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House of Commons
Joint Committee on the
National Security Strategy

The next National Security Strategy

First Report of Session 2014–15

Report, together with formal minutes

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The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy is appointed by the House of Lords and the House of Commons to consider the National Security Strategy.

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Summary

We have always been clear that the new NSS must be a truly strategic framework document that looks at security as a whole, enabling policy across Government to reflect the UK's security priorities and objectives. The focus of the next NSS should be wide, encompassing resilience, deterrence and defence; and also emerging risks, such as pandemics and climate change, which threaten international order.

The NSS should look hard at the UK's place within the international order, and what strategic thinking should underpin its actions over the next five years. It also needs to influence the Comprehensive Spending Review, to ensure that the Government can make fully-informed decisions on security-related spending.

The last five years have seen a range of international developments, ranging from the growth of radicalisation and fundamentalism, to growing concerns around our energy supply, and rising aggression from Russia. The NSS must be flexible enough to support contingency planning, and in this Report we recommend that the Government produce a classified NSS or annex which can be used in Government departments to influence planning assumptions for a range of scenarios.

The Government has been reluctant to share much information on the work of the National Security Council, but we are clear that this body should have a strategic advisory role, rather than just a reactive operational one, and needs to meet regularly throughout the year.

We have been disappointed by the lack of engagement from the Government on occasion, and in this Report we express our frustration at the lack of preparation and consultation for the next NSS.

The Joint Committee was set up to look purely at the National Security Strategy, and we have spent this Parliament producing a series of Reports that we hope have been useful to the Government in implementing the current strategy and planning for the new one. We look forward to the publication of the next NSS later in 2015.

1 Introduction

1. Our Committee was established with a broad role: “to consider the National Security Strategy” (NSS). We have published four Reports over the last four years, looking at a variety of aspects of the NSS. We began with an initial review of the Strategy and the National Security Council (NSC) which was published in 2012.¹ Our second Report expressed our disappointment at the Government’s response to our initial work.² Our third Report concentrated on the impact of the NSS and NSC on Government policy and departments.³ For our fourth Report, we took evidence from the Prime Minister, and also looked at the future for the NSS; we took oral evidence from a range of international experts on international relations and energy security. In that Report we said that our final Report of the Parliament would look at preparations for and the context of the next NSS in some detail.⁴

2. In preparing for this Report, we held a seminar with a number of external experts in October 2014, covering a variety of topics of relevance to the NSS, which we found immensely useful. We also received written evidence. We received an in-confidence briefing from the Cabinet Office on cyber security, and continue to receive NSC agendas and the Government’s six-monthly Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) summary reports to the NSS and SDSR Implementation Board.

3. We would like to thank all those who have assisted us in our work, and, in particular, to express our gratitude to our specialist advisers Professor Malcolm Chalmers of the Royal United Services Institute and Professor Sir Hew Strachan, Chichele Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford, who have contributed so greatly to our efforts throughout this Parliament.

1 First Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2010–12, *First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, HL Paper 265/HC 1384

2 First Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2012–13, *Planning for the next National Security Strategy: comments on the Government’s Response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2010–12*, HL Paper 27/HC 423

3 Second Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2012–13, *The Work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012*, HL Paper 115/HC 984

4 First Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2013–14, *The Work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013–14*, HL Paper 169/HC 1257, para 52

2 The next National Security Strategy

4. The first NSS was produced in 2008⁵, with a 2009 update⁶, and the second after the General Election in 2010⁷, in parallel with the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR)⁸ and the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).⁹ The current Government is working on the basis that there will be a new NSS after the election, again alongside an SDSR and CSR. In practice, this will be dependent on the politics of 2015, but we proceed at this point on the assumption that the next NSS is less than a calendar year away.

Developments since 2010

5. The 2010 NSS set out: “we face no major state threat at present and no existential threat to our security, freedom or prosperity”.¹⁰ Although the UK remains relatively secure (we have seen no return to Cold War levels of threat), international events, many unexpected, have led to greater insecurity and uncertainty.

International terrorism

6. The 2010 NSS led with international terrorism, and this remains a major threat, although the threat has broadened from Al-Qaeda, with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) emerging as a group which has caused worldwide political concern. The interactions between the two organisations, and their encouragement of others to follow in their paths, have renewed and deepened the challenge across the Middle East and Africa.

Radicalisation and religion

7. Concerns about radicalisation have risen worldwide since 2010, and the UK threat level is currently at Severe as a result of domestic threats from UK Jihadists returning from Syria, Iraq and other troubled areas. The growth of worldwide radicalisation has had an impact on UK public confidence, and created new security risks.

8. Religious fundamentalism and intolerance across religions seems to have risen globally; in particular Islamic separatists and fundamentalists are now seen a serious threat in destabilised parts of the world. The Government has carried out a review of the Prevent strand of CONTEST, its counter-terrorism strategy, which aims to reach out to minority communities, but questions continue to be raised about how well religious feeling, the reasons for its growth, and its links to violent extremism are understood.

5 *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an interdependent world*, March 2008, Cm 7291

6 *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Update 2009, Security for the Next Generation*, June 2009, Cm 7590

7 *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: the National Security Strategy*, October 2010, Cm 7953

8 *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, October 2010, Cm 7948

9 *Spending Review 2010*, October 2010, Cm 7942

10 Cm 7953, para 1.11

Instability in the Arab world

9. In December 2010, the so-called Arab Spring began as a series of popular uprisings against authoritarian regimes, but generated political upheaval, civil disorder, and conflict across North Africa and the Middle East. Successful and unsuccessful protests and uprisings made unprecedented use of social media to organise and encourage support. Against this backdrop, the UK was one of a group of European and Middle Eastern nations which took part in campaigns against Colonel Gaddafi's forces in Libya in 2011. In 2013, after Syria became embroiled in full civil war, both parliamentary and public opinion seemed hostile to the prospect of another long-standing military engagement in Syria, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq. Today a group of states, including Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya and Iraq, are unable to govern all their own territories, and there have been ripple effects in other territories such as Somalia, Mali and Nigeria.

Ukraine

10. In 2014 Russia broke international law with its annexation of Crimea. The US and EU have imposed sanctions on Russia and NATO decided to enhance its reactive capabilities in response. Despite these actions, and the suspected shooting down of a civilian Air Malaysia plane in July 2014, President Putin has avoided all-out war by using subversion and subterfuge. The situation in Ukraine remains volatile.

Russia

11. Russia's actions in Ukraine have introduced question marks over the role and future of NATO operations in neighbouring countries and re-awakened the threat posed by Russia to states in Eastern Europe and the Baltic, some of which are NATO and/or EU member states. Russia's increasing isolation in international politics (for example, the G8 met last year as the G7, excluding President Putin from the table), increased military spending and apparent willingness to display force in the face of universal condemnation suggest the next five years could well see an escalation of the Russian threat to the security of Western Europe.

China and the Pacific

12. The UK's diplomatic relationship with China has recently warmed slightly but concerns remain about authoritarianism and persistent human rights abuses on the part of the Chinese Government. Other shifts we have seen include escalating tensions in the South China Sea and a closer relationship between Russia and China as the former tries to off-set the EU's sanctions by developing markets to its east. The growth of UK trade with China since 2010 demonstrates the importance of adapting to the growing economic power of China and other major rising economies.

13. A pivot to Asia and the Pacific in US foreign policy was announced in 2012. Its extent and implications are debated, but the NSS needs to consider its potential consequences for the UK, given that the US is the UK's most important strategic partner.

Cyber security and organised crime

14. Some of the problems the UK faces today are those predicted in 2010. A Tier One risk in the last NSS was cyber security. As the world becomes ever more reliant on electronic communications and commerce, the UK's vulnerability to cyber attack, in both the private and public sphere, increases. The Government's cyber security strategy has successfully combined the efforts of Government and business in identifying and attempting to address these risks. We must remain aware that those attempting to launch electronic attacks will be able to access resources and protection from nations seeking to undermine others. Organised crime, including cybercrime, has an ideal environment in which to flourish, given these levels of instability across several regions

Climate change

15. Climate change and its effects have remained on the world's agenda, with ongoing public debate on the severity of the situation. Although the UK has experienced dramatic weather, including flooding and high winds, the greater effects of climate change may yet be felt, and serious efforts have not yet been made to begin adaptation measures. Dr Fatih Birol of the International Energy Agency, told us that the UK needed to increase the resilience of its energy infrastructure.¹¹ It is very likely that the UK will need to invest heavily, both in the energy industry directly, and more broadly in order to carry out effective adaptation.

16. The world is experiencing increasing levels of forced population movement and migration, stemming from a variety of causes including conflict, economic instability and the impact of a changing climate. This is likely to have an increasing effect on the UK, as it will result in levels of migration far above those resulting from existing conflict, economic growth or global trade.

Energy

17. Issues of energy resilience run wider than climate change. Oil prices are currently falling, with potential impact on some of the most unsettled world regions, particularly of course Russia; the UK's Energy Security Strategy focuses on 'keeping the lights on' in the short term but says little about longer term resilience.¹² The security of the UK's energy supply is far from certain, given that there are both political and physical threats to the energy we receive from Russia and the Middle East. In addition, the Prime Minister told us that the NSC would be considering the issue of foreign ownership of energy infrastructure when we raised our concerns with him.¹³

Economic shifts

18. The last NSS stated that the relative weight of economic activity around the world was shifting towards the rising economies of Asia, Latin America and the Gulf.¹⁴ The finances

11 Oral evidence from Dr Fatih Birol, International Energy Agency, Q63

12 Energy Security Strategy, Cm 8466, November 2012

13 Oral evidence from the Prime Minister, Q36

14 Cm 7953, para 1.13

of the developing and rising economies continue to diverge from the developed world, with the rising economies now slightly flatter after recovering from the worldwide economic dip. It is clear that we continue to operate in a world with substantial economic unpredictability and shifts in economic power. The economic stagnation of the Eurozone also presents us with a range of economic and political challenges, as seen most recently in Greece.

19. Threats have changed over the last Parliament and the new NSS will need to address them. It may even be the case that existential threats become of greater importance over the next five years. The NSS must engage with this possibility.

Political consensus

20. The new NSS must belong to the new Government, whatever form that takes. It is not for us to tell the incoming executive what the content of its NSS should be, but we do urge it to seek cross-party consensus so far as possible. The more buy-in to security policy across the political spectrum, the better the Government of the day is able to plan. This planning should be for the next twenty years covered by the National Security Risk Assessment (NRSA), the basis for the NSS priorities in the current document.

Planning

21. The next NSS will be published after the election. We have been clear that we wanted the Government to spend substantial time preparing the next NSS. Both the National Security Advisers, Sir Peter Ricketts and Sir Kim Darroch, told us that the next NSS would be prepared well in advance, with consultation beginning two years out,¹⁵ and in response to our 2012 Report, the Government said it was then starting to consider the scope, structure and timing of the next NSS.¹⁶ In January 2014, the Prime Minister told us that it would “span the period of the next election. We should be starting now”.¹⁷ He also said the views of this Committee would be valued in preparing the strategy.¹⁸

22. The Government told us in December 2014 that “decisions on the nature and scope of expert consultation for the next National Security Strategy will be for the next Government to take”.¹⁹ **We regret that we are in much the same position as in 2010, and that the 2015 NSS, along with the SDSR and CSR, is likely to be prepared too quickly.**

Consultation

23. We are aware that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office have been conducting some preliminary work but the Government has not shared the extent of this work with us. The Government tells us it plans to consult us in March, which, given that it will be two weeks before Dissolution, is a very short timeframe

15 Oral evidence from Sir Kim Darroch Q9

16 First Special Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2012–13, *Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report of Session 2010–12*, HL Paper 115/HC 984, para 2

17 Oral evidence from the Prime Minister Q30

18 Oral evidence from the Prime Minister Q45

19 Evidence from the Cabinet Office

indeed. The Cabinet Office has told us that a range of external experts has been consulted, which we welcome. This includes groups such as the Natural Hazards Partnership, and a National Security Experts Group drawn from academia and think-tanks.²⁰

24. Whatever the make-up of the next Government, it would also surely have benefitted from some degree of public engagement. **We are disappointed that the current Government has not undertaken more preparatory expert consultation for the next NSS: it has missed a valuable opportunity to prepare the NSS over a reasonable period of time, and to involve Parliament, the public and outside experts in its work. Leaving so much to be done until after the General Election will mean an unnecessary rush which can only damage the quality of the strategy.**

Relationship with Spending Review

25. As we said in our first report of this Parliament, the NSS should be used to set the Government's security agenda. We stated

“The relationship between the NSS, the SDSR, and the CSR is complex. It might be thought better to develop the NSS, and SDSR, first, to find out how much it will cost to protect the UK; and then to reflect this in the CSR. However, strategy must be realistic and take account of financial realities; a strategy that is underfunded will fail. But this does not mean that the NSS and SDSR should simply be forced into conclusions predetermined by the money that the CSR has allocated. If the NSS and SDSR show that the money allocated is inadequate, then more money must be found. There is therefore benefit in carrying out these processes in parallel”.²¹

The production of the next NSS will be a matter of urgency if it is to inform CSR allocations. The NSS should enable Government to establish its strategic priorities and therefore its spending requirements. We believe spending on defence and domestic security should not be made to fit a previously set allocation of funds. **The Government must ensure that the thinking behind the priorities of the next NSS are identified and communicated within Government in time to inform and drive CSR security allocations.**

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26. When we took evidence from the Prime Minister in January 2014, we asked whether the next National Security Strategy would be fundamentally different or follow the same model. He told us that “The national security strategy needs a refresh. I do not think it will be a complete overhaul”.²² In our last Report, we expressed concern at this statement, saying that we felt the NSS needed to take a different approach and address wider questions.²³ We are not convinced that merely ‘refreshing’ the existing NSS will provide the Government with the guidance and framework it needs to plan adequately for security-related policy. In 2012 we said it was important to create a long-term framework, with

20 Evidence from the Cabinet Office

21 HL Paper 265/HC 1384, para 9

22 Oral evidence from the Prime Minister Q30

23 HL Paper 169/HC 1257, Para 43

flexibility to respond to short-term demands.²⁴ We see no reason to move from this position, which has indeed been reinforced by the work we have done over the past two years. **The rapidly changing world demonstrates the need for a thorough revisit of the NSS even if fundamental assumptions remain the same.**

Scope

27. The current NSS focuses on overarching national objectives: domestic security; support for the international rules-based order; supporting specific national interests; and supporting poverty reduction and freedom worldwide. These objectives continue to take account of a variety of issues, for example economic fragility, climate change and pandemics, which we firmly believe should be within the scope of the NSS.

28. Over the Parliament we have sought and heard views from a range of people on the subjects covered by the NSS, and also on issues that the last NSS did not address. We have gone into some of these in detail in our previous Reports. Our view remains that the next NSS must take a broad enough approach to ‘security’; for example, climate change presents several threats to our security, ranging from economic instability to environmental crisis. It realistically must have limits, and cannot and should not go into detail, but the strategy should contain evidence that the Government is thinking about security from different angles, and can provide a strategic framework applicable to a range of threats. Horizon-scanning is a vital part of our security planning, but is not the purpose of the NSS itself. **Witnesses who submitted evidence commented that they were concerned at the lack of ‘strategy’ in the NSS.²⁵ We believe the National Security Strategy needs to be more strategic.**

29. The issue of the international rules-based order raises other questions. How should we deal with the fact that parts of the world consider the UK’s actions in Iraq and Libya have broken these rules? Is the UK playing its full part in upholding international order through multilateral organisations? Has the response of the UK and that of the organisations it supports been proportionate when other nations break the rules? The recent events in Syria and Crimea have illustrated some inherent problems. These are issues that should fall within the scope of the NSS. It should also address the importance of our strategic links with the US, and the policy arising from that. **We recommend that the scope of the next NSS be wide, encompassing resilience, deterrence and defence; and also emerging risks, such as pandemics and climate change, which threaten international order.**

Strategic context

30. We have been sceptical of the likelihood of achieving the stated objective that the UK must ‘reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence’²⁶, particularly given the lack of funding dedicated to the pursuit of this aim. Even during the lifespan of the current NSS, the UK’s international influence has fluctuated. The reality is that the UK now faces a variety of scenarios, including the growth of fundamentalism in the UK and abroad, the rising hostility of Russia and political changes in the Middle East. The NSS should be

24 HL Paper 265/HC 1384, para 15

25 Evidence from A Defence Strategy Research Group

26 Cm 7953, Para 0.8

rooted in as realistic an assessment of the UK's international influence as can possibly be made, rather than a statement of political intent that may be impossible to fulfil. **The next NSS should set clear objectives for the UK's future place in the world and geopolitical priorities, and inform the SDSR's assessment of the means required to achieve them.**

Contingency provisions

31. The preparation process for the NSS ought to include thinking about those potential scenarios which are clearly possible (though perhaps not desired) and can readily be predicted; for example, how security would be affected should the UK decide to leave the EU. It should attempt to cover the next twenty years, which is the lifespan of the NRSA, the assumptions of which underpin the NSS. We recognise that the Government may well be reluctant to put its contingency plans for specific events in the public domain; these could be produced on a confidential basis, but put in writing and, crucially, known to and available to those who may need them. **The thinking that goes into developing the next NSS, and the creation of a clear cross-Government strategy should provide a framework within which Government can produce clear contingency plans for internal use if and when required.**

Geopolitical priorities

32. We have heard repeated criticisms throughout the parliament that the current NSS fails to approach issues on a regional basis. While we do not believe that the NSS should set out a strategy for each part of the world, it should explain the Government's geopolitical priorities for the coming Parliament and beyond. Clearly there are regions which deserve their own strategies, for which the UK may have to consider complex and far reaching foreign policy, including the Middle East, Asia-Pacific, South Asia, Russia, North-West Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe. The NSC would be the ideal body to develop and monitor strategies to address these priorities, which should provide a framework for UK policy across departments in regard to each country and region, without burrowing deeply into specifics. We therefore welcome the fact that the NSC has agreed a number of country and regional strategies, the content of which is not made publicly available for understandable diplomatic reasons. The NSC should be working to develop and monitor these strategies, and the NSS should be informing the NSC in this work. **We urge the Government to make clearer statements on its geopolitical priorities as part of the next NSS, and to agree sub-strategies for key regions so that Government priorities are consistently applied in all departments.**

Sub-strategies

33. Since the 2010 NSS a range of strategies, some cross-departmental, and some not, have been published which include objectives which sit within the remit of the NSC. These include CONTEST, Building Stability Overseas, the Maritime Strategy, the Cyber strategy and so on. NSC agendas, at least in the abbreviated form shown to us, make it difficult to assess whether sufficient attention has been paid to domestic issues which underpin these strategies. Indeed, we have little evidence that relevant strategies, such as Army 2020, have been discussed at all.

34. We were critical in our last Report about the fact that the Energy Strategy is a DECC document rather than a cross-departmental document, and fails to address the issues of climate change.²⁷ ‘Operation Trojan Horse’, in which Ofsted discovered evidence of plans to ‘Islamise’ several Birmingham state schools, revealed fundamental disconnection over the issue of radicalisation between the relevant Departments—something the next edition of CONTEST must address. As an island nation the UK must be able to be certain that the Maritime Strategy is fit for strategic purpose, which requires clear NSC oversight.

35. We believe that as part of the process of drawing up the NSS the Government should review these strategies, look at which have worked and why, and which need updating, and by when. It could also look at whether there are any gaps where additional strategies are needed.

36. We would expect such documents to be cross departmental, and include aid and trade and other departments rather than just the FCO and MoD. When complete they should be considered by the NSC. Such strategies can have several roles, including co-ordinating Government departments, ensuring resources are focused where they can do most good, and letting the people in those regions know how we see our relationship with them.

37. The NSS cannot cover every topic or region of the world in any detail. Instead the NSS should be a framework setting out the broad principles, with the details set out in other strategy documents to be published later. The NSC should have a role in co-ordinating the various Government strategies touching on security. The NSS development process must include a stock take of the current strategies.

Spending decisions in 2010

38. The current NSS does not link spending priorities to identified risks (or opportunities). The Strategy states

“our strategy sets clear priorities—counter-terrorism, cyber, international military crises and disasters such as floods. The highest priority does not always mean the most resources, but it gives a clear focus to the Government’s effort”.²⁸

39. The Government did make some spending decisions on the basis of the last NSS, most notably on cyber. However, as we pointed out, we did not see many other relationships between the NSS document and spending decisions, including those in the SDSR. For example, flooding was identified as a Tier one risk in the 2010 NSS. But in 2014, after the extensive flooding, extra money had to be found for the Environment Agency.

40. We believe there should be a correlation between high priorities and resources. Obviously some initiatives will be less expensive than others; it need not necessarily be the case that the most money must be spent on the more urgent or important activities. But we have not had clear evidence that the risk priorities identified in the NSS drive Government spending in areas other than cyber security. This does not make sense. **We would like to see the Government clearly set out its resource priorities alongside its risk assessments.**

²⁷ HL Paper 169/HC 1257, para 37

²⁸ Cm 7953, p 5

We do not want to see a repeat of the situation in which the NSS set out priority risks with no link to funding decisions.

41. It is worth reiterating that the National Security Strategy has a 20 year timescale. In that time, the Government can expect to see its funding on certain areas increased considerably. Spending on climate change, flooding, and cyber may be required to rise substantially above inflation, particularly once infrastructure costs for adaptation work begin. **As part of the next NSS, the Government should look at how spending in security-related areas is likely to have to change over the next 20 years. We would not want to pre-empt the findings of such an exercise, but we believe it would be highly informative.**

Soft Power

42. The NSS is concerned with security as a whole. Just as its scope is wider than defence and international concerns, it needs to look at wider measures than military, diplomatic, development, intelligence and other hard security measures. This affects CSR decisions, as it could lead to spending requirements that sit outside SDSR considerations. We have heard a great deal about ‘soft’ power during the Parliament. The Lords Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence’s 2014 Report: *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World* makes many thoughtful recommendations on ways in which the UK Government needs to adjust its thinking on its international activities. The Committee summarises:

“In an era in which the distribution and very nature of power, influence and engagement are undergoing radical change, the UK finds itself with a tremendous range of institutions and relationships in politics, economics, science and culture, often amassed over generations, which give it a great deal of internationally recognised soft power”.²⁹

43. We are aware that there is some controversy about the usefulness of ‘soft’ power as a political concept. However, Monocle’s 2013 Soft Power survey, compiled with the Institute for Government, puts the UK at number two in the world for ‘soft power influence’³⁰ so it is not something that should be ignored. ‘Soft’ power may play a particularly useful role in creating and promulgating a narrative against the messages used to radicalise young people in the UK and abroad. The Government should think in depth about the balance between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power, particularly in the context of the UK’s strengths and existing capacity. **At a time of restricted Government spending, ‘soft’ power may be an opportunity to examine ways of extending a positive UK influence around the world at minimal cost. This must not be at the expense of ensuring that we have sufficient ‘hard’ power behind it to fulfil our strategic aims. The next NSS should contain clear guidance on the Government’s thinking on the development and interpretation of ‘soft’ power in its work abroad.**

29 Report of the Lords Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Session 2013–14, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*, HL Paper 150, para 311

30 <http://monocle.com/film/affairs/soft-power-survey-2013/>

International strategies and overseas aid

44. We have heard criticisms that the complex interrelationship between international development, sustainability and security is insufficiently reflected in cross-departmental working between DfID, MoD, the FCO and others, and in the distribution of Official Development Assistance (ODA). We recognise that there are statutory constraints on the delivery of the DfID component of ODA funding. These should not prevent us recognising that global insecurity is a contributing factor to poverty, as well as threatening sustainable development and UK security. The current narrow approach to ODA limits effective policy responses across Government to such drivers of insecurity and poverty. We would like to see more in the NSS to guide joint working in this area. It would be useful for those developing the NSS to look at the Building Stability Overseas strategy and examine how this might be further developed. **The NSS should set out the assumptions and aims underlying its international strategies. In particular it should re-examine the relationship between development and security.**

FCO capabilities

45. We are concerned that continuing reductions in FCO funding are weakening diplomatic efforts at a time when the UK's international influence should be as strong as possible. The Government's capacity to provide diplomatic intelligence and specific insights into other countries, which the Foreign Office has provided in the past, has suffered from successive cuts in expenditure; the NSS needs to prioritise building up networks to put us in a better position to tackle new international challenges. **The NSS must ensure sufficient spending on FCO capabilities to support the UK's international strategies.**

Deterrence

46. The NSS, in explaining the crucial deterrent effect of military forces, should underline the importance of the decision in 2016 of the replacement of the ballistic missile submarines that carry the Trident nuclear deterrent. SDSR funding decisions must reflect our need for deterrence alongside that of conventional defence and cyber capabilities. **The NSS should provide a framework for the next Government's decision on the renewal of Trident.**

Public engagement

47. The tight timetable to enable the NSS to feed into the CSR process will make any public consultation as part of drawing up the NSS virtually impossible. This is regrettable but now unavoidable. However the next NSS will still need to be communicated to the public.

48. Over the Parliament, we have heard and in some cases expressed criticism of Government communication in a number of strategic areas. We questioned ministers about what the strategic goal in Afghanistan was, and how it was being explained to both the British people and the Afghan people.³¹ We also questioned the Prime Minister whether in the aftermath of the Snowden leaks he personally was doing enough to explain

31 Oral evidence from Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell Q175

to the public the work that the intelligence agencies were doing, and why they need the powers that they have. He said that as the minister responsible “I need to try to explain what they do and I have done some of that”.³²

49. While the public’s support for our armed forces is apparent on Remembrance Day and in fundraising for armed forces charities, the general population is seemingly increasingly reluctant to deploy our armed forces overseas, particularly ground forces, in circumstances where they perceive that objectives are unclear. We note the conclusions by the Defence Committee in its Report *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One* that a proactive communications strategy is necessary to garner public support for defence, and that the lack of public understanding of the armed forces could pose a strategic threat to the armed forces themselves.³³ It is clear, and understandable, that the public expect to be informed about the reasons for entering into conflict. We also note with interest that politicians of various parties invoked public opinion as reasons for military decisions on Syria and Libya, occasions where two different options were chosen, which raises questions about a genuine link between public opinion and political thinking. **Public opinion is a strategic consideration.**

50. We recognise that there is a complex relationship between Government, politicians, and the public, in which ministers seek to lead, but at the same time follow the public. **We think the Government is currently too passive when it comes to leading the public debate on security issues.**

51. The Government must be proactive in getting the public behind the national security strategy, including the politically unpopular parts of it. This does not mean that the document itself needs to be widely read, but the principles on which this country bases its national security should be understood and supported. In a democracy, if the Government does not have sufficient support for the measures that it needs to take to keep the country safe,—whether spending or deployments—there is a danger that they will not happen. **The Government should be prepared to do what it takes to get the public behind the measures that are needed to keep this country safe.**

52. As we have already mentioned in paragraph 32 there are issues that the NSS should cover that cannot be published. Indeed it is often the most important decisions that cannot be announced publicly. These can be the UK’s weaknesses, plans for potential conflicts, or concerns about friends and allies that it would be undiplomatic to make public. When the NSS was first published we wondered whether there was a classified version or annex or related papers. We now understand that (with the exception of the National Security Risk Assessment) there is not. **The National Security Strategy should not be limited to what can be published. A serious and comprehensive strategy should address sensitive issues. A classified version of the NSS would be appropriate, given the importance of ensuring that all those across Government working on security policy need to know exactly what the Government’s strategy is. We would also expect to be invited to scrutinise any such document on a confidential basis.**

32 Oral evidence from the Prime Minister Q25

33 House of Commons Defence Committee *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One*, Seventh Report of Session 2013–14 HC 197, paras 24 and 89

National Security Council

53. In every Report, we have expressed concerns about the working of the National Security Council. We heard from the Prime Minister that he views it as an important part of security machinery, with the capacity to bring together parts of Government to discuss security. The Institute for Government has recently produced an extremely useful report on the National Security Council, and we note that it states that the NSC has delivered positive results in strengthening cross-Government working in some areas.³⁴

54. During this Parliament, the Cabinet Office agreed to share the NSC's agendas with us; this has enabled us to make some assessment of the work it does. However, we are not able to scrutinise the NSC effectively with the limited information this provides to us. From what we know, it seems to us that it is mostly a reactive body, rather than a strategic one, which seems to us to be a lost opportunity. We recognise there is a reluctance to release Cabinet Committee papers, but see no reason why we should not receive regular confidential oral briefings on the work of the Council. **We urge the Government to provide us with oral briefings about the work of the NSC during the next Parliament.**

55. At its outset, the NSC met weekly. We have expressed our concern more than once at the lack of regular NSC meetings; we see no reason why it only meets when the House is sitting, particularly given the summer recess, during which world events often need the Government's consideration. We note that the NSC (Officials) group *does* meet weekly.³⁵ In our view the NSC should meet regularly regardless of the Parliamentary timetable, even if not weekly, as it is not satisfactory for the NSC to go so long without meeting at all in August and September/October. **The NSC should meet more regularly but not necessarily more often, to ensure that it has opportunity to consider all the issues in its strategic remit.**

56. The NSS identifies Priority Risks in three tiers.³⁶ We have seen no evidence that all of these risks have been looked at by the NSC, except when issues that fall into the risk categories are current. It would be good if the NSC discussed each of these risks at least once during the Parliament, and also looked at the new National Security Risk Assessment. This would help the Government assess what was happening at a strategic level to mitigate and plan for these risks. **Each of the Priority Risks in the NSS should be on the NSC agenda at least once in a Parliament.**

Our future work

57. We look forward to seeing how the Government's work in preparing for the next NSS progresses. We have made a number of recommendations in our Reports this Parliament, and we look to the Government to make use of our ideas. We believe there is value in this Committee continuing to work in the next Parliament.

34 *The National Security Council: National Security at the centre of government*, Institute for Government, p4

35 Evidence from the Cabinet Office

36 Cm 7953, p27

58. After the 2010 election, this Committee was not set up until December, and was unable to meet before January 2011. **We urge the Government to support the speedy appointment of the Joint Committee after the next election.**

Conclusions and recommendations

1. Threats have changed over the last Parliament and the new NSS will need to address them. It may even be the case that existential threats become of greater importance over the next five years. The NSS must engage with this possibility. (Paragraph 19)
2. We regret that we are in much the same position as in 2010, and that the 2015 NSS, along with the SDSR and CSR, is likely to be prepared too quickly. (Paragraph 22)
3. We are disappointed that the current Government has not undertaken more preparatory expert consultation for the next NSS: it has missed a valuable opportunity to prepare the NSS over a reasonable period of time, and to involve Parliament, the public and outside experts in its work. Leaving so much to be done until after the General Election will mean an unnecessary rush which can only damage the quality of the strategy. (Paragraph 24)
4. The Government must ensure that the thinking behind the priorities of the next NSS are identified and communicated within Government in time to inform and drive CSR security allocations. (Paragraph 25)
5. The rapidly changing world demonstrates the need for a thorough revisit of the NSS even if fundamental assumptions remain the same. (Paragraph 26)
6. Witnesses who submitted evidence commented that they were concerned at the lack of 'strategy' in the NSS. We believe the National Security Strategy needs to be more strategic. (Paragraph 28)
7. We recommend that the scope of the next NSS be wide, encompassing resilience, deterrence and defence; and also emerging risks, such as pandemics and climate change, which threaten international order. (Paragraph 29)
8. The next NSS should set clear objectives for the UK's future place in the world and geopolitical priorities, and inform the SDSR's assessment of the means required to achieve them. (Paragraph 30)
9. The thinking that goes into developing the next NSS, and the creation of a clear cross-Government strategy should provide a framework within which Government can produce clear contingency plans for internal use if and when required. (Paragraph 31)
10. We urge the Government to make clearer statements on its geopolitical priorities as part of the next NSS, and to agree sub-strategies for key regions so that Government priorities are consistently applied in all departments. (Paragraph 32)
11. The NSS cannot cover every topic or region of the world in any detail. Instead the NSS should be a framework setting out the broad principles, with the details set out in other strategy documents to be published later. The NSC should have a role in co-ordinating the various Government strategies touching on security. The NSS development process must include a stock take of the current strategies. (Paragraph 37)

12. We would like to see the Government clearly set out its resource priorities alongside its risk assessments. We do not want to see a repeat of the situation in which the NSS set out priority risks with no link to funding decisions. (Paragraph 40)
13. As part of the next NSS, the Government should look at how spending in security-related areas is likely to have to change over the next 20 years. We would not want to pre-empt the findings of such an exercise, but we believe it would be highly informative. (Paragraph 41)
14. At a time of restricted Government spending, 'soft' power may be an opportunity to examine ways of extending a positive UK influence around the world at minimal cost. This must not be at the expense of ensuring that we have sufficient 'hard' power behind it to fulfil our strategic aims. The next NSS should contain clear guidance on the Government's thinking on the development and interpretation of 'soft' power in its work abroad. (Paragraph 43)
15. The NSS should set out the assumptions and aims underlying its international strategies. In particular it should re-examine the relationship between development and security. (Paragraph 44)
16. The NSS must ensure sufficient spending on FCO capabilities to support the UK's international strategies. (Paragraph 45)
17. The NSS should provide a framework for the next Government's decision on the renewal of Trident. (Paragraph 46)
18. Public opinion is a strategic consideration. (Paragraph 49)
19. We think the Government is currently too passive when it comes to leading the public debate on security issues. (Paragraph 50)
20. The Government should be prepared to do what it takes to get the public behind the measures that are needed to keep this country safe. (Paragraph 51)
21. The National Security Strategy should not be limited to what can be published. A serious and comprehensive strategy should address sensitive issues. A classified version of the NSS would be appropriate, given the importance of ensuring that all those across Government working on security policy need to know exactly what the Government's strategy is. We would also expect to be invited to scrutinise any such document on a confidential basis. (Paragraph 52)
22. We urge the Government to provide us with oral briefings about the work of the NSC during the next Parliament. (Paragraph 54)
23. The NSC should meet more regularly but not necessarily more often, to ensure that it has opportunity to consider all the issues in its strategic remit. (Paragraph 55)
24. Each of the Priority Risks in the NSS should be on the NSC agenda at least once in a Parliament. (Paragraph 56)

25. We urge the Government to support the speedy appointment of the Joint Committee after the next election. (Paragraph 58)

Formal Minutes

Monday 9 February 2015

Members present:

Margaret Beckett, in the Chair

Lord Boateng	Sir Alan Beith
Lord Clark of Windermere	Paul Murphy
Baroness Falkner of Margravine	Mark Pritchard
Lord MacGregor of Pulham Market	
Lord Mitchell	
Baroness Neville-Jones	
Lord Ramsbotham	
Lord West of Spithead	

Draft Report *The next National Security Strategy*, proposed by the Chair, brought up and considered.

Ordered, That the draft Report be considered, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 58 agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House of Commons and that the Report be made to the House of Lords.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of House of Commons Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Monday 16 March 2015 at 4.00 pm]

List of written evidence

(published on the Committee's website as The next National Security Strategy)

- 1 David L Bowen
- 2 Population Matters
- 3 DefenceSynergia
- 4 Global Sustainability Institute, Anglia Ruskin University
- 5 Dr Daniel Stevens, University of Exeter, and Dr Nick Vaughan-Williams, University of Warwick
- 6 Foundation for Information Policy Research
- 7 Scientists for Global Responsibility
- 8 Dr Tim Oliver, Department of Defence and International Affairs, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
- 9 Campaign Against Arms Trade
- 10 Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
- 11 Conciliation Resources
- 12 Oxford Research Group
- 13 Transparency International UK, International Defence and Security Programme
- 14 Dr Rory Cormac, University of Nottingham
- 15 Dr Victor Madeira, Institute for Statecraft
- 16 James Flint
- 17 Professor Andrew M Dorman, Centre for British Defence and Security Studies, King's College London
- 18 Dr Jamie Gaskarth, Plymouth University
- 19 Saferworld
- 20 Institute for Conflict, Co-operation and Security, University of Birmingham
- 21 Dr David Blagden, Adrian Research Fellow in International Politics, Darwin College, University of Cambridge
- 22 The Cabinet Office

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/>.

Session 2014–15

First Special Report	The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013–14: Government response to the First Report of the Committee, Session 2013–14	HC 578 / HL Paper 26
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Session 2013–14

First Special Report	The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012-13	HC 179 / HL Paper 58
First Report	The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013–14	HC 1257 / HL Paper 169

Session 2012–13

First Report	Planning for the next National Security Strategy: comments on the Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2010–12	HC 423 / HL Paper 27
Second Report	The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012	HC 984 / HL Paper 115
First Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2012–13	HC 758 / HL Paper 65

Session 2010–12

First Report	First review of the National Security Strategy 2010	HC 265 / HL Paper 1384
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