

Policy Takeaways and Recommendations from dinner in London:

“NATO’s Frontline: Exploring Eastern Flank’s Summit Priorities”

(9 April, 19:00–21:00)

Takeaways:

- 1. Ongoing Conflict Dynamics:** Both Russia and the West remain entrenched in the conflict with no clear end in sight. The situation in Ukraine is precarious, with the country struggling to meet its military objectives and heavily reliant on Western support, which has been inconsistently delivered.
- 2. Importance of US Political Outcomes:** The outcomes of US elections are pivotal, potentially influencing the level and continuity of support provided to Ukraine.
- 3. Need for a Stronger European Defence Industry:** There is a critical consensus on the necessity to build and expand the European defence industry to reduce reliance on non-European sources and enhance self-sufficiency, especially in critical supplies like ammunition and gunpowder.
- 4. Strategic and Operational Shortfalls:** Despite some operational successes, such as Ukraine’s ability to neutralise the Black Sea fleet, there are significant concerns about the readiness and capability of European forces, notably the UK’s challenge in generating a warfighting brigade.
- 5. Economic and Strategic Investment Challenges:** The discussion highlighted the need for increased defence spending across European NATO members, ideally reaching at least 2% of GDP. This investment is crucial not only for immediate defence needs but also for preparing for future ‘grey zone’ conflicts and ensuring long-term security.
- 6. Public Perception and Education:** There is a significant gap in public education and perception regarding defence, with a lack of urgency and awareness about the existential nature of current threats. This complacency needs to be addressed through targeted public education campaigns and a re-evaluation of how defence issues are discussed in public discourse.
- 7. Transatlantic and Internal NATO Unity:** Strengthening unity within NATO and across the Atlantic is seen as essential for forming a coherent and effective response to Russian aggression and other emerging threats. This includes fostering better cooperation and strategic alignment among member states.
- 8. Innovation and Industry Engagement:** There is a recognised need to involve more small and medium enterprises in defence production and to break down barriers that prevent new entrants into the defence sector. Innovation should be at the forefront of NATO’s strategy to adapt to new warfare technologies and tactics.

9. **Long-term Contracts and Strategic Planning:** The lack of long-term contracts and comprehensive strategic planning is a significant vulnerability that NATO needs to address to ensure consistent and effective support for Ukraine and readiness for future conflicts.
10. **Understanding Modern Warfare and Preparing for Future Threats:** NATO must adapt to the realities of modern and future warfare, which will likely involve cyber elements and non-traditional battlefields. This adaptation requires a clear understanding of potential threats and the development of appropriate strategies and capabilities to address them.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Strengthening the European Defence Industrial Base:

Urgency in Support and Procurement

- ▶ The urgency of the current geopolitical situation, highlighted by ongoing conflicts involving Ukraine, necessitates immediate and substantial support to Ukraine and a rapid enhancement of European defence capabilities.

Investment in Defence Industries

- ▶ There is a critical need to rebuild and expand the European defence industrial base, including investments in key areas such as ammunition production and high-tech defence systems. This includes addressing the lack of capabilities like gunpowder production in the UK.

2. Enhancing NATO's Strategic Response and Unity:

Strategic Priorities

- ▶ NATO must prioritise building a robust European defence industry to reduce reliance on non-European sources and ensure a unified response to external threats.

Commitment to Defence Spending

- ▶ European allies should commit to increasing defence spending, focusing on long-term contracts to stabilise and stimulate defence production.

3. Addressing the Challenges of Long-term Security and Deterrence:

Comprehensive Defence Strategy

- ▶ Develop a clearer, more aggressive strategy to confront and deter aggressors, moving beyond deterrence failure debates to proactive defence measures.

Transatlantic Cooperation

- ▶ Strengthen transatlantic unity, especially in the digital realm, to enhance collective security and ensure coordinated responses to threats.

4. Overcoming Complacency in Defence Preparedness:

Public and Political Engagement

- ▶ Overcome public and political complacency regarding defence by enhancing public education on security threats and the importance of defence spending. This involves integrating defence topics into political discourse to elevate their priority in public policy.

Adaptation to Modern Warfare

- ▶ Recognise and adapt to the realities of modern warfare, which may not align with traditional views of military conflicts, ensuring that strategies are responsive to dynamic and evolving security challenges.

5. Streamlining Defence Procurement and Innovation:

Faster and More Efficient Processes

- ▶ Enhance the efficiency of procurement processes, drawing on the UK's efforts to streamline defence acquisitions and reduce bureaucratic overheads. This includes adopting more flexible procurement methods that can quickly adapt to urgent needs.

Innovation and SME Engagement

- ▶ Encourage innovation and involve small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in defence production to diversify and strengthen the defence supply chain.

6. Addressing Financial and Operational Challenges in Defence:

Economic Considerations

- ▶ Address the economic challenges of defence spending, recognising the difficulty in balancing defence budgets with the need for extensive investment in capabilities that may not see immediate use.

Production Capabilities and Long-term Contracts

- ▶ Assess and enhance production capabilities to meet current demands and future contingencies, emphasising the importance of long-term planning and contracts to provide stability and predictability for defence industries.

7. Preparing for Future Conflicts and Grey Zone Warfare:

Anticipating Future Threats

- ▶ Prepare for grey zone conflicts and other non-traditional warfare scenarios that NATO may face over the next five years. This preparation should include comprehensive strategies that involve all member states and adjust to the rapid changes in global geopolitical dynamics.

Building Comprehensive Threat Assessments

- ▶ Continuously update and refine threat assessments to ensure NATO strategies are based on accurate and timely intelligence, adapting to the shifts in global power dynamics and emerging threats.