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building bridges for global security

Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

Written Submission on the 2015 National Security Strategy

Submitted by Oxford Research Group   September 2014

Summary

- The strategic purpose of the NSS should be to build global peace and security as the UK cannot insulate itself from insecurity abroad. The NSS can only achieve this by acknowledging what drives insecurity, not merely acknowledging the symptoms of conflict and insecurity.

- The UK should plan to manage its relative decline as a world power and focus its resources more regionally or through intergovernmental organisations. The National Security Council should coordinate its resources and levers of international influence as part of a comprehensive cross-government strategy.

- Sequencing of the forthcoming NSS review and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) is critical. Unlike in 2010, the NSS must precede the SDSR and be coordinated with it such that UK defence and security policy responds explicitly to risks identified in the NSS.

- The UK's key alliances over the next 20 years are likely to privilege the US and European partners, notably France. This will have significant reputational implications given recent and current military interventions. Broader and deeper relations with 'southern' democracies is desirable in future.

- The main short and medium term risks to UK security are likely to arise as 'blowback' from post-2001 UK military campaigns and perceived support for authoritarian regimes in the greater Middle East. Climate change, marginalisation and resource scarcity pose major long-term threats.

- The NSS should be informed by a broad 'human security' perspective that understands individual and collective security as linked through a web of social, political, economic and ecological factors and responsibilities. Broader debate on the nature of human, national and global security is desirable as part of the NSS review process.

1. Introduction

1.1 Oxford Research Group (ORG) is a UK-based charity that provides information, analysis, methodology, policy advice and mediation in order to promote a more sustainable approach to global security. ORG currently runs or hosts programmes working on: sustainable security and alternatives to militarisation; the implications of 'remote control' warfare; and mediation of several conflicts in the Middle East.

1.2 This submission will focus on seven questions raised by the Joint Committee in its call for evidence:

- The UK's national security priorities
    1. What should these be over the next 20 years and how should they steer the next NSS?
- The UK's place in the world
    2. Should the UK plan to maintain its global influence?
- Strategic choices
    3. How can the next NSS be made most useful in guiding decisions in government and long-term spending decisions?
- International relationships
    4. Which will be the UK's critical international relationships over the next 20 years?
- Risks and contingencies
    5. What are the main risks to the UK's national security?
    6. Is the government's horizon-scanning effective?
- Scope
    7. How broadly should the NSS define national security?

2. The UK's National Security Priorities, 2015-35

What should the UK's national security priorities be for the next 20 years, and how should these steer the next NSS?

2.1 The objective of the NSS should be to build an environment of sustainable international peace and security, recognising that the UK's national security is indivisible in the long-term from that enjoyed by other states and peoples. This is necessarily a *strategic* process that must identify not just current and future threats to the UK but also what drives the insecurity behind those threats. This is crucial for the Strategy to devise means by which the UK can work to mitigate or resolve these factors over the long-term. Focus on defined present threats or responses to specific crises is likely to lead to policies that seek to contain or 'neutralise' threats through securitised responses. While occasionally necessary as emergency measures, such responses are often counter-productive and antithetical to the strategic objective of preventing and resolving conflict.

2.2 Approaches taken to prioritise risks should be reviewed, including a number of aspects of the National Security Risk Assessment Exercise (NSRA) that formed part of the 2010 NSS. The compilation of this static ranking system to inform the decisions laid out in the SDSR contradicts assertions within the 2010 NSS that the diversity and complexity

of the contemporary risk environment means that "no single risk will dominate […] we no longer face such predictable threats". This assertion has certainly proven true since 2010. "Risk of major instability, insurgency or civil war overseas which creates an environment that terrorists can exploit to threaten the UK" (considered only a Tier Two risk in 2010) has been at the forefront of UK security thinking since then and has motivated UK interventions in Libya, Mali and now Iraq. Given the complex and changeable nature of the risk environment, the utility of a static ranking system should be revisited.

2.3 The NSRA should be more directly linked to the NSS, which has in its current iteration taken a more nuanced approach to complex risks. Both the 2010 NSS and preceding Ministry of Defence report *Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2040* describe global environmental constraints and resource insecurity, including climate disruption, as a source and multiplier of critical risks to the UK. Yet, inconsistency between the NSRA and the NSS means that threats arising from the multiplier effect of climate change – not just natural disasters – did not feature in the 2010 NSRA. Given that SDSR defence policy takes the security risks ranked in the NSRA as a foundation for security responses, any NSRA undertaken for the next NSS must include a more comprehensive view of security risks.

3. The UK's Place in the World

Should the UK plan to maintain its global influence?

3.1 The UK must be realistic about its global influence in the 21st century and plan to manage its relative decline rather than cling to the role of a 19th century great power. The UK may currently be a global diplomatic and trading power but it no longer has the capacity to project effective military power beyond Europe, the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. The rise of new powers in the South Atlantic, Indian Ocean and western Pacific will be the defining feature of the 21st century geopolitical transition. This is likely to be accompanied by greater local resistance to the privileged military and diplomatic role of the UK and other former colonial powers outside of strictly European affairs.

3.2 Global influence is complex; its aspects and levers include diplomacy, military, aid, trade, finance, historic or reputational influence, and the 'soft' powers of media, culture and education. These may be reinforcing, or they may negate one another. Whereas the UK traditionally thinks of its historical legacy as boosting its contemporary influence, this legacy may actually undermine UK security in an increasingly educated, informed and unequal world. Factors that tend to undermine British perceived legitimacy and influence include: the colonial legacy, historic and recent military interventions, retention of nuclear weapons, failure to reform the UN Security Council and its veto, alliances, and arms sales. In particular, the UK's very close relationship with the US has an enormous impact on global perceptions of British power, influence and independence. Uncritical diplomatic and economic relationships in the Middle East, notably with Israel and the Gulf monarchies, also have significant consequences for British influence.

3.3 The UK should consider what combination and coordination of its levers of global influence would best achieve its strategic objective of upholding national and international security. Taking a more holistic human security approach will help to reduce the counter-productive dependency on military tools in attempting to build,

enforce, or reinforce security. The National Security Council (NSC) is potentially a very important institution in assessing and coordinating the UK's various levers of influence over national and global security governed by a comprehensive, all-government mandate and strategy. It should be given greater powers to distribute and coordinate these resources within an agreed overall envelope, rather than the present system, which *de facto* prioritises military over diplomacy over aid and soft power resources, and prioritises control over cooperation.

4. Strategic Choices

How can the next NSS be made most useful in guiding decisions in government and long-term spending decisions?

4.1 Given that the NSS should inform the resourcing decisions of the SDSR, the near synchronised release of the NSS and SDSR in 2010 gave rise to questions of strategic continuity. If the NSS is truly to guide long-term spending decisions, the timing of the updating of both documents is crucial. While welcome, the timing of this inquiry into the NSS already gives rise to questions of whether enough time is left ahead of 2015-16 to sequence the processes adequately. We urge the committee to do what it can to urge prioritising the NSS review ahead of the SDSR, pushing the SDSR process into 2016 if necessary. This staggered scheduling for review of these strategies, such that the NSS can be announced before the SDSR, would ensure that the latter can be a truly coherent and strategic response to the NSS.

4.2 The NSS as a document is less important than the NSC as an institution. Translating the NSS into actionable policy will require that the NSC be resourced to serve its original purpose. While the NSC should be the central instrument for translating the NSS from paper to policy for continual assessment of the global threat environment, it has thus far spent focused more on crisis response than on long-term responses to international security challenges. The Joint Committee stated its concerns in this regard in February 2013.[1]

4.3 The context within which the NSS is reviewed is also crucial. Government defence procurement decisions over the past year – including the confirmation of the purchase of 14 F-35B fighters, new aircraft carriers and the recent £1.1bn investment in new intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance technology for counter-terrorism operations – pre-determine the options and resources available for British security operations in future, *before* the NSS has outlined what the likely threats will be and the SDSR has outlined how the UK will respond to them. We urge the committee to consider within the NSS review what ability the Government should have to make key defence spending decisions so close to the updating of the strategy itself.

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[1] JCNSS, The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012, 2nd Report of Session, HL Paper 115 HC 984, 28 February 2013, p.4.

5.   International Relationships

Which will be the UK's critical international relationships over the next 20 years?

5.1 It is likely that UK's critical international relationships will continue to be with NATO and the European Union (whether or not the UK remains a full member) over the next decades. The United States and, to much lesser extent, France are likely to continue to be the main bilateral partners. These relationships may be problematic for the UK's security in that it is widely perceived to be the junior and uncritical partner to the US as the dominant (but declining) world power. Thus, discontents about the US' military-led control and containment policy towards the non-western world will increasingly be reflected upon the UK. The relationship with France may have a localised resonance (notably in Africa and the Near East) for perceptions of the UK where the two great nineteenth century powers are seen to collaborate in neo-colonial dominance. In these regards, NATO's ambitions to carve a role for itself in 'non-territorial defence' outside of Europe may be problematic for the UK.

5.2 Whereas for most of their history the EU and most of NATO were almost exceptional in their commitment to democracy and civil liberties, the number of such broadly 'liberal' states has increased hugely in the last 20 to 30 years. Many of the Latin American, Asian and African states of the 'Third Wave' of democratization (roughly 1970s-1990s) are now becoming well institutionalised democracies with comparable values to the UK. Yet, with a few Commonwealth exceptions, the UK's key international partners remain confined to the North Atlantic alliance of the late 1940s. As the relative power and reputation of the 'West' declines, effective security and influence for the UK will depend on stronger relationships with non-western democracies such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa.

6.   Risks

What are the main risks to the UK's national security?

6.1 'Blowback' from the various ill-considered UK and US military interventions since 2001 is currently the most acute risk to UK security. These have proved comprehensively that force has limited use in countering terrorism and violent extremism. Many of the most pressing security challenges facing the UK are directly related to the previous use of military force in regime change operations such as Iraq and Libya, both of which have resulted in resurgent violent extremism, myriad armed actors, fragile and fractured states incapable of dealing with these dynamics, and huge negative consequences for regional security environments. Threat from these operations is compounded by explicit or implicit British support for US, Israeli, French and Saudi or Emirati operations elsewhere in majority Muslim countries, in which the UK is perceived as part of the 'far enemy' with a neo-colonial ambition to divide and rule the Islamic world.

6.2 As assessed in the 2010 NSS, and *Global Strategic Trends—Out to 2040,* climate disruption and its multiplier effect on global security issues will be a driver of insecurity "so pervasive in nature and influence that it will affect the life of everyone on the planet over the next 30 years". The current decade has already seen a clear increase in impact across the world. Events since 2010, including excessive heat waves, floods,

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droughts and Typhoon Haiyan, the strongest land-fall cyclone ever recorded, all point to accelerated disruption. Current impact is asymmetric, falling mainly in often densely populated areas of the 'Global South' such as south and south-east Asia, where high levels of poverty and/or rapid urbanisation result in low resilience to climate disruption. The security impacts of such disruption on unregulated migration, competition over resources and subsequent exacerbation of existing tensions must not be underestimated. Indeed, the role of climate disruption as a catalyst of the 'Arab Spring' is increasingly being explored.

6.3 A complex interplay of discrimination, poverty and social and economic inequalities continues to undermine global security. Uprisings across the Arab world, devastation wrought by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, and violent protests in the streets of Paris, London, Stockholm, Rio de Janeiro and Ferguson have brought the impact of marginalisation to the forefront of security debates in the current decade. This is a global phenomenon with interconnected local and transnational drivers, in many cases exacerbated by severe global resource and environmental constraints. In particular, potential links between social exclusion and terrorism – outlined as a Tier Two risk in the 2010 NSRA - appear to be coming to the fore in sectarian conflicts across the Levant. As income and group inequalities widen, and the disproportionate impact on marginalised populations of environmental, food, land, water and energy insecurity becomes increasingly clear, such risks will be exacerbated.

6.4 Compounding the security risks posed by socio-economic inequality, increased access to information technologies around the world means that, while the great majority of the world's population are on the economic and political margins, their knowledge of their own marginalisation is steadily increasing, as is their organising capacity. Anti-elite sentiments can be a powerful driver of radicalisation and militarisation, and the longer the majority world is side-lined from the benefits of global economic prosperity, the greater the threat to global security.

Is the Government's horizon-scanning effective, and are our national contingency plans adequate?

6.5 A number of important horizon-scanning processes, such as the MOD's *Global Strategic Trends* provide ample understanding of the complexity of the modern security environment and myriad scenarios that might arise to threaten British security. Again, the central instrument for bringing such analysis into the NSS – the National Security Council – has been overly focused on specific *reactions* to global crises. Effective horizon-scanning, particularly towards a preventive security agenda can help to address the recurrent nature of modern security challenges, but only if the NSC is tasked and resourced to embrace such methodologies and respond proactively.

6.6 The NSS process must consider how to actively link long-term thinking into the NSS and, more importantly, into the work of the NSC. While the most recent *Global Strategic Trends* study considers the security environment for the next 30 years, the static quinquennial nature of the NSS reduces incentive to raise the risk horizon beyond five years. More effective use of the NSC presents an opportunity to ensure that the NSS remains a 'living document' capable of absorbing shifts in the global security environment and planning more strategic responses.

7. Scope

How broadly should the NSS define national security?

7.1 Despite its island location and military strength, there is no prospect of the UK isolating its 'national' security from not just regional but global insecurity. This should be an underlying assumption of the new NSS, just as the 2010 NSS states that "Our security, prosperity and freedom are interconnected and mutually supportive". UK security, prosperity and freedom cannot be effectively insulated from global insecurity, poverty and oppression. This is particularly true where such conditions are, or are widely perceived to be, the result – directly or indirectly – of UK policy, such as military interventions or support for authoritarian governments, or UK protection of structural advantages, such as trade policies and veto rights in the UN Security Council.

7.2 The focus on prosperity as a fundament of national security in the 2010 NSS is problematic in that the UK's historic and contemporary prosperity are rooted in structural inequalities in the international economic and financial systems that undermine the prosperity of many less developed societies. In particular, the next NSS may wish to examine the impact on global human security of the City of London and several UK overseas territories in their role as financial hubs. These have negatively impacted the UK's will to respond effectively to Russian actions in Ukraine as well as contributing, through facilitating capital flight, organised crime and tax avoidance, to the fragility of many poorer countries.

7.3 Thinking globally, the NSS should follow a broad 'human security' perspective that understands individual and collective security as linked through a web of social, political, economic and ecological factors and responsibilities. There is by no means a national consensus on what 'security' means and a wider, more open debate on the nature of human, national and global security is highly desirable as part of the NSS review process. The recent Ammerdown Invitation[2] to dialogue on 'Security for the future' is a valuable contribution to the British reconceptualization of security and should be taken up by Parliament and Government as part of a process of rethinking UK defence and security strategy.

Oxford Research Group is an independent non-governmental organisation and registered charity, which works to promote a more sustainable approach to global security. ORG has been building trust between policy-makers, academics, the military and civil society since 1982. ORG and its internationally recognised consultants combine detailed knowledge of security issues, together with an understanding of political decision-making, and many years of expertise in facilitating constructive dialogue. More information can be found at: www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk

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[2] The Ammerdown Invitation: Security for the Future, published 23 September 2014 on openSecurity.net, see http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/sites/default/files/Security_for_the_Future.pdf

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