateral system. These formats can help the UK uphold international cooperation and advance UK influence. But they also carry risks: if poorly coordinated they may inadvertently contribute to the erosion of multilateral institutions. (Paragraph 142)
35. *A priority for the UK Government should be to engage with like-minded partners, maintaining openness to US re-engagement, but not relying on it. This could include building sustained coalitions with states such as Brazil, India, Canada and Australia, and other Commonwealth countries, Indonesia, Mexico, the Gulf countries and others that share UK interests on specific issues.* (Paragraph 143)

36. *The Government should ensure that other groupings reinforce—not replace—multilateral structures by coordinating positions with UN bodies and other international institutions. (Paragraph 144)*
37. *US retrenchment from global commitments is creating leadership vacuums that adversarial states may exploit. To guard against this, the UK Government should conduct a cross-government assessment to map areas where US retreat creates risks to UK security and prosperity, and prioritise those where UK interests are most at risk. (Paragraph 147)*
38. *The UK Government should remain steadfast in upholding the UK's international legal obligations and demonstrate adherence, even in the face of a US retreat from international law compliance. (Paragraph 154)*

Withdrawal from the international aid architecture

39. The closure of USAID and US aid cuts have left development funding gaps that have already had an impact on donor countries and joint development projects. With a reduced aid budget of 0.3% GNI, the UK Government's capacity to fill US funding gaps is limited, requiring focused intervention and new partnerships. (Paragraph 161)
40. *The UK Government should therefore urgently assess funding gaps created by US withdrawal to identify priorities and mandates on areas of expertise and long-term impact, such as humanitarian aid, climate change, girls' education and good governance. (Paragraph 162)*
41. *The UK Government should continue to collaborate with the US on international development where possible, but it should also focus on working with other established and emerging donors (including the Gulf states) to develop more resilient collective funding frameworks. (Paragraph 163)*

The economic relationship

42. The UK derives sizable benefits from its close economic relationship with the US, but this also leaves it exposed to shifts in US policy. US trade policy is moving towards a more protectionist and security-oriented model. This trajectory holds risks for the UK, especially given the importance of the US market for the UK economy and the inherent asymmetry within the relationship. Although specific approaches between administrations may vary, the underlying trend towards greater protectionism and the use of trade policy as a tool for national security is expected to continue. (Paragraph 198)
43. There is therefore a higher probability of US unilateral trade action affecting UK sectors; a greater likelihood of “security conditionality” being attached to market access; and higher domestic costs UK businesses may face from uncertainty and compliance. (Paragraph 199)
44. The framework for an Economic Prosperity Deal recently agreed with the US is explicitly designed to be non-binding and contains open-ended language about further tariff reductions and sectoral coverage that is contingent on US investigations and supply-chain security judgements. While it anticipates coordination on economic security and the non-market policies of third countries (i.e. China), UK interests require commitments to be more clearly defined to insulate the trade relationship from arbitrary change. (Paragraph 200)

45. *To this end, the UK Government should follow a twin-track approach. First, it should work with the US to ensure that obligations in the EPD are clearly scoped, and reject broad and ambiguous supply-chain security commitments in future agreements. Second, it should articulate a clearer strategy towards its engagement with China and commit to alignment where UK and US interests converge. These could include defining controls on dual-use high-end technologies and taking coordinated action against demonstrable non-market practices harming the UK. (Paragraph 201)*
46. *Given the protectionist trend in US trade policy, the UK Government should map areas of excessive dependence on US systems, technologies or markets to help determine where greater sovereign capability or diversified partnerships are needed. A more balanced UK trade strategy—combining stronger domestic capability with wider international diversification with our European partners and beyond—would provide greater resilience against US political volatility. (Paragraph 202)*
47. *As part of this, reducing border frictions with the EU should remain a strategic priority for the UK Government. The UK Government should also support firms to expand into alternative markets to help spread risks. The UK's accession to the CPTPP provides an avenue for this. (Paragraph 203)*
48. *As a mid-sized trading nation, it is in the UK's interest that the international trading environment is stable and predictable. The UK Government should therefore continue to support multilateral frameworks, while seeking opportunities to encourage US participation when politically feasible. (Paragraph 204)*
49. *Tariff liberalisation within the general terms of the EPD is incompatible with the WTO principle of non-discrimination. As the EPD remains only a framework, its eventual state is unclear. The UK Government should ensure that it is developed into an agreement that does not place the UK in breach of its WTO obligations. We echo the International Agreement Committee's recently issued recommendation that the UK Government should be cautious about consolidating or replicating the EPD approach, as it risks undermining the multilateral trade system on which the UK relies. (Paragraph 205)*

Emerging opportunities

50. *Collaboration with the US on advanced technologies—particularly on AI and other frontier technologies (civilian and defence)—presents opportunities for innovation-led economic growth, providing a multiplier effect for the UK (Paragraph 216)*
51. *Yet the UK should also take steps to avoid over-dependence on the US. One area of concern is the UK's reliance on US-based technology in the provision of payment platforms. In this context, we welcome steps taken to provide alternative payment systems to Visa and Mastercard. (Paragraph 217)*
52. *There are also risks as the UK's more interventionist approach to tech regulation, both on safety and competition grounds, complicates collaboration. To retain its autonomy, the UK Government should continue to articulate its red lines clearly and set up structured dialogues to manage disputes. The UK Government will need to remain flexible as it may need to pivot at times towards sectors where cooperation is commercially attractive but less politically sensitive. These could include fintech, cybersecurity and digital trade. (Paragraph 218)*
53. *The UK Government should engage in a structured UK–US programme of collaboration focused on: (1) joint analysis and data sharing, including coordinated*

mapping of vulnerabilities in sensitive supply chains; and (2) dialogue on export control reform, ensuring that regulatory regimes support both national security objectives and commercial competitiveness. (Paragraph 219)

54. *Finally, the UK has an opportunity to present itself as a stable alternative location for investors and businesses unsettled by political volatility in the US. However, it can only do so long-term if it retains its own credibility as an upholder of trade rules. (Paragraph 220)*

Academic, research and cultural cooperation

55. The academic and research partnership remains a pillar of the bilateral relationship and is an important source of UK soft power. Collaboration with the US, in particular, helps augment UK outputs. It also fosters people-to-people links that can help sustain the UK-US relationship and insulate against political volatility. (Paragraph 232)
56. While historically strong, this aspect of the relationship faces challenges from shifts in US policy under this Trump administration: new restrictions on DEI, reductions in federal research budgets, politicisation of grant making, and tightened visa rules have created uncertainty and could disrupt existing research partnerships or erode them over time. (Paragraph 233)
57. *In the short term, the UK will need to be more vocal in articulating tangible, reciprocal benefits of collaboration to an “America First” administration, focusing on how UK expertise advances US national interests. (Paragraph 234)*
58. *It is unclear whether future administrations would adopt similar policies, but US domestic polarisation makes this a possibility. Even in the longer term, therefore, the UK must move beyond relying on historical sentiment or assumptions based on past practice. It will require more proactive management to navigate the climate of political volatility and US funding cuts that may persist beyond President Trump. (Paragraph 235)*
59. The UK and the US have historically benefitted from a shared cultural affinity rooted in language, history and values. However, cracks are increasingly becoming evident on issues such as immigration, climate change and freedom of speech. (Paragraph 245)
60. *The UK Government, particularly in its bilateral engagements with the US, should counter narratives of UK and European decline by clearly communicating to US audiences that the UK remains a resilient, stable and successful society, contrary to some negative portrayals in US commentary. As a long-term strategy, the UK Government should support institutions that can help counter this negative narrative and promote a positive image of the UK. (Paragraph 246)*
61. *In addition, public opinion shifts pose a challenge to maintaining close connections. Sustaining goodwill among younger generations, in particular, is essential for the long-term health of the relationship, which will require renewed investment in people-to-people links, academic exchanges, and creative collaboration. (Paragraph 247)*

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF MEMBERS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (from 27 January 2026)
 Lord Alderdice
 Baroness Blackstone
 Lord Bruce of Bennachie
 Baroness Coussins (until 27 January 2026)
 Baroness Crawley
 Lord Darroch of Kew
 Lord De Mauley (Chair until 27 January 2026)
 Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie
 Lord Grocott
 Lord Houghton of Richmond
 Lord Lamont of Lerwick (from 27 January 2026)
 Baroness Morris of Bolton (until 27 January 2026)
 Baroness Prashar (from 27 January 2026)
 Lord Robertson of Port Ellen (Chair) (from 27 January 2026)
 Lord Soames of Fletching (until 27 January 2026)

Declaration of interests

Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (from 27 January 2026)
No relevant interests declared

Lord Alderdice
No relevant interests declared

Lord Bruce of Bennachie
Global Chair, Water Unite (a charity with interests in the US)
Adviser, DAI UK (parent company based in Bethesda, Maryland)

Baroness Coussins (until 27 January 2026)
No relevant interests declared

Baroness Crawley
No relevant interests declared

Lord Darroch of Kew
Member of the Global Board, Panterra (international consultancy with an office and operations in the US)
Adviser, Dataminr (American AI company which supplies the US Administration (interest ceased December 2025)).
Advisory role limited to access to European (not UK) market)

Lord De Mauley (Chair until 27 January 2026)
No relevant interests declared

Baroness Fraser of Craigmaddie
No relevant interests declared

Lord Grocott
No relevant interests declared

Lord Houghton of Richmond
Global Director, Draken (company provides air combat training in America, Europe and Saudi Arabia)
Chair, Draken (Europe)
Shareholder in Tadaweb (open-source intelligence company trading in the US and Europe)

Lord Lamont of Lerwick (from 27 January 2026)

Honorary President, British-Iranian Chamber of Commerce

Baroness Morris of Bolton (until 27 January 2026)

No relevant interests declared

Baroness Prashar (from 27 January 2026)

No relevant interests declared

Lord Robertson of Port Ellen (Chair) (from 27 January 2026)

Senior Counsellor, The Cohen Group

Lead, UK Strategic Defence Review (2024–2025)

Lord Soames of Fletching (until 27 January 2026)

No relevant interests declared

A full list of members' interests can be found in the register of Lord's interests:

<https://www.parliament.uk/hlregister>.

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF EVIDENCE AND COMMITTEE ACTIVITY

Evidence is published online at <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/360/international-relations-and-defence-committee/publications/>.

Evidence in alphabetical order

Professor Donald Abelson, Professor of Political Science, McMaster University	QQ 45–52
ADS Group	FRU0011
Dr Sophy Antrobus, Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and Co-Director, Freeman Air and Space Institute, King’s College London	QQ 182–195
Evie Aspinall, Director, British Foreign Policy Group	QQ 95–110
Jamie Arrowsmith, Director, Universities UK International	QQ 132–144
Gerard Baker, Editor-at-Large, Wall Street Journal	QQ 35–44
Ben Bland, Director, Asia-Pacific Programme, Chatham House and Dr William Matthews, Senior Research Fellow for China and the World, Chatham House	FRU0025
James Black, Deputy Director, Defence and Security Research Group and European Lead for Space, RAND Europe	QQ 207–213
Hon John O. Brennan, Former Director, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)	QQ 196–206
Dr Nell Breyer, Executive Director, Association of Marshall Scholars	QQ 155–160
British Association for American Studies	FRU0013
BritishAmerican Business	FRU0034
Dr Justin Bronk, Senior Research Fellow for Airpower and Technology, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)	QQ 182–195
Centre for Inclusive Trade Policy (CITP)	FRU0023
Chatham House	FRU0026
TheCityUK	FRU0022
Anne Clewlow	FRU0027
Council on Geostrategy	FRU0035
Dr Michael Collins, Reader in American Studies, King’s College, London	FRU0003
Dr James Cooper, Associate Professor of History and American Studies, York St John University	FRU0007

Dr Cecilia Corsini, Research Associate, University of Glasgow, Prof Dr Bernhard Reinsberg, Professor, University of Glasgow and Dr Giuseppe Zaccaria, Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Glasgow	FRU0017
Ambassador (retired) Ivo Daalder, Former US Permanent Representative to NATO and Senior Fellow, Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs	QQ 118–131
Professor Andrew Dorman, Professor of International Security, King's College London and Professor David Dunn, Professor in International Politics, University of Birmingham	FRU0018
Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	QQ 214–226
Dr Suzanne Doyle, Lecturer in International Relations, University of East Anglia	FRU0024
Anthony Dworkin, Senior Policy Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)	QQ 118–131
Jennifer Ewing, Spokesperson, Republicans Overseas UK	QQ 15–25
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	FRU0014
Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman	QQ 245–254
Professor Michael Gasiorek, Professor of Economics, Sussex University	QQ 68–80
Sophia Gaston, Senior Research Fellow, King's College London	QQ 172–181
Dr Francesca Ghiretti, Research Leader, RAND Europe	QQ 81–94
Dr Jonathan Gilmore, Lecturer in International Politics, University of Manchester	FRU0030
Dmitry Grozoubinski, former Australian trade negotiator, founder, ExplainTrade	QQ 68–80
Dr Peter L. Hays, Professorial Lecturer, Space Policy and International Affairs, Space Policy Institute, The George Washington University	QQ 207–213
Roger Higginson, Research Associate, Sussex University	FRU0006
Dr Matthew Alan Hill, IR and Politics department head, Liverpool John Moores University	FRU0032

Rep Jim Himes, Democratic Congressman for Connecticut's 4th congressional district, House of Representatives	QQ 145–154
James Hughes, Head, US and Canada Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office	QQ 214–226
Dr Yuka Kobayashi, Senior Lecturer in China and International Politics, SOAS, University of London	FRU0031
Professor Charles Kupchan, Professor of International Affairs, Georgetown University, and Senior Fellow, Council on Foreign Relations	QQ 95–110
Anton La Guardia, Diplomatic Editor, The Economist	QQ 35–44
Dr Zeno Leoni, Assistant Professor, King's College London	FRU0012
Charles Lichfield, Deputy Director and C. Boyden Gray Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council	QQ 81–94
London Politica	FRU0008
Sam Lowe, Partner, Flint Global	QQ 53–67
Edward Luce, US National Editor, Financial Times	QQ 35–44
Sir David Manning GCMG, KCVO, former British Ambassador to the United States (retired)	QQ 1–14
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	FRU0021
Lord McDonald of Salford	QQ 245–254
Simon Mellor, Deputy Chief Executive, Arts and Museums, Arts Council England	QQ 132–144
Franklin Miller, Principal, Scowcroft Group	QQ 161–171
Daniel Mullaney, former US trade negotiator, and Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council	QQ 53–67
Professor Sir David Omand, former Director, GCHQ and currently Visiting Professor, Department of War Studies, King's College London	QQ 196–206
Dame Karen Pierce, former British Ambassador to the United States (until February 2025) and incoming UK Special Envoy to the Western Balkans	QQ 1–14
Professor Dan Plesch, Professor of Diplomacy and Strategy, SOAS, University of London	FRU0020

Prosperity Institute	FRU0033	
Gideon Rabinowitz, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Bond		QQ 111–117
John Raine CMG OBE, Chair, Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission		QQ 132–144
Laurel Rapp		QQ 245–254
Peter Rough, Senior Fellow and Director, Center on Europe and Eurasia, Hudson Institute		QQ 227–234
Dr Andrew Sanders, Senior Lecturer, Politics and International Relations, De Montfort University	FRU0001	
Dr Kori Schake, Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute		QQ 26–34
The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)	FRU0038	
Professor Michael Schmitt, Professor of International Law, University of Reading		QQ 235–244
Sir Nigel Sheinwald GCMG, former British Ambassador to the United States (retired)		QQ 1–14
Anthony Silberfeld Director of Transatlantic Relations, Bertelsmann Foundation	FRU0015	
Symington W. Smith	FRU0009	
Lauren Speranza, Fellow, Transatlantic Defense and Security Program, Center for European Policy Analysis		QQ 161–171
Dr Yusra Suedi, Lecturer in International Law, University of Manchester	FRU0036	
Dr. Lauren Sukin (Assistant Professor of International Relations at London School of Economics and Political Science)	FRU0016	
Taylor Summerfield, Undergraduate student at the University of East Anglia	FRU0002	
Greg Swenson, Chair, Republicans Overseas UK	FRU0037	QQ 15–25
Alex Thier, Chief Executive Officer, Lapis Communications, and former Executive Director, Overseas Development Institute		QQ 111–117
Professor Monica Toft, Professor of International Politics and Director of the Center for Strategic Studies, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University		QQ 45–52

Dr Dafydd Townley, Senior Teaching Fellow, University of Portsmouth	QQ 196–206
Tara Varma, Managing Director, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Paris Office	QQ 227–234
Sarah Vaughan	FRU0010
Dr Leslie Vinjamuri, Professor of International Relations at SOAS, University of London and Director, US and the Americas Programme, Chatham House	QQ 26–34
Ella Weatherburn, Jamie Holliday, James McConnell, Charlie Murphy, Oluwatimilehin Ogunleye, Caileigh Russell, Max Tinkler, Matthew Wallace, Samuel White and Declan Worden, students at Edge Hill University	FRU0019
Professor Marc Weller, Programme Director, International Law Programme, Chatham House	QQ 235–244
Prof Nicholas Westcott, Professor of Practice in Diplomacy, SOAS, University of London	FRU0029
Sir Peter Westmacott GCMG, LVO, former British Ambassador to the United States (retired)	QQ 1–14
Eliot Wilson	FRU0028
Dr Elliot Winter, Senior Lecturer, Newcastle University	FRU0005

APPENDIX 3: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Background

The United States and the United Kingdom share close historical, language and cultural ties and the term ‘special relationship’ is often used to describe the partnership and the extensive level of co-operation between both countries, particularly on diplomatic, defence and intelligence matters.

The ‘special relationship’ has endured through many US presidencies, and it is likely that the US will remain the UK’s principal ally. A period of recalibration is, however, inevitable. The ongoing public and political debate in the US over its global role poses specific challenges for the UK, particularly in addressing gaps should there be reduced US international engagement. The Trump Administration will shape US foreign policy for the next four years, yet there are also broader US policy trends that will likely persist beyond the President’s second term and which the UK Government needs to be ready to respond to.

This inquiry provides an opportunity to evaluate the current state of the transatlantic relationship and make evidence-based recommendations to the UK Government about how the relationship can be strengthened while simultaneously ensuring it continues to safeguard UK interests in the years ahead. The International Relations and Defence Committee is undertaking an inquiry into the UK’s future relationship with the US.

Areas of interest

1. What is your understanding of a ‘special relationship’ between the UK and the US? How, if at all, does the UK-US relationship differ from relationships the UK and the US have with other Western allies?
 - (a) To what extent is the relationship underpinned by close historical and cultural ties, and to what degree does it have significant institutional depth? What does this say about the strength and flexibility of the relationship?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of a close UK-US relationship and how do you assess its current state?
 - (a) Is there an asymmetry in the relationship currently that may be a source of significant tension if left unaddressed?
 - (b) How does a close relationship with the US affect Britain’s standing in the international community?
3. How will a second Trump term affect the US’ perception of the UK as an important ally?
 - (a) What parts of the new UK Government’s agenda (e.g. its planned reset with the EU) may cause friction with the US?
4. Are there long-term macro trends in US foreign or trade policy that are likely to persist regardless of who is President, and how might they impact the UK-US relationship?
5. Looking ahead, what are the main opportunities for co-operation, as well as the potential future friction points?

6. How do you assess the current state of the UK-US economic relationship? What are the key areas of alignment and tension?
7. How will US market access, broader trade policy and/or regulatory practices likely evolve under President Trump and beyond? How would these impact the UK?
 - (a) What are the most viable and effective options for the UK to co-operate with the US in the economic sphere?
 - (b) What challenges might arise in pursuing these options?
 - (c) How can the UK effectively manage the likely points of tension to safeguard its interests?
8. How do you assess the current state of the UK-US diplomatic relationship?
9. What are the likely priority areas for US foreign policy in the long term, and what future friction points (e.g. China) do you foresee? How should the UK respond?
10. To what extent is Trump's scepticism towards multilateralism and international organisations indicative of a broader, long-term, trend in US policy?
 - (a) What challenges does this present to the rules-based international order and institutions like the UN in particular?
 - (b) How might this affect the work of the UK in those institutions and, more broadly, its foreign policy approach?
11. To what extent is the US retreating from international development and what does this mean for the UK's own development priorities and engagement with developing countries?
12. How would you assess the UK-US defence and intelligence-sharing relationship, including strengths, weaknesses and areas where the UK may be currently overly dependent on the US?
13. How do you assess the impact on UK policy of diverging strategic priorities, e.g. in relation to NATO or the focus on the Indo-Pacific?
14. What are the implications for UK policy of US approaches to technology sharing, joint procurement and defence exports?
15. What is your assessment of the likely future US attitude to continued co-operation with the UK over nuclear weapons and technology, including AI?
16. How may the growing role of commercial actors in the space sector impact UK-US cooperation on space (particularly in space security and satellite communications) and what strategies should the UK adopt in response?

ANNEX: GUIDANCE FOR SUBMISSIONS

Submissions should be made online by clicking the "Start" button below.

This is a public call for evidence. The deadline for making a written submission is 5pm on 14 March.

There is no requirement to answer all questions in your submission and concise submissions are preferred. If you think there are important areas not covered by our questions, please address them. Responses should not be longer than five sides of A4 in size 12 font. Paragraphs should be numbered.

All submissions made through the online form will be acknowledged automatically by email.

A submission accepted by the committee as written evidence may be published online at any stage. When published, it becomes subject to parliamentary copyright and is protected by parliamentary privilege. The Committee cannot accept any submissions that have not been prepared specifically in response to this call for evidence, or that have been published elsewhere.

Once your submission has been accepted as evidence and published you may publicise or publish it yourself. In doing so you must indicate that it was prepared for the Committee, and you should be aware that your publication or re-publication of your evidence may not be protected by parliamentary privilege.

Personal contact details will be removed from evidence before publication but will be retained by the Committee Office and may be used for specific purposes relating to the committee's work—for instance to seek additional information.

Substantive communications to the committee about the inquiry should be addressed to the clerk of the committee, whether or not they are intended to constitute a formal written submission. You can email hintrelations@parliament.uk with any questions.

Please bring this document to the attention of groups and individuals who may not have received a copy direct, including those who have not previously engaged with Parliament. Diversity comes in many forms and hearing a range of different perspectives means that committees are better informed and can more effectively scrutinise public policy and legislation. Committees can undertake their role most effectively when they hear from a wide range of individuals, sectors or groups in society affected by a particular policy or piece of legislation. We encourage anyone with experience or expertise of an issue under investigation by a select committee to share their views with the committee, with the full knowledge that their views have value and are welcome.

You can follow the progress of the inquiry at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8614/the-uks-future-relationship-with-the-us/>.