

Whitehall Report 2-18

# Mind the Gap

Comparing Foreign Policy Attitudes of Security  
Elites and the General Public

Catarina P Thomson



Royal United Services Institute  
for Defence and Security Studies

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# Key Findings

- There is some convergence between what security elites and the UK public consider to be critical threats to the vital interests of the UK, including the possibility of cyber attacks (and to a lesser extent climate change and Russian territorial ambitions).
- The public feels more threatened by issues that are considered less critical for security elites (including international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and large numbers of economic migrants and refugees coming to the UK) – something to be expected as they touch on economic and social issues that are closer to the public's immediate interests.
- A majority of the UK public and UK security elites consider that in these uncertain times, security alliances with Europe need to remain strong. Support for protecting the 'special relationship' with the US is lower, particularly among the public.
- A majority of the UK public and UK security elites support a strong national military, and believe the UK should keep its nuclear weapons. Support for reducing defence spending is very low across both samples.
- Both the UK public and the UK security elites support multilateralism and unilateralism and reject isolationism (elites do so significantly more than the public).
- On some (but not all) foreign policy and security issues, there are significant divisions between members of the public who voted Remain and those who voted Leave in the Brexit referendum.



# Results

## Introduction

**W**ITH THE FIRST major post-referendum defence and security review expected to be handed down this summer, key actors are calling for a fundamental re-evaluation of national priorities. General Nicholas Carter recently urged caution regarding the threat posed by Russia, describing ‘Russia as the most complex and capable security challenge we have faced since the Cold War’.<sup>1</sup> Vulnerabilities to cyber attacks have also been highlighted, by both the current defence secretary, Gavin Williamson, and his predecessor, Michael Fallon. The head of the UK’s National Cyber Security Centre, Ciaran Martin, has warned such attacks are a matter of ‘when, not if’.<sup>2</sup>

How widespread are these concerns among national security elites and the broader public? Or are other issues considered more pressing in the current international environment?

Based on the first national survey to focus on security policy preferences and foreign policy attitudes, this report offers insights into the differences and commonalities that exist between security elites and the general public. Security elites were chosen based on their deeper knowledge of defence and security issues. The sample included members of the Defence Academy, as well as from RUSI and their extended network. A companion survey was fielded with a representative sample of British adults.<sup>3</sup>

The next section of the report compares what security elites and members of the public identify as critical threats to the UK, and ascertains what each group considers should be important national foreign policy goals. The following focuses on what elites and general domestic audiences think should be the UK’s post-Brexit role in the world, including attitudes towards key allies, the armed forces and defence spending. The final section discusses elite and public foreign policy attitudes (mainly multilateralism, unilateralism and isolationism).

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1. Nicholas Carter, ‘Dynamic Security Threats and the British Army’, speech given at RUSI, 22 January 2018.
  2. Ewen MacAskill, ‘Major Cyber-Attack on UK a Matter of “When, not if” – Security Chief’, *The Guardian*, 23 January 2018.
  3. For further details on samples and methodology, please see Appendix.

## Critical Threats and National Foreign Policy Goals

Security elites consider cyber attacks, climate change and Russian territorial ambitions to be the most critical threats to the vital interests of the UK in the next ten years.<sup>4</sup> Approximately seven out of ten security elites (73%) consider cyber attacks on UK computer networks to be a critical threat. A quarter of elites view such attacks as an important but not critical threat, and only 2% consider cyber attacks not to be an important threat to the UK in the next ten years. 43% classify climate change as a critical threat to the UK, 38% view it as an important threat and 19% perceive it as not important. When it comes to Russia's territorial ambitions, 42% of security elites consider this a critical threat, 48% as an important but not critical threat and only 10% view it as not important.

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4. For details regarding choice of survey items, please see Appendix.

**Table 1:** Threats to the Vital Interests of the UK in the next Ten Years

	Critical Threat		Important But Not Critical Threat		Not an Important Threat	
	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public
<b>Cyber-attacks on UK Computer Networks</b>	73%	53%	25%	42%	2%	5%
<b>Climate Change</b>	43%	42%	38%	44%	19%	14%
<b>Russia's Territorial Ambitions</b>	42%	39%	48%	51%	10%	10%
<b>International Terrorism</b>	40%	70%	52%	25%	7%	5%
<b>The Possibility of Unfriendly Countries Becoming Nuclear Powers</b>	40%	52%	48%	42%	12%	6%
<b>Islamic Fundamentalism</b>	37%	64%	52%	30%	11%	6%
<b>Political Instability in the Middle East</b>	28%	41%	63%	51%	9%	8%
<b>Diseases and Pandemics</b>	27%	28%	56%	56%	17%	16%
<b>Large Number of Refugees from Conflict Zones Coming into the UK</b>	18%	43%	50%	40%	32%	17%
<b>The Development of China as a World Power</b>	18%	18%	57%	61%	25%	21%
<b>The Continuing Conflict in Syria</b>	17%	41%	65%	51%	18%	8%
<b>Large Number of Economic Migrants Coming into the UK</b>	14%	41%	43%	40%	43%	19%
<b>Economic Competition from Low Wage Countries</b>	13%	20%	46%	60%	41%	20%

For members of the public, the most critical threats are international terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and cyber attacks. Seven out of ten people consider international terrorism as a critical threat to vital UK interests in the next ten years, a quarter view the issue as important but not critical, and only 5% perceive the matter as not important.<sup>5</sup> The percentages are very similar for Islamic fundamentalism, which may indicate that this might be the type of transnational terrorism respondents have in mind (although it is important to note that follow-on items to ascertain if this was indeed the case were not included). 64% of members of the public considered Islamic fundamentalism to be a critical threat, 30% a threat of importance, and only 6% viewed it as neither.<sup>6</sup> Cyber attacks on UK computer networks were the only issue in the top three concerns of both samples (it must be noted, however, that the surveys were carried out before the rather spectacular cyber attack on the NHS<sup>7</sup>). Approximately half (53%) of the public respondents considered it a critical threat, 42% perceived it to be of importance, and only 5% classified the matter as not important.<sup>8</sup>

The most significant gaps between elite and popular views stem from the public feeling particularly threatened by issues that are considered less critical for elites. The largest gaps pertain to the issues described above as being considered the most threatening for members of the public: there is a 30 percentage point gap between elite–public threat perception regarding international terrorism. This gap remains quite high – at 27 percentage points – for Islamic fundamentalism. It is possible that public alertness remains high given recent terrorist incidents across the UK, while security elites have transitioned to newer national security concerns. Extensive media coverage on terrorist attacks in the UK (including newspaper reports linking attacks to Islam and to Muslim communities<sup>9</sup>) might partially explain this divergence in elite–popular views.

The next two largest gaps reflect societal divisions that have become salient in post-referendum Britain: members of the public appear more threatened by large numbers of economic migrants coming to the UK, as well as by the large number of refugees entering the UK fleeing from conflict zones. 41% of public respondents consider large numbers of economic migrants as a critical threat to the UK in the next ten years,<sup>10</sup> compared with only 14% of elites (that is, there

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5. For members of the public who voted Remain, 60% consider international terrorism a critical threat, compared with 80% of those who voted to leave the EU.
  6. Among members of the public, 50% of Remainers consider Islamic fundamentalism a critical threat, as do 79% of Leavers.
  7. *Financial Times*, 'NHS Cyber Attack Far More Extensive than Thought, Says Report', 27 October 2017.
  8. Among members of the public, 51% of Remainers consider cyber attacks on UK computer networks a critical threat, compared with 59% of Leavers.
  9. Miqdaad Versi, 'Why the British Media is Responsible for the Rise in Islamophobia in Britain', *The Independent*, 4 April 2016.
  10. 17% of Remainers and 65% of Leavers consider the issue to be a critical threat. Differences between socioeconomic categories are also significant: only 33% of members of the public who work in professional, managerial or administrative occupations (classified as social grades AB or C1

is a 27-point gap). Figures are similar when it comes to the influx of refugees: 43% of the public view the matter as a critical threat, compared with only 18% of security elites (the gap here is of 25 points).<sup>11</sup>

Despite these gaps, there are areas of remarkable convergence: climate change is perceived as a critical threat by 43% of elites and 42% of the public. 38% of elites and 44% of the public consider the issue important but not critical.<sup>12</sup> Russian territorial ambitions are also triggering similar levels of threat perception across samples: 42% of elites and 39% of the public consider the issue a critical threat; 48% of elites and 51% of the public view the matter as important but not critical; whereas only 10% of each sample would classify Russian territorial ambitions as neither.<sup>13</sup> The development of China as a world power is less threatening to both samples. Interestingly, however, here the percentage that considers the matter to be a critical threat is exactly the same: 18% (57% of security elites view the issue as important, as do 61% of the public<sup>14</sup>).

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by the UK Office for National Statistics) consider large number of economic migrants coming into the UK a critical threat, compared with 51% of those with manual occupations (social grades C2 or DE).

11. 20% of Remainers and 64% of Leavers consider the issue to be a critical threat. 37% of those in social grades AB/C1 consider refugee influx as a critical threat, compared with 51% of those in social grades C2/DE.
12. 53% of those who voted Remain consider climate change a critical threat, compared with 29% of Leavers.
13. 37% of Remainers and 41% of Leavers consider Russia's territorial ambitions to be a critical threat.
14. 14% among Remainers and 21% for Leavers.

**Table 2:** Foreign Policy Goals

	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important at all	
	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public
<b>Defending our Allies' Security</b>	67%	32%	30%	58%	3%	10%
<b>Preventing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons</b>	62%	61%	36%	35%	2%	4%
<b>Combating International Terrorism</b>	56%	74%	42%	23%	2%	3%
<b>Limiting Climate Change</b>	51%	47%	34%	41%	15%	13%
<b>Strengthening the United Nations</b>	38%	36%	46%	51%	16%	13%
<b>Maintaining Superior Military Power Worldwide</b>	33%	29%	50%	52%	16%	20%
<b>Protecting Weaker Nations Against Foreign Aggression</b>	33%	24%	57%	61%	10%	14%
<b>Combating World Hunger</b>	32%	41%	52%	46%	17%	13%
<b>Protecting the Jobs of British Workers</b>	30%	67%	54%	29%	16%	4%
<b>Promoting and Defending Human Rights in Other Countries</b>	29%	30%	54%	50%	17%	19%
<b>Helping to Bring a Democratic Form of Government to Other Nations</b>	11%	16%	56%	56%	33%	27%

When it comes to foreign policy goals, the preferences of elites and members of the public are generally more aligned. In all but three areas, the gap between the percentage of security elites and the public who consider an issue should be a very important foreign policy goal for the UK is less than 10 percentage points. This contrasts with the perception of threats to vital national interests described above, and brings to the forefront the need to consider what other factors are producing this high convergence of foreign policy goals (the following section will discuss data on one such factor – perceptions of what the UK's role in the world should be).

The top three very important foreign policy goals for elites are: defending allies' security (67%); preventing the spread of nuclear weapons (62%); and combating international terrorism (56%). There is significant convergence with public preferences on the matter, as the only item that differs dramatically between them is allied defence not ranking highly for the public (the gap is quite large here at 35 percentage points). Only 32% of members of the public think that defending our allies' security should be a very important foreign policy goal<sup>15</sup> (although 58% claim it should be a somewhat important foreign policy goal, and only 10% think the matter is not important at all). This, however, may also reflect the fact that public opinion and security elites have different understandings of what the defence of allied security implies in practical and policy terms.

Interestingly, 56% of elites identify combating international terrorism as something that should be a very important foreign policy goal, while only 40% of members of this group considered international terrorism to be a critical threat to the UK (although more than half do consider international terrorism to be an important but not critical threat). There is greater convergence on the matter for members of the public: 74% state combating international terrorism should be a very important UK foreign policy goal,<sup>16</sup> and 70% identified international terrorism as posing a critical threat to the UK. Although the gap between elites and members of the public considering this issue a very important foreign policy goal is not as wide as allied defence, it is still quite large at 18 points (the third largest gap in the study).

The largest gap between elite and public preferences for national foreign policy goals is the 37-point difference in considering whether protecting the jobs of British workers should be a very important foreign policy goal. 67% of the public thinks that protecting the jobs of national workers should be a very important foreign policy goal.<sup>17</sup> This is the second most highly rated item on the list, after combating international terrorism. Although this figure is higher than the 41% of the public who considered large-scale economic migration to the UK to be critical threat (as well as the 43% of the public who thought as much about refugee migration), it does seem to align with those particular public concerns.

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15. This percentage is the same among those who voted Remain and Leave in the referendum.

16. 70% among Remainers and 81% among Leavers.

17. 55% of Remainers versus 82% of Leavers consider the matter should be very important foreign policy goal, as do 63% of those in social grades AB/C1 and 73% of in social grades C2/DE.

## The UK's Role in the World

A majority of security elites and members of the public support the notion of a UK that takes an active role in world affairs. Almost the totality of elites (97%) think it would be best for the future of the UK to take an active part in world affairs, as does 67% of the public. Unsurprisingly, there is a considerable distance between the preferences of members of the public who voted Remain and Leave in the Brexit referendum (although a majority in both groups favours an outward facing UK). While almost eight out of ten (79%) Remain voters consider that taking an active part in world affairs is best for the future of the UK, only six out of ten (62%) Leave voters share that view.

**Table 3:** Do you think it will be best for the future of the United Kingdom if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs?

	Elites	Public
<b>Active Part</b>	97%	67%
<b>Stay Out</b>	3%	33%

**Table 3.1:** Of the public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

	Remain	Leave
<b>Active Part</b>	79%	62%
<b>Stay Out</b>	21%	38%

A similar pattern is found when considering whether the role of economic globalisation has been positive or negative for the country. 93% of security elites view globalisation as mostly good, as do 76% of members of the public. Almost nine out of ten Remainer members of the public state globalisation has been mostly good, compared with 72% of Leave voters. The question, however, does not drill down into the different understandings of 'globalisation' – this may explain the apparently contradictory results when asked about migration.

**Table 4:** Do you believe that globalisation, especially the increasing connections of our economy with others around the world, is mostly good or mostly bad for the United Kingdom?

	Elites	Public
<b>Mostly Good</b>	93%	76%
<b>Mostly Bad</b>	7%	24%

**Table 4.1:** Of the public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

	Remain	Leave
<b>Mostly Good</b>	87%	72%
<b>Mostly Bad</b>	13%	28%

A phrase often heard in pundit and policy circles alike is whether the UK should ‘punch above its weight’ internationally. The percentage of security elites who think the UK should ‘punch above its weight’ is almost double that of the public (62% either strongly agree or agree, compared with 35% of the public). Interestingly, only 30% of Remain voters either strongly agree or agree with this statement (compared with 42% of Leave voters).

**Table 5:** It is important for the United Kingdom to punch above its weight in international affairs

	Elites	Public
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	23%	9%
<b>Agree</b>	39%	26%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	19%	33%
<b>Disagree</b>	14%	19%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	4%	5%
<b>Don’t Know</b>	1%	8%

**Table 5.1:** Of the public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

	Remain	Leave
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	5%	13%
<b>Agree</b>	25%	29%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	35%	34%
<b>Disagree</b>	23%	16%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	6%	3%
<b>Don’t Know</b>	5%	6%

As Brexit negotiations progress, a key issue will be what the UK’s national orientation should be.<sup>18</sup> Approximately nine out of ten (92%) elites consider that in these uncertain times, security alliances with Europe need to remain strong (47% strongly agreed with this statement; 45% agreed). Support from the public is lower, but continues to be remarkably high. 74% of the

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18. The concept of ‘national orientation’ was coined by Michael Clarke, as a pragmatic alternative to the ideas of ‘grand national strategy’.

public is of the view that UK security alliances with Europe should remain strong: support among Remainers is almost as high as among security elites at 87%, and drops to a still considerably high figure of 67% for Leavers.

**Table 6:** In these uncertain times, our security alliances with Europe need to remain strong

	Elites	Public
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	47%	28%
<b>Agree</b>	45%	46%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	4%	15%
<b>Disagree</b>	4%	3%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	0%	1%
<b>Don't Know</b>	0%	6%

**Table 6.1:** Of those public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

	Remain	Leave
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	44%	18%
<b>Agree</b>	43%	49%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	9%	21%
<b>Disagree</b>	1%	5%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	1%	1%
<b>Don't Know</b>	3%	5%

Another key national orientation alternative constitutes the 'special relationship' with the US. 73% of security elites either strongly agree or agree with the statement that it is essential to protect this relationship, compared with about half of the general UK public (49%). Support among Leave voters is higher (61%), relative to those who voted Remain.

**Table 7:** It is essential to protect the ‘special relationship’ with the United States

	<b>Elites</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	33%	13%
<b>Agree</b>	40%	36%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	16%	27%
<b>Disagree</b>	8%	13%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	2%	5%
<b>Don’t Know</b>	0%	7%

**Table 7.1:** Of the public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

	<b>Remain</b>	<b>Leave</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	8%	19%
<b>Agree</b>	32%	42%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	30%	25%
<b>Disagree</b>	19%	8%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	7%	3%
<b>Don’t Know</b>	4%	4%

Perhaps unsurprisingly, support for the UK military is higher among security elites than among members of the public. A very high percentage of security elites – 85% – either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, ‘the UK needs a strong military to be effective in international relations’ (compared with 61% of the public). However, when one disaggregates the public response according to vote choice in the Brexit referendum, 74% of Leavers strongly agree or agree with this view (compared with 51% among Remainers). Support for use of force against foreign expansionism is generally lower: 60% of elites strongly agree or agree with the statement, ‘the UK should take all steps including the use of force to prevent aggression by any expansionist power’, compared with 41% of the general public (46% among Leavers and 37% among those who voted Remain).

**Table 8:** The UK should take all steps including the use of force to prevent aggression by any expansionist power

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Don't Know	
Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public
18%	9%	42%	32%	23%	31%	13%	12%	3%	4%	1%	11%

**Table 9:** The UK needs a strong military to be effective in international relations

Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Don't Know	
Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public	Elites	Public
40%	22%	45%	39%	8%	19%	6%	10%	2%	3%	0%	7%

Support for cuts in national defence spending is extraordinarily low across the board (only 6% among security elites, and 12% among the general public). A majority (58%) of elites would like the government to increase spending in defence. Across the public, support for increased spending on defence is substantially lower (38%); however, among Leave voters this appears as the majority opinion – 54%, compared with only 25% among those who voted Remain.

**Table 10:** Do you think the government should spend more on defence, less on defence, or about the same?

	Elites	Public
<b>More</b>	58%	38%
<b>About the same</b>	37%	42%
<b>Less</b>	6%	12%
<b>Don't know</b>	0%	8%

**Table 10.1:** Of the public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

	Remain	Leave
<b>More</b>	25%	54%
<b>About the same</b>	49%	37%
<b>Less</b>	19%	6%
<b>Don't Know</b>	7%	4%

Support for maintaining nuclear capabilities is high across the board (81% of elites either strongly agree or agree, as do 60% of members of the public). Similarly to the items above, we also find differences between Leavers and Remainers: 73% of Leavers strongly agree or agree with maintaining nuclear weapons, compared with 51% of those who voted Remain.

**Table 11:** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Britain should keep its nuclear weapons

	Elites	Public
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	55%	30%
<b>Agree</b>	26%	30%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	7%	17%
<b>Disagree</b>	7%	10%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	4%	7%
<b>Don't Know</b>	1%	6%

**Table 11.1:** Of the public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

	Remain	Leave
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	20%	43%
<b>Agree</b>	31%	30%
<b>Neither Agree or Disagree</b>	17%	14%
<b>Disagree</b>	16%	6%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	11%	4%
<b>Don't Know</b>	6%	4%

## Multilateralism, Unilateralism and Isolationism

Both security elites and members of the public tend to score highly on multilateralism as well as unilateralism: their foreign policy attitudes correspond with the active role they would like the UK to play in the global stage discussed in the previous section. Regarding multilateralism, 88% of security elites either strongly agree or agree with the statement, 'in deciding on its foreign policies, the UK should take into account the views of its major allies'. A majority of the public supports this view (51%). 79% of security elites strongly agree or agree with the statement, 'the best way for the UK to be a world leader in foreign affairs is to build international consensus' (compared with 53% of the general public). Support for working more through international organisations such as the UN is not as high – 56% of elites strongly agree or agree, as does 44% of the public.<sup>19</sup>

Support for taking unilateral action at times is also high across the board. A majority of the public (56%) and more than three quarters of elites (76%) either strongly agree or agree that 'sometimes it is necessary for the UK to go at it alone in international affairs'.

Unsurprisingly, members of the public who voted Remain are significantly more favourable towards multilateral action, whereas Leave voters view taking unilateral international action more favourably. Support for the items that measure multilateralism varies between 67% and 59% among Remainers (compared with 45–32% for Leavers). On the other hand, 71% of those who voted Leave strongly agree or agree with the statement, 'sometimes it is necessary for the UK to go at it alone in international affairs', relative to only 47% of Remain voters.

Isolationism is low across the board, particularly among security elites. Only 5% of elites strongly agree or agree with the statement, 'the UK's interests are best protected by avoiding involvement with other nations', and just 3% strongly agree or agree with the notion that the UK should 'mind its own business when it comes to international affairs'. Public rejection of isolationism is also high, but not as overwhelming as was the case for security elites. 23% of the public strongly agrees or agrees that 'the UK's interests are best protected by avoiding involvement with other nations', and 23% agree with the statement, 'the UK needs to simply mind its own business when it comes to international affairs'. Isolationist tendencies are generally lower for those who voted Remain (15% and 17% on the just-mentioned items) compared with those who supported leaving the EU (29% in both items).

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19. Analyses presented in this section has been published previously as written evidence submitted to the Defence Select Committee. See Catarina Thomson, Jason Reifler and Thomas Scotto, 'Perceptions on NATO and Defence Policy: Public Opinion in the UK, France, Germany and the United States and Security Elite Views in the UK', written evidence given to the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, October 2017.

**Table 12:** Please say whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements

		Agree or Strongly Agree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree	
		Elites	Public	Elites	Public
Multilateralism	The UK should work more through international organisations, like the UN	56%	44%	15%	13%
	In deciding on its foreign policies, the UK should take into account the views of its major allies	88%	51%	5%	15%
	The best way for the UK to be a world leader in foreign affairs is to build international consensus	79%	53%	8%	5%
Unilateralism	Sometimes it is necessary for the UK to go at it alone in international affairs	76%	57%	14%	12%
Isolationism	The UK's interests are best protected by avoiding involvement with other nations	5%	23%	86%	39%
	The UK needs to simply mind its own business when it comes to international affairs	3%	23%	88%	41%

**Table 12.1:** Of the public respondents, according to Remain/Leave split

		<b>Remain</b>	<b>Leave</b>
<b>Multilateralism</b>	<b>The UK should work more through international organisations, like the UN</b>	59%	32%
	<b>In deciding on its foreign policies, the UK should take into account the views of its major allies</b>	61%	46%
	<b>The best way for the UK to be a world leader in foreign affairs is to build international consensus</b>	67%	45%
<b>Unilateralism</b>	<b>Sometimes it is necessary for the UK to go at it alone in international affairs</b>	47%	71%
<b>Isolationism</b>	<b>The UK's interests are best protected by avoiding involvement with other nations</b>	15%	29%
	<b>The UK needs to simply mind its own business when it comes to international affairs</b>	17%	29%

# Appendix 1: Methodological Details

## I. The Security Elite Survey

The term ‘elites’ is used here as it is common in the related literature (see for instance, ‘The Future of Europe: Comparing Public and Elite Attitudes’ research paper, Chatham House, June 2017). Alternative terms might include senior practitioners. The elite survey was funded by the Economic Social and Research Council (grant ES/L010879/1), and includes two different sub-samples. The first consists of 64 members of the Defence Academy (specifically from the Joint Services Command and Staff College), where the survey was fielded in December 2016 (after the election of President Donald Trump, but before he took office). 93% are active military (including representatives of all branches). The second sub-sample consisted of 533 members of RUSI and the RUSI extended network, and that survey was fielded in March–April 2017 (before the 2017 general election was announced). Of the second sub-sample, 42% had served in the military (in all three branches). The security elite survey was fielded using Qualtrics survey software.

## II. The General Public Survey

A companion survey was conducted in April 2017 (prior to the announcement of the 2017 general election). The public response survey was funded by the Economic Social and Research Council (grant ES/L010879/1) and by a University of Exeter ADR Strategic Fund. The survey was fielded by YouGov with a representative sample of 2,000 UK adults. To achieve such a sample, YouGov drew a sub-sample of their online panel that is representative of British adults in terms of gender, age, social class and type of newspaper (upmarket, mid-market, red-top, no newspaper) they read. Once this sample has been identified, email invitations are sent to respondents (only they may participate in the survey, they do not know ahead of time what the topic of the survey will be about, and each respondent can answer each survey only once). The analyses presented here distinguishing between preferences of members who claimed to have voted Remain or Leave are based on their vote-choice recollection only.

Once the survey is complete, the data is then statistically weighted to the national profile of all adults (including people without internet access). The data is weighed by age, gender, social class, region, level of education, how respondents voted at the previous election, how respondents voted at the EU referendum and their level of political interest. Targets for the weighted data are derived from four sources:

1. The Census.
2. Large-scale random probability surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey, the National Readership Survey and the British Election Study.
3. The results of the 2015 general election.
4. Official Office for National Statistics population estimates.

# Appendix 2: Survey Questions

**F**OR THE ITEMS described in this report, security elites and public respondents were asked the same questions. To facilitate cross-national comparisons, some items closely mimic those asked by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs Opinion Leaders Survey (particularly the questions asked in the first section of the report, as well as some questions asked in the second section).<sup>20</sup> Some items replicate scales used in research conducted by Jason Reifler (University of Exeter) and Thomas Scotto (University of Strathclyde), including the items measuring support for the military employed in the second section of the report, and the foreign policy attitude scale used in the final section. Other items mentioned in the report were created by the researcher. When batteries of questions were used, the order of items within each battery of questions was randomised.

## **Critical Threats and National Foreign Policy Goals**

Below is a list of possible threats to the vital interests of the United Kingdom in the next 10 years. For each one, please select whether you see this as a critical threat, an important but not critical threat, or not an important threat at all:

- Cyber-attacks on UK Computer Networks.
- Climate Change.
- Russia's Territorial Ambitions.
- International Terrorism.
- The Possibility of Unfriendly Countries Becoming Nuclear Powers.
- Islamic Fundamentalism.
- Political Instability in the Middle East.
- Diseases and Pandemics.
- Large Number of Refugees from Conflict Zones Coming into the UK.
- The Development of China as a World Power.
- The Continuing Conflict in Syria.
- Large Number of Economic Migrants Coming into the UK.
- Economic Competition from Low Wage Countries.

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20. There are some differences, however. The Chicago Council survey includes additional items, some of which did not seem pertinent in an European context (such as drug-related violence in Mexico, for instance). The final item in this battery (Diseases and Pandemics) was not included in the Chicago Council survey.

Response categories are:

- Critical threat.
- Important but not critical threat.
- Not an important threat.

Below is a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United Kingdom might have. For each one please select whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United Kingdom, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all:

- Defending our Allies' Security.
- Preventing the Spread of Nuclear Weapons.
- Combating International Terrorism.
- Limiting Climate Change.
- Strengthening the United Nations.
- Maintaining Superior Military Power Worldwide.
- Protecting Weaker Nations Against Foreign Aggression.
- Combating World Hunger.
- Protecting the Jobs of British Workers.
- Promoting and Defending Human Rights in Other Countries.
- Helping to Bring a Democratic Form of Government to Other Nations.

Response categories are:

- Very important.
- Somewhat important.
- Not important at all.

### **The United Kingdom's Role in the World**

Do you think it will be best for the future of the United Kingdom if we take an active part in world affairs or if we stay out of world affairs?

Response categories are:

- Active Part.
- Stay Out.

Do you believe that globalization, especially the increasing connections of our economy with others around the world, is mostly good or mostly bad for the United Kingdom?

Response categories are:

- Mostly good.
- Mostly bad.

It is important for the United Kingdom to punch above its weight in international affairs:

Response categories are:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree or disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.

In these uncertain times, our security alliances with Europe need to remain strong:

Response categories are:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree or disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.

It is essential to protect the 'special relationship' with the United States:

Response categories are:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree or disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.

Please say whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- The UK should take all steps including the use of force to prevent aggression by any expansionist power.
- The UK needs a strong military to be effective in international relations.

Response categories are:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree or disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.

Do you think the government should spend more on defence, less on defence, or about the same?

- More.
- About the same.
- Less.
- Don't know.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Britain should keep its nuclear weapons:

Response categories are:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree or disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.

### **Multilateralism, Unilateralism, and Isolationism**

Please say whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- The UK should work more through international organisations, like the UN.
- In deciding on its foreign policies, the UK should take into account the views of its major allies.
- The best way for the UK to be a world leader in foreign affairs is to build international consensus.
- Sometimes it is necessary for the UK to go at it alone in international affairs.
- The UK's interests are best protected by avoiding involvement with other nations.
- The UK needs to simply mind its own business when it comes to international affairs.

Response categories are:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree or disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.



# About the Author

**Dr Catarina P Thomson** is Senior Lecturer in Security and Strategic Studies in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Exeter. Her background is in clinical psychology and international relations, and her approach to security studies incorporates political psychology and domestic factors to understand the strategic behaviour of state and non-state actors in times of international conflict. Her work has been funded by the American National Science Foundation and the Economic and Social Research Council.