

Deterrence is not a threat: UK statement to the OSCE

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UK Politico-Military Counsellor Arron Newble rejects Russia's portrayal of deterrence as a threat and asks which armed attack it relies on under Article 51.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

The United Kingdom wishes to express solidarity with Bulgaria and Malta following the attacks in the Black Sea this week.

The United Kingdom also remains unwavering in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, and for a just and lasting peace.

Last week, the Russian Federation presented this Forum with twenty slides under the heading "threats by collective West officials". Almost every citation of Western officials depended on one thing: a hypothetical Russian attack. The other quotes describe sanctions, diplomatic pressure, or support for Ukraine's right to self-defence. None describes a plan to attack Russia. Strip away the selective editing and what remains is a collection of deterrence statements. Deterrence is not a threat. It is a promise that aggression will fail.

The Kremlin itself knows that NATO is a defensive alliance. NATO is not at war with Russia, and it seeks no confrontation with Russia. Every increase in defence spending by the UK and its Allies, every change in force posture and every new NATO member since 2022 is the result of Russia's full-scale invasion of a sovereign neighbour. In 1997, NATO and Russia declared that they did not consider each other adversaries. It was Russia, not NATO, that abandoned that commitment through its repeated use of force against sovereign states.

That use of force is precisely what the UN Charter prohibits. Article 2, paragraph 4 obliges every State to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, a principle every participating State reaffirmed in the Helsinki Final Act and the Code of Conduct. Last week, Russia told this Forum that its actions are consistent with Article 51. But Article 51 preserves the right of self-defence only if an armed attack occurs. Ukraine did not attack Russia, and in more than four and a half years the Kremlin has not identified an armed attack that could justify the invasion of its neighbour. In 2022, the UN General Assembly deplored Russia's aggression by an overwhelming majority, and the International Court of Justice ordered Russia to suspend its military operations immediately. It has not done so.

Russia has also claimed that States supporting Ukraine have become "parties to the conflict". This is wrong. Under the UN Charter, a State that has been attacked has the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence, and other States may lawfully assist it. That is categorically different from supplying the aggressor in breach of international law and UN Security Council resolutions, as the DPRK and Iran have done. Assisting the victim is lawful. Assisting the aggressor is not. Publishing lists of civilian companies across Europe and implying that they are targets is an attempt

at intimidation, but it will not work.

Mr Chair, we should ask why Russia invests so much effort in this narrative. The answer lies at home. Open-source analysis indicates that military spending reached a record 44 per cent of federal budget outlays in the first half of 2026. A society is being reorganised around war, and the Kremlin must justify this to its citizens. It has therefore chosen to fabricate a threat from the West.

Mr Chair, we therefore ask the Russian delegation a simple question: what armed attack, by Ukraine or by any NATO Ally, does the Russian Federation rely on to invoke Article 51?

If the Russian Federation is truly concerned about Europe's investment in its own defence, the remedy lies entirely in its own hands. It should agree to a full, immediate and unconditional ceasefire, withdraw its forces from Ukraine's internationally recognised territory, and engage seriously in negotiations towards a just and lasting peace.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/deterrence-is-not-a-threat-uk-statement-to-the-osce>