



House of Commons

House of Lords

Joint Committee on the
National Security Strategy

The UK's national security machinery

First Report of Session 2021–22



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to the report*

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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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Publications

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The current staff of the Committee are Carolyn Bowes (Commons Committee Operations Officer), Harriet Deane (Commons Clerk), Mark Doyle (Media & Communications Officer), Ashlee Godwin (Commons Senior Specialist and Team Lead, International Affairs Unit), Simon Keal (Lords Clerk) and Breda Twomey (Lords Committee Assistant).

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Summary

We launched our inquiry into the national security machinery and the work of the National Security Council (NSC) because of our concerns about the Government's preparations for covid-19, the test case of our biosecurity inquiry last year. The end of our inquiry coincided with the rapid fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban following the withdrawal of NATO forces. Both issues demonstrate why the UK needs a strong and purposeful NSC in a fast-changing landscape of complex risks, shifting global power and rapid technological innovation. Yet they also exemplify, in different ways, our inquiry's most negative findings about the ability of the NSC to make and implement strategy and to plan for crises with rigour.

With great regret, we have concluded that recent events in Afghanistan suggest the NSC and the cross-government machinery that supports its work are inadequate to the task. The fall of Afghanistan was devastating on both a human and strategic level. The Government presided over a major review of the UK's national security that had little to say about the country and our presence there, while its limited preparation for NATO's withdrawal of troops can only be described as a systemic failure.

More than a decade since the NSC was established in its present form, there remains a troubling lack of clarity about its role and remit, its relationship with other ministerial committees, how it allocates funding for its national security goals, and how it manages the division of responsibilities with the three Devolved Administrations. When a major national security crisis came in the form of covid-19, the decade-old NSC structures were abandoned in favour of ad-hoc arrangements and improvisation—a decision we regard as a serious mistake. Furthermore, while we acknowledge that the covid-19 pandemic was unprecedented in its scale, we are concerned that the Government has proven unable to prepare for and respond to two national security crises simultaneously.

High-quality and timely information is essential to the NSC's discussions and decision-making. To achieve this in the digital age will require a shift in culture and skills within Whitehall's national security community. The Government will increasingly need to draw on open-source information and data analysis, maximising the potential of vast volumes of data in combination with human expertise. Routine challenge and external engagement are essential in sharpening policy analysis and guarding against the dangers of groupthink. The Government must also use a range of techniques for thinking about, and preparing for, the many possible futures that lie before us.

We have heard little during this inquiry to assuage the considerable unease we expressed about the Government's approach to risk management in our Biosecurity report. Witnesses painted a picture of a loose, unstructured cross-government approach, with weak oversight from the centre and unclear prioritisation of risks now that the Government has removed the numbered tiers from the National Security Risk Assessment. We therefore call on the Government to reinforce its risk management processes by establishing a consistent and robust warning function for all national security risks (both threats and hazards), providing notice of near-term dangers and changes in long-term trends—a task which might be assigned to a strengthened Joint Intelligence Organisation in the Cabinet Office. The Government should also re-establish a ministerial committee for national security risks, in addition to identifying

departmental Chief Risk Officers for national security, overseen by a single Chief Risk Officer in the Cabinet Office.

As our inquiry drew to a close, the National Security Adviser (NSA) shared with us the outcomes of his review of national security systems and processes. While we welcome the Government's desire to improve the national security machinery, we consider the NSA's review to have been narrow in focus and unambitious in its outcomes. We can discern little that is qualitatively different between the 'integration' of the Integrated Review and the 'fusion' introduced by the last NSA.

Most concerningly, the new model for the NSC risks becoming a halfway house: it is neither a slower-paced forum for tackling the most fundamental questions facing UK national security, nor a weekly meeting of senior Ministers—convened and brokered by the Prime Minister—to tackle the most pressing issues. It is the Prime Minister's personal investment of time and authority that lends credibility to the NSC and its cross-government structures. Yet under the new system, the Prime Minister will spend roughly 65% less time in NSC meetings than under the previous practice of weekly meetings when Parliament is in session.

In our initial assessment, therefore, this is a retrograde step that suggests a more casual approach to national security. However, we encourage the Government to return to a more open dialogue with us, sharing—in confidence as necessary—the information we need (and have previously received) if we are to make a constructive contribution to the reform of the UK's national security machinery in this Parliament.

1 Introduction

1. The primary function of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) is “to consider the National Security Strategy”.¹ During our eleven-year history, fulfilling this purpose has involved scrutinising: the cross-government national security strategies, the process by which they were created, and the resources allocated to their delivery; discrete policy areas within those strategies; and the structures for Government decision-making on national security—particularly the role of the National Security Council (NSC), the National Security Adviser (NSA) and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

2. Our first inquiry of this Parliament took the covid-19 outbreak and biosecurity as a ‘test case’ to assess the UK’s systems of national security oversight, since a pandemic was identified as one of the Tier 1 (highest-priority) national security risks.² The shortcomings exposed by that inquiry led us to conclude that more detailed scrutiny of the machinery of government for national security was required. Such an inquiry would also offer a timely opportunity to assess the effectiveness of the NSC and its supporting structures a decade after they were established in their current form.

3. The rapid and chaotic fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban as we drafted our report underscores our inquiry’s timeliness. The trajectory of events in that country over the past two decades, and particularly within the past 18 months, demonstrates why we need a strong and purposeful NSC that sets and oversees the implementation of the UK’s national security strategy in a way that is both rigorous and realistic, and that is attentive to a wide range of possible contingencies that might affect our national interest. Such contingencies are highly diverse in nature, ranging—for example—from the evacuation of civilians from a conflict zone, to the emergence of a new infectious disease, a prolonged, wide-area electricity outage, a major global financial crisis and the invocation of Article V by a NATO Ally.

4. We launched our inquiry into the UK’s national security machinery in January 2021, with an additional call for evidence in March,³ following the publication of the Government’s most recent national security strategy—the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (Integrated Review)—and its accompanying Defence Command Paper.⁴ The Integrated Review also set in train an internal review of “national security systems and processes”, led by the NSA, Sir Stephen Lovegrove.⁵

1 Standing Order No 1521, [Standing Orders of the House of Commons relating to public business 2019](#)

2 Joint Committee on National Security Strategy (JCNSS), First Report of Session 2019–21, [Biosecurity and national security](#), HL 195, HC 611

3 The terms of reference and call for evidence published in January and March 2021 can be found on the Committee [website](#). We did not examine the Government’s merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID) in September 2020, before the completion of the Integrated Review. Other Select Committees have considered this matter. See International Development Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2019–21, [Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger](#), HC 596; Foreign Affairs Committee, Second Report of Session 2019–21, [Merging Success: Bringing Together the FCO and DFID](#), HC 525

4 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021; Ministry of Defence (MoD), *Defence in a Competitive Age*, [CP 411](#), March 2021. Other Select Committees have launched inquiries dedicated to the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper. See, for example, Foreign Affairs Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2019–21, [A brave new Britain? The future of the UK’s international policy](#), HC 380, and Defence Committee inquiries on [The Integrated Review—Threats, Capabilities and Concepts](#) and [Defending Global Britain in a Competitive Age](#).

5 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p. 97

High-level outcomes of this review were shared with us after we had finished taking oral evidence in July.⁶

5. During our inquiry, we received a substantial number of very helpful written submissions and held six oral evidence sessions. Our witnesses included:

- Former Prime Ministers and Chairs of the NSC, Rt Hon David Cameron and Rt Hon Theresa May MP, who had also attended the NSC in her capacity as Home Secretary (2010–16);
- Lord (Philip) Hammond, a member of the NSC as Defence Secretary (2011–14), Foreign Secretary (2014–16) and Chancellor of the Exchequer (2016–19);
- Lord (Peter) Ricketts, the UK's first National Security Adviser (2010–12), and other former senior officials and experts on national security;
- Officials from the Welsh and Scottish Governments;
- Lieutenant General (ret'd) HR McMaster, former US National Security Advisor (2017–18); and
- The then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, and the current NSA, Sir Stephen Lovegrove.

We also received valuable input from our four Specialist Advisers, Professor Malcolm Chalmers, Professor Michael Clarke, Paddy McGuinness and Professor Sir Hew Strachan.⁷ We are grateful to all who contributed to our inquiry.

6 Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#))

7 Specialist advisers declared the following interests. Professor Malcolm Chalmers: Deputy Director-General, Royal United Services Institute. Professor Michael Clarke: Consultant to SCS Strategy Ltd; Consultant to Annington Housing Ltd; Adviser to Gemini-i Analytics Ltd; founding partner of Riskology Global Ltd; Trustee, the FAROS foundation; Visiting Professor at King's College London; Visiting Professor at University of Exeter and Associate Director of the Strategy and Security Institute; Distinguished Fellow, Royal United Services Institute; Fellow, Royal College of Defence Studies. Paddy McGuinness: Director and Founder of Hudhud Associates Limited; founder of Oxford Digital Healthcare; chair of trustees, St Joseph's Hospice Hackney; member of the Oxford Board of the Oxford & Cambridge Catholic Education Board; senior advisor, Brunswick Group LLC; strategic partner, C5 Capital; advisory board, Glasswall Solutions; advisory board, KAZUAR Advanced Technologies Ltd; advisory board, Pool Reinsurance. Professor Sir Hew Strachan: Emeritus Fellow at All Souls College, University of Oxford; Life Fellow at Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge; Professor of International Relations at the University of St Andrews; Comité scientifique, Laboratoire de Recherche sur la Défense, IFRI, Paris; Ambassador for the HALO Trust; consultant for the Global Strategic Partnership (a consortium led by RAND Europe), commissioned by the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Ministry of Defence; a member of the Armed Forces Covenant group (until July 2021); patron, British Pugwash Group; HM Lord Lieutenant, Tweeddale.

2 The National Security Council: how—and how effectively—does it operate?

A brief introduction to the NSC and its machinery

6. The National Security Council (NSC) is a Cabinet committee and the main forum for collective discussion of the Government's objectives for national security. Chaired by the Prime Minister, it brings together senior Ministers from relevant departments to coordinate a “whole-of-Government approach” to national security.⁸ The NSC is also responsible for the creation and delivery of the national security strategies that have been published approximately every five years since 2010, in addition to any interim reviews, such as those published in 2018.⁹

7. The NSC was first established in its present form in 2010, building on previous practices and enabling the flexible use of ministerial sub-committees.¹⁰ The inauguration of the NSC also prompted changes at the official level, with the creation of a dedicated National Security Adviser (NSA), a shadow committee known as NSC (Officials), and a secretariat—the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.¹¹

8. There have been periodic attempts in recent years to strengthen the cross-Whitehall policy-making machinery that supports the work of the NSC and the national security ‘centre’ in the Cabinet Office. These include the establishment in 2018 of cross-departmental National Security Implementation Groups (NSIGs) on each of the NSC's priorities under the ‘Fusion Doctrine’.¹² The 2021 Integrated Review initiated a further review of “national security systems and processes” by the NSA, Sir Stephen Lovegrove.¹³ The high-level outcomes of this review were communicated to us in July 2021 (see Box 1).

8 [“National Security Council”](#), accessed 20 August 2021; Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#)); JCNSS, First Report of Session 2010–12, [First Review of National Security Strategy 2010](#), HL Paper 265, HC 1384, para 79

9 HM Government, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, [Cm 7953](#), October 2010 and HM Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, [Cm 7948](#), October 2010; HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, [Cm 9161](#), November 2015; HM Government, [National Security Capability Review](#), March 2018; Ministry of Defence, [Mobilising, Modernising and Transforming Defence: A report on the Modernising Defence Programme](#), December 2018; HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021 and MoD, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, [CP 411](#), March 2021

10 [Qq 6, 22](#). Ten NSC sub-committees existed during the first decade of the NSC's existence, although not all at the same time. These included: nuclear security and deterrence; threats, hazards, resilience and contingencies; emerging powers; Libya; Afghanistan; Strategic Defence and Security Review implementation; cyber; counter-terrorism; Syria and Iraq; cross-government funds. Institute for Government (IfG), [“Cabinet committees”](#), accessed 20 August 2021

11 Dr Joe Devanny and Josh Harris, [“The National Security Council: National security at the centre of government”](#), IfG, 2014

12 The Fusion Doctrine was introduced in the 2018 National Security Capability Review. It was intended to strengthen the Government's “collective approach to national security” and create “a more accountable system to support collective Cabinet decision-making”. This would be achieved through the creation of National Security Implementation Groups (NSIGs). NSIGs were established for the NSC's priority policy areas, and each was led by a Senior Responsible Owner, some of whom had authority for allocating funding. Some witnesses such as Lord McDonald questioned whether Fusion Doctrine and the creation of NSIGs had amounted to anything more than cross-government working that should already have been happening. HM Government, [National Security Capability Review](#), March 2018; oral evidence taken before the JCNSS on 28 January 2019, HC (2017–19) [625](#); Q73 [Lord McDonald]

13 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, pp. 19, 97

There is currently limited information and evidence available on these reforms, although we outline our initial views in later sections of this report.

Box 1: The National Security Adviser's review of national security systems and processes

The terms of reference for the NSA's review were to deliver a "new operating model that is optimised for agility and integration", and which:

- a) ensures strong ministerial oversight of the implementation process; b) establishes a more consistent identification of major threats and trends; c) strengthens strategic analysis leading to actionable decisions; and d) puts in place effective delivery and implementation frameworks.¹⁴

The outcomes of the review were as follows:

- The Prime Minister will chair the NSC once per month, and "more frequently if circumstances dictate";
- Ministers will also meet monthly without the Prime Minister as a sub-committee to the NSC ("National Security Ministers"—NSM), on matters the Prime Minister wishes to delegate;
- The NSM Chair will rotate according to the topic of discussion. It will either be the Home Secretary (on homeland security), the Foreign Secretary (on foreign policy), the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (on resilience), the Chancellor of the Exchequer (on economic security), or the Minister of State at the Cabinet Office on "Europe or trade related issues". It is unclear which Minister will chair the NSM on cross-cutting issues—for example, on state threats that fall short of 'war' under international law;
- The Prime Minister will approve the agenda for the NSC and NSM, including the appropriate chair; and
- The NSC(O) group of officials will continue to provide support for both the NSC and NSM.

Membership of the NSC has also changed as a result of the NSA's review, with the core membership now comprising: the Prime Minister; Chancellor of the Exchequer; Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs; Home Secretary; Defence Secretary; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; Minister of State at the Cabinet Office (currently Lord Frost); and the Attorney General. The BEIS Secretary and International Trade Secretary have been removed from the NSC.

Source: HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021, p. 97; Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#)); Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#))

9. The role of the NSC is to act as the central point of discussion and ministerial decision-making on the UK's national security strategy. This should reasonably include setting the priorities against which resources will be allocated and holding the rest of Government to account on that strategy's implementation. This report considers the extent to which the NSC currently serves that purpose and makes recommendations for reform. In the third chapter, it discusses what further changes might be required to enable the NSC to fulfil its role effectively.

What is on the NSC's agenda?

10. Under the revised NSC model established following the NSA's review, there will now be a maximum of 24 meetings of NSC Ministers a year—a reduction of approximately 30% from previous practice.¹⁵ The Prime Minister approves the agenda for both the NSC and the new National Security Ministers (NSM) meeting, with the advice of the NSA.¹⁶ From the information provided by the Government, it is unclear how the NSC and the new NSM group relate to one another—in terms of the topics they will consider, whether there is a division of responsibility between strategy-making and operational decision-making and implementation, or whether the NSM has delegated authority for decision-making in the Prime Minister's absence.¹⁷

11. Suzanne Raine, former Head of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC, 2015–17), told us that the process by which agenda items are decided is as important as the meeting itself. She said:

For me, there is a real decision about how you programme for it and whether you can find a way for it to do strategic thinking, or whether it ends up as, primarily, a crisis response body. In my perfect world, it should do two things: it should anticipate and it should decide.¹⁸

12. We explored this issue in detail during our inquiry, asking our witnesses three interrelated questions about: the level of NSC discussion (specifically, whether it gives sufficient attention to strategy); the policy areas it considers; and how the NSC's work is distinguished from that of other ministerial committees.

Long-term strategy-making versus operational decision-making

13. According to the Cabinet Office, the NSC “convenes to discuss a mix of: forward-looking strategies on priority issues; preparation for, and follow up from, significant events; and responses to urgent issues.”¹⁹

14. Our predecessor Committees have long voiced concerns that the NSC's preoccupation with operational, day-to-day issues—such as the management of the Libya campaign in 2011—has reduced its ability to think strategically.²⁰ Indeed, David Cameron, Theresa May and Lord Ricketts (former UK NSA, 2010–12) all described the difficulty of sustaining ministerial focus on strategic issues “in the maelstrom of governing in the 24/7 era”.²¹ Since 2016, the prolonged crises of Brexit and covid-19 have made this task even more difficult. Ed Arnold of The D Group has described how this “semi-permanent state of crisis management has consumed the vast majority of UK political and Whitehall capacity,

15 This figure is calculated on the basis that the NSC was previously expected to meet in each week that Parliament was in session. In 2021, there are 35 sitting weeks for the House of Commons, meaning that under the previous system, there should have been 35 NSC meetings this year. Under the new system proposed by the NSA, however, the Prime Minister will attend only 12 meetings each year, while other NSC Ministers will attend 24 meetings.

16 Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#)); Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#))

17 Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#)); [Q6](#)

18 [Q83](#) [Suzanne Raine]

19 Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#))

20 JCNSS, First Report of Session 2010–12, *First Review of National Security Strategy 2010*, HL Paper 265, HC 1384, Summary. The Libya sub-committee met “62 times in the five months when the Libya crisis was at its head—three times a week”, according to then-NSA Lord Ricketts. He described it as almost “a war Cabinet”. [Q22](#)

21 [Qq2, 7, 19](#); [Q37](#)

forcing a premium on tactical firefighting to the detriment of real strategic thinking”.²²

15. In oral evidence, Professor Sir David Omand—former UK Security and Intelligence Co-ordinator (2002–05)—used the example of quantum computing to demonstrate the importance of long-term thinking in national security.^{23,24} This example also highlights the importance of clarity about the NSC’s role—in this instance, whether it should set the cross-government strategy for advanced technologies or consider operational issues arising from a particular emerging technology.

16. Some of our witnesses thought the NSC’s strategic focus might be strengthened if its agenda were limited to the top three or four cross-departmental issues facing the UK. Bronwen Maddox, Director of the Institute for Government, said:

The integrated review did a very thoughtful job of trying to anticipate some of the changes, acknowledging that the threats change very often. Just trying to focus on the ones that the NSC can best tackle is best at this point. [...] If you bundle everything in, Whitehall could tie itself up in gigantic meetings for years, and I am not sure it would answer the key questions about the threats.²⁵

Policy areas under discussion

17. The term ‘national security’ encompasses an increasingly broad range of man-made threats and natural or accidental hazards, which are collectively known as risks.²⁶ The scope of the Integrated Review reflects this broad definition (see Annex 1) and should guide the work of the NSC in the years to 2025. However, we and our predecessor Committees have consistently heard that the NSC has, in practice, focused almost entirely on defence and foreign policy issues since its inception in 2010. Discussions of, and planning for, state-based and terrorist threats have been prioritised over natural hazards and “hard-edged” threats such as serious and organised crime.²⁷

22 Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) ([NSM0014](#))

23 [Q83](#) [Professor Sir David Omand]

24 Quantum computing has been seen as a potentially revolutionary leap forward, promising to complete some tasks much faster. In classical computers, the unit of information, or “bit”, can have a value of either one or nought. Its equivalent in a quantum system—the quantum bit (qubit)—can be both at the same time, opening the door for multiple calculations to be performed simultaneously. According to *Wired* magazine, quantum computing could “transform medicine, break encryption and revolutionise communications and artificial intelligence. Companies like IBM, Microsoft and Google are racing to build reliable quantum computers. China has invested billions.” Among the potential innovations through quantum computing are: rapid acceleration of the development of artificial intelligence; more efficient products, such as new materials for batteries in electric cars, better and cheaper drugs, and vastly improved solar panels; and cryptography. One estimate by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace suggests “it is realistically possible that a practical quantum computer could become available over the next ten to twenty years that would be sufficiently large to place many encryption systems at risk.” Cody Godwin and James Clayton, “[Microsoft team retracts quantum ‘breakthrough’](#)”, *BBC News*, 9 March 2021; Amit Katwala, “[Quantum computing and quantum supremacy, explained](#)”, *Wired*, 5 March 2020; “[Implications of Quantum Computing for Encryption Policy](#)”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 25 April 2019

25 [Q72](#)

26 According to Professor Omand, there has been a shift from the Cold War-era “secret state” model to the “protecting state” of today, which is less narrowly focused on defined enemies, instead taking on the management of a wide range of risks to public safety and security. Sir David Omand (Professor at War Studies Department, King’s College London) ([NSM0002](#))

27 [Qq37, 40; Q54; Q71](#) [Lord McDonald]; oral evidence taken before JCNSS, 8 July 2020, HC (2019–21) [674](#), Q14. We have been provided with the agenda topics for NSC meetings over a number of years on a confidential basis, in order to facilitate parliamentary scrutiny, and these are consistent with our witnesses’ assessments.

18. We asked the Government how topics are selected for NSC meetings. Sir Stephen told us that he is responsible for providing advice on the agenda of the NSC and the NSM, ensuring that it

strikes the correct balance on matters relating to national security, foreign policy, defence, international relations and development, resilience, energy and resource security [...].²⁸

However, according to the Cabinet Office, topics are proposed for NSC discussion in the first instance by the “principal national security departments”.²⁹

19. We are concerned that the National Security Council’s agenda depends on departments raising topics for attention. This practice runs the risk that issues of strategic importance are not brought before the NSC because individual departments do not see the need for cross-cutting decisions. It also reinforces the departmental siloes the NSC was established to overcome. The Cabinet Office—under the expert leadership of the National Security Adviser—should proactively identify the items for collective discussion by Ministers, instead of being content to follow the lead of the system that the NSC is meant to direct.

20. Witnesses also questioned whether the NSC was effective at dealing with the complexity of issues on its agenda.³⁰ The Integrated Review described a challenging security environment in which the distinction between domestic and international security is “increasingly unreal”, and which involves making careful trade-offs between security and prosperity, and between values and interests.³¹ Yet Lord (Simon) McDonald (Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCO, 2015–20) observed that the “jury is still out” on whether the NSC could effectively incorporate domestic and international security issues.³² Bronwen Maddox agreed, saying:

If it is dealing with something like the manifestation at home of a threat that comes from abroad, such as terrorism, and how to pursue that at home, I think that aspect, specifically the joining up of thinking about terrorism in domestic and foreign policy, has worked.

Where it does not work [...] is on questions of joining up big bits of policy—for example on Russia, or on China now—with a policy where, on the one hand, quite properly we want to trade with them, but on the other hand we have some security apprehension about their role.³³

How is the NSC distinguished from other ministerial committees?

21. During our inquiry, we explored the NSC’s relationship with other ministerial committees that do work of relevance to national security. Our interest in this question was driven primarily by: i) the experiences of the covid-19 pandemic—a prolonged national security crisis profoundly tied up with social and economic policy; and ii) the breadth

28 Cabinet Office (NSM0032)

29 Cabinet Office (NSM0019)

30 Q10

31 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021, pp. 17, 24–32; Q2; Q21

32 Q71 [Lord McDonald]

33 Q71 [Bronwen Maddox]

of the Integrated Review, which explicitly stated the importance of the UK's domestic strength and competitiveness to its national security.

Crisis management structures

22. We asked witnesses to explain the demarcation between the NSC and the Civil Contingencies Committee, better known as 'COBRA' or 'COBR' (which stands for Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms). Lord Ricketts said there was "a fairly clear distinction between the policy-setting Cabinet committee role of the NSC" and the "tactical crisis management" undertaken by COBR, with the latter's processes for managing time-limited emergencies such as flooding and terrorist attacks well-established.³⁴

23. There were more question marks about how the Government manages prolonged, complex and multi-dimensional crises such as covid-19. The Cabinet Office told us that under such circumstances, the NSC "or another Cabinet committee" will set strategy and take policy decisions, "while COBR will focus on the immediate operational response".³⁵ Yet, as Ed Arnold of The D Group noted, the number of times that the Government reorganised its response to covid-19 between January and June 2020 suggests that the existing machinery of government for crisis response was "deemed not fit for purpose".³⁶ Lord Ricketts further observed that covid-19 had highlighted "the problem of deciding when a brewing crisis will become a major strategic threat to the country" and needs to be "elevated" to the NSC.³⁷

24. However, according to Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office), neither COBR nor the NSC was appropriate for driving the response to covid-19. He said: "we had to adapt operationally as time went on in order to deal with the range of challenges that we faced", which required "a sense of agility and improvisation".³⁸

Predictable structures for policy- and decision-making?

25. The Government has repeatedly refused or ignored our written requests for cross-Whitehall wiring diagrams and for a list of all ministerial committees that are relevant to national security, which would have increased our understanding of the various paths for decision-making and delivery in relation to national security matters.³⁹ However, we are aware of a number of cross-government committees with remits that might cover aspects of the Integrated Review, or that do so directly. These include:

- Cabinet committees such as: Climate Action (Strategy) and (Implementation);

34 Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#)); [Q131](#); [Q24](#)

35 Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#))

36 Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) ([NSM0014](#)). COBR was used to manage the covid-19 crisis in its initial stages, first meeting in January 2021. From May, four Ministerial Implementation Groups (MIGs) were established (public sector, international, healthcare and the economy), chaired by different Cabinet Ministers and attended by the Devolved Administrations (DAs). In June 2020, the MIGs were replaced by two Cabinet committees: Covid Strategy (S) and Covid Operations (O). The DAs were not represented on these committees; instead, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Michael Gove) convened a dedicated group for dialogue with the DAs, which was described as an "effective forum for airing different perspectives". [Q117](#)

37 [Q26](#)

38 [Q142](#) [Rt Hon Michael Gove MP]

39 National Security Adviser ([NSM0024](#)); Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#)); Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#))

Domestic and Economic (Strategy) and (Implementation); and Domestic Affairs and the Union;

- The new ministerial National Science and Technology Council (NSTC), which will be chaired by the Prime Minister;⁴⁰ and
- Other “ministerial small groups” about which there is almost no information in the public domain, including those on cyber and China.⁴¹

26. Michael Gove told us that the Cabinet Secretary is responsible for advising the Prime Minister on which ministerial committee should consider a particular policy question when there is an overlap in responsibilities. He set out a broad formula for determining the division of ministerial discussion on national security matters:

- The NSC deals with “some of the big, strategic, horizon-scanning issues”. It is also the “appropriate forum for discussing policy when dealing with a specific crisis”, such as the “situation in the Sahel”;
- A “typical” COBR discussion would be “a specific event of the kind that the national risk register identifies”, where there are “relatively familiar and well-rehearsed processes for dealing with it”, such as flooding or an outbreak of animal disease; and
- Inter-ministerial groups would be used when “you require effective co-ordination across lots of departments [...] and strong relationships over a period of weeks”, enabling rapid decision-making and effective delivery.⁴² Mr Gove explained that inter-ministerial groups are set up “from time to time” to “deliver operationally some of the issues where the NSC believes that the Government should proceed”.⁴³

27. Sir Stephen stated that “the name on the door of the committee is rather less important” so long as officials are able to ensure that “the right people at the right time are talking about the right things with the right material”.⁴⁴ However, Ed Arnold argued that this “opaque and incoherent” approach makes it “more difficult for politicians and civil servants, without prior national security experience, to understand their role within an everchanging system.”⁴⁵ It also undermines the ability of the Devolved Administrations to engage routinely with the UK Government on national security, as we discuss later in this report.

28. The NSC and its supporting structures were established in 2010 so that Ministers could “anticipate and decide”, both in setting the UK’s national security strategy and in managing risks. Yet when a major, anticipated national security crisis came in the form of covid-19, those structures were abandoned in favour of ad-hoc arrangements. We regard this as a serious mistake.

40 Prime Minister’s Office, “[Press release: Prime Minister sets out plans to realise and maximise the opportunities of scientific and technological breakthroughs](#)”, 21 June 2021, accessed 22 August 2021

41 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021, p. 40; National Security Adviser ([NSM0024](#)); [Q127](#) [Rt Hon Michael Gove MP]

42 [Q129](#) [Rt Hon Michael Gove MP]

43 [Q127](#) [Rt Hon Michael Gove MP]

44 [Q122](#) [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]

45 Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) ([NSM0014](#))

29. There is a troubling lack of clarity about the NSC's role and remit, and its relationship with other ministerial committees. This has important consequences for ensuring clear lines of ministerial authority and accountability, and for enabling robust and predictable processes in preparing for meetings and implementing any decisions. The confused and contradictory evidence we have taken from the Government on this issue has not been helped by its lack of transparency over existing inter-ministerial groups.

30. *The Cabinet Secretary should write to us, by the end of November, setting out the protocol or processes through which he recommends to the Prime Minister that topics are assigned for discussion at either the NSC, COBR, full Cabinet, another Cabinet committee or an inter-ministerial group. We also call on the Government to publish the full list of cross-government committees—at inter-ministerial and senior official level—that consider topics relevant to the Integrated Review.*

31. The NSA's review of the national security system and processes has led to the creation of a two-tier NSC system with the Prime Minister chairing only half of the meetings. It is apparent that senior Ministers will spend approximately 30% less time in collective, routine discussion using the NSC structures. The Prime Minister will spend roughly 65% less time in NSC meetings. As such, the new arrangement risks becoming a halfway house: it appears to be neither a slower-paced forum for tackling the most fundamental questions facing UK national security; nor is it a weekly meeting of senior Ministers—convened and brokered by the Prime Minister—to tackle pressing issues. In our initial assessment, this is a retrograde step that suggests a more casual approach to national security.

32. *The Government should clarify:*

- *How the NSC and the new National Security Ministers group relate to one another in practice—in terms of their agendas, any division of responsibility between strategy-making and operational decision-making and implementation, or whether the NSM has delegated authority for decision-making in the Prime Minister's absence;*
- *What status NSM decisions will carry in law, in the event of a judicial review; and*
- *Who will chair the NSM on cross-cutting issues, such as Afghanistan, that require the orchestration of diplomatic, development, military and security instruments.*

The Government should also explain why it has decided not to designate a permanent Chair of the NSM. This would have positive implications for the consistency of decision-making on national security and their implementation, even though we recognise it may also have awkward political implications for the Prime Minister.

The role of the Prime Minister as Chair

33. We heard that the Prime Minister's investment of time and personal authority in the NSC is essential in three key respects:

- i) **The focus and frequency of meetings**, the constitution of any sub-committees, and the choice of NSA as its Secretary—as has been described in previous sections of this report;⁴⁶
- ii) **The quality of NSC meetings' outcomes**: David Cameron told us that the NSC was an important forum in which to “thrash out” issues between departments. Without the Prime Minister as Chair and arbiter, he warned of a “danger of very interesting discussion but no conclusion”;⁴⁷ and
- iii) **Implementation of NSC decisions**: providing oral evidence to our predecessor Committee, Sir Oliver Letwin—then Chair of the NSC sub-committee on SDSR Implementation—described the Prime Minister as the “ultimate line of defence” in ensuring implementation.⁴⁸

34. It has been suggested that the current Prime Minister has invested less time and energy in the NSC than his predecessors⁴⁹—likely due at least in part to the “twin challenges” of Brexit and covid-19.⁵⁰ The result has been that the NSC has met less frequently; in fact, it did not meet at all during the first few months of the covid-19 pandemic.⁵¹ Edward Elliott and Sam Goodman of the British Foreign Policy Group described the “ease” with which the NSC was put to one side during a national crisis as “worrying”.⁵² Dr Joe Devanny (King’s College London) observed in May 2020 that covid-19 had not “made other national security issues vanish”—indeed, it had made them more difficult to manage. He called on the Prime Minister to reconvene the NSC to discuss these second-order effects, speaking of a “momentum that only a prime minister can deliver”.⁵³

35. **The NSC’s activities depend heavily on the day-to-day interests, commitment and capacity of the Prime Minister, which has implications for the frequency with which the NSC meets and the topics it considers. Even strong structures and processes cannot compensate fully for a lack of prime ministerial engagement and the attendant loss of the NSC’s cross-government authority. While the National Security Ministers meeting might be a useful mechanism for a Prime Minister who is willing to delegate authority to colleagues, it is far from optimal. The Prime Minister is the ultimate broker between Ministers and it is his engagement that lends the NSC and its supporting structures credibility. There is also the risk that he may decide to take policy in a different direction, no matter what has been agreed at the NSM. It is imperative that the Prime Minister invests his time and personal authority in the work of the NSC in upholding the UK’s national security.**

46 [Q123](#) [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]; [Qq4, 6](#); [Q18](#); [Q67](#) [Lord McDonald]; [Qq71, 81](#) [Bronwen Maddox]; Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) ([NSM0001](#)); Celia G. Parker (PhD candidate at King’s College London) ([NSM0008](#)); Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) ([NSM0014](#)); Henry Jackson Society ([NSM0018](#))

47 [Qq4, 6](#); [Q71](#) [Bronwen Maddox]

48 Oral evidence taken before JCNSS on 23 May 2016, HC (2016–17) [153](#), Q44

49 Celia G. Parker, “[National Security Council: why it would be unwise for Johnson to reduce its role](#)”, LSE Blogs, 7 September 2020; Edward Elliott and Sam Goodman, “[‘Global Britain’? Assessing Boris Johnson’s major changes to national security and foreign policy](#)”, LSE Blogs, 14 July 2020; Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) ([NSM0001](#))

50 [Q9](#)

51 Oral evidence taken before the Defence Committee, HC (2019–21) [295](#), Q3

52 Edward Elliott and Sam Goodman, “[‘Global Britain’? Assessing Boris Johnson’s major changes to national security and foreign policy](#)”, LSE Blogs, 14 July 2020

53 Joe Devanny, “[Coronavirus and the NSC](#)”, Medium.com, 15 May 2020

The role of the National Security Adviser as Secretary

36. The NSA role is wide-ranging and involves significant responsibilities. According to the Government, these include: providing advice to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet across the national security portfolio; acting as Secretary to the NSC; leading the national security teams in the Cabinet Office and the wider Whitehall community; and maintaining relationships with key domestic and international stakeholders.⁵⁴ To this list, we would add the power to initiate action, subject to approval by the Prime Minister and/or the NSC—as former NSA Lord Sedwill did in 2018, in responding to the Skripal poisoning and in introducing the Fusion Doctrine.

37. There have been five civil servant holders of the position of NSA since it was created in 2010 and one withdrawn (political) appointment. Between April 2018 and September 2020, the NSA ‘double-hatted’ as the Cabinet Secretary under what had begun as a temporary arrangement, following the departure from Government of the late Lord Heywood on health grounds. From September 2020 to March 2021 there was no permanent NSA in post, with Deputy National Security Adviser David Quarrey temporarily stepping up to the role. The three-year period in which there was no dedicated NSA coincided with the Brexit negotiations, the covid-19 pandemic and the post-Brexit Integrated Review—among the most significant strategic moments the UK has faced in recent history.

38. Witnesses highlighted three important factors in the appointment of the NSA:

- **Experience and expertise:** witnesses told us that, ideally, candidates would have some security experience, as well as an understanding of “how the system works, particularly Washington, the EU, China and Russia and how to work with them”.⁵⁵ Former US National Security Advisor HR McMaster also said the NSA must be prepared to speak truth to power, avoiding the trap of “competitive sycophancy” that often surrounds presidents and prime ministers;⁵⁶
- **Capacity:** most witnesses agreed that the NSA is a full-time role that requires an individual dedicated to its execution. Otherwise, there is a risk that the NSC would be weakened or the “stature” of the NSA role undermined;⁵⁷ and
- **Continuity and institutional memory:** the Henry Jackson Society questioned whether the high churn rate of NSAs undermined the NSC’s “ability to retain institutional memory, leaving it too vulnerable to evolution based on incumbent personality rather than experience.”⁵⁸

54 [“National Security Adviser: Sir Stephen Lovegrove”](#), accessed 20 August 2021; Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#))

55 [Q74](#) [Bronwen Maddox]

56 The Prime Minister’s appointment of then-EU negotiator Lord Frost in 2020 drew heavy criticism for his lack of “proven expertise” and disconnect from the civil service system that the NSA must lead. Lord Frost’s appointment was later withdrawn. Rajeev Sayal, [“Theresa May says UK’s new national security adviser has ‘no proven experience’”](#), *The Guardian*, 30 June 2021; Lord Ricketts, [“Speaking Truth to Power: The Problem with Prime Minister Johnson’s New National Security Adviser”](#), RUSI, 30 June 2020; Richard Johnstone, [“O’Donnell: Frost’s appointment as national security adviser ‘risks civil service politicisation’”](#), *Civil Service World*, 29 June 2020; [Q42](#); [Q74](#); [Q101](#)

57 Drs Joe Devanny and Tim Stevens from King’s College London said the NSA portfolio is too broad even for one person, suggesting it should be redistributed into “a series of more streamlined and focused deputy NSA portfolios”. [Q4](#); [Q74](#) [Bronwen Maddox]; Dr Joe Devanny (Lecturer in National Security Studies at King’s College London) and Dr Tim Stevens (Lecturer in Global Security at King’s College London) ([NSM0020](#))

58 Henry Jackson Society ([NSM0018](#))

39. The centrality of the National Security Adviser to the effective functioning of the NSC cannot be overstated. The twin challenges of covid-19 and Brexit have dominated the Government's operational capabilities in the past two years. It is regrettable that this has coincided with a three-year period in which there was no dedicated National Security Adviser. It is vital that the NSA is a full-time, dedicated role, and that there is sufficient forward planning to avoid long gaps between appointees. He or she must also be able to command the confidence of the national security machinery across Whitehall.

Who attends the NSC?

40. We heard that it is essential to strike the balance between ensuring that the NSC's remit is well-represented within its membership and enabling collective discussion, decision-making and accountability among Ministers.⁵⁹ In Lord McDonald's view, for instance, the NSC and especially the NSC(O) had lost coherence as their size increased, with the latter now comprising representatives of "at least two-thirds of the Cabinet".⁶⁰

41. As a result of the NSA's review, the NSC's core membership has been reduced in order to "keep the discussion decision focused and strategic" (see Table 1). The NSA said that other Ministers and senior officials would join "as the agenda demands".⁶¹

Table 1: NSC core membership in July 2020 vs. July 2021

Membership in July 2020	Membership after July 2021
Prime Minister (Chair)	Prime Minister (Chair)
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Attorney General	Attorney General
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs*
Secretary of State for International Development	
Secretary of State for Home Affairs	Secretary of State for Home Affairs
Secretary of State for Defence	Secretary of State for Defence
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Lord Frost)
Secretary of State for International Trade	
Officials in regular attendance in July 2020	Officials in regular attendance after July 2021
NSA (Secretary), JIC Chair, Chief of the Defence Staff, heads of security and intelligence agencies	No known changes

* This change took place following the merger between the FCO and DFID in September 2020.

Source: Cabinet Office, "List of Cabinet Committees", last changed 19 November 2020, accessed 21 August 2021; Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#))

59 [Q72](#); Edward Elliott and Sam Goodman, "'Global Britain'? Assessing Boris Johnson's major changes to national security and foreign policy", LSE Blogs, 14 July 2020

60 [Q68](#)

61 Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#))

42. The Integrated Review stated that “the distinction between economic and national security is increasingly redundant”.⁶² It placed unprecedented emphasis on: climate change; science, technology and UK industrial capacity; the need for a global economy based on free and fair trade and resilient to economic threats; and the new potential of trade as an instrument of UK national security and international policy. The National Security and Investment Act 2021—under which the BEIS Secretary has powers to intervene in mergers, acquisitions and other investments that could run counter to UK national security interests—was among the first pieces of legislation passed under the banner of the Integrated Review.⁶³ The new Investment Security Unit (ISU), which will be responsible for assessing foreign direct investment (FDI) transactions under the Act, will also be located in BEIS, incorporating staff previously based in the Cabinet Office.⁶⁴

43. In this context, the loss of the expertise and authority of the Secretaries of State for BEIS and International Trade is unlikely to be mitigated by the addition of Lord Frost, whose portfolio includes EU trade and “supporting the coordination of cross-Government positions on trade issues”.⁶⁵

44. The revised membership of the NSC may aid its focus but we are concerned by the absence of the BEIS Secretary. This is a serious omission, given his responsibility for UK policy on climate change and energy security, his powers under the National Security and Investment Act 2021, and the inclusion of science and technology in the Integrated Review. It is also curious that the International Trade Secretary has been replaced by a Cabinet Office Minister whose portfolio covers the UK’s relationship with the EU but not the range of international trade matters covered in the Integrated Review. While we recognise that other Ministers will be invited to attend when appropriate, the new membership does suggest a narrow focus for the NSC, which could severely undermine its ability to oversee the implementation of the Integrated Review. We recommend that the BEIS Secretary be restored to the NSC, given the range and relevance of his responsibilities to UK national security and the Integrated Review.

How are the NSC’s decisions funded?

45. The NSC has no budget of its own, which means that funding for the delivery of the Government’s national security strategies must be sought and allocated through (primarily individual) departmental bids, under Spending Reviews.⁶⁶ This runs the risk that departmental activity will not collectively deliver cross-government goals. It can also drive competition between departments and agencies instead of collaboration, as Lord Hammond vividly recalled:

when you talk to departmental Ministers with budgets, as soon as you start to use words like “cross-cutting”, “integrated” and “interdepartmental”, little hairs immediately start to prickle on the backs of necks.⁶⁷

62 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021, p. 19

63 [National Security and Investment Act 2021](#)

64 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 2021–22, *Sovereignty for sale: the FCDO’s role in protecting British strategic assets*, HC 197, Box 1

65 “Minister of State: The Rt Hon Lord Frost CMG”, accessed 21 August 2021

66 These bids are then assessed jointly by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury against national security priorities, before departments decide how to spend the budget ultimately allocated to them, which is often less than they bid for. Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#)); [Qq54](#), [58](#)

67 [Q54](#)

46. This problem is not limited to the national security domain. We note with interest the recent recommendations of the Commission for Smart Government, which called for the creation of a Treasury Board—located within a new Prime Minister’s Department (combining Number 10 with the Cabinet Office)—to oversee “the current spending responsibilities of the Treasury”. It also recommended the replacement of Spending Reviews with a ‘Plan for Government’, which would be focused on funding Government priorities and impact instead of setting budgets department by department.⁶⁸

47. Providing oral evidence, Cat Tully, Managing Director of the School of International Futures (SOIF), similarly suggested that HM Treasury could reduce inter-departmental competition and incentivise long-term thinking and investment by making changes to how it conducts Spending Reviews and to the Green Book and Magenta Book.⁶⁹ However, absent such significant changes to the structure of Government and/or the reform of HM Treasury processes, many witnesses pointed to the essential role of the NSC in setting strong priorities to guide funding bids and allocations.⁷⁰ Suzanne Raine told us:

Brutal decision-making about how much money you have and what the priorities are, however hard that is, would significantly help to focus the minds of the departments that we are asking to work together more effectively.⁷¹

Funding the Integrated Review

48. Strict prioritisation and hard choices are even more important—and more difficult—when Government budgets are squeezed. The Integrated Review took place against the backdrop of the economic pressures and uncertainty caused by the covid-19 pandemic.⁷² Originally intended to coincide with a Comprehensive Spending Review, the Integrated Review was delayed by several months—and was eventually published in March 2021—while a one-year Spending Review was completed in November 2020 (SR20). Exception was made for the Ministry of Defence (MoD), which received a multi-year settlement.⁷³ According to the Government, an internal paper developed during the Integrated Review process informed spending decisions under SR20. Future SRs will be informed by the 2021 Integrated Review publication, providing “further opportunities to align resources with ambition”.⁷⁴

49. Witnesses to our inquiry have raised significant concerns about funding for the Integrated Review:

- **Ambition that outstrips resources:** Lord Ricketts concluded that the Integrated Review failed to make any choices about the use of resources (of people, budgets

68 The Commission for Smart Government, “[Strategic, Capable, Innovative, Accountable: Four Steps to Smarter Government—Headline proposals](#)”, July 2021, pp. 21–24

69 [Q87](#) The Green Book is guidance issued by HM Treasury on how to appraise policies, programmes and projects. The Magenta Book provides guidance on evaluation in government: its scoping, design, conduct, use and dissemination as well as the capabilities required of government evaluators.

70 [Q28](#); [Q58](#); [Q87](#) [Suzanne Raine]

71 [Q87](#) [Suzanne Raine]

72 “[Britain suffered worst recession of all G7 leading economies, says IMF](#)”, *The Times*, 27 January 2021; “[Government borrowing: peacetime record confirmed](#)”, House of Commons Library, 23 April 2021

73 HM Treasury, “[Spending Review to conclude late November](#)”, 21 October 2020; HM Treasury, “[Spending Review 2020](#)”, November 2020

74 Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#)); HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p. 18

or ministerial energies), which limits its use in guiding spending decisions.⁷⁵ Lord Hammond observed that the MoD continues to report a budget shortfall, despite its £24-billion uplift.⁷⁶ The significant reduction in aid spending in 2021 calls into question the Government's claims to be a leading international development player, a soft-power 'superpower' and a science and tech 'superpower'—even if the cuts prove to be temporary, as the Government has stated;⁷⁷ and

- **The sequencing of goal-setting and spending decisions:** Rethinking Security observed that the announcement of major spending decisions in SR20 in the absence of an updated strategy suggests “no robust linkage between risk assessment and resource allocation in the UK”. Lord Ricketts, meanwhile, noted that departments still waiting for multi-year settlements face an increased risk that “some of the aspirations set out in the Review will not be followed up with the necessary resources”.⁷⁸

50. We asked Michael Gove how funding was being allocated under the Integrated Review, not least because—unlike the 2010 and 2015 SDSRs—the Review was not predicated on a tiers-based risk assessment of threats and hazards (see Annex 1).⁷⁹ Mr Gove failed to answer the question in person and in subsequent correspondence, although he did tell us that the NSC would “almost certainly” hold a discussion on the next Spending Review as it approaches. The NSA's answer did not reassure us that there is a clear process for allocating spending to security priorities:

When it comes to resource allocation [...] not only do we have greater appreciation, which is reflected in the integrated review, of opportunity, or areas where we wish to be more active for a reason that is not immediately associated with risk, but we have a better sense of the longer-term trends.

Obviously, there is a great deal of balancing and complicated assessment and discussion to be able to get the right balance between those aspects, but it is a proper, methodologically robust process. [...] I assure you that we are seeking to make the right prioritisation resource decisions against that full set of criteria.⁸⁰

75 [“The Integrated Review in Context”](#), King's College London, July 2021, p. 14

76 [Q62](#)

77 In SR20, the Government announced that the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget would be cut to 0.5% of gross national income in 2021—a 29% reduction from the 0.7% target which was met each year from 2013 to 2020 and was a statutory requirement from 2015. ODA expenditure was also reallocated under seven “strategic priorities” set by the Integrated Review. Analysis by the international development network Bond suggests that in 2021/22, ODA has been cut entirely to over 100 countries and territories, bilateral aid has been more than halved, and the commitment to focus half of UK aid spend on fragile and conflict-affected states has been abandoned. Professor Michael Clarke has described the negative implications of ODA cuts for the UK's soft power. He has further highlighted that the Government's intention to increase total UK expenditure on R&D to 2.4% of GDP—the OECD average—is “hardly an ambitious target for a country that aims to be a ‘Science and Tech Superpower’.” Institute for Fiscal Studies, *The UK's reduction in aid spending*, [Briefing Note BN322](#) (London: IfS, April 2021); *Reducing the UK's aid spend in 2021*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper No. 9224, July 2021; [“The Integrated Review in Context”](#), King's College London, July 2021, p. 35; [“UKRI Official Development Assistance letter 23 March 2021”](#), UKRI, accessed 19 August 2021; Malcolm Chalmers, [“The Integrated Review: The UK as a Reluctant Middle Power?”](#), RUSI Occasional Paper, March 2021

78 ADS ([NSM0004](#)); Rethinking Security ([NSM0017](#)); [“The Integrated Review in Context”](#), King's College London, July 2021, p. 14

79 [Q121](#)

80 [Qq132, 137](#); Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

51. The Integrated Review sets a bold and ambitious direction of travel. However, it is unclear how this process has informed funding allocations under Spending Review 2020 or how it will guide SR21 for those departments that did not benefit from a multi-year settlement last November.

52. It is regrettable that the Integrated Review did not take place alongside a multi-year spending review due to the covid-19 pandemic. As our predecessor Committees have highlighted, the two processes should take place in parallel and iteratively, with the Government's ambition ultimately matched by affordability. Instead, the credibility of the Integrated Review's broad commitments is undermined by the lack of associated funding for most departments. Severe—if temporary—cuts to the aid budget further bring the strategic sense and affordability of the Integrated Review into question, with limited discussion of how and why aid expenditure will be prioritised across themes, geographies and funding channels.

53. *The Government should return to the practice of holding its reviews of national security strategy in parallel with multi-year spending reviews in future. It should also use the opportunity of the Spending Review 2021 to explain how its funding allocations are consistent with the Integrated Review, and to identify any changes to its goals as a result.*

54. There are some attempts by the Cabinet Office to coordinate funding bids across departments and to guide the Treasury's subsequent decision-making. Nevertheless, the final allocation of funding is frequently the result of a battle of wills between individual Secretaries of State, Number 10 and the Treasury. It is far removed from any clear-headed assessment of the Government's key national security priorities, the level of resourcing required to achieve them, and collective agreement among senior Ministers of the final allocations.

55. *There is a pressing need for strategic direction over cross-government resources dedicated to national security. We recommend that the NSC be given a formal role in reviewing departmental settlement decisions relating to national security and assessing whether funding has been spent as allocated. Its collective view should then be circulated across Whitehall to inform funding decisions by individual Secretaries of State.*

How are the NSC's decisions implemented?

56. David Cameron praised the NSC as an instrument of implementation. He said it had allowed him to “drive action” on national security issues within “powerful departments” by coming to collective decisions during NSC meetings and then relying on the National Security Secretariat to “follow through”.⁸¹ However, repeated efforts by Government to strengthen implementation since 2015 suggest that the NSC and its supporting structures have not always been adequate to the task of delivering a flexible response to a rapidly changing security environment. These reform efforts have included:

- The establishment of an NSC sub-committee dedicated to the implementation of the 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review;⁸²

81 Qq2–3

82 IfG, “Cabinet committees”, accessed 20 August 2021; JCNSS, First Report of Session 2016–17, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), HL 18, HC 153; Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) ([NSM0014](#))

- The use of ‘annual posture reviews’ to take stock of the UK’s positioning on national security and adjust the Government’s approach as security conditions changed;⁸³ and
- The creation of cross-government National Security Implementation Groups at official level under the Fusion Doctrine in 2018.⁸⁴

57. By the Government’s own admission, more effective implementation—overseen by a more “robust” centre—will be essential to the delivery of the Integrated Review.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Sir Stephen’s 2021 review of national security systems and processes (see Box 1) raises some important issues:

- **The Integrated Review was completed before an assessment was made of the Government’s ability to deliver it**, and seemingly without detailed plans for how it would be implemented. This runs counter to the need, highlighted by Bronwen Maddox, to build implementation in “right from the beginning”;⁸⁶
- Substantial **elements of the ‘new’ approach to implementation do not seem qualitatively different from previous practice** (see Table 2), even though the NSA told us this system would “replace the NSIG structure”.⁸⁷ At worst, there is a risk that cross-department cooperation might be weakened at official level by downgrading the formal status of NSIGs;⁸⁸
- National security and international policy will now benefit from **the same reporting requirements as domestic economic and social policy**, via the tracking of priority deliverables and departmental Outcome Delivery Plans—a welcome parity of status and focus. However, witnesses questioned whether it was possible to establish useful metrics for national security and foreign policy, not least because “other countries have a vote”;⁸⁹ and
- **The manner in which the NSC will oversee implementation remains unclear.** Sir Stephen said that ministerial oversight will be “refocused below the NSC to allow for strategic focus at the NSC itself”, with a “range” of Ministers responsible depending on the “subject and implementation plan”. He did not explain how ministerial oversight would work for cross-departmental policy objectives.⁹⁰

83 HM Government, *National Security Capability Review*, March 2018; [oral evidence taken before the JCNSS on 28 January 2019, HC \(2017–19\) 625](#)

84 See footnote 12 for a detailed description of the Fusion Doctrine. See also JCNSS, Fourth Report of Session 2017–19, *Revisiting the UK’s national security strategy: The National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme*, HL Paper 406, HC 2072, p. 25, Box 2

85 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021; Cabinet Office (NSM0032); Sir Stephen Lovegrove, National Security Adviser (NSM0036); Q135 [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]

86 Q81 [Bronwen Maddox]

87 Cabinet Office (NSM0032)

88 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021, p. 19

89 Cabinet Office (NSM0032); Q81 [Lord McDonald]; Q127 [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]

90 Sir Oliver Letwin, then-Chair of the NSC sub-committee on SDSR Implementation. Oral evidence taken before JCNSS on 23 May 2016, HC (2016–17) 153, Q44

Table 2: Implementation of NSC decisions before and after the NSA's 2021 review of national security systems and processes

	Before the NSA's review	After the NSA's review
NSC sub-strategies	Our predecessor Committee was told in 2016 that there were 40 geographic and thematic sub-strategies agreed by the NSC.	A system for delivery "designed around a set of geographic and thematic IR [Integrated Review] sub-strategies.
Senior Responsible Owner (SRO)	From 2018, at least some of the NSC sub-strategies were overseen by SROs and the NSIGs they chaired. SROs were "personally accountable" to the NSC for cross-departmental work.	Integrated Review sub-strategies will be overseen by an SRO. SROs will also "be charged with coordinating an integrated approach, owning and managing risk, and they will be overseen by the National Security Council."
Cross-departmental coordination	Under the Fusion Doctrine, SROs' roles involved "coordinating in support of collective decision-making". They did this through NSIGs, which drew "on a wide range of departments or agencies".	SROs "will convene the relevant officials across government to develop and deliver their objectives".
Monitoring implementation	Unknown if there were equivalent measures to those proposed by the NSA under previous practice.	The sub-strategies and priority deliverables will be integrated into the existing Government Planning and Performance Framework, with priority deliverables tracked every quarter.

Source: Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#)); Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#)); Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#)); JCNSS, Second Report of Session 2016–17, *Conflict, Stability and Security Fund*, para 4; National Security Adviser ([NSA0003](#)); JCNSS, Fourth Report of Session 2017–19, *Revisiting the UK's national security strategy: The National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme*, HL Paper 406, HC 2072, p. 25, Box 2

58. The Integrated Review was unfortunately published by the Government before it had reviewed NSC structures, raising the question of whether sufficient thought was given to its implementation as it was drawn up. There is limited qualitative difference between the 'fusion' introduced by the previous National Security Adviser and the 'integration' sought by the incumbent and demanded by the Integrated Review.

59. It is unclear what role, if any, the NSC and NSM will now play in overseeing the Integrated Review's implementation. We are gravely concerned that the failure to appoint a permanent Chair of the NSM will undermine accountability for, and oversight of, implementation of collective ministerial decisions on national security.

60. NSC and NSM meetings should be conducted in a way that enables Ministers to monitor progress towards national security goals and to use that information in shaping their decisions, especially in the absence of the Prime Minister's personal authority. As such, we recommend that:

- *Discussion of items on the NSC and NSM agenda should start with an update*

on the progress made towards the Government's goals in that area, as well as any obstacles that have hindered implementation;

- *There should be a standing item on the NSC agenda for resolving inter-departmental conflicts that have arisen since the previous meeting;*
- *There should be quarterly reporting to the Prime Minister on key national security 'deliverables'; and*
- *The NSC should hold an annual NSC session on the Government's overall progress in implementing the Integrated Review. This session should inform updates to the Government's national security goals as well as the Annual Report to Parliament.*

How does the NSC serve the whole of the UK?

61. National security is a policy area 'reserved' to the UK Government, although responsibility for implementation is devolved in important areas (see Annex 2). The Integrated Review was peppered with references to the Union, describing the "shared interests" of sovereignty, security and prosperity as "the glue that binds the Union". Yet it included few practical references to the Devolved Administrations (DAs), save for the section on resilience, which stated that the Government would work with them to develop a comprehensive national resilience strategy.⁹¹

62. The DAs have criticised the UK Government for failing to engage with them sufficiently on the Integrated Review, despite its potential impact on the people of the devolved nations and on the devolved legislatures' decision-making responsibilities.⁹² We were told that the DAs were not shown draft proposals or text for the Integrated Review, and instead received only "very high-level briefings". This hindered their ability to hold their own formal discussions and to feed into the UK Government process.⁹³

63. We heard that this experience during the Integrated Review process is broadly indicative of wider relations between the UK Government and the DAs on matters of national security. The representatives of all three DAs were positive about the cooperation on crisis response with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and other key agencies—strengthened in recent years by preparations for a 'No Deal Brexit'.⁹⁴ However, the DAs no longer have a mechanism for feeding into the development of the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) because the dedicated NSC sub-committee was disbanded in July 2019. We also heard that Devolved Ministers' access to the NSC apparatus is "very limited, probably bordering on zero in that formal sense".⁹⁵

91 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021, pp. 13, 22, 88. The DAs are now represented on the newly-established UK Resilience Forum, which meets twice a year and is chaired by the Paymaster General, the Cabinet Office Minister responsible for resilience. See Cabinet Office, "[UK Resilience Forum: inaugural meeting](#)", 11 August 2021

92 Scottish Government, "[A Scottish Perspective on Climate, Defence, Security and External Affairs](#)", March 2021, p. 14

93 Q118; Q139 [Rt Hon Michael Gove MP], Scottish Government, "[A Scottish Perspective on Climate, Defence, Security and External Affairs](#)", March 2021, p. 1

94 Qq109, 111; Northern Ireland Assembly ([NSM0033](#))

95 Q116 [Joe Griffin]

64. The absence of standing mechanisms for the DAs' engagement has clear implications for UK-wide national security, given their role in preparing for and responding to a growing range of threats and hazards—from extreme weather events and health crises, to terrorist attacks, the effects of a cyber-attack on critical national infrastructure and even matters of economic security.⁹⁶ In written evidence, Ed Arnold of The D Group warned that failure to address the inability of the UK Government machinery “to adequately represent the devolved governments and regional political entities [... could] contribute to future secession and the breakup of the UK”.⁹⁷

65. Joe Griffin (Director General, Education & Justice, Scottish Government) told us that

We do not have assurance, if you like, that the policy is being consistently implemented across the United Kingdom, because we have no means of understanding what the lead government department in Whitehall is doing.⁹⁸

Reg Kilpatrick (Director General, Covid Co-ordination, Welsh Government) said simply:

we are now largely in a position where we do not have full sight, or even significant sight, of a lot of the national security matters that are being discussed within Whitehall, which we really need if we want the devolved Administrations to maintain the security of their populations.⁹⁹

66. A recent report by the Institute for Government highlighted the role of political decision-making in driving divergence between the UK Government and DAs in response to covid-19.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, we heard that the pandemic offered lessons for improving the structures for intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation on national security at both ministerial and official level:

- **Clear structures for regular engagement**—with predictable processes and topics for discussion—can help to build trust and confidence between the UK Government and DAs;
- **Whitehall structures and processes that are ‘UK-wide’ by design can be effective.** Mr Kilpatrick spoke very positively of the “good national work” done by the Joint Biosecurity Centre (established in May 2020) and expressed his hope that the DAs would be engaged early and regularly in the creation of the new Situation Centre, to ensure it offered a “truly national picture” in the event of future crises; and
- **UK-wide information flows are invaluable in establishing a common understanding** between the UK Government and DAs. Mr Griffin contrasted the “impressive” development of data collection and analysis by the Cabinet Office during the covid-19 crisis with the confusion of multiple ad-hoc commissions for information in other parts of the pandemic response. Mr Kilpatrick also highlighted the DAs’ need to understand both the evidence basis for UK Government policy-making as it develops “more complex strategies” in general,

96 Foreign Affairs Committee, *Correspondence with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy relating to Newport Wafer Fab, dated 22/07/2021 and 13/07/2021*

97 Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) (NSM0014)

98 Q116 [Joe Griffin]

99 Q113 [Reg Kilpatrick]

100 IfG, “Whitehall Monitor 2021”, pp. 27–29

and the scale and detail of threats to UK national security in particular.¹⁰¹

67. We asked the NSA whether his review of national security systems and processes had considered how the DAs might be brought into the UK national security machinery. Sir Stephen's answer was quite vague:

There are some fault lines. Getting the right voices in the right order in the right room is not straightforward. We have a mix in this area, as the CDL [Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Michael Gove] says, of devolved responsibilities and instruments and, rightly, national ones. Getting that right is not straightforward. It is about conversations as much as anything else.¹⁰²

68. Michael Gove, the Minister responsible for the Union, stated that secession in any part of the UK would be “devastating” to national security.¹⁰³ He suggested that the review of intergovernmental relations, which has been under way since 2018, would deliver better communication on national security issues by establishing a regular forum for discussion among Ministers and officials of the UK Government and DAs.¹⁰⁴ However, he also told us that

Wiser heads than mine can look properly at that division of responsibilities [with the DAs] and assess whether or not the current machinery means that, when it comes to protection, we have exactly what we require.¹⁰⁵

69. We agree with Michael Gove, the Minister responsible for the Union, that a break-up of the United Kingdom would pose a fundamental risk to national security. If UK national security is to be served effectively, the Government must ensure that the voices of all three Devolved Administrations are heard within UK decision-making structures. Yet despite the emphasis on the Union in the Integrated Review, the Devolved Administrations have been side-lined in UK-wide national security structures, and they were not considered as part of the NSA's review of internal processes.

70. *We recommend that the Cabinet Office undertakes a review of the role of the Devolved Administrations in national security strategy- and policy-making, with consideration given to:*

- *Mechanisms for their direct contribution to the development of the National Security Risk Assessment;*
- *Representation on NSC sub-committees;*
- *The secondment of Devolved Administration officials into the National Security Secretariat and relevant Government departments (and vice versa); and*
- *The potential fine-tuning of the demarcations between devolved and reserved powers.*

101 [Qq109–110](#) [Reg Kilpatrick], [Qq111–12](#) [Joe Griffin]; [Q113](#) [Reg Kilpatrick]; [Qq116, 119](#)

102 [Q139](#) [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]

103 [Q139](#) [Rt Hon Michael Gove MP]

104 [Q139](#) [Rt Hon Michael Gove MP]

105 [Q138](#)

71. *We would welcome a briefing, in confidence, from the Government about its plans to make the Union a strong foundation for national resilience. Furthermore, noting the previous Government's failure to prepare for a potential Scottish secession in 2014, we would also welcome assurances—in the event that a second Scottish referendum is called—that the Government has in place detailed and rigorously tested contingency plans for a break-up of the Union, including its implications for wider national security priorities.*

Conclusion: What next for the NSC?

72. The NSC and its Cabinet Office structures are one part of what is widely considered a relatively small and weak centre of Government.¹⁰⁶ It was described recently by the Institute for Government as “the worst of all worlds: a highly centralised system of government without the capacity to organise it from the centre”.¹⁰⁷

73. We have considered whether an alternative committee structure for the NSC might better enable it to fulfil its role. On domestic policy, the Cabinet sub-committee structure for each thematic policy area is delineated by strategy and operations. Ed Arnold argued that this structure should also be used for national security, so that the machinery is no longer “misaligned”.¹⁰⁸ The Institute for Government has also described the EU Exit (Operations) committee (also known as ‘XO’), as a model “worth replicating”: it reportedly “thrashed” through decisions and issues in daily meetings under Mr Gove’s chairmanship, “giving the centre and Number 10 a firm grip on delivery”.¹⁰⁹

74. We asked the Minister and the NSA whether the NSC might benefit from the same separation of strategy and operations, with each potentially supported by a dedicated Deputy National Security Adviser. Sir Stephen said his review had considered this model and while the Government was “keen to get the benefit from” the Brexit and covid-19 committee structures, it would be a “deeply formidable task” for one committee to oversee implementation across the whole “waterfront” of national security.¹¹⁰

75. While we welcome the Government’s desire to improve the national security machinery, we consider the NSA’s review to have been narrow in focus and unambitious in its outcomes. The centre of Government is in need of fundamental overhaul, with a reinvigorated NSC underpinned by much clearer lines of responsibility and accountability. Our inquiry considered the creation of three NSC sub-committees for strategy, implementation and risk, each chaired by a Cabinet Minister and supported by a dedicated Deputy National Security Adviser. Regardless of the final model, however, the degree of dependence on personalities and personal preferences must be re-examined. Some flexibility is to be welcomed, but this should not be at the expense of robust and consistent structures that can cope with multiple challenges at once.

Should the NSC be placed on a statutory footing?

76. Many witnesses suggested that making the NSC a statutory body—as with its US counterpart—would improve oversight and accountability, as well as ensuring that

106 The UK has a smaller centre of Government than many international comparators. See Joe Devanny, “Co-ordinating UK Foreign and Security Policy: The National Security Council”, *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 160, No. 6, 2015)

107 Alex Thomas, “[The heart of the problem: A weak centre is undermining the UK government](#)”, IfG, January 2021

108 Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) (NSM0014)

109 Joe Owens, “[Dominic Cummings’ plan to ‘shake up’ Cabinet committees is positive – but not without problems](#)”, IfG, January 2020

110 [Q127](#) [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]

improvements to the system are “enduring”.¹¹¹ However, the two former Prime Ministers who gave evidence to us were firmly opposed to the idea, suggesting it would “add to complications”, might invite litigation and would undermine the important flexibility that characterises the current arrangements.¹¹² Bronwen Maddox suggested that this issue be kept under review, noting that “British flexibility, as we have seen, can be flexibility too far”.¹¹³ Michael Gove gave a more detailed objection:

My own instinct is that it would be a mistake to put anything on to a statutory footing when it comes to the organisation of Cabinet committees, task forces and all the rest of it. Everything from the prospect of judicial review of those arrangements to the amount of time that it would take to dismantle one particular structure and replace it with another inclines me against it.¹¹⁴

77. There are advantages to putting the NSC on a statutory footing, such as ensuring that there is a shared sense of ‘mission’ across Government, that the NSC’s purpose is clear, and that it meets with regularity. However, these could be achieved through stronger structures and sustained commitment from Ministers, without the risks of inflexibility inherent in creating a statutory body. We will continue to monitor NSC activity, including through the reporting requirements proposed later in this report, and will revisit this issue in future if necessary.

111 Celia G. Parker (PhD candidate at King’s College London) ([NSM0008](#)); Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) ([NSM0014](#)); Professor Rory Cormac (Professor of International Relations at University of Nottingham) ([NSM0001](#)); Henry Jackson Society ([NSM0018](#))

112 [Q5](#); [Q44](#)

113 [Q74](#) [Bronwen Maddox]

114 [Q128](#)

3 What does the NSC need to fulfil its role effectively?

Building the NSC's understanding

78. If the NSC's role is "to anticipate and to decide", as Suzanne Raine described, it needs access to high-quality and timely information that enables it to do both in relation to risks and opportunities.¹¹⁵ Professor Omand told us that, while it is for Ministers, and ultimately for the Prime Minister, to strike the balance between what is desirable and what is possible, officials can

make the decision-maker's life very much easier if you have that assessment and analysis, the policy options have [...] already been discussed between officials across all the relevant departments so that nobody is blindsided, and they have exposed to Ministers the differences. I am no great fan of having official meetings and this stitch-up: "There is only one solution. Here it is". You have to expose the options.¹¹⁶

79. Professor Omand told us that the Government needs the capacity to address both the more immediate risks (which are broadly quantifiable within a five-year timeframe) and the longer-term uncertainties. Suzanne Raine, by contrast, said the Government's priority should be the rigorous understanding and management of risks that are "real and present dangers".¹¹⁷

80. Professor Omand suggested the NSC should be serviced with four types of information that cross these timelines, to aid its understanding and inform its decision-making:

- Reliable, consistent **situational awareness**, answering the sort of factual questions that start with "what, when, and where" about what is happening;
- An **explanation** of the facts, answering questions objectively about "how and why and who was responsible?" and "Is this a coincidence in the data or a sign of a wider design?"
- **Estimates** of how events may unfold, including modelling how others might respond to possible NSC policy choices—answering questions such as "what is likely to happen if we do—or do not—act a particular way?"
- **Strategic notice** of major future challenges that are possible, which can prompt the NSC to ask "how could we prepare for this so that it never comes to test us?"

He said that while the Government has capabilities that could provide the NSC with this information, they are not "necessarily in the right place or connected by the right processes".¹¹⁸

115 [Q83](#) [Suzanne Raine]

116 [Q88](#) [Professor Sir David Omand]

117 [Qq84, 90](#)

118 Sir David Omand (Professor at War Studies Department, King's College London) ([NSM0002](#)); [Q84](#) [Professor Sir David Omand]

81. During our inquiry, we asked whether the NSC has access to the range of information it needs, supported by capabilities across Government. We have focused in particular on the Government's:

- Capabilities and processes for long-term thinking and testing foundational assumptions;
- Analytical capabilities and warning functions (which are closely related to the Government's risk management processes, discussed in the next section);
- Use of open-source information; and
- Diversity of thought and use of external challenge to minimise groupthink.

Long-term thinking and testing assumptions

82. The machinery underpinning the NSC was criticised by witnesses for its weakness in supporting long-term, strategic thinking and decision-making.¹¹⁹ They described a range of tools and techniques, such as the creation of alternative scenarios and horizon-scanning, that might provide the Government with 'strategic foresight' when making decisions on national security today—that is, helping the Government to think about, understand and prepare for an inherently uncertain and unpredictable future.

83. We heard that engaging in this type of 'futures thinking' enables the Government to anticipate and be more proactive in its work,¹²⁰ by helping it to:

- Identify and prioritise national goals;
- Identify possible future scenarios, establish which are desirable, how the Government can achieve them and what might prevent it from doing so;
- Challenge assumptions about the future and stress-test decision-making today;
- Improve the Government's ability to monitor and respond to the changing national security landscape, including risks and opportunities; and
- Better identify the national security capabilities that will be needed in the future.¹²¹

84. It is unclear whether the new "central strategy development and delivery function" in the National Security Secretariat will engage in longer-term futures thinking or whether it

119 Henry Jackson Society ([NSM0018](#))

120 There is a lack of clarity in the use of these terms across Government and the private sector. In this report, we use the definitions provided by the Government Office for Science (GO Science) as follows.

'Futures thinking' refers to "different approaches to thinking about the future and exploring factors that could give rise to possible and probable future characteristics, events and behaviours."

'Foresight' (or 'strategic foresight') refers to "the tools/methods for conducting futures work, for example, horizon scanning (gathering intelligence about the future) and scenarios (describing what the future might be like)."

'Horizon-scanning' is "a systematic examination of information to identify potential threats, risks, emerging issues and opportunities, beyond the Parliamentary term, allowing for better preparedness and the incorporation of mitigation and exploitation into the policy making process."

See GO Science, "[A brief guide to thinking about futures thinking and foresight](#)", 2021, p. 3

121 [Qq84–85, 90](#)

will provide a central point of 'ownership' for such efforts across Government.¹²² However, Cat Tully told us that the cross-government "foresight network", led by the Government Office for Science, could "be really empowered" and that the existing "atomised pockets" of horizon-scanning capabilities could be used much more effectively. Turning futures thinking into "insight and action in the here and now", she said, will require educating policy-makers on "what is useful insight and plausible alternatives that we need to start preparing for and investing in."¹²³

Analytical capabilities and warning functions

85. Suzanne Raine has written previously that assessment and analysis should be prioritised in an "era of discord" and flux, because it can provide an early warning system and enable the Government to "keep its poise"—knowing when to act and "when to ignore".¹²⁴ She told us that

You could create an incredibly powerful government analytical machine by being wiser about how you use the Government's professional analysts and by making sure that they fitted into a proper structure that then developed the understanding that feeds the National Security Council.¹²⁵

86. We heard that the cross-government analytical capability might be strengthened in several ways. Witnesses told us that it should:

- **Have a broader remit**, covering the identification and analysis of all threats and hazards that now fall within the definition of 'national security'. We heard that, as with other areas of national security policy-making, there has been a tendency to prioritise 'hard' security threats over accidental and natural hazards;¹²⁶
- Provide a **consistent warning system across all risks**, linking the analytic effort with policy-makers. This system should identify clearly which department or cross-departmental analytical body is responsible for monitoring each national security risk. It should also have clear thresholds for when to escalate information to decision-makers as conditions change;¹²⁷ and
- Have an "**empowered central point**" into which this monitoring system feeds, "to ensure that the risks are being monitored in real time and weighted against each other." According to Ms Raine, there is no one government body or process which manages this currently.¹²⁸

122 Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#)). The Civil Contingencies Secretariat does engage in horizon-scanning on a shorter timescale in support of the NSRA. Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

123 [Q84](#) [Cat Tully]

124 Suzanne Raine, "[The Integrated Review Should Prioritise Understanding](#)", RUSI, 28 September 2020

125 [Q84](#) [Suzanne Raine]

126 [Q27](#); Sir David Omand (Professor at War Studies Department, King's College London) ([NSM0002](#)); [Q95](#) [Professor Sir David Omand]

127 According to Suzanne Raine, the monitoring and warning function works well in some areas such as terrorism and cyber security—both of which benefit from a dedicated cross-government analysis and assessment body which also owns the monitoring system, in the form of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) and the National Cyber Security Centre, respectively. [Qq84, 85, 92](#) [Suzanne Raine]

128 Suzanne Raine, "[Half of the National Risk Register is Missing](#)", *RUSI Newsbrief* (Vol. 41, No. 1, January/February 2021)

87. Professor Omand suggested that the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)—and the team of analysts in the Cabinet Office that supports it, the Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO)—should be tasked with drawing together analysis and assessment of both threats and hazards from across government, for use by the NSC. He further called for the Chair of the JIC to be given responsibility for providing the NSC with both near-term warnings about impending risks and longer-term ‘strategic notice’ of “things that you could imagine may not happen but that, if they did, would be very serious”. This is in contrast to the JIC’s current role, which is focused primarily on providing assessments of, and near-term warnings on, threats and events overseas (see Box 2). The approach suggested by Professor Omand would provide a single central analytical and assessment capability that would span all national security risks and provide a warning function for both the short and longer term. Under this proposal, the JIC Chair would be responsible for providing the NSC with “the totality of that kind of advice”.¹²⁹

Box 2: The Joint Intelligence Committee and the Joint Intelligence Organisation

The **Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)** is an inter-agency body based in the Cabinet Office. Its membership comprises senior officials from the Cabinet Office, including the JIC Chair, the Chief of the Assessments Staff and the National Security Adviser; senior representatives from the FCDO, MoD, the Home Office and HM Treasury; and the Heads of the Secret Intelligence Service, MI5 and GCHQ. Its formal role is to bring to the attention of Ministers and departments “assessments that appear to require operational, planning or policy action”, including by keeping under review threats to security in the UK and overseas. It has a wide remit, requiring it to assess events and situations relating to “external affairs, defence, terrorism, major international criminal activity, scientific, technical and international economic matters” and “other transnational issues”, drawing on secret intelligence, diplomatic reporting and open-source material. The Chair of the JIC provides “all-source assessment briefings” to the NSC, informed by JIO briefing materials.

The **Joint Intelligence Organisation (JIO)** is an assessment function within the Cabinet Office. Its analysts take raw intelligence gathered by the intelligence agencies and produce briefings and assessments that consider tactical and strategic national security issues, providing warnings of threats to UK interests and monitoring countries at risk of instability. Its remit has recently been expanded to cover additional risks, such as health security. There were approximately 80 JIO analysts in 2018.

The JIO is not formally part of the National Security Secretariat, even though its workflow is shaped by the NSC. This separation between teams is intended to help maintain the division between intelligence analysis and assessment and policy-making—one of the key lessons of the Iraq War.

Source: “[Joint Intelligence Committee](#)”, GCHQ, accessed 18 August 2021; “[Joint Intelligence Committee](#)”, accessed 18 August 2021; Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#)); “[National Intelligence Machinery](#)”, MI5, accessed 18 August 2021; Sir David Omand (Professor at War Studies Department, King’s College London) ([NSM0002](#)); Intelligence and Security Committee, [Annual Report 2018–2019](#), HC 633, p. 19; Dr Joe Devanny and Josh Harris, “[The National Security Council: National security at the centre of government](#)”, IfG, 2014, p. 14

88. Witnesses had differing views on the desirability of expanding the JIC’s (and therefore the JIO’s) focus and role. Lord Ricketts agreed there should be clear responsibility for the warning function within Government, and that the warning function is “inherent in the JIC’s process”. However, he questioned whether the JIO “has the expertise to give that kind of strategic notice of issues such as pandemics and climate emergencies.”¹³⁰ Lord McDonald argued that although the capability on natural hazards was needed, the wealth

129 [Q84](#) [Professor Sir David Omand]

130 [Q27](#)

of open-source information available on such risks meant it “should not be located in the secret space”.¹³¹

89. Suzanne Raine, however, argued that setting up an alternative body to provide a central warning function on natural hazards and any threats not covered by the JIC would lead to some duplication. She further clarified that the JIC “is not just for secret intelligence; it is for all information”, including open source as its ‘baseline’.¹³² This suggests there is some confusion about the extent to which the JIC and JIO utilise open-source information in their assessments.

90. Ms Raine also drew our attention to the relative lack of resources allocated to analysis across Government, describing it as “underresourced and deprioritised”. Noting that “monitoring and assessment requires real expertise, because you are monitoring how things are changing over time”, she called on the Government to provide “a stable resourcing model for all analyst bodies”, especially for the JIO at the centre of Government.¹³³

Use of open-source information

91. During our inquiry, we have heard about the potential of open-source information to improve the Government’s understanding of the national security landscape, and to track risks and opportunities. Professor Omand and Suzanne Raine pointed to the work of online investigator Bellingcat in attributing the 2018 poisoning of Sergei Skripal to Russian military agents, for example.¹³⁴ Lt Gen (retd) HR McMaster told us that

If there is an area where the intelligence community should focus reform efforts, it is accessing more routinely unclassified sources of information. [...] We need more open-source intelligence—skimming of social media, for example. If you want to learn about the Syrian civil war and what is going on inside Syria, probably the best source is social media skimming these days.¹³⁵

92. However, the existence of what Suzanne Raine described as an “infinite amount of information” presents a significant challenge: how best to manage the vast amounts of available data—through storing, sorting, analysing and distributing information to decision-makers in an accessible and timely manner.¹³⁶ Written evidence provided by Dr Filippa Lentzos and Professor Michael Goodman of King’s College London stated:

increased data does not necessarily equate to increased insight, knowledge or wisdom. While in the recent past, having power meant having access to data, in today’s world, with overwhelming amounts of data available, having power means knowing what to ignore, what to prioritise and how to analyse it.¹³⁷¹³⁸

131 [Q70](#)

132 [Qq84–85](#) [Suzanne Raine]

133 [Qq84, 95](#) [Suzanne Raine]

134 Professor Sir David Omand, former UK Security and Intelligence Coordinator in the Cabinet Office (2002–05) and Suzanne Raine, former Head of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (2015–2017) ([NSM0031](#))

135 [Q108](#)

136 [Q96](#) [Suzanne Raine]

137 Dr Lentzos and Professor Goodman noted the range of challenges this involves, from information overload, to disinformation, information security vulnerabilities and poorly understood biases in data collection and analysis. See Dr Filippa Lentzos (Senior Research Fellow at King’s College London) and Professor Michael Goodman (Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs at King’s College London) ([NSM0009](#))

138 [Q87](#) [Suzanne Raine]

93. According to the former Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security, Professor Anthony Finkelstein, Government decision-making is “increasingly conducted at lower classification, remotely, and with much greater emphasis on data to underpin decision-making”.¹³⁹ Yet Lord McDonald told us that Whitehall struggles in synthesising open-source information with secret intelligence, even though the unclassified space is now “bigger” and “maybe more important” than the classified space. He also noted that the JIC Chair speaks first at NSC meetings, thereby framing the discussion in a way that—in his assessment—is focused primarily on secret intelligence.¹⁴⁰

94. Lt Gen McMaster said that technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data and geotagging were “immensely important” in enabling the “routine use of unclassified sources of information”.¹⁴¹ However, Professor Omand cautioned against drinking “the AI Kool-Aid”, noting that while AI can sort “dumb” data, skilled analysts are still needed to interpret and understand it.¹⁴² In written evidence, Rebellion Defence, an AI software company, similarly stressed the importance of technological and organisational changes that would “bring together human expertise with technology to make better decisions from data”.¹⁴³

95. As a result, Professor Omand and Suzanne Raine called for the creation of a joint centre of expertise on open-source information to drive its use in the intelligence community and across Whitehall, and to ensure that “there is proper training available in the access to and safe use of open sources.” They consequently welcomed the launch of INDEX (the Information and Data Exchange) by the Professional Head of Intelligence Analysis in the Cabinet Office¹⁴⁴—the purpose of which is to improve the sharing of information (analysis, assessment and reporting) and data across government.¹⁴⁵

Counteracting groupthink: diversity of thought and use of challenge

96. The 2004 Butler report on the use of intelligence in making the case for the Iraq War highlighted the dangers of ‘groupthink’—the development of a “prevailing wisdom”. It consequently identified the need for Government policy-making to be exposed to ‘structural challenge’ through established methods and procedures such as red-teaming.¹⁴⁶
¹⁴⁷ Even within the context of the early 2000s, the report stated:

139 Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security, Cabinet Office ([NSM0030](#))

140 [Qq69–70](#) [Lord McDonald]

141 [Q108](#)

142 [Q96](#) [Professor Sir David Omand]

143 Rebellion Defence Limited ([NSM0005](#))

144 Professor Sir David Omand, former UK Security and Intelligence Coordinator in the Cabinet Office (2002–05) and Suzanne Raine, former Head of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (2015–2017) ([NSM0031](#))

145 According to the Government, INDEX will be a “trusted and secure digital service for government”, focusing on “solving the most pressing information and data-related problems”. It will include an accredited cloud that allows centralised access: to OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE material; to the best platforms and tools within government; and to a stream of curated information and data from the public domain. This core capability will be further improved by innovations in technology including machine learning and advanced analytics. The platform is still in the proof-of-concept phase. Email correspondence between the Professional Head of Intelligence Analysis (Cabinet Office) and Committee staff, 24 August 2021

146 Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, [Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction](#), HC 898, para 57

147 The MoD describes a ‘red team’ as “a team that is formed with the objective of subjecting an organisation’s plans, programmes, ideas and assumptions to rigorous analysis and challenge.” MoD, [“Red teaming: a guide to the use of this decision making tool in Defence”](#), accessed 26 August 2021

The more diffuse range of security challenges of the 21st century means that it will not be possible to accumulate the breadth and depth of understanding which intelligence collectors, analysts and users built up over the years about the single subject of the Soviet Union. [...] Well developed imagination at all stages of the intelligence process is required to overcome preconceptions.¹⁴⁸

97. Several witnesses argued that the problem of groupthink persists within the NSC system.¹⁴⁹ They highlighted two broad solutions, the first of which is to open up NSC policy-making processes to greater diversity of thought both within and beyond Government.

98. Lack of diversity within Whitehall's national security community has been recognised as an issue that must be addressed for some time: for example, in 2017, then-NSA Lord Sedwill described diversity and inclusion as 'Mission Critical'.¹⁵⁰ Lord McDonald observed that at least some tendencies towards groupthink within national security stems from the fact that the departments represented around the NSC and NSC(O) table were themselves "pretty un-diverse". Bronwen Maddox described progress in this regard as "painfully slow".¹⁵¹

99. Diversity of thought might also be improved by increased engagement with external experts—something which David Cameron said he wished the NSC had done more, given that "there are a lot of people outside government who know a hell of a lot more than the people inside government".¹⁵² Lord Ricketts further observed that the "broadening" of national security risks—"moving away from the military security area"—means that "we ought to be tapping into wider expertise in the country for risks that are outside the perimeter of classified information."¹⁵³ However, we heard that the Government's engagement with academics continues to be "sporadic and irregular", while much more could be done in relation to civil society, for example.¹⁵⁴

100. The second solution highlighted by witnesses was the greater use of systematic or 'structural' challenge—using techniques and tools such as horizon-scanning, scenario-planning and exploring alternative contingencies and red-teaming¹⁵⁵—as part of Government policy-making processes to test policy options and decisions, and to put "new ideas and possibilities on the table".¹⁵⁶

101. Cat Tully told us that such techniques were not just about testing policy substance, but about creating a "mindset" which internalises the "very deep message that our view of the future is not likely to be the one that plays out".¹⁵⁷ Ms Tully welcomed the fact that

148 Report of a Committee of Privy Counsellors, *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, HC 898, paras 56–57

149 Celia G. Parker (PhD candidate at King's College London) ([NSM0008](#)); Dr Filippa Lentzos (Senior Research Fellow at King's College London) and Professor Michael Goodman (Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs at King's College London) ([NSM0009](#))

150 Cabinet Office, *Mission Critical – Why Inclusion is a National Security Issue and what You Can Do to Help*, July 2017

151 [Q78](#)

152 [Q13](#)

153 [Q27](#)

154 Dr Filippa Lentzos (Senior Research Fellow at King's College London) and Professor Michael Goodman (Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs at King's College London) ([NSM0009](#)); Saferworld ([NSM0016](#))

155 See footnote 147 for a definition of red-teaming. See also Mariam Elgabry (PhD Researcher in Cyber-biosecurity and a founding Director of Enteromics Ltd. at UCL/Enteromics), Dr. Darren Nesbeth (Associate Professor for Biochemical Engineering at Advanced Centre for Biochemical Engineering, UCL), and Prof Shane Johnson (Director of the Dawes Centre for Future Crime at Jill Dando Institute, UCL) ([NSM0026](#))

156 [Q90](#) [Cat Tully]

157 [Qq90, 94](#) [Cat Tully]

the civil service is “beginning to really engage” with such tools and techniques. However, other witnesses sounded a note of caution about such tools if they are not used well: for example, UK Computing Research Committee (UKCRC) warned that red-teaming can “reinforce complacency and unwarranted optimism” if it is not sufficiently independent of the policy-making teams, while Dr Daniel Lomas from the University of Salford observed that the effectiveness of red-teaming exercises depends on the diversity of the participants.¹⁵⁸

102. The NSA told us that new Strategic Advantage Cell in the National Security Secretariat is “tasked explicitly with bringing sustained and rigorous challenge to our grand strategy”.¹⁵⁹

103. The NSC needs high-quality information and analysis to make its decisions. All information provided to the NSC should draw on the best possible sources for the topic under discussion—which, in many instances, will be open-source information and data analysis, supplemented as necessary by diplomatic reporting and secret intelligence. The Government must make the necessary organisational and technological changes that would enable it to bring insight from data together with human expertise.

104. Diversity of thought and exposure to challenge are critical to better decision-making on national security, sharpening policy analysis and guarding against groupthink. The NSC structure should be in regular and constructive contact with external experts, including with academia, think tanks and those potentially involved in the delivery of the national security strategy—for example, relating to cyber security and biosecurity. *In light of previous, unfulfilled commitments to improve external engagement and challenge, we recommend that the Government updates us on progress against this recommendation in six months’ time, and then on an annual basis.*

105. It is vital that the NSC is exposed not only to near-term assessments of risks, but also to longer-term ‘futures thinking’, using a range of tools and techniques such as strategic foresight and horizon-scanning. Such practice is not about predicting the future. Instead, it recognises the reality that the future will not play out as we expect, and so we must be prepared to respond to many possible contingencies. The civil service is already undertaking this work in isolated pockets of best practice, but the Government should consider strengthening this function within the Cabinet Office and giving it a more prominent, routine role in informing NSC discussions. This will better enable Ministers to stress-test their decisions, challenge their underlying assumptions and identify which additional capabilities might best protect the UK’s national security in the long term.

106. *We recommend strengthening the Joint Intelligence Organisation at the centre of Government, ensuring that its remit incorporates providing assessments of the full range of threats and hazards. The Government should also consider tasking it with providing the formal warning function for all national security risks, in the near and longer term. It is essential that the JIO has the capacity to perform this function well and the Treasury should prioritise funding accordingly. The JIO should also ensure that its reporting maximises the volume of open-source information available.*

158 UK Computing Research Committee (UKCRC) ([NSM0023](#)); Dr Daniel Lomas (Lecturer in International History at University of Salford) ([NSM0021](#)). UKCRC is an expert panel of the Institution of Engineering and Technology and the BCS, The Chartered Institute for Information Technology.

159 Sir Stephen Lovegrove (National Security Adviser at Cabinet Office) ([NSM0036](#))

Robust risk management processes

107. The Government uses risk management to “compare, assess and prioritise all major disruptive risks to our national security”, including man-made threats and natural or accidental hazards.¹⁶⁰ The most serious risks to UK national security are captured in the classified National Security Risk Assessment (see Box 3), the most recent iteration of which was completed in 2019. The Government has previously published high-level summaries of the NSRA in 2010 and 2015, alongside the national security strategies. However, in 2020 the Government combined it with the public National Risk Register instead, without setting out its prioritisation of risks.¹⁶¹

Box 3: The National Security Risk Assessment

The NSRA is intended to identify and assess future security risks, generate actions, and offer evidence to enable central and local government to undertake contingency planning. This includes highlighting the common consequences arising from a range of risks, both domestic and international. The NSRA formerly organised risks into three ‘tiers’, based on a matrix assessment of their likelihood plotted against their impact. Previous Tier 1 risks have included a major accident or natural hazard, such as a severe flooding, and a hostile attack on UK cyber space by a state or non-state actor.

The NSRA process is led by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) in the Cabinet Office and is informed by intelligence and information from across Government, as well as contributions from external experts. It is updated roughly every two years.

The CCS will use the next NSRA in 2022 to establish a National Exercise Programme, with cross-government exercises having focused primarily on EU exit and covid-19 risks since 2019.

Source: JCNSS, First Report of Session 2019–21, *Biosecurity and national security*, HL 195, HC 611; HM Government, “National Risk Register: 2020 edition”, December 2020; Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#))

108. In our scrutiny of the national security machinery, we have sought to build on the findings of our biosecurity inquiry last year, in which we used the Government’s handling of UK biological security and covid-19 as a ‘test case’ for its management of Tier 1 (highest-priority) national security risks.¹⁶² We were also mindful of the work being undertaken in parallel by the House of Lords Select Committee on Risk Assessment and Risk Planning. As such, we have focused our attention on:

- The utility of the NSRA as a tool for driving understanding of, and preparation for, national security risks across Government; and
- Mechanisms for central governance and oversight of cross-government risk management, and the potential of the ‘three lines of defence’ model as an alternative approach.

160 “Fact sheet 2: National Security Risk Assessment”, 2010

161 Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#)); JCNSS, First Special Report of Session 2019–21, *Biosecurity and national security: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2019–21*, HC 1279

162 JCNSS, First Report of Session 2019–21, *Biosecurity and national security*, HL 195, HC 611

Utility of the National Security Risk Assessment

109. The Integrated Review explicitly recognised the need to review the Government's approach to risk assessment.¹⁶³ We have heard similar concerns to those raised during our biosecurity inquiry about how the NSRA is drawn up, and how it is turned into action by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) and departments. These concerns included:

- Whether the **methodology** used to create the NSRA can accommodate the complexity of risks in an increasingly interconnected world. According to Sam Hilton of the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk (University of Cambridge), the NSRA does not sufficiently explore: high-risk, high-uncertainty risks (where estimating the likelihood is difficult); 'extreme risks' which are of low probability but high in potential impact;¹⁶⁴ emerging risks (such as a new infectious disease); and linked and compounding risks.¹⁶⁵ He also observed that planning for these types of risks "varies hugely from department to department", comparing the Environment Agency's Thames Estuary 2100 risk plan favourably with the preparation for a pandemic by the Department of Health and Social Care, for example;¹⁶⁶
- A **National Risk Register (NRR) which is incomplete** because it does not list the risks to the UK's goals and plans, as a corporate register would do. Ms Raine called on the Government to identify both what would thwart its strategic goals as it starts to implement the Integrated Review and how to mitigate these risks;¹⁶⁷
- An NSRA that is **not easily translated into action** by Ministers and civil servants because it encompasses too many risks—a view expressed in an oral evidence session by Theresa May and Professor Omand;¹⁶⁸
- A **mismatch between prioritisation and funding** under the tiers system that was used in iterations of the NSRA before 2019.¹⁶⁹ Lord Ricketts described the lack of spending on emerging threats as a "cultural problem in Whitehall".¹⁷⁰ However, Lord Hammond disputed Lord Ricketts' assessment that finance ministries were generally unwilling to fund preparedness for events that might not happen;¹⁷¹ and

163 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021, p. 89

164 Dr Toby Ord, an Oxford academic and existential risk expert, said: "An existential catastrophe would destroy the UK's present and the future—affecting both present citizens and all future citizens. They therefore have uniquely high stakes—because the UK would by definition be unable to recover from one single such disaster." Dr Toby Ord (Senior Research Fellow at Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University) ([NSM0013](#))

165 For instance, the covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated how a crisis in one part of the world can quickly become global, and how a health crisis can quickly become an economic and trade crisis.

166 Mr Sam Hilton (Research Affiliate at Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#)). See also Dr Toby Ord (Senior Research Fellow at Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University) ([NSM0013](#))

167 Suzanne Raine, "[Half of the National Risk Register is Missing](#)", *RUSI Newsbrief* (Vol. 41, No. 1, January/February 2021)

168 [Q47](#); [Q92](#) [Professor Sir David Omand]; Mr Ed Arnold (Director at The D Group) ([NSM0014](#))

169 *Rethinking Security* ([NSM0017](#)). Our predecessor Committee also commented on the mismatch between the categorisation of a nuclear attack as a Tier 2 risk and the scale of Government spending on the nuclear deterrent, which far outstrips spending on Tier 1 risks. See JCNSS, First Report of Session 2016–17, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review*, HL 18, HC 153, para 102

170 [Q25](#)

171 [Q25](#); [Q54](#)

- **Limited opportunities for external challenge** as part of the risk assessment process. While the CCS and departments do undertake consultation in drawing up the NSRA, the Government has acknowledged that improvement is needed.¹⁷² The think tank Reform called for a presumption towards transparency, and for the establishment of an Independent Civil Contingencies Advisory Group to feed into the risk assessment process, including by convening “independent challenge groups”.¹⁷³ Sam Hilton pointed out that the Swiss government refers its risk assessment to the multi-disciplinary Paul Scherrer Institute for an independent second opinion, while the Norwegian government has a “wide consultation process that has driven feedback from all sectors at all levels”.¹⁷⁴

110. Sir Stephen Lovegrove told us that the NSRA methodology is currently under routine review in preparation for the 2022 iteration. Undertaken with support from the Royal Academy of Engineering, the review will consider lessons identified from covid-19 as well as how to improve the use of independent challenge and communication of risk.¹⁷⁵ Sir Stephen would not commit to publishing the next NSRA, stating that decisions “have not yet been taken”.¹⁷⁶

Using the NSRA to prioritise risks: no more tiers

111. NSRAs have previously categorised national security risks in three tiers, based on an assessment of their likelihood and potential impact. In the closing stages of our inquiry, the Government told us that the tiers were removed for the 2019 iteration of the NSRA.¹⁷⁷ Michael Gove explained that the decision to do so

was made to maintain the separation between the assessment of the risk and the prioritisation decisions and judgements that drive capability building; these discussions are informed by the NSRA but should happen separately to the assessment process.¹⁷⁸

112. We asked the Minister how the Government was now prioritising its efforts on national security risks in terms of ministerial and departmental time, exercises and funding. He said that: the NSC “routinely discusses national security risks and decides where to prioritise efforts”; the Integrated Review “set out the government’s priorities in national security and foreign policy”, using the NSRA as “part of its evidence base”; and that the “upcoming national resilience strategy will further set out HMG priorities in this area”. He added that “Lead Government Departments (LGDs) are responsible for planning and overseeing levels of preparedness for their risks, with ultimate accountability residing with the Secretary of State.”¹⁷⁹

113. We received a confusing answer to our question as to the Government’s highest-priority risks under the 2019 NSRA. Mr Gove said: “The NSRA does not prioritise risks for preparedness purposes.” He then described a differentiated approach to the Government’s

172 Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#))

173 Reform think tank ([NSM0027](#))

174 Mr Sam Hilton (Research Affiliate at Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#))

175 Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#)); HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, [CP 403](#), March 2021, p. 89

176 National Security Adviser ([NSM0024](#))

177 Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#))

178 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

179 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

treatment of national security risks, saying:

For low to moderate impact and likelihood risks, risk-agnostic planning is developed based on the identified Planning Assumptions, (which set out the common consequences across the NSRA scenarios). For red risks (high impact and moderate to high likelihood), more specific planning is implemented that draws on both risk-agnostic and risk-specific capabilities.¹⁸⁰

It is unclear how the new traffic-light system of risk categorisation maps onto the previous tiers approach. The more detailed preparation for 'red risks' suggests they are considered a priority. We are unsure why the Government will not tell us what these red risks are, when previous Governments were content to publish such information.

114. This belated revelation about the removal of the tiers in NSRAs only adds to our concerns about the seriousness and consistency of the Government's approach to risk management. In particular, it is unclear what weight the Government put upon the NSRA in setting its goals and allocating funding under the Integrated Review.¹⁸¹ Ms Raine drew our attention to the "loose and unstructured" way in which the word 'risk' is used throughout the Integrated Review publication. It remains unclear how the Government is connecting the risk management and policy-making processes via the NSC and its supporting structures.¹⁸²

115. We also note that the Government failed to tell us during our biosecurity inquiry last year that it was no longer using numbered tiers in the NSRA, even though our inquiry—and many of our conclusions and recommendations—explicitly considered pandemics as an example of a Tier 1 risk. The Government had many opportunities to inform us of this change, including a private briefing by officials, written and oral evidence, and its formal response to our report. As such, it is difficult to find reassurance in the NSA's statement that the Government has "not jettisoned the risk assessment, and a sense of which risks are more critical, more catastrophic and more likely".¹⁸³

116. The Government should have informed Parliament that it had removed the tiers from the 2019 National Security Risk Assessment during our biosecurity inquiry in 2020 or in its response to our Biosecurity report.

Central governance and oversight: three lines of defence model

117. Michael Gove said that the NSC "is the collective decision making committee which considers matters related to resilience." He explained that

Within the CO [Cabinet Office], Paymaster General is the Minister responsible for resilience and risk, and within this role oversees the delivery of the NSRA. Ministerial responsibility of the Resilience Strategy is currently being finalised.

Mr Gove also confirmed that—as the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—he would chair any NSM meetings on resilience, even though he was not the Minister responsible. These meetings would "cover operational decisions, discuss strategy and deal with lower-level crises."¹⁸⁴

180 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

181 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

182 [Q84](#) [Suzanne Raine]

183 [Q137](#) [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]

184 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

118. Beneath the level of the NSC, the Government is continuing its review of cross-department governance arrangements for resilience, including the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. According to Mr Gove, the review will consider the lessons from the covid-19 response and EU exit 'No Deal' preparations "when it is assessed that operational responders and wider government stakeholders have greater capacity to engage."¹⁸⁵

119. Witnesses reinforced the findings of our biosecurity inquiry that there is a lack of cross-government leadership—at ministerial and official level—on national security risk management, leading to an inconsistent approach across Government.¹⁸⁶ We heard that:

- Political and civil service **short-termism undermines the risk assessment process**, reducing the incentive for thorough investigations of longer-term risks. For Sam Hilton, "insufficient long-term thinking, systems thinking, futures thinking and technical expertise across the civil service reduces the ability of staff to manage risks and to work with situations of high-uncertainty";¹⁸⁷
- The **Civil Contingencies Secretariat must be empowered** to hold departments to account as part of a stronger system of checks and balances. It must also be able to provide greater expertise to departments in drawing up high-quality plans;¹⁸⁸
- The **'Lead Government Department' model is inadequate** in the face of complex national security risks.¹⁸⁹ Reform argued that "it cannot fall only to a Lead Government Department to prepare for a designated risk".¹⁹⁰ Suzanne Raine has also pointed out that "Some of these departments have louder voices at the centre than others, which may mean their risks are prioritised because they get more attention".¹⁹¹ However, any changes to this model would need to consider the implications for departments' statutory and regulatory responsibilities for critical national infrastructure sectors. It would also need to consider the implications for accountability to Parliament; and
- There should be an **established mechanism for ministerial coordination**. The NSC sub-committee dedicated to threats, hazards, risks and contingencies was disbanded in July 2019, as part of a wider Cabinet committee consolidation.¹⁹² However, witnesses said a ministerial coordination committee was needed to "ease the portfolio split between the Cabinet Office and MHCLG" in particular, given their "differing responsibilities regarding resilience".¹⁹³ As noted earlier, the Devolved Administrations also called for a mechanism by which they could feed into the NSRA.¹⁹⁴

185 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

186 [Q84](#) [Suzanne Raine]; Mr Sam Hilton (Research Affiliate at Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#))

187 Mr Sam Hilton (Research Affiliate at Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#))

188 Mr Sam Hilton (Research Affiliate at Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#)); Cambridge University's Centre for the Study of Existential Risk ([NSM0029](#))

189 Under this model, responsibility for resourcing and overseeing levels of preparedness to the potential consequences of each risk is assigned to a single department, which is tasked with coordinating across Government as necessary.

190 Reform think tank ([NSM0027](#))

191 Reform think tank ([NSM0027](#)); Suzanne Raine, "[Half of the National Risk Register is Missing](#)", *RUSI Newsbrief* (Vol. 41, No. 1, January/February 2021)

192 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

193 Dr Rowena Hill (Associate Professor of Disasters and Emergencies at Nottingham Trent University); Rich Pickford (Knowledge Exchange and Impact Officer at Nottingham Civic Exchange); Adam Potter (Research Assistant at Nottingham Trent University) ([NSM0010](#))

194 [Q110](#) [Joe Griffin]

120. Risk experts called for the Government to adopt the ‘three lines of defence’ approach to risk management (see Box 4). For Dr Toby Ord, an Oxford academic, this would be a timely change, given the experience of the covid-19 pandemic, the publication of the Integrated Review and wider efforts to reform the civil service, and one that would allow the Government to “become a world leader in this field”.¹⁹⁵

Box 4: The ‘three lines of defence’ model of risk management

The ‘three lines of defence’ model of risk management has long been common in the private sector, particularly since the global financial crisis of 2007–08. Its aim is to ensure a coordinated and cohesive approach to risk management, by organising essential roles and responsibilities into three ‘lines of defence’:

- i) Day-to-day risk management and control, spread across a business or organisation, with individuals responsible for corrective actions and direct management of risks;
- ii) Functions that oversee risk (such as a Chief Risk Officer), with limited independence from the rest of the organisation; and
- iii) An independent assurance process (for example, an external audit), typically reporting to the governing body for the organisation.

The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, a standard-setting body of central banks from 28 jurisdictions, noted in 2011 that a “strong risk culture and good communication among the three lines” are also important characteristics.

Source: Deloitte, “[Project Risk Management: Applying the Three Lines of Defence Model to Project Risk Management](#)”; Mr Sam Hilton (Research Affiliate at Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#)); Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, [Principles for the Sound Management of Operational Risk](#), June 2011

121. Witnesses suggested different ways this model might be put into practice by the Government.¹⁹⁶ Sam Hilton called for the Government to appoint an independent government Chief Risk Officer (CRO) as the second line of defence, supported by a dedicated unit to oversee the process of national security risk management. Dr Ord alternatively argued that this new model should focus more narrowly on extreme or existential risks, pointing to the findings of his research that: “There is very roughly a one in six chance of existential catastrophe in the next 100 years from extreme risks including pandemics, extreme climate change scenarios, nuclear conflicts and the creation of unaligned artificial general intelligence”.¹⁹⁷

122. Commenting on the proposed model, Suzanne Raine said that the CRO should be a senior figure within the Cabinet Office—whether the JIC Chair, the NSA or a new appointment. She also stressed the importance of connecting the CRO to cross-government analytical, monitoring and warning functions. However, she doubted whether it would be helpful to create an external auditing and expertise body for “a lot of the really complicated, interconnected risks that we deal with on a daily basis in national security”, such as terrorism and state threats.¹⁹⁸ Doing so would also require mechanisms for sharing potentially sensitive information securely and in confidence.

195 Dr Toby Ord (Senior Research Fellow at Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University) ([NSM0013](#))

196 For example, Mr Sam Hilton (Research Affiliate at Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#)); Dr Toby Ord (Senior Research Fellow at Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University) ([NSM0013](#)); Cambridge University’s Centre for the Study of Existential Risk ([NSM0029](#))

197 Dr Toby Ord (Senior Research Fellow at Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University) ([NSM0013](#))

198 [Q93](#) [Suzanne Raine]

123. We are seriously concerned by the apparent downgrading of risk management in central Government. There is still not an NSC sub-committee dedicated to the management of risks. Central oversight and governance of risk management across departments remains under review. It is also unclear how the Government is prioritising its efforts and funding now that it no longer uses tiers to categorise risks in the National Security Risk Assessment.

124. Risk management across government is loose, unstructured, and lacking in central oversight and accountability at both the ministerial and official level. The centre of Government continues to maintain a relatively hands-off approach, rather than actively holding 'lead departments' to account for preparedness. In the wake of the covid-19 pandemic and the weaknesses it has exposed, this approach is demonstrably inadequate in managing the nature and scale of the threats and hazards we face today.

125. *We recommend that the Government:*

- *Re-establish a ministerial governance structure for overseeing risk and resilience, with a strong connection to the NSC—for example, by re-establishing a dedicated NSC sub-committee. This ministerial committee should be directly connected to the cross-government warning function described earlier.*
- *Establish greater clarity of responsibility for national security risks, by designating Chief Risk Officers in each department and agency, overseen by a Chief Risk Officer in the Cabinet Office. The work of the central CRO would need to be deconflicted from the strategy and policy focus of the Deputy National Security Adviser for National Security and Resilience.*

The Government should also consider establishing an external audit function for the assessment and management of risks where appropriate. The Government should update us on its progress against this recommendation when it informs us of the outcomes of its review of the NSRA methodology and/or the biosecurity governance review.

A national security profession

126. The Integrated Review stated that its delivery “will depend on the availability of people with the right skills, experience and security clearances to form flexible, diverse and multidisciplinary teams.” It acknowledged that “faster progress is needed” in building such capabilities.¹⁹⁹ As part of our inquiry, we have considered the more fundamental need to establish a cross-government national security profession—that is, a recognisable community of civil servants with a shared sense of mission, doctrine and knowledge base.²⁰⁰ One option for doing so is the establishment of a cross-government College for National Security (CfNS) as part of the Government’s new Curriculum and Campus for

199 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, p. 99

200 We use ‘doctrine’ here to refer to a fundamental set of principles that guide all those working in national security across Government as they pursue its national security objectives. The definition is that used by RAND Corporation, “[Military Doctrine](#)”, accessed 23 August 2021

Government Skills²⁰¹—a proposal that was made in the Integrated Review.²⁰²

127. Former Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security Professor Anthony Finkelstein observed that the UK is “unusual amongst its allies in having no government-sponsored institution capable of driving the learning necessary to the formulation and execution of a modern national security doctrine.” He told us that a CfNS could play a key role in equipping national security professionals for the “changed environment” by:

- Promoting new curricula, new thinking and analytic skills;
- Sustaining the UK’s leading role in national security thought and practice;
- Providing a platform for innovative solutions to the toughest national security challenges; and
- Facilitating links with allies and boosting the UK’s reputation for innovative problem-solving.

In particular, he said, all national security professionals will need a “significantly enhanced understanding of accelerating technological and societal developments”, which will have a “potentially game-changing impact on our security and way of life.”²⁰³

128. Responses to the CfNS proposal have been mixed, and we note that similar initiatives have previously failed due to a lack of “traction” within Whitehall.²⁰⁴ Sir Ian Andrews, Vice-Chair of the National Preparedness Commission and former Second Permanent Secretary at the MoD, described it as potentially “invaluable” and “overdue”, given its potential to “develop a depth of mutual understanding and trust between all those entities likely to be involved in a response to a future crisis”, including beyond Whitehall.²⁰⁵ By contrast, Theresa May questioned the need for a College for National Security, comparing existing “relationships in the security field” favourably with those within the police, for example.²⁰⁶ It is also not yet clear how the CfNS would avoid duplicating existing analogous offerings, such as the FCDO’s Diplomatic Academy, and the MoD’s Defence Academy and Royal College of Defence Studies,²⁰⁷ as well as the higher-education opportunities available to some civil servants.²⁰⁸

201 The curriculum and training campus was elaborated upon in the Declaration on Government Reform, which committed to “a new digital way to access learning, a mandatory induction package, and a data masterclass for the SCS [Senior Civil Service]”. The Government also plans to “bolster traditional skills such as drafting written advice, understanding statistical concepts, and appreciating how Parliament works, as well as developing expertise in areas including digital, data, science, and project and commercial delivery”. Cabinet Office, [“Policy paper: Declaration on Government Reform”](#), 15 June 2021

202 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, p. 99

203 Professor Finkelstein listed data, analytics, novel sensors, commercialised space, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, behavioural sciences, bioengineering, and global technologically mediated platforms as examples of technological developments that all national security professionals will need to understand. Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security, Cabinet Office (NSM0030)

204 Sir Ian Andrews, [“A College for National Security \(and Resilience\)?”](#), National Preparedness Commission, 15 June 2021

205 Sir Ian Andrews, [“A College for National Security \(and Resilience\)?”](#), National Preparedness Commission, 15 June 2021; Professor Sir David Omand, former UK Security and Intelligence Coordinator in the Cabinet Office (2002–05) and Suzanne Raine, former Head of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (2015–2017) (NSM0031); Q87

206 Q36

207 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [“Diplomatic Academy”](#), accessed 23 August 2021; Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, [“RCDS programme”](#), accessed 23 August 2021

208 Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security, Cabinet Office (NSM0030)

129. We welcome the Government's plans for a College for National Security in principle. It is essential to create a shared mission, language and understanding of threats and opportunities. It is also critical that Whitehall develops new skills and policy knowledge relevant to the digital age: the use of data in policy-making and understanding of the impact of technological change should be instinctive among civil servants—rather than being the preserve of the expert few within Government. A College could also build networks and relationships between key stakeholders within and outside Government, helping to diversify the voices contributing to our national security. However, its ability to succeed depends on the clarity of its relationship with existing bodies such as the Diplomatic Academy and the Royal College of Defence Studies; commitment from senior leaders from across the sector; and sufficient resources to deliver the level of technical capabilities required for current and future national security challenges.

Training for Ministers

130. Providing oral evidence to our biosecurity inquiry, the then Paymaster General, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, said: “you can have all sorts of structures in place [... but] what matters more is attitude” among Ministers.²⁰⁹ The everyday pressures on Ministers can make it difficult to find time for training. We also heard that some elected politicians “naturally bridle” at the suggestion it is needed.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, Ms Mordaunt called for all Ministers—not just Secretaries of State—to be “trained to deal with situations and in the best shape possible to make the right decisions.” She suggested establishing a training programme for MPs before they become Ministers. She also noted the importance of exercises in making sure that Ministers are “drilled”.²¹¹

131. The NSA told us that national resilience exercising has been focused principally on EU Exit and covid-19 risks since 2019, including a series of cross-Whitehall exercises at both official and ministerial level. From 2022, Sir Stephen said, the Civil Contingencies Secretariat will re-establish a comprehensive National Exercise Programme to reflect NSRA priorities.²¹²

132. It is vital that the NSC receives intelligence and policy options informed by a high-performing civil service with advanced capabilities, but there must be a willing and reliable customer at the end of the national security ‘supply chain’. We agree with the former Paymaster General, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, that the attitude and experience of Ministers are essential factors in effective policy- and decision-making, and that some form of ‘training’ is indispensable. We therefore welcome the Government’s plans for a National Exercise Programme in 2022 and look forward to hearing more details, including which Ministers will participate.

Transparency and accountability

133. The Integrated Review places significant emphasis on the role of non-government actors in meeting the security challenges facing the UK in the coming years—referring, for example, to a ‘whole-of-UK effort’ in delivering the UK’s goal of sustaining strategic

209 Oral evidence taken before JCNSS on 9 November 2021, HC (2019–21) [611](#), Q64 [Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP]

210 [Q94](#)

211 Oral evidence taken before JCNSS on 9 November 2021, HC (2019–21) [611](#), Q64 [Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP]

212 Cabinet Office ([NSM0032](#))

advantage through science and technology, a 'whole-of-nation' approach to cyber, and a 'whole-of-society' approach to building national resilience.

134. Lord Hammond expressed scepticism about this ambition, especially given the nature of today's security threats. Although he was in favour of opening up government processes to a group of people "outside the ministerial and official circle" who are vetted in some way, he cautioned:

It would be a huge mistake to sacrifice security for transparency in a world where we know that most of our adversaries have extremely non-transparent systems. Non-transparency delivers some advantages to our potential opponents.

He added:

It is far easier for a country like China to look at the whole of its society and think about how it would mobilise it to provide national resilience than it is for us, in a liberal democracy, where we are naturally wary of government seeking to direct private actors, except in times of dire national emergency.²¹³

135. In contrast, Cat Tully strongly welcomed the Integrated Review's approach as "a process of engagement rather than a document", noting the public-engagement initiatives on "big strategic questions" in France, Germany, Spain, Canada and Singapore. She said:

The prize is huge on this. The risk of failure is a massive national security risk in itself, which is a next generation that is unconnected to the processes of this institution of government.

Ms Tully said that building intergenerational consensus on the UK's role in the world can happen in many ways, "whether it is engaging at a Select Committee level or engaging with Treasury".²¹⁴ We also note the work of the non-profit Open Data Institute in encouraging and enabling a more open philosophy in policy-making through open data, open protocols and open-source tools.²¹⁵

136. Other witnesses were not quite so ambitious and instead simply called for greater transparency of the NSC's objectives so that UK civil society, academia and the private sector can better contribute to the UK's national security goals. The NGO Saferworld urged the Government to release unclassified versions of the NSC's sub-strategies, noting the commitment of previous Governments to do so.²¹⁶ UKCRC said that the lack of visibility of NSC priorities was hampering world-leading scientists from knowing how best to contribute to the Government's integrated approach, and it called on the Government to break down "silos" between the NSC, lead departments and UK Research and Innovation.²¹⁷

213 [Q64](#)

214 [Q91](#); see also School of International Futures, "[A National Strategy for Next Generations: Pilot Programme Report](#)", October 2020, Executive Summary

215 "[Projects and Services](#)", Open Data Institute, accessed 14 September 2021

216 Saferworld ([NSM0016](#))

217 UK Computing Research Committee (UKCRC) ([NSM0023](#))

The role of the UK Parliament and parliamentary scrutiny

137. Ms Tully described how Parliament's efforts to hold the Government to account can encourage it to think about, and plan for, the long term.²¹⁸ As Saferworld pointed out,²¹⁹ Professor John Bew—the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser who led the Integrated Review for the Prime Minister's Office—has also previously highlighted the value of parliamentary scrutiny for national security. In a 2017 Policy Exchange paper, he and his co-author Gabriel Elefteriu pointed to the “important contribution” of the JCNSS and other Select Committees. They added: “Both in terms of bringing foreign policy issues before the public, and as a forum of strategic debate, parliament has a crucial role to play”.²²⁰

138. It is difficult for us to fulfil this role without access to the information we need.²²¹ As Lord Hammond observed, there are good reasons why the Government is less transparent on national security than other policy areas. Nevertheless, our predecessor Committees have enjoyed a more open relationship with Government. For example, previous administrations have shared with us in confidence:

- NSC agendas, including topics, the titles of papers for discussion and the departments presenting them;
- Reasons for NSC and NSC(O) meetings being missed by the NSA;
- SDSR implementation reports;
- A biannual summary of what each NSC sub-committee had discussed; and
- A list of the Government's top national security priorities, and the names of the SROs overseeing them.

This is basic information which greatly assisted our scrutiny of the Government's activities and our ability to hold Ministers to account for their commitments to the public. In the early days of the Cameron administration, the Government also delivered press briefings on select NSC meetings.²²²

139. We also note the findings of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee that Parliament's challenge in scrutinising national security matters will only increase “as the Government continues to implement the fused approach to security that it outlined in the Integrated Review.”²²³ This is evident from the debates in both Houses on the role of Select Committees in scrutinising the work of the Investment Security Unit.²²⁴ The BEIS Select Committee will be responsible for overseeing the work of the ISU but sensitive information will only be provided to the Committee Chair in private, on privy council terms.²²⁵

218 [Q84](#)

219 Saferworld ([NSM0016](#))

220 John Bew and Gabriel Elefteriu, “[Foreign Policy and National Security in the New Parliament](#)”, Policy Exchange, 2017, pp. 2, 6

221 Saferworld ([NSM0016](#)); Rethinking Security ([NSM0017](#))

222 For example, see Prime Minister's Office, “[Number 10 Press Briefing—Morning, from 27 September 2010](#)” and Prime Minister's Office, “[Press briefing: afternoon 25 June 2013](#)”

223 Foreign Affairs Committee, Third Report of Session 2021–22, [Sovereignty for sale: the FCDO's role in protecting British strategic assets](#), HC 197, para 63

224 HC Deb, 20 January 2021, col [988ff](#); HC Deb, 26 April 2021, col [151ff](#); HL Deb, 4 February 2021, col [2333ff](#); HL Deb, 2 March 2021, col [312GCff](#); HL Deb, 16 March 2021, col [195ff](#); HL Deb, 15 April 2021, col [1453ff](#)

225 [Correspondence with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on the role of the Foreign Affairs Committee in scrutinising the work of the Investment Security Unit \(ISU\)](#), dated 10 May 2021 and 28 April 2021

140. In correspondence, Michael Gove assured us that the Government is “committed to ensuring Select Committees have the information they need to fulfil their vital oversight roles”.²²⁶ In addition, the NSA referred to the new ‘Strategic Advantage Cell’ within the National Security Secretariat, which will be tasked with improving relationships with academia, think tanks and parliamentarians. He further advised us that the Government would “try” to bring the first annual report for the Integrated Review before Parliament “before recess next year”—by late July 2022.²²⁷

141. However, we received a mixed response from the Government to our subsequent requests for further information. We asked that the Government share, in confidence, the NSC’s priority deliverables for the Integrated Review each year; but Michael Gove told us it would “not be appropriate to provide a running public commentary on the changing priorities of the NSC, some of which could be sensitive at the time”. He committed to providing future updates on the biosecurity review and the National Exercise Programme that will be established in 2022. However, Mr Gove was non-committal on sharing the findings of the review of NSRA methodology, saying simply that the “findings are not yet available”.²²⁸

142. Transparency and accountability are key building blocks of effective decision-making and implementation in national security, increasing opportunities for challenge and connecting the public to national security decision-makers. Inevitably, there will be some issues that require discussions to take place behind closed doors. However, greater openness is essential in an environment in which citizens are subject to national security threats on a daily basis and, as such, are central actors in building national resilience. There is no reason why the NSC and its machinery should not aspire to be part of the wider open-data movement within Government, using open protocols and the best open-source tools available. However, integrating these effectively into policy-making will require a shift in culture and skills.

143. We agree with Professor John Bew, who led the Integrated Review for the Prime Minister’s Office, that Parliament has a crucial role to play as a forum for strategic debate on national security. To that end, we recommend that the Government commits to an annual report to Parliament on national security and the Integrated Review, including notable updates to the trends outlined in the document, an update on the overall threat and opportunity picture, and progress against the Government’s national security objectives. Recognising the Committee’s proper role in scrutinising the NSC and its products, we also call on the Government to return to a more open relationship. To support our vital scrutiny work, we ask that the Government submits to us annually (in confidence, if needed):

- a) *Priority Integrated Review deliverables and progress against them;*
- b) *NSC and NSM agendas, showing agenda items, paper titles and the name of the department or agency submitting them;*
- c) *Attendees at each NSC and NSM meeting;*
- d) *Reasons for any meeting cancellation or delays;*

226 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

227 [Q125](#) [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]; [Q139](#) [Sir Stephen Lovegrove]

228 Cabinet Office ([NSM0035](#))

- e) *An update on external engagement (e.g. with policy experts) throughout the year, to inform NSC and NSM papers; and*
- f) *An update on the work of the College for National Security, if it is established, detailing the training provided and the numbers of participants, broken down by department, agency and type of external organisation.*

4 The NSC and Afghanistan

144. Providing oral evidence in June, Lt Gen McMaster told us that

One of the ways to measure success is the degree to which the Government are reacting to events, or have strategic frameworks in place that allow the Government to try to bend events toward well-defined goals and objectives.²²⁹

145. Although the fall of Kabul came after we finished taking evidence for our inquiry, we felt it important to consider recent events in light of their implications for the functioning of the NSC, which existed for eleven of the twenty years that the UK had a major presence in Afghanistan. It is precisely the type of complex, cross-government policy area that the NSC and its supporting structures (including more recently an NSIG) were established to manage—involving the orchestration of many departments and agencies to deliver the Government's strategy, and coordination with multiple allies and partners. Indeed, we understand that Afghanistan was a relatively frequent agenda item for the NSC over the past decade, including in the past year.

146. Nevertheless, as with covid-19—the case study from our last inquiry on biosecurity—events in Afghanistan raise serious questions about the role of the NSC, its strategy-making ability, the effectiveness with which it directs cross-government operational activity and planning, and the delivery of the Integrated Review. As Lord Darroch, former NSA and Ambassador to the US, has observed, it appears that the UK has “rather passively acquiesced in the foreign policy disaster”, from which it will take “quite a long time” to recover.²³⁰

147. Among the most important concerns raised by the trajectory of events in Afghanistan about the functioning of the NSC are:

- The extent to which the Government, since 2001, has articulated a **meaningful strategy for Afghanistan, identifying the UK's unique interests and concerns** within an international coalition. In September, the then Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, publicly questioned whether the UK had ever had clear military objectives, the means to achieve them or a “clear and coherent exit strategy”. Professor Michael Clarke, Distinguished Fellow at the defence think tank RUSI, has observed that while many UK leaders have “pretended” to be enacting a strategy in Afghanistan, in reality “they were operating little more than the UK's tactics within a US strategy over which they had next to no influence.”²³¹ It is unclear what steps, if any, the Government took to voice opposition to President Biden's deadline for US and NATO troop departure, either before it was announced or in the weeks that followed;
- The failure to **orchestrate a timely, unified operational response** to the United States' decision to withdraw and its timeline for doing so. The Government had 18 months to plan for the final drawdown of NATO troops in Afghanistan. Yet planning only began in January 2021 according to the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), or in April 2021 according to the then Foreign Secretary.²³² Press

229 Q106

230 Catherine Neilan, “Afghanistan withdrawal ‘disaster’ risks undermining Global Britain project, warns Lord Darroch”, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 August 2021

231 Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 September 2021, HC (2021–22) 685, Qq23, 116; Michael Clarke, “Afghanistan and the UK's Illusion of Strategy”, RUSI, 16 August 2021

232 Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 September 2021, HC (2021–22) 685, Q13; [The Andrew Marr Show](#), BBC, 5 September 2021

reports and questions raised by MPs suggest that key pieces of planning were subsequently missed or mishandled. These included: a joined-up response between the FCDO and MoD in evacuating UK nationals and vulnerable Afghan citizens; a single scheme for those seeking evacuation, instead of the three currently run by different departments; the failure to identify and verify those eligible for evacuation in advance; the late approval of the Home Office resettlement scheme, which reportedly came on 18 August—three days after the fall of Kabul; and the FCDO's failure to lay the ground for safe passage of evacuees via third countries in the region;^{233,234}

- The **resilience and flexibility of the NSC system**, and its ability to handle more than one major policy issue at a time. The Doha Agreement was signed in February 2020 but the NSC did not meet for several weeks thereafter due to the covid-19 pandemic.²³⁵ Furthermore, UK Government planning for NATO troop withdrawal did not begin until at least January 2021—and as late as April in some parts of the Government such as the FCDO—despite the original deadline for withdrawal of 1 May 2021.²³⁶ It is unclear whether the UK Government was aware of the Biden Administration's plans to extend the deadline before it was announced in mid-April this year;
- The UK's **strategic constancy**. The Integrated Review made only two passing references to Afghanistan, while the attendant Defence Command Paper devoted one short paragraph to the Afghan 'train, advise, assist' mission. Suzanne Raine has warned against such 'flip-flopping' between counter-terrorism and "state power rivalry" as the driver of UK foreign policy. Both, she said, "require constant, not episodic, engagement";²³⁷ and
- What events in Afghanistan, and particularly the approach taken by the United States, **mean for the Integrated Review**. Lord Ricketts has commented that its "airy assumptions of British exceptionalism have not survived their first contact with reality". Press reports suggest Ministers have called for the Integrated Review to be revisited, given its foundational assumption of a globally engaged US. The Government will at least need to consider whether it used its various links with the US to best effect in seeking to influence the Biden Administration over the past several months, and how it might work differently on other priorities in the future. Experts have also debated what events in Afghanistan mean for NATO, with General (ret'd) Sir Richard Barrons (former commander of Joint Forces Command) arguing it has been shown to be a "very limited concept and

233 ["I don't believe Taliban pledge on women's rights, Priti Patel says"](#), *BBC News*, 18 August 2021; Eleni Courea and Larisa Brown, ["Ex-forces chiefs condemn failure to protect Afghan interpreters"](#), *The Times*, 28 July 2021; oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 September 2021, HC (2021–22) [685](#); HC Deb, 18 August 2021, col [1253ff](#); HC Deb, 6 September 2021, col [21ff](#)

234 The Home Office resettlement scheme had not been launched when we considered our report for publication, almost a month after the scheme was first announced.

235 White House, ["Remarks by President Biden on the Way Forward in Afghanistan"](#), 14 April 2021

236 State Department, ["Agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan \[Doha Agreement\]"](#), 29 February 2021; oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 September 2021, HC (2021–22) [685](#), Q13

237 Lord Ricketts, ["The Afghanistan crisis has exposed Global Britain's delusions of grandeur"](#), *New Statesman*, 25 August 2021; Suzanne Raine, ["What should we do when terrorists go quiet?"](#), *Engelsberg Ideas*, 20 May 2021

a very limited force” without US military power.²³⁸

148. Professor Clarke described the situation as a “sobering story for the UK as it embarks on its ‘Global Britain’ future in the 2020s”, with Afghanistan now in a “strategically worse” position than before the 9/11 attacks.²³⁹ Noting the lack of “command and control” for cross-departmental planning, former CDS Lord (David) Richards of Herstmonceux concluded that

[the NSC] mechanism is completely broken. It needs a major overhaul to turn it from a nineteenth century talking shop into a dynamic twenty first century cross-government coordination and communications centre [...].²⁴⁰

149. **The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban is devastating on both a human and strategic level. Given both the timing of this crisis—which came after we had finished taking evidence for our inquiry—and the secrecy of NSC discussions, we are left with a number of outstanding questions about the Government’s handling of Afghanistan and the role of the NSC in key processes. We will call the National Security Adviser to provide oral evidence and a private briefing at the earliest opportunity after the conference recess.**

150. *By 18 October, the NSA should write to us to answer the following questions:*

- a) *At what point did the Government give its consent to the February 2020 Doha Agreement negotiated by the United States and the Taliban? If it did not agree with this decision, why did it endorse the agreement at the UN Security Council meeting on 10 March 2020?*
- b) *Why did (some parts of) the UK Government only begin planning for the withdrawal of NATO troops and its potential consequences, including the increased likelihood of the Taliban coming to power, in April 2021?*
- c) *What was the role of the NSC and the Afghanistan NSIG in overseeing planning for the implementation of the Doha Agreement? On which dates did the NSC meet to discuss Afghanistan since April 2021?*
- d) *What action did the Government take to anticipate and prepare for the second- and third-order effects of the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan?*
- e) *On which date did the NSC—or another ministerial committee—last revisit the Government’s plans for an urgent evacuation of Kabul, including the processing of asylum seekers (if, indeed, such a plan was in place)?*
- f) *Has the NSC met to discuss the strategic implications of the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban? If not, when will it do so?*

238 Lord Ricketts, “[The Afghanistan crisis has exposed Global Britain’s delusions of grandeur](#)”, *New Statesman*, 25 August 2021; “[Nato allies urge rethink on alliance after Biden’s ‘unilateral’ Afghanistan exit](#)”, *Financial Times*, 17 August 2021; Elisabeth Braw, “[Europe Runs Risk of Becoming a Global Strategic Victim](#)”, *Foreign Policy*, 23 August 2021; Tim Shipman and Josh Glancy, “[The £2 trillion Afghani-shambles](#)”, *Sunday Times*, 22 August 2021; Malcolm Chalmers, “[The Next Act in the Afghan Tragedy](#)”, *RUSI*, 17 August 2021

239 Michael Clarke, “[Afghanistan and the UK’s Illusion of Strategy](#)”, *RUSI*, 16 August 2021

240 Lord Richards, “[David Richards: Offer a single point of contact and overhaul the National Security Council. How to help the Afghans we left behind](#)”, *ConservativeHome*, 5 September 2021

- g) *Why is there so little reference to Afghanistan in the Integrated Review? At what point will this be revisited by the NSC, and will the Government be drawing up a new strategy on Afghanistan?*
- h) *What are the implications of the United States' approach to Afghanistan in the past two years for the future of NATO, and for the viability of the Integrated Review, which is based on assumptions of a globally engaged US?*
- i) *Do events in Afghanistan suggest a US withdrawal from intervention elsewhere (for example in Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sinai and Mali); and what are the implications for the UK's ability to pursue its own objectives in relation to counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and conflict resolution?*
- j) *What are the implications of the Taliban victory for the UK's relationship with Pakistan, including the terrorist risk emanating from that country, and the attendant risks of terror attacks in the UK?*

The Government should use an annex to the NSA's letter to provide information that cannot be put into the public domain.

Understanding Afghanistan and planning for the withdrawal of NATO troops

151. In written evidence, KCL's Dr Lentzos and Professor Goodman said:

Surprised organisations and decision-makers are more likely to miss opportunities for preventing or pre-empting attacks and other threats, tend to be less well prepared for managing the unavoidable crises, and more likely to look ill-informed and out-of-control in the eyes of citizens, taxpayers and voters. They are also less likely to see opportunities to advance peace, security and prosperity.²⁴¹

152. The Government was clearly surprised by the trajectory of events in Afghanistan since July. On 8 July, the Prime Minister told the House of Commons that "there is no military path to victory for the Taliban".²⁴² At that time, the Taliban controlled 90 of Afghanistan's 398 districts, according to BBC analysis. By 16 August, the Taliban controlled all but seven districts and the Government of Afghanistan had collapsed.²⁴³ When the Prime Minister addressed MPs on 18 August, he said:

I think it would be fair to say that the events in Afghanistan have unfolded faster, and the collapse has been faster, than I think even the Taliban themselves predicted. What is not true is to say that the UK Government were unprepared or did not foresee this, because it was certainly part of our planning.²⁴⁴

153. Appearing before the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on 1 September, the then Foreign Secretary said that:

241 Dr Filippa Lentzos (Senior Research Fellow at King's College London) and Professor Michael Goodman (Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs at King's College London) ([NSM0009](#))

242 HC Deb, 8 July 2021, col [1107](#)

243 "[Mapping the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan](#)", *BBC News*, 16 August 2021

244 HC Deb, 18 August 2021, col [1254](#)

- The central intelligence assessment used by the Government “until late on” had proven incorrect in its judgment that there would be only a “steady deterioration” in security following the withdrawal of NATO troops, and that “it was unlikely Kabul would fall this year”. He said this view was widely shared among NATO Allies. However, it is unclear whether Ministers and departments were working from the same assumptions, with both the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary suggesting it had been clear for weeks or “many months that the situation could go very fast”;²⁴⁵
- He personally had warned of “optimism bias” in Whitehall and among allies, particularly in relation to: i) whether President Biden would go ahead with the withdrawal of troops as planned; and ii) the ability of the Taliban to win by striking a series of local agreements in combination with a well-structured insurgent campaign against Afghan forces.²⁴⁶ This speaks to longstanding debates about whether the UK ever understood fully the nature of the power dynamics and relationships in Afghanistan, and therefore the type of conflict it was engaged in;²⁴⁷
- It may be that countries such as the UK and US, which have invested so much in the success of Afghanistan over the past 20 years, were less capable of making a clear-eyed assessment of events on the ground than allies such as France; and
- Notwithstanding the judgment of the central assessment, the Government still undertook contingency planning for the less likely scenarios.²⁴⁸

154. **There are hard questions for the Government to answer about what appears to be either a failure to understand fundamental elements of the situation in Afghanistan—specifically, the strategy and strength of the Taliban and, as importantly, the fragility of the Afghan Government and its security forces without NATO support—or a failure to respond effectively to the information available, or possibly both.**

155. **It is impossible for us to draw conclusions from the fragmentary reporting and speculation currently available in the public domain. Nevertheless, the Government must establish where the root of the problem lay, assessing whether it was one or a combination of:**

- **an intelligence failure—that is, a failure to gather the intelligence necessary to form a sufficiently accurate understanding of the situation on the ground;**
- **an assessment and analysis failure—that is, a failure to interpret the available information in a way that provided a sufficiently accurate understanding of the situation on the ground;**

245 Oliver Wright, [“Boris Johnson insists the risk of rapid Afghanistan collapse was clear”](#), *The Times*, 3 September 2021

246 Kate Clark, a journalist located in Afghanistan since 2001, argues that despite the continuation of peace talks in Doha in 2020 and 2021, the Taliban’s intent to take control of Afghanistan was clear—not least through the systemic removal of potential opposition from civic society. Kate Clark, [“The Taliban’s rise to power: As the US prepared for peace, the Taliban prepared for war”](#), Afghanistan Analysts Network, 21 August 2021

247 Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict, 1978–2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); George Vlachonikolis, [“An incompetent war: Britain in Helmand”](#), *War on the Rocks*, 22 May 2014

248 Oral evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 1 September 2021, HC (2021–22) 685, Q23; Victor Mallet, [“Why France was more clear-eyed about Afghanistan than the US”](#), *Financial Times*, 31 August 2021

- a failure, including by the Afghanistan NSIG, to marshal the vast knowledge and resources on Afghanistan within the UK Government in a way that supported effective ministerial decision-making;
- groupthink on behalf of Ministers and/or senior officials;
- a reluctance by Ministers and/or senior officials to engage fully with the realities of information presented to them and to challenge their own assumptions accordingly; and/or
- a failure of diplomacy to bring forward an alternative NATO coalition on the ground.

The NSA should outline his initial assessment of these matters in the confidential annex of his letter to us.

156. The key to preparing for an uncertain future is to plan in detail for multiple possible scenarios. While no plan survives contact with reality, it is the act of rigorous planning that enables the Government to adapt and respond in a more coordinated way as events unfold.

157. *We urge the Government to revisit how it plans for major domestic and international crises, including the possibility of simultaneous crises—as has happened with covid-19 and Afghanistan. As events in Afghanistan have shown, it is essential that the Government has up-to-date and detailed procedural plans for a range of potential scenarios, which both assign tasks and responsibilities across departments, and inform exercises involving Ministers and officials. These plans should cover a range of highly serious, anticipatable contingencies—such as the evacuation of civilians from conflict zones and fragile countries, the emergence of a new infectious disease, a prolonged, wide-area electricity outage, a major global financial crisis and the withdrawal of NATO security guarantees by key Allies. The Government should update us in confidence on its progress against this recommendation in six months' time, and then on an annual basis.*

Annex 1: An introduction to the 2021 Integrated Review

- 1) It is the task of the UK's national security machinery, with the NSC at its apex, to implement the Integrated Review (IR)—*Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*—which was published in March 2021. A Command Paper outlining the Defence contribution to the IR, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, was published a few days later. The IR also committed to the development and publication of other cross-government papers, such as a national resilience strategy.
- 2) **An overview:** The IR describes a complex environment in which there is rapid change, with power changing in nature and changing hands. It states that the boundaries between “war and peace, prosperity and security, trade and development, and domestic and foreign policy”—as well as between economic and national security—are becoming blurred as hostile actors increasingly use them in an “integrated” manner.²⁴⁹
- 3) Within this context, the IR sets out four overarching goals that together form its ‘Strategic Framework’ for action in the years to 2025: sustaining strategic advantage through science and technology; shaping an open and resilient international order; strengthening security and defence at home and overseas; and building resilience at home and overseas.
- 4) **A new approach?** Previous SDSRs were rooted in a risk management approach to national security—seeking to reduce threats or hazards, minimise vulnerability and lessen negative consequences. In contrast, the Government says it took a ‘grand strategy’ approach under the Integrated Review: a more aspirational style which aims to secure long-term security, peace and prosperity through—in the words of one of its earliest proponents, the military historian Basil Liddell Hart—coordinating and directing “all the resources of a nation” towards the attainment of its goals. Grand strategy is rooted in long-term thinking, with an emphasis on bringing history into policy calculations.²⁵⁰
- 5) **Initial reception:** We received limited evidence on the quality and content of the IR itself, which was not within the scope of this inquiry (although we sought evidence on the manner in which it addressed aspects of national security machinery).
- 6) Reception to the IR has been mixed. Lord Ricketts praised its “ambitious targets” and said it “struck a careful balance on policy towards China”; former MI6 Chief Sir John Sawers said it “succeeds in linking foreign policy to the UK’s domestic priorities”; and a former Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, described it as an “impressive exercise”. But it has also been widely and strongly criticised for failing to prioritise the Government’s goals and for setting ambitions that are greater than the resources available—especially in light of the cut to aid spending, which was announced months before the IR was concluded.²⁵¹

249 HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403, March 2021; Ministry of Defence (MoD), *Defence in a Competitive Age*, CP 411, March 2021

250 Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1967), pp. 321–22

251 “[The Integrated Review in Context](#)”, King’s College London, July 2021; Malcolm Chalmers, “[The Integrated Review: The UK as a Reluctant Middle Power?](#)”, RUSI Occasional Paper, March 2021

Annex 2: High-level summary of reserved and devolved powers relevant to national security

Policy area	Reserved power	Devolved power		
		Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland
International Relations and Defence	Yes			
National Security	Yes			
Nationality and Immigration	Yes			
Nuclear Energy	Yes			
Media and Telecoms	Yes			
Health and Social Care	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Housing, Communities and Local Government	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Business	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Justice and Policing	Partial	Yes		Yes
Energy	Partial			Yes

Note: Devolution in the UK is typically expressed as responsibility for broad policy areas, such as ‘business’ or ‘health and social care’. However, this characterisation can overlook responsibility for areas crucial to national security. For example, while business policy is substantially devolved, responsibility for business competition, including monopolies and mergers, as well as intellectual property, is a reserved power of the Westminster Parliament.²⁵² Health and social care is similarly devolved, but the Westminster Parliament has made specific provision for retention of responsibility for medicines, medical supplies and poisons from the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments.²⁵³

252 Scotland Act 1998, [Schedule 5](#); Wales Act 2017, [Schedule 1](#); Northern Ireland Act 1998, [Schedule 3](#).

253 Scotland Act 1998, [Schedule 5](#); Wales Act 2017, [Schedule 1](#). The specific reservation is styled ‘Medicines, medical supplies, biological substances etc’ in the Wales Act 2017. The Commons Library [notes](#) that “although medicines regulation is devolved to Northern Ireland, by agreement the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency leads for the whole UK”.

Annex 3: Acronyms and abbreviations

AI—Artificial intelligence

BEIS—Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

CCS—Civil Contingencies Secretariat

CDS—Chief of the Defence Staff

CfNS —College for National Security

COBR—taken to refer to the Civil Contingencies Committee, also known as ‘COBRA’

CRO—Chief Risk Officer

DA—Devolved Administrations

DFID—Department for International Development (before September 2020)

DNSA—Deputy National Security Adviser

FCDO—Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (after September 2020)

FCO—Foreign and Commonwealth Office (before September 2020)

FDI—Foreign direct investment

IfG—Institute for Government

INDEX—Information and Data Exchange, in the Cabinet Office

Integrated Review (IR)—Integrated Review for Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy

ISU—Investment Security Unit

JIC—Joint Intelligence Committee

JIO—Joint Intelligence Organisation

JTAC—Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre

LGD—Lead Government Department

MoD—Ministry of Defence

NATO—North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO—Non-governmental organisation

NSA—National Security Adviser

NSC—National Security Council

NSC(O)—National Security Council (Officials)

NSIG—National Security Implementation Group

NSM—National Security Ministers

NSRA—National Security Risk Assessment

ODA—Official Development Assistance

SDSR—Strategic Defence and Security Review

SR—Spending Review

SRO—Senior Responsible Owner

Conclusions and recommendations

The National Security Council: how—and how effectively—does it operate?

1. The role of the NSC is to act as the central point of discussion and ministerial decision-making on the UK's national security strategy. This should reasonably include setting the priorities against which resources will be allocated and holding the rest of Government to account on that strategy's implementation. (Paragraph 9)
2. We are concerned that the National Security Council's agenda depends on departments raising topics for attention. This practice runs the risk that issues of strategic importance are not brought before the NSC because individual departments do not see the need for cross-cutting decisions. It also reinforces the departmental siloes the NSC was established to overcome. The Cabinet Office—under the expert leadership of the National Security Adviser—should proactively identify the items for collective discussion by Ministers, instead of being content to follow the lead of the system that the NSC is meant to direct. (Paragraph 19)
3. The NSC and its supporting structures were established in 2010 so that Ministers could “anticipate and decide”, both in setting the UK's national security strategy and in managing risks. Yet when a major, anticipated national security crisis came in the form of covid-19, those structures were abandoned in favour of ad-hoc arrangements. We regard this as a serious mistake. (Paragraph 28)
4. There is a troubling lack of clarity about the NSC's role and remit, and its relationship with other ministerial committees. This has important consequences for ensuring clear lines of ministerial authority and accountability, and for enabling robust and predictable processes in preparing for meetings and implementing any decisions. The confused and contradictory evidence we have taken from the Government on this issue has not been helped by its lack of transparency over existing inter-ministerial groups. (Paragraph 29)
5. *The Cabinet Secretary should write to us, by the end of November, setting out the protocol or processes through which he recommends to the Prime Minister that topics are assigned for discussion at either the NSC, COBR, full Cabinet, another Cabinet committee or an inter-ministerial group. We also call on the Government to publish the full list of cross-government committees—at inter-ministerial and senior official level—that consider topics relevant to the Integrated Review.* (Paragraph 30)
6. The NSA's review of the national security system and processes has led to the creation of a two-tier NSC system with the Prime Minister chairing only half of the meetings. It is apparent that senior Ministers will spend approximately 30% less time in collective, routine discussion using the NSC structures. The Prime Minister will spend roughly 65% less time in NSC meetings. As such, the new arrangement risks becoming a halfway house: it appears to be neither a slower-paced forum for tackling the most fundamental questions facing UK national security; nor is

it a weekly meeting of senior Ministers—convened and brokered by the Prime Minister—to tackle pressing issues. In our initial assessment, this is a retrograde step that suggests a more casual approach to national security. (Paragraph 31)

7. *The Government should clarify:*

- *How the NSC and the new National Security Ministers group relate to one another in practice—in terms of their agendas, any division of responsibility between strategy-making and operational decision-making and implementation, or whether the NSM has delegated authority for decision-making in the Prime Minister's absence;*
- *What status NSM decisions will carry in law, in the event of a judicial review; and*
- *Who will chair the NSM on cross-cutting issues, such as Afghanistan, that require the orchestration of diplomatic, development, military and security instruments.*

The Government should also explain why it has decided not to designate a permanent Chair of the NSM. This would have positive implications for the consistency of decision-making on national security and their implementation, even though we recognise it may also have awkward political implications for the Prime Minister. (Paragraph 32)

8. The NSC's activities depend heavily on the day-to-day interests, commitment and capacity of the Prime Minister, which has implications for the frequency with which the NSC meets and the topics it considers. Even strong structures and processes cannot compensate fully for a lack of prime ministerial engagement and the attendant loss of the NSC's cross-government authority. While the National Security Ministers meeting might be a useful mechanism for a Prime Minister who is willing to delegate authority to colleagues, it is far from optimal. The Prime Minister is the ultimate broker between Ministers and it is his engagement that lends the NSC and its supporting structures credibility. There is also the risk that he may decide to take policy in a different direction, no matter what has been agreed at the NSM. It is imperative that the Prime Minister invests his time and personal authority in the work of the NSC in upholding the UK's national security. (Paragraph 35)
9. The centrality of the NSA to the effective functioning of the NSC cannot be overstated. The twin challenges of covid-19 and Brexit have dominated the Government's operational capabilities in the past two years. It is regrettable that this has coincided with a three-year period in which there was no dedicated National Security Adviser. It is vital that the NSA is a full-time, dedicated role, and that there is sufficient forward planning to avoid long gaps between appointees. He or she must also be able to command the confidence of the national security machinery across Whitehall. (Paragraph 39)
10. The revised membership of the NSC may aid its focus but we are concerned by the absence of the BEIS Secretary. This is a serious omission, given his responsibility for UK policy on climate change and energy security, his powers under the National Security and Investment Act 2021, and the inclusion of science and technology in the Integrated Review. It is also curious that the International Trade Secretary

has been replaced by a Cabinet Office Minister whose portfolio covers the UK's relationship with the EU but not the range of international trade matters covered in the Integrated Review. While we recognise that other Ministers will be invited to attend when appropriate, the new membership does suggest a narrow focus for the NSC, which could severely undermine its ability to oversee the implementation of the Integrated Review. *We recommend that the BEIS Secretary be restored to the NSC, given the range and relevance of his responsibilities to UK national security and the Integrated Review.* (Paragraph 44)

11. The Integrated Review sets a bold and ambitious direction of travel. However, it is unclear how this process has informed funding allocations under Spending Review 2020 or how it will guide SR21 for those departments that did not benefit from a multi-year settlement last November. (Paragraph 51)
12. It is regrettable that the Integrated Review did not take place alongside a multi-year spending review due to the covid-19 pandemic. As our predecessor Committees have highlighted, the two processes should take place in parallel and iteratively, with the Government's ambition ultimately matched by affordability. Instead, the credibility of the Integrated Review's broad commitments is undermined by the lack of associated funding for most departments. Severe—if temporary—cuts to the aid budget further bring the strategic sense and affordability of the Integrated Review into question, with limited discussion of how and why aid expenditure will be prioritised across themes, geographies and funding channels. (Paragraph 52)
13. *The Government should return to the practice of holding its reviews of national security strategy in parallel with multi-year spending reviews in future. It should also use the opportunity of the Spending Review 2021 to explain how its funding allocations are consistent with the Integrated Review, and to identify any changes to its goals as a result.* (Paragraph 53)
14. There are some attempts by the Cabinet Office to coordinate funding bids across departments and to guide the Treasury's subsequent decision-making. Nevertheless, the final allocation of funding is frequently the result of a battle of wills between individual Secretaries of State, Number 10 and the Treasury. It is far removed from any clear-headed assessment of the Government's key national security priorities, the level of resourcing required to achieve them, and collective agreement among senior Ministers of the final allocations. (Paragraph 54)
15. *There is a pressing need for strategic direction over cross-government resources dedicated to national security. We recommend that the NSC be given a formal role in reviewing departmental settlement decisions relating to national security and assessing whether funding has been spent as allocated. Its collective view should then be circulated across Whitehall to inform funding decisions by individual Secretaries of State.* (Paragraph 55)
16. The Integrated Review was unfortunately published by the Government before it had reviewed NSC structures, raising the question of whether sufficient thought was given to its implementation as it was drawn up. There is limited qualitative difference between the 'fusion' introduced by the previous National Security Adviser and the 'integration' sought by the incumbent and demanded by the Integrated Review.

(Paragraph 58)

17. It is unclear what role, if any, the NSC and NSM will now play in overseeing the Integrated Review's implementation. We are gravely concerned that the failure to appoint a permanent Chair of the NSM will undermine accountability for, and oversight of, implementation of collective ministerial decisions on national security. (Paragraph 59)
18. *NSC and NSM meetings should be conducted in a way that enables Ministers to monitor progress towards national security goals and to use that information in shaping their decisions, especially in the absence of the Prime Minister's personal authority. As such, we recommend that:*
 - *Discussion of items on the NSC and NSM agenda should start with an update on the progress made towards the Government's goals in that area, as well as any obstacles that have hindered implementation;*
 - *There should be a standing item on the NSC agenda for resolving inter-departmental conflicts that have arisen since the previous meeting;*
 - *There should be quarterly reporting to the Prime Minister on key national security 'deliverables'; and*
 - *The NSC should hold an annual NSC session on the Government's overall progress in implementing the Integrated Review. This session should inform updates to the Government's national security goals as well as the Annual Report to Parliament. (Paragraph 60)*
19. We agree with Michael Gove, the Minister responsible for the Union, that a break-up of the United Kingdom would pose a fundamental risk to national security. If UK national security is to be served effectively, the Government must ensure that the voices of all three Devolved Administrations are heard within UK decision-making structures. Yet despite the emphasis on the Union in the Integrated Review, the Devolved Administrations have been side-lined in UK-wide national security structures, and they were not considered as part of the NSA's review of internal processes. (Paragraph 69)
20. *We recommend that the Cabinet Office undertakes a review of the role of the Devolved Administrations in national security strategy- and policy-making, with consideration given to:*
 - *Mechanisms for their direct contribution to the development of the National Security Risk Assessment;*
 - *Representation on NSC sub-committees;*
 - *The secondment of Devolved Administration officials into the National Security Secretariat and relevant Government departments (and vice versa); and*
 - *The potential fine-tuning of the demarcations between devolved and reserved powers. (Paragraph 70)*

21. *We would welcome a briefing, in confidence, from the Government about its plans to make the Union a strong foundation for national resilience. Furthermore, noting the previous Government's failure to prepare for a potential Scottish secession in 2014, we would also welcome assurances—in the event that a second Scottish referendum is called—that the Government has in place detailed and rigorously tested contingency plans for a break-up of the Union, including its implications for wider national security priorities.* (Paragraph 71)
22. There are advantages to putting the NSC on a statutory footing, such as ensuring that there is a shared sense of 'mission' across Government, that the NSC's purpose is clear, and that it meets with regularity. However, these could be achieved through stronger structures and sustained commitment from Ministers, without the risks of inflexibility inherent in creating a statutory body. We will continue to monitor NSC activity, including through the reporting requirements proposed later in this report, and will revisit this issue in future if necessary. (Paragraph 77)

What does the NSC need to fulfil its role effectively?

23. The NSC needs high-quality information and analysis to make its decisions. All information provided to the NSC should draw on the best possible sources for the topic under discussion—which, in many instances, will be open-source information and data analysis, supplemented as necessary by diplomatic reporting and secret intelligence. The Government must make the necessary organisational and technological changes that would enable it to bring insight from data together with human expertise. (Paragraph 103)
24. Diversity of thought and exposure to challenge are critical to better decision-making on national security, sharpening policy analysis and guarding against groupthink. The NSC structure should be in regular and constructive contact with external experts, including with academia, think tanks and those potentially involved in the delivery of the national security strategy—for example, relating to cyber security and biosecurity. *In light of previous, unfulfilled commitments to improve external engagement and challenge, we recommend that the Government updates us on progress against this recommendation in six months' time, and then on an annual basis.* (Paragraph 104)
25. It is vital that the NSC is exposed not only to near-term assessments of risks, but also to longer-term 'futures thinking', using a range of tools and techniques such as strategic foresight and horizon-scanning. Such practice is not about predicting the future. Instead, it recognises the reality that the future will not play out as we expect, and so we must be prepared to respond to many possible contingencies. The civil service is already undertaking this work in isolated pockets of best practice, but the Government should consider strengthening this function within the Cabinet Office and giving it a more prominent, routine role in informing NSC discussions. This will better enable Ministers to stress-test their decisions, challenge their underlying assumptions and identify which additional capabilities might best protect the UK's national security in the long term. (Paragraph 105)
26. *We recommend strengthening the Joint Intelligence Organisation at the centre of Government, ensuring that its remit incorporates providing assessments of the full*

range of threats and hazards. The Government should also consider tasking it with providing the formal warning function for all national security risks, in the near and longer term. It is essential that the JIO has the capacity to perform this function well and the Treasury should prioritise funding accordingly. The JIO should also ensure that its reporting maximises the volume of open-source information available. (Paragraph 106)

27. The Government should have informed Parliament that it had removed the tiers from the 2019 National Security Risk Assessment during our biosecurity inquiry in 2020 or in its response to our Biosecurity report. (Paragraph 116)
28. We are seriously concerned by the apparent downgrading of risk management in central Government. There is still not an NSC sub-committee dedicated to the management of risks. Central oversight and governance of risk management across departments remains under review. It is also unclear how the Government is prioritising its efforts and funding now that it no longer uses tiers to categorise risks in the National Security Risk Assessment. (Paragraph 123)
29. Risk management across government is loose, unstructured, and lacking in central oversight and accountability at both the ministerial and official level. The centre of Government continues to maintain a relatively hands-off approach, rather than actively holding 'lead departments' to account for preparedness. In the wake of the covid-19 pandemic and the weaknesses it has exposed, this approach is demonstrably inadequate in managing the nature and scale of the threats and hazards we face today. (Paragraph 124)
30. *We recommend that the Government:*
 - *Re-establish a ministerial governance structure for overseeing risk and resilience, with a strong connection to the NSC—for example, by re-establishing a dedicated NSC sub-committee. This ministerial committee should be directly connected to the cross-government warning function described earlier.*
 - *Establish greater clarity of responsibility for national security risks, by designating Chief Risk Officers in each department and agency, overseen by a Chief Risk Officer in the Cabinet Office. The work of the central CRO would need to be deconflicted from the strategy and policy focus of the Deputy National Security Adviser for National Security and Resilience.*

The Government should also consider establishing an external audit function for the assessment and management of risks where appropriate. The Government should update us on its progress against this recommendation when it informs us of the outcomes of its review of the NSRA methodology and/or the biosecurity governance review. (Paragraph 125)

31. We welcome the Government's plans for a College for National Security in principle. It is essential to create a shared mission, language and understanding of threats and opportunities. It is also critical that Whitehall develops new skills and policy knowledge relevant to the digital age: the use of data in policy-making and understanding of the impact of technological change should be instinctive among civil servants—rather than being the preserve of the expert few within Government.

A College could also build networks and relationships between key stakeholders within and outside Government, helping to diversify the voices contributing to our national security. However, its ability to succeed depends on the clarity of its relationship with existing bodies such as the Diplomatic Academy and the Royal College of Defence Studies; commitment from senior leaders from across the sector; and sufficient resources to deliver the level of technical capabilities required for current and future national security challenges. (Paragraph 129)

32. It is vital that the NSC receives intelligence and policy options informed by a high-performing civil service with advanced capabilities, but there must be a willing and reliable customer at the end of the national security 'supply chain'. We agree with the former Paymaster General, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, that the attitude and experience of Ministers are essential factors in effective policy- and decision-making, and that some form of 'training' is indispensable. We therefore welcome the Government's plans for a National Exercise Programme in 2022 and look forward to hearing more details, including which Ministers will participate. (Paragraph 132)
33. Transparency and accountability are key building blocks of effective decision-making and implementation in national security, increasing opportunities for challenge and connecting the public to national security decision-makers. Inevitably, there will be some issues that require discussions to take place behind closed doors. However, greater openness is essential in an environment in which citizens are subject to national security threats on a daily basis and, as such, are central actors in building national resilience. There is no reason why the NSC and its machinery should not aspire to be part of the wider open-data movement within Government, using open protocols and the best open-source tools available. However, integrating these effectively into policy-making will require a shift in culture and skills. (Paragraph 142)
34. *We agree with Professor John Bew, who led the Integrated Review for the Prime Minister's Office, that Parliament has a crucial role to play as a forum for strategic debate on national security. To that end, we recommend that the Government commits to an annual report to Parliament on national security and the Integrated Review, including notable updates to the trends outlined in the document, an update on the overall threat and opportunity picture, and progress against the Government's national security objectives. Recognising the Committee's proper role in scrutinising the NSC and its products, we also call on the Government to return to a more open relationship. To support our vital scrutiny work, we ask that the Government submits to us annually (in confidence, if needed):*
 - a) *Priority Integrated Review deliverables and progress against them;*
 - b) *NSC and NSM agendas, showing agenda items, paper titles and the name of the department or agency submitting them;*
 - c) *Attendees at each NSC and NSM meeting;*
 - d) *Reasons for any meeting cancellation or delays;*
 - e) *An update on external engagement (e.g. with policy experts) throughout the year, to inform NSC and NSM papers; and*

- f) *An update on the work of the College for National Security, if it is established, detailing the training provided and the numbers of participants, broken down by department, agency and type of external organisation. (Paragraph 143)*

The NSC and Afghanistan

35. The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban is devastating on both a human and strategic level. Given both the timing of this crisis—which came after we had finished taking evidence for our inquiry—and the secrecy of NSC discussions, we are left with a number of outstanding questions about the Government's handling of Afghanistan and the role of the NSC in key processes. We will call the National Security Adviser to provide oral evidence and a private briefing at the earliest opportunity after the conference recess. (Paragraph 149)
36. *By 18 October, the NSA should write to us to answer the following questions:*
- a) *At what point did the Government give its consent to the February 2020 Doha Agreement negotiated by the United States and the Taliban? If it did not agree with this decision, why did it endorse the agreement at the UN Security Council meeting on 10 March 2020?*
 - b) *Why did (some parts of) the UK Government only begin planning for the withdrawal of NATO troops and its potential consequences, including the increased likelihood of the Taliban coming to power, in April 2021?*
 - c) *What was the role of the NSC and the Afghanistan NSIG in overseeing planning for the implementation of the Doha Agreement? On which dates did the NSC meet to discuss Afghanistan since April 2021?*
 - d) *What action did the Government take to anticipate and prepare for the second- and third-order effects of the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan?*
 - e) *On which date did the NSC—or another ministerial committee—last revisit the Government's plans for an urgent evacuation of Kabul, including the processing of asylum seekers (if, indeed, such a plan was in place)?*
 - f) *Has the NSC met to discuss the strategic implications of the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban? If not, when will it do so?*
 - g) *Why is there so little reference to Afghanistan in the Integrated Review? At what point will this be revisited by the NSC, and will the Government be drawing up a new strategy on Afghanistan?*
 - h) *What are the implications of the United States' approach to Afghanistan in the past two years for the future of NATO, and for the viability of the Integrated Review, which is based on assumptions of a globally engaged US?*
 - i) *Do events in Afghanistan suggest a US withdrawal from intervention elsewhere (for example in Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sinai and Mali); and what are the implications for the UK's ability to pursue its own objectives in relation to counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency and conflict resolution?*

- j) *What are the implications of the Taliban victory for the UK's relationship with Pakistan, including the terrorist risk emanating from that country, and the attendant risks of terror attacks in the UK?*

The Government should use an annex to the NSA's letter to provide information that cannot be put into the public domain. (Paragraph 150)

37. *There are hard questions for the Government to answer about what appears to be either a failure to understand fundamental elements of the situation in Afghanistan—specifically, the strategy and strength of the Taliban and, as importantly, the fragility of the Afghan Government and its security forces without NATO support—or a failure to respond effectively to the information available, or possibly both. (Paragraph 154)*

38. *It is impossible for us to draw conclusions from the fragmentary reporting and speculation currently available in the public domain. Nevertheless, the Government must establish where the root of the problem lay, assessing whether it was one or a combination of:*

- *an intelligence failure—that is, a failure to gather the intelligence necessary to form a sufficiently accurate understanding of the situation on the ground;*
- *an assessment and analysis failure—that is, a failure to interpret the available information in a way that provided a sufficiently accurate understanding of the situation on the ground;*
- *a failure, including by the Afghanistan NSIG, to marshal the vast knowledge and resources on Afghanistan within the UK Government in a way that supported effective ministerial decision-making;*
- *groupthink on behalf of Ministers and/or senior officials;*
- *a reluctance by Ministers and/or senior officials to engage fully with the realities of information presented to them and to challenge their own assumptions accordingly; and/or*
- *a failure of diplomacy to bring forward an alternative NATO coalition on the ground.*

The NSA should outline his initial assessment of these matters in the confidential annex of his letter to us. (Paragraph 155)

39. *The key to preparing for an uncertain future is to plan in detail for multiple possible scenarios. While no plan survives contact with reality, it is the act of rigorous planning that enables the Government to adapt and respond in a more coordinated way as events unfold. (Paragraph 156)*

40. *We urge the Government to revisit how it plans for major domestic and international crises, including the possibility of simultaneous crises—as has happened with covid-19 and Afghanistan. As events in Afghanistan have shown, it is essential that the Government has up-to-date and detailed procedural plans for a range of potential scenarios, which both assign tasks and responsibilities across departments,*

and inform exercises involving Ministers and officials. These plans should cover a range of highly serious, anticipatable contingencies—such as the evacuation of civilians from conflict zones and fragile countries, the emergence of a new infectious disease, a prolonged, wide-area electricity outage, a major global financial crisis and the withdrawal of NATO security guarantees by key Allies. The Government should update us in confidence on its progress against this recommendation in six months' time, and then on an annual basis. (Paragraph 157)

Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

The Members of the Joint Committee which conducted the inquiry were:

Margaret Beckett MP (Chair)

Lord Brennan

Sarah Champion MP

Yvette Cooper MP

Tobias Ellwood MP

Richard Graham MP

Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill

Baroness Henig

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger

Darren Jones MP

Alicia Kearns MP

Lord King of Bridgwater

Lord Laming

Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho

Sir Edward Leigh MP

Angus Brendan MacNeil MP

Sir Robert Neill MP

Baroness Neville-Jones

Lord Reid of Cardowan

Bob Stewart MP

Lord Strasburger

Tom Tugendhat MP

The following Members were discharged from the Committee during the inquiry:

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem (January 2021)

Lord Harris of Haringey (January 2021)

Lord Powell of Bayswater (January 2021)

Declarations of interest (Lords)²⁵⁴

The following interests, relevant to this inquiry, were declared:

Lord Brennan

Advisory Board Member, Assured Enterprises Inc., which provides commercial cyber security services in the United States

Member, APPG for the Armed Forces

Baroness Healey of Primrose Hill

No relevant interests declared

Baroness Henig

Non-Executive Chair of SecuriGroup Ltd, Glasgow, a private security company providing security guards and events security

President of Security Institute, a membership organisation of professionals in private security and government departments

Chair, Register of Chartered Security Professionals (since 2019)

Baroness Hodgson of Abinger

Co-chair of APPG for Women, Peace and Security

Member of steering board of Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI)

Trustee, the Chalker Foundation

Honorary Colonel of Outreach Group, 77th Brigade

Coordinator of Afghan Women's Support Forum

Visit to Bangladesh, September 2019, to participate in an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health study tour; cost of travel, accommodation and subsistence met by the APPG, supported by the European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health

Member, APPG for the Armed Forces

Trustee of the Armed Forces Parliamentary Trust

Lord King of Bridgwater

Patron of Defence Forum

Previously, Government Trade Envoy to Saudi Arabia

254 The declaration of interests by the Commons Members are available in the Committee's [Formal Minutes 2021–22](#).

Member, APPG Group for the Armed Forces

Director of London International Exhibition Centre (ExCel)

Lord Laming

Mentor to Care For Children, a charity that enabled the Chinese government to find and support orphanage children to be placed with foster families, and which is currently working in Thailand and Vietnam

Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho

Founder and Chair of Doteveryone (unpaid)

Chancellor of Open University

Member of the Panel for the Independent Surveillance Review

Baroness Neville-Jones

No relevant interests declared

Lord Reid of Cardowan

Director/shareholder, John Reid Advisory Ltd (risk management; homeland security strategy)

Chairman, Institute for Strategy, Resilience and Security, University College London

Chair, Advisory Board, Shearwater Group plc (digital resilience/cyber security)

Lord Strasburger

Shareholder in Aegis Data Holdings Ltd (data centres) until July 2020, Alphabet Inc, Amazon Inc, Apple Inc (technology), Bath & West Community Energy, Big Brother Watch Ltd (defending civil liberties), Footdown Ltd (management software), LAT Water Ltd, Microsoft Inc, Tesla Inc

Director, Big Brother Watch Ltd

Party to a legal challenge against the Government for alleged failure to investigate foreign state interference in the UK's democratic process, which has been crowdfunded by For The Citizens Limited (a non-profit organisation)

Formal minutes

Monday 13 September 2021

Members present:

Margaret Beckett MP, in the Chair

Sarah Champion MP	Alicia Kearns MP
Tobias Ellwood MP	Lord King of Bridgwater
Richard Graham MP	Lord Laming
Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill	Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho
Baroness Henig	Baroness Neville-Jones
Baroness Hodgson of Abinger	Lord Reid of Cardowan
Darren Jones MP	Lord Strasburger

Draft Report, *The UK's national security machinery*, proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 157 agreed to.

Annexes agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

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

Resolved, 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 1 November at 4.00pm]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Monday 1 March 2021

Rt Hon David Cameron , former Prime Minister	Q1–16
Lord Ricketts , former National Security Adviser	Q17–28

Monday 22 March 2021

Rt Hon Theresa May MP , former Prime Minister and Home Secretary	Q29–53
Rt Hon Lord Hammond of Runnymede , former Cabinet Minister	Q54–66

Monday 26 April 2021

Lord McDonald of Salford , former Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Bronwen Maddox , Director, Institute for Government	Q67–82
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Monday 7 June 2021

Professor Sir David Omand , former UK Security and Intelligence Coordinator in the Cabinet Office; Suzanne Raine , former Head of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre; Cat Tully , Managing Director, School of International Futures	Q83–96
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Monday 21 June 2021

Lieutenant General (retired) H R McMaster , former US National Security Advisor	Q97–108
Joe Griffin , Director General, Education & Justice, Scottish Government; Reg Kilpatrick , Director General, Covid Co-ordination, Welsh Government	Q109–119

Monday 5 July 2021

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP , Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Cabinet Office; Sir Stephen Lovegrove , National Security Adviser, Cabinet Office	Q120–139
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Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

NSM numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 ADS ([NSM0004](#))
- 2 Arnold, Ed (Director, The D Group) ([NSM0014](#))
- 3 Bowsher, Dr Gemma (Research Associate, Conflict and Health Research Group, Dept War Studies, King's College London); Ms Rose Bernard (Research Affiliate, Conflict and Health Research Group, Dept War Studies, King's College London); and Professor Richard Sullivan (Professor of Cancer and Global Health, Conflict and Health Research Group, Dept War Studies, King's College London) ([NSM0025](#))
- 4 Cabinet Office ([NSM0019](#))
- 5 Cambridge University's Centre for the Study of Existential Risk ([NSM0029](#))
- 6 Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster ([NSM0035](#))
- 7 Cormac, Professor Rory (Professor of International Relations, University of Nottingham) ([NSM0001](#))
- 8 Devanny, Dr Joe (Lecturer in National Security Studies, King's College London); and Dr Tim Stevens (Lecturer in Global Security, King's College London) ([NSM0020](#))
- 9 Dover, Professor Robert (Professor, University of Hull) ([NSM0012](#))
- 10 Elgabry, Mariam (PhD Researcher in Cyber-biosecurity and a founding Director of Enteromics Ltd., UCL/Enteromics); Dr Darren Nesbeth (Associate Professor for Biochemical Engineering, Advanced Centre for Biochemical Engineering, UCL); and Prof Shane Johnson (Director of the Dawes Centre for Future Crime, Jill Dando Institute, UCL) ([NSM0026](#))
- 11 Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([NSM0034](#))
- 12 Henry Jackson Society ([NSM0018](#))
- 13 Hill, Dr Rowena (Associate Professor of Disasters and Emergencies, Nottingham Trent University); Rich Pickford (Knowledge Exchange and Impact Officer, Nottingham Civic Exchange); and Adam Potter (Research Assistant, Nottingham Trent University) ([NSM0010](#))
- 14 Hilton, Sam (Research Affiliate, Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, Cambridge University) ([NSM0011](#))
- 15 Lentzos, Dr Filippa (Senior Research Fellow, King's College London) and Professor Michael Goodman (Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs, King's College London) ([NSM0009](#))
- 16 Lomas, Dr Daniel (Lecturer in International History, University of Salford) ([NSM0021](#))
- 17 National Security Adviser (Sir Stephen Lovegrove) ([NSM0024](#)) ([NSM0032](#)) ([NSM0036](#))
- 18 Northern Ireland Assembly (The Executive Office) ([NSM0033](#))
- 19 Novosiolova, Dr Tatyana (Research Fellow, Center for the Study of Democracy, Bulgaria) and Professor Malcolm Dando (Leverhulme Emeritus Fellow, University of Bradford, UK) ([NSM0003](#))
- 20 Office of the Chief Scientific Adviser for National Security, Cabinet Office ([NSM0030](#))
- 21 Omand, Sir David (Professor, War Studies Department, King's College London) ([NSM0002](#))

- 22 Omand, Professor Sir David, former UK Security and Intelligence Coordinator in the Cabinet Office (2002–05) and Suzanne Raine, former Head of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (2015–2017) ([NSM0031](#))
- 23 Ord, Dr Toby (Senior Research Fellow, Future of Humanity Institute, Oxford University) ([NSM0013](#))
- 24 Parker, Celia G (PhD candidate, King's College London) ([NSM0008](#))
- 25 Rebellion Defence ([NSM0005](#))
- 26 Reform ([NSM0027](#))
- 27 Rethinking Security ([NSM0017](#))
- 28 Rogers, Professor Paul (Emeritus Professor of Peace Studies, University of Bradford) ([NSM0006](#)) and ([NSM0022](#))
- 29 Saferworld ([NSM0016](#))
- 30 School of International Futures (SOIF) ([NSM0028](#))
- 31 UK Computing Research Committee (UKCRC) ([NSM0023](#))
- 32 United Kingdom National Committee of the Blue Shield ([NSM0007](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Biosecurity and national security	HC 611
1st Special	Biosecurity and national security: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1279