

UK AND NATO TODAY

*General Sir James Everard
Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe*

The UK remains powerful. The UK has an unparalleled network. We are a Nuclear Power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a leading member of NATO (overall, we are one of the biggest contributors to NATO operations and missions, and fill our permanent establishment commitment to more than 90 per cent), we sit at the heart of the Commonwealth of Nations, we have an extensive and impressive diplomatic and intelligence footprint, and our five-eyes intelligence sharing partnership is the envy of those who sit outside it.

The UK's defence budget is also the second largest in NATO after the US, meeting the NATO Defence Investment Pledge, and the biggest in the EU. We are also one of only six countries that meet or exceed the UN's target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income for international aid spending. Our Armed Forces are also respected around the world for their capability, agility and reach as a full spectrum force; one of very few nations left who maintain forces for high-intensity warfighting, expeditionary operations and defence engagement. We are creative (but should be less shrill over our reference army or thought leadership status, because we are some way from being a lodestar). But for a nation with so much going for it, once so confident, even bold, we can seem divided, distracted, discontented, and hesitant about our place in the world to outside eyes.

At the same time, the underground narrative questions the political value of NATO. It suggests that after 70 years NATO has lost its mojo; that support for NATO is falling; that NATO is too big and too slow and military power is no longer important. The story goes that NATO is being undermined: by differences between European allies; by differences between Europe and America on key foreign policy issues; by doubts over America's commitment to Europe; by the lack of European military capacity, and even by Europe's yearning for neutrality (*Washington Post*, 19th September 2019).

My reply? That complacency has always been the curse of our forces and the killer of our men and women and is best avoided. That we live in dangerous times and we are a long way from the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, triumph of liberal democracy and the so-called End of History. That the strategic shocks and after-shocks of the 21st Century (and I could list a minimum of ten that represent lost certainties) have made life more complicated and unpredictable, seeing the return of great power competition, the growth of terrorism and the rise of a polycentric, competitive, more difficult world order, with an increase in the number of threats

and challenges (hybrid, conventional and terrorist) which we all face, all the time. That it is unwise to take peace for granted. That military power is still important. That these threats and challenges alone, let alone in combination, exceed the capacity of any single nation to manage, or resolve.

So, we should play to our strengths. NATO is a working Alliance underpinned by a Treaty that is the model of brevity and clarity, gives the US a seat at the European security table and has kept the peace in the Euro-Atlantic Area for 70 years. Change takes time, but since 1949 NATO has been an extraordinary instrument for building common purpose between allies. This constancy of purpose has in hard times always overcome the necessarily different, often disparate and sometimes contradictory perspectives and interests of allies. Finally, like vegetables to a child, NATO is something that is good for you, rather than something you have to necessarily like. Why? Because being a true ally can be difficult, it can be hard work, demands constant attention and may even require the prioritisation of Alliance over national requirements.

As a result I **know** that the West and UK need more NATO, not less. For the UK it is now even more important in the context of BREXIT as we work to give structure, meaning and purpose to the idea of Global Britain. I think Global Britain is all about reinvesting in our relationships, championing the rules-based international order and demonstrating that the UK is open, outward looking and confident on the world stage. The temptation is to believe all change is for the better, (the baby/bathwater moment is another curse) when we can and should build and adapt alongside NATO, as the cornerstone of our defence.

There is a long list of visible achievements flowing from the Wales, Warsaw and Brussels Summits – you know these well. At the same time, we have improved command and control and decision-making, improved our understanding of activities on our eastern flank and the co-ordination of activity on our southern flank. NATO has a growing partnership programme that is building defence capacity not just in Afghanistan and Iraq, but where and when it is needed. The Alliance is also working on a new approach (for the first time since 1967) that will, in time, move NATO away from a reactive case-by-case approach to crisis management, to a more proactive comprehensive defensive strategy that continually contests the play-books of our adversaries, geographically and across all-domains, regaining the initiative and better exploiting Alliance strategic advantages. All this linked to a significantly larger NATO Response Force than we have today. NATO has mass. NATO has reach. NATO has know-how.

Is the UK the leading and most influential European member of NATO? The basic facts on the UK contribution to NATO



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International allies: A British soldier from the NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup converses with an Estonian counterpart during an urban warfare training exercise

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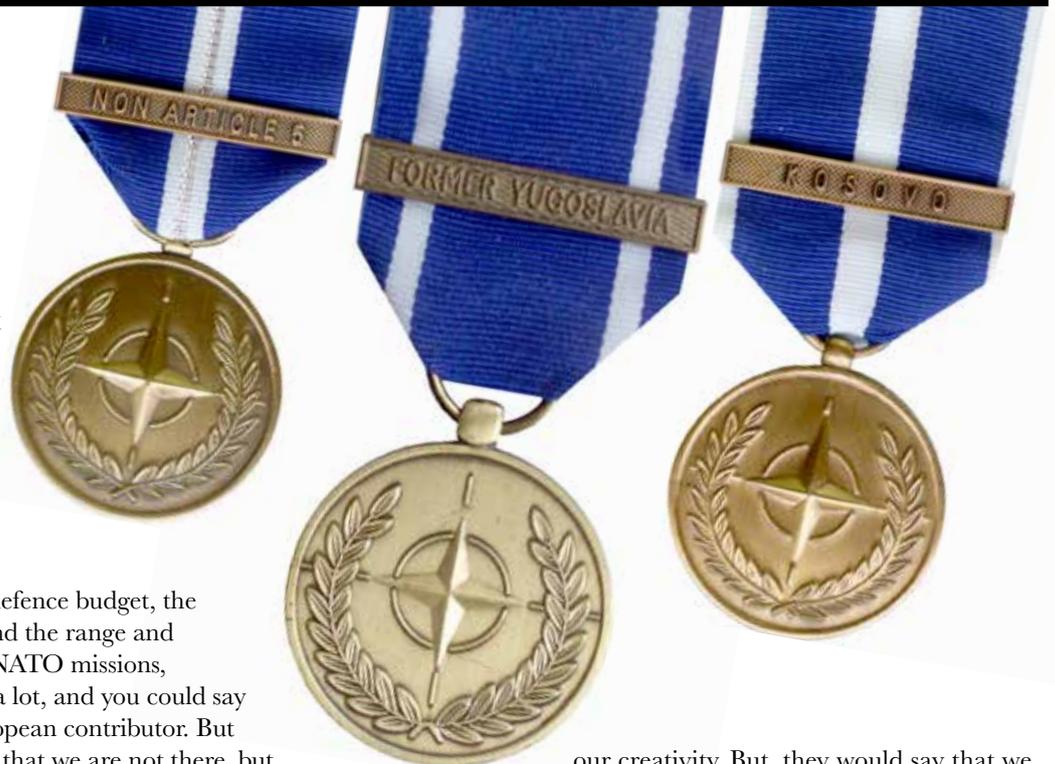


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Is the UK the leading and most influential European member of NATO? The basic facts on the UK contribution to NATO are compelling, in terms of our defence budget, the Continuous at Sea Deterrence and the range and depth of our contribution to all NATO missions, operations and activities

are compelling, in terms of our defence budget, the Continuous at Sea Deterrence and the range and depth of our contribution to all NATO missions, operations and activities. We do a lot, and you could say we are ‘there’ as the leading European contributor. But many of our allies would suggest that we are not there, but that we are only thereabouts.

Why the hesitation and gap? Our allies like the fact that the UK retains a collective memory of greatness, a memory that still persuades many people on our island that if there is something in the world that needs to be done, then Britain should be amongst the countries doing it. They like the UK investment in developing high-quality leaders, the importance we place on collective training, our thinking and



our creativity. But, they would say that we do not yet instinctively think NATO in the UK in the same way that you would reach for your seatbelt in a car. This is the challenge: we could and should always ‘Think NATO’ – in peace, crisis and war, across all domains, across all functions, across time and better message our commitment to NATO – until this becomes habit. If we do so, the UK’s influence within NATO will increase, Global Britain will become a reality and the UK will be stronger and safer.