



House of Commons
Defence Committee

**National security and
resilience: Government
response to the
Committee's Third
Report of Session
2009–10**

**Second Special Report of Session
2009–10**

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The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

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The following Members were also Members of the Committee during the Parliament.

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Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at: www.parliament.uk/defcom

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Mike Hennessy (Clerk), Georgina Holmes-Skelton (Second Clerk), Karen Jackson (Audit Adviser), Judy Goodall (Inquiry Manager), Richard Dawson (Senior Committee Assistant), Christine McGrane (Committee Assistant) and Miguel Boo Fraga (Committee Support Assistant).

Contacts

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Second Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Third Report of Session 2009-10 on *National security and resilience* on 16 December 2009, as House of Commons Paper HC 149. The Government's response to this Report was received on 11 February 2010. This is appended.

Government response

The Government welcomes the House of Commons Defence Committee's follow-up report on the Defence contribution to UK National security and resilience.

We agree with the Committee that the MoD has a good story to tell and do not believe we were reticent in responding to requests for information. We hope that some of these issues can be addressed in our response below.

The Government's response to the Committee's individual conclusions and recommendations as set out on page 7 of the report are as follows:

1. (Recommendation 1) Issues of national security are likely to dominate key areas of political debate during the next Parliament as they have during this; they will continue to feature prominently in the forum of public debate, and that prominence will only increase in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics. We very much hope that our successor Committee will take a strong interest in this subject. (Paragraph 3)

2. (Recommendation 2) We are disappointed with the quality of the information contained both within the MoD's initial response to our Report and in the supplementary memorandum. We believe that the MoD has a good story to tell in relation to national security, all the more given the heavy reliance upon the capabilities of our Armed Forces to maintain that security. We therefore have difficulty in understanding why the MoD has been so reticent in responding to our requests for further information. It seems unduly anxious about setting out in more detail the important role it plays and its account of its own national security-related activities. All of this seems to reveal a lack of confidence and an attempt to downplay the importance of its role. (Paragraph 4)

The MoD does not believe that it showed a lack of confidence or attempted to downplay the importance of its role in national security and resilience. The evidence provided by the MoD simply tried to reflect the small but important role we play. The MoD is not the lead Government Department for national security or resilience, and in both cases works to the direction of another lead Department with the obvious exception of UK integrity against a traditional military enemy. In all other cases Defence contributes to national security and resilience by assisting the civil authorities, at their request, when there is a requirement for us to do so.

The Department's evidence, to the Committee, set out in some detail the various roles and capabilities available to support the civil authorities and also set out the context in which Defence now operates. That context is Defence as a supporting player to another lead Department or Agency either providing support under the pan-Government Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CONTEST) for operations at home or abroad, or providing support in civil emergencies to the emergency services within the framework of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA(04)).

The CCA(04) has significantly reduced the call on Defence resources at home in all but niche or extreme circumstances, freeing our people and assets to undertake the tasks they have been trained for. The CCA(04) has also generated significant progress in the country's

ability to respond to disruptive challenges and the Cabinet Office's Civil Contingencies Secretariat deserves considerable credit for delivering real cross-Government and inter-Agency co-ordination.

3. (Recommendation 3) We would welcome from the MoD more information on the review of maritime security. (Paragraph 5)

The first annual update to the *National Security Strategy* (NSS) set out the Government's intention to address national security challenges in the maritime domain. Since June 2009, the Cabinet Office has been leading a cross-Government project on maritime security, consisting of five workstreams that have been examining Strategic objectives, Situational Awareness, International Engagement, Private Sector engagement, and legal framework. The project is still ongoing but will help strengthen our response to challenges in the maritime environment by prioritising our aims, assessing our current capabilities and identifying ways to fill any key gaps. This cross-Government project will report in due course.

4. (Recommendation 4) We acknowledge that, for security reasons, elements of the MoD's and the Government's work in the area of national security cannot be placed within the public domain. However, the Government needs to be more explicit about what exactly it is doing, how it will fund its activities and plans, and who will lead and coordinate them. We also believe that the Government should provide updates by classified memorandum or briefing to our Committee and other appropriate select committees. We deplore the fact that the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, announced almost eighteen months ago in July 2008, has not yet even been appointed, let alone met, and will now presumably have no effect until after the General Election. (Paragraph 6)

The Government is committed to being as open as is practicable with regards to UK National security evidenced by the publication of the NSS, the National Risk Register, CONTEST, and the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Safety and Security Strategy to name but a few. Version 2 of the NSS recognised the importance of a strategic, cross-government approach with the integration of national security action being vital to success. The NSS concluded that the means to do this would be through a strategic framework with clear planning assumptions that would form the basis for prioritisation across government. The planning assumptions set out the Government's long-term view of issues that have national security implications so that they can be fully taken into account in the future planning decisions of each department.

The first NSS announced the intention to establish a Parliamentary Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) to help monitor the implementation and development of the strategy. The final motion to establish the Committee was agreed by the House of Lords on 1 February. The Committee's inaugural meeting took place on 9 February. The remit of the JCNSS is to consider and report on the annual update to the NSS, and as such will draw on the expertise of the ISC, along with other Committees with an interest in national security. The Chair of the HCDC will be a member of the JCNSS. The Prime Minister consulted widely on the role and membership of the Committee and, where appropriate, took on board as many of the points raised before it was established. As

Members are aware, following consultation, the process is subject to the progress of business and daily planning of parliament.

5. (Recommendation 5) We would welcome clarification from the Government of how frequently the Ministerial Committee on National Security, International Relations and Development and its sub-committees have met or otherwise discussed matters since they were established. (Paragraph 7)

The membership and terms of reference of Cabinet Committees are published approximately every six months. This is the only information that is routinely made publicly available. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to disclose the details of Cabinet Committee proceedings and this remains the case.

6. (Recommendation 6) The House ought to be kept informed of the progress of the dialogue between the MoD and the Home Office over preparations for security at the Olympics in as much detail as appropriate. (Paragraph 8)

The Olympic's Minister updates the House as appropriate on the progress of the London 2012 Olympic Games.

7. (Recommendation 7) It is vital that the forthcoming Green Paper makes all the necessary and important connections between national security and our strategic defence capabilities. The next Government must, in its work on the Strategic Defence Review, make more explicit than is currently the case those connections and spell out clearly the role of the UK's defence assets in our national security. (Paragraph 9)

We agree with the Committee's assessment and as the Secretary of State for Defence announced in the House on 3 Feb 2010 at the launch of the Defence Green Paper the Government fully acknowledges the need to make the link between national security as articulated in the NSS and the future Strategic Defence Review. The Green paper describes six key strategic questions that need to be addressed by the future Review, which should address the concerns of the Committee. These six questions are:

- Where should we set the balance between focusing on our territory and region and on engaging threats at distance?
- How far are future conflicts likely to share the characteristics of our engagement in Afghanistan, and what approach should we therefore take if we employ armed force to address threats at distance?
- What contribution should our Armed Forces make to ensuring security and contributing to resilience within the UK?
- How could we more effectively employ armed force in support of wider efforts to prevent conflict and to strengthen international stability?
- Do our current international defence and security relationships require rebalancing in the longer term?
- Should we further integrate our Forces with those of our key allies and partners?