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House of Commons
Joint Committee on the
National Security Strategy

First review of the National Security Strategy 2010

First Report of Session 2010-12

Report, together with formal minutes

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The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

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

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Footnotes

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Summary

The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy was established to consider the National Security Strategy (NSS). This is our first report.

We welcome the publication of the 2010 NSS and we believe that it has started to make a contribution to the security of this country. However, we see it as work in progress. We have identified ways in which the NSS, and the decision-making processes which underpin it, should be improved.

The current NSS was, for understandable reasons, produced to a very tight timescale. We hope that the production of the next NSS—expected in 2015—will involve a much wider public debate and an attempt at a political consensus. Planning for this will need to start soon.

We are concerned that the NSS has avoided some of the more difficult questions about the UK's future. Its assertion of “no reduction in influence” is unrealistic and masks the need for the Government to prioritise its efforts. The NSS is also uncritical in its discussion of alliances, avoiding questions about when the UK needs the ability to act alone, and which capabilities it requires. The new US strategy document itself raises important questions about our reliance on US support.

The NSS is based on the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA). The Government's unwillingness to provide us with the information we requested about the NSRA means that we are not in a position to give any assurance about its adequacy. We need this information if we are to do our job properly, as a Joint Committee tasked with scrutinising the NSS.

The Government has said that the NSS guided the capability decisions in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and the choice of an “adaptable posture”. We have called on the Government for more clarity about what the “adaptable posture” is and how the decision related to the NSS. We have been unable to find evidence that the NSS has influenced decisions made since the SDSR, including the Government's responses to the Arab Spring. We call on the Government to develop an “overarching strategy”, a common understanding about the UK's interests and objectives that guides choices on investment across government departments, as well as guiding operational priorities and crisis response. However, this must be based on a realistic vision of the UK's future role in the world.

We welcome the setting up of the National Security Council (NSC), though we remain to be convinced that it is significantly different from, or more strategic than, the Cabinet Committees which operated under previous Governments. The NSC and its subcommittee NSC(Libya) took an active role in running the UK's operations in Libya. We question whether this allowed strategic focus to be maintained. We also have concerns about how the NSC selects its topics for discussion and find its failure to discuss the collapse of the Eurozone or the possibility of Scottish independence extraordinary. We call for Ministers to have more regular exposure to advice from outside experts.

We welcome the appointment of a National Security Adviser, although we still have questions about the nature of the role, and its status. The Government sees no need at present for a National Security Minister: we suggest this be kept under review.

1 Introduction

Our role

1. In March 2008 the previous Government published *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an interdependent world*.¹ It was agreed that a Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (NSS) should be appointed, consisting of 22 members: 12 from the Commons and ten from the Lords with the terms of reference “to consider the National Security Strategy”.² The Committee was appointed but only had time to hold one oral evidence session before the general election.³

2. The current Government published a new NSS, *Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, and a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), in October 2010.⁴ The Joint Committee was reappointed at the end of 2010 and we met for the first time in the current Parliament in January 2011. We decided to begin our work by scrutinising the NSS and the associated structures for Government decision-making on National Security, particularly the role of the National Security Council (NSC) and the National Security Adviser (NSA). To that end we put out a call for written evidence and received five submissions, in addition to information received from the Cabinet Office.⁵

3. We do not wish to duplicate the work of other Select Committees, and instead have drawn on the important work they have done. Most notably, this report draws on the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee’s reports on *Who does UK National Strategy?*⁶ and the House of Commons Defence Committee’s report *The Strategic Defence and Security Review and the National Security Strategy*.⁷ The relationship between the NSS and the SDSR is a close and complex one, and it has not been possible for us to consider the implementation of the NSS without also considering the SDSR.

4. We held four evidence sessions in the Summer and Autumn of 2011: with two former Security Ministers, The Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones, Minister of State for Security and Counter-Terrorism, Home Office, 2010-11, and Admiral The Rt Hon The Lord West of Spithead, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Security and Counter-terrorism), Home Office, 2007-10 and formerly Chief of the Naval Staff and First Sea Lord; the current Minister for Government Policy Advice at the Cabinet Office, The Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP; and the first NSA, Sir Peter Ricketts.⁸

¹ *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an interdependent world*, Cm 7291, March 2008.

² *Standing Orders of the House of Commons Public Business* 2011, SO No 152I and HL Deb, 6 December 2010, Col 10.

³ Minutes of Proceedings, 22 March 2010, HL Paper 115/HC 488-i.

⁴ *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, Cm 7953, October 2010, and *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010.

⁵ This evidence is published on the internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/publications/>

⁶ House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, First Report of Session 2010-11, *Who does UK National Strategy?*, HC435; and Sixth Report of Session 2010-12, *Who does UK National Strategy? Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2010-11*, HC 713.

⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2010-12, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review and the National Security Strategy*, HC 761.

⁸ The oral evidence is published on the internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/publications/>

5. We are grateful to those who have given evidence, and also to our specialist advisers, Professor Malcolm Chalmers, Research Director / Director, UK Defence Policy at the Royal United Services Institute and Professor Hew Strachan, Chichele Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford.

2 The National Security Strategy

The 2010 review process

6. The Government published the most recent NSS, *Strong Britain in a n Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, on 18 October 2010, five months after the General Election. The *Strategic Defence and Security Review*—which sought to describe how the NSS would be implemented—was published on 19 October. On 20 October, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt Hon George Osborne MP, presented the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), which set out budgetary allocations to government departments, including those charged with implementation of the NSS and SDSR.⁹ **It is significant that the NSS and SDSR were produced in parallel with the Spending Review—rather than guiding or following it—and after a review of just five months.**

7. The Defence Committee has described this five month timetable as “truncated”.¹⁰ We asked our witnesses about their views on the review process and the lessons for the future. Lord West told us that to do an NSS “properly” with the current level of resources would take a year.¹¹ Sir Peter Ricketts (who was then NSA) said that, were he in post for the next NSS, he would “start two years ahead on the research and the detailed analysis that would build up to then completing the National Security Strategy”.¹² Baroness Neville-Jones disagreed, saying it should take less than a year: “I do not think that the quality of thought is improved by taking excessive time. Putting people under a bit of pressure to think intensively over a period of time produces just as good, if not rather better, results”.¹³

8. Our witnesses agreed that that doing the NSS and SDSR and the spending review in parallel was probably the correct way to do things.¹⁴ Oliver Letwin said that, while he personally thought the approach used in 2010 was the correct one, the Government had not yet decided how to conduct the next NSS and SDSR.¹⁵ Sir Peter Ricketts said that:

if we had had the alternative of completing the spending round and then turning to the strategy and the SDSR, the budget would have been fixed and there would have been no opportunity to argue for more for defence or the Home Office as a result of the strategy work.¹⁶

Sir Peter Ricketts told us that, as a result of the NSS and CSR being done at the same time, extra money had been found for counter-terrorism and cyber security.¹⁷

⁹ *Spending Review 2010*, Cm 7924, October 2010.

¹⁰ HC 761, para 27.

¹¹ Q 64

¹² Q 150

¹³ Q 24

¹⁴ Lord West Q65, and Baroness Neville-Jones Q24 (although she felt that the “framework” of the NSS should be done first).

¹⁵ Q 104

¹⁶ Q 150

¹⁷ Q 150

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

10. We welcome the Government's decision to produce the SDSR at the same time as the NSS. In principle, this should allow us to see, alongside the Strategy, what impact it will have on policy priorities and resource allocation.

11. We also welcome the Government's commitment to review the NSS and SDSR regularly. A five yearly review cycle, as is currently proposed, seems to us appropriate. However, producing a new Strategy shortly after a General Election—as this timetable suggests—raises the danger of a hurried review process, particularly if there is a change of Government.

12. The order in which the NSS, SDSR, and CSR are begun is not particularly significant. What is crucial is that all three are able to influence each other, in a process which is begun in plenty of time. The timing of the Election led to the 2010 NSS, SDSR and CSR being completed in a relatively short timescale, with little consultation. We urge the Government to plan for a much longer lead time for the 2015 review.

The 2010 National Security Strategy

13. The SDSR states that:

The National Security Strategy sets out two clear objectives: (i) to ensure a secure and resilient UK by protecting our people, economy, infrastructure, territory and ways of life from all major risks that can affect us directly; and (ii) to shape a stable world, by acting to reduce the likelihood of risks affecting the UK or our interests overseas, and applying our instruments of power and influence to shape the global environment and tackle potential risks at source. It also sets out in its National Security Risk Assessment a clear prioritisation of those potential threats we face.¹⁸

14. The NSS is a 37 page document in four “parts” or chapters. The first two parts set out the strategic context and how the Government sees the UK's role in the world. It sets out a range of threats (including Al Qaeda,¹⁹ nuclear proliferation,²⁰ espionage,²¹ and terrorist groups linked to Northern Ireland²²) and makes predictions for the future. The predictions include: increased economic interdependence and integration,²³ the potential growth of

¹⁸ SDSR, para 1.4.

¹⁹ NSS, para 1.2.

²⁰ NSS, para 1.5.

²¹ NSS, para 1.6.

²² NSS, para 1.7.

²³ NSS, para 1.14.

ideological threats other than Al Qaeda,²⁴ population pressure in parts of the world leading to instability and conflict,²⁵ and an increasing threat from accidents in, or the malicious misuse of developments in, the biological sciences.²⁶ The third chapter of the NSS contains a table of “priority risks”²⁷ divided into three tiers, and the chapter then sets out how the Government intends to address the four tier one risks (terrorism, cyber security, natural hazard or accident, and an international military crisis drawing in the UK). The last chapter, “our response”, addresses implementation and resources, but says that detailed information is in the SDSR.

15. Thinking about what the future may hold, and the UK’s role in it, is essential if the Government is to be prepared and to target resources effectively. This does not mean making rigid predictions, which constrain our ability to respond to the unexpected, but creating a long-term framework, within which the UK has the flexibility to respond to short-term demands.

16. We welcome the decision of this Government and the last to publish an NSS. We believe that producing and publishing an NSS can help to play an important role in identifying likely future threats to, and opportunities for, the UK. This allows the UK to prepare for them and, in an era of scarce resources, to prioritise effectively. This is important to maintaining the security of the country.

National Security Risk Assessment

17. It is stated that the “priority risks” in the NSS were identified by the NSC after it had seen the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA).²⁸ The NSRA has not been published but its methodology is described in an annex to the NSS.²⁹ The NSRA process is said to have

compared, assessed and prioritised all major disruptive risks to our national interest, which are of sufficient scale or impact so as to require action from government and/or which have an ideological, international or political dimension.³⁰

The plausible worst case scenario of various risks were scored in terms of likelihood and potential impact (giving greatest weight to those with the ability to cause immediate and direct harm to the UK’s territories, economy, people, key institutions and infrastructure). These were then plotted on a matrix to allow comparisons to be made. The process was done at 5 and 20 year horizons.³¹

18. Sir Peter Ricketts told us “I think the prioritisation of the risks in the National Security Strategy is worthwhile”.³² Lord West told us that a similar exercise under the previous

²⁴ NSS, para 1.22.

²⁵ NSS, para 1.28.

²⁶ NSS, para 1.24.

²⁷ NSS, p 27.

²⁸ NSS, para 3.14.

²⁹ NSS, p 37.

³⁰ NSS, A.2; also Cabinet Office 02.

³¹ NSS, A.2, A.4.

³² Q 144

Government had successfully identified pandemic flu as the greatest risk in the short-term. It had also led to important counterterrorism work.³³

19. The NSS says that the NSRA process:

provides an insight into potential future risks, so as to contribute to decisions on capabilities for the future. It does not directly address immediate security issues. Thus we did not include in the NSRA a risk directly related to a conflict in Afghanistan, since we are already engaged there. But we do include risks of future terrorism and risks of future conflicts.³⁴

However it does include cyber security, even though it says this is a current risk: “this is not simply a risk for the future. Government, the private sector and citizens are under sustained cyber attack today, from both hostile states and criminals”.³⁵

20. We asked Oliver Letwin about the decision not to include Afghanistan in the NSRA. He told us that:

Because it [the NSRA] looks at the probability and impact—two axes on a graph—of specific events that affect our national security, it is not looking at decisions within our control. It is looking at the question of what may come and hit us ... The question of the withdrawal of British troops [from Afghanistan] at a given date is resolvable in the sense that it is under our control. Of course, the consequences of doing so are another matter, but the decision on whether to do it or not is one that we can ourselves make.³⁶

21. We asked the Cabinet Office for more detailed information of how the priority risks were assessed on likelihood and impact over the next five and twenty years, and for a chart showing how these risks were plotted in the matrix presented in the Annex to the NSS. It provided some more information, but not the requested chart.³⁷ We raised the matter with the Minister, who subsequently sent us an illustrative diagram which added little to the information given in the NSS.³⁸ We pursued the point with Sir Peter Ricketts, asking him what material was put before the National Security Council; whether they had information indicating how each risk was scored and how those scores were arrived at. Sir Peter Ricketts told us that the NSC had:

a very detailed and very highly classified document that went through a large number of national security risks and set out alongside them the consideration they had been given in terms of their possible impact, the likelihood of them happening and, therefore, where they would come out in the matrix work that had been conducted.³⁹

³³ Q 54

³⁴ NSS, para 3.9.

³⁵ NSS, para 3.27.

³⁶ Q 102

³⁷ Cabinet Office 02.

³⁸ Cabinet Office 03.

³⁹ Q 157

We asked to see that document, if necessary in confidence. By letter of 7 February, Sir Kim Darroch, the new NSA, informed us that “the Government are willing to answer specific questions about the risks to national security assessed in the NSRA” but that “Pending further consultations on the precedent which release of a Cabinet Committee paper might set, however, we are not able to provide the text in this case.”⁴⁰

22. We find this unacceptable. It is not that we particularly wish to see a Cabinet Committee paper, but we cannot judge if the priority risks are the right ones without more detailed information about how they were arrived at. We fully accept that some parts of the NSRA, particularly those relating to terrorism and hostile countries, are sensitive and must remain classified. Other elements—the NSRA also covers pandemic flu, accidents, flooding, and severe space weather, for example—could probably be published.⁴¹ We note that, for the civil risk register, tables are in the public domain showing the relative values that the Government placed on life, loss of homes, and economic losses, in order to compile the register.⁴² We would like to see similar information for the NSRA.

23. **We regret that the Government’s unwillingness, to date, to provide us with all the information we requested about the NSRA, means that we are not in a position to give the two Houses any assurance about its adequacy. We urge the Government to reconsider its position on this. We need this information if we are to do our job properly, as a Joint Committee tasked with scrutinising the NSS.**

24. **We remain to be convinced of the Government’s reasoning for not including Afghanistan in the NSRA. The Government has said that it is not including “immediate security issues” but terrorism, accidents, flooding and cyber attack are included, though they are all current threats. While the date of troop withdrawal may be a firm policy, we take the view that Afghanistan and the surrounding region remain an area of risk for the UK’s security and this ought to be reflected in the NSRA.**

25. **In principle, we welcome the development of the NSRA but the Government must ensure that it does not lead to a false sense of security. Any forecasting tool, however well designed, is imperfect and speculative, and the results produced should be treated with caution and used as a support for, not a substitute for, good judgement. The NSRA will not always predict the next big problem: resources must be allocated to continual horizon-scanning, and must be available to deal with unpredicted risks as they emerge.**

No reduction in influence

26. The NSS says that:

The National Security Council has reached a clear conclusion that Britain’s national interest requires us to reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence.⁴³

⁴⁰ Cabinet Office 05.

⁴¹ NSS, para 3.44.

⁴² <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/national-risk-register>

⁴³ NSS, para 0.8.

At other points the NSS talks about extending⁴⁴ or enhancing⁴⁵ the UK's influence. What "influence" means is not defined in the NSS itself, although it is often linked to national security: "In order to protect our interests at home, we must project our influence abroad"⁴⁶ In other places influence seems to be distinguished from security. For example it states: "we need to understand the context within which we operate in order to protect our security, achieve our national objectives and maintain our influence in world affairs."⁴⁷ The NSS discusses a broad range of "influences": military power, diplomacy (including the UK's role in international organizations), aid and also cultural effects (such as the large numbers of Britons living overseas and the tens of thousands of Chinese students studying here).

27. The NSS predicts the weight of economic activity shifting to Asia, Latin America and the Gulf,⁴⁸ the development of a multipolar world "with power distributed more widely than in the last two decades. The circle of international decision-making will be wider and potentially more multilateral",⁴⁹ and the rise of India and China as global powers.⁵⁰ The NSS refers several times to reform of the UN Security Council but says no more about what form that might take.⁵¹ The NSS says that the "US will remain the most powerful country in the world, economically and in military terms".⁵²

28. The Defence Committee has questioned whether no reduction in influence is realistic given Government spending cuts. Its report on the SDSR and NSS published in August 2011 said that:

The Government appears to believe that the UK can maintain its influence while reducing spending, not just in the area of defence but also at the Foreign Office. We do not agree. If the UK's influence in the world is to be maintained, the Government must demonstrate in a clear and convincing way that these reductions have been offset by identifiable improvements elsewhere rather than imprecise assertions of an increased reliance on diplomacy and 'soft power'. If the Government cannot do so, the National Security Strategy is in danger of becoming a 'wish list' that fails to make the hard choices necessary to ensure the nation's security.⁵³

29. Given the UK's low economic growth rate compared with those of the world's emerging economies, we believe it is wholly unrealistic not to expect any diminution in the UK's power and influence in the medium and long term. If, as the NSS predicts, the circle of international decision-making becomes wider and new global powers emerge, then it is likely that established high-income powers—the UK included—will have relatively less influence. Similarly it is possible that reform of the UN Security Council will involve other

⁴⁴ NSS, para 0.5.

⁴⁵ NSS, para 1.16.

⁴⁶ NSS, p 4.

⁴⁷ NSS, para 1.1.

⁴⁸ NSS, para 1.13.

⁴⁹ NSS, para 1.15.

⁵⁰ NSS, para 1.18.

⁵¹ NSS, para 1.16, para 2.10.

⁵² NSS, para 1.10.

⁵³ HC 761, para 64.

countries gaining a permanent seat on the Security Council: although the Government supports the addition of India and Brazil, for example, this will inevitably dilute the UK's position as only one of five countries that currently holds such a position. These trends make it even more important that the Government consider how to maintain its security objectives, perhaps through building wider partnerships.

30. A key point of the NSS is to set priorities, and to guide choices in an era of diminished resources. While such a strategy may contain aspirational elements it must also be realistic. The NSS simultaneously recognises the rise of new global powers, shifts in the centres of economic activity, and reduced resources in the UK, while at the same time asserting “no reduction in influence”. This is wholly unrealistic in the medium to long term and the UK needs to plan for a changing, and more partnership-dependent, role in the world.

Definition of “influence”

31. The NSS is not clear what is meant by “influence”. In places the NSS says that projecting our influence abroad is necessary to protect our interests at home; in other places, “influence” seems to be an end in itself. In written evidence, the Cabinet Office told us that “The Government considers influence to mean our ability to have an effect on the beliefs and actions of others, which in turn leads to action in support of our interests or greater acceptance of our own actions”.⁵⁴

32. It seems to us that there are many different types of influence. For example, that which comes from goodwill and “soft power” is very different from that which comes from threats and “hard power”. A country can have a lot of influence with some countries while at the same time having very little with others, particularly when it comes to “soft power”. There are also complex questions around the costs and benefits of different ways of gaining influence. Some of the references in the NSS are to cultural effects, whose direct influence on behalf of national interests is inherently hard to judge.

33. The NSS lacks a geopolitical focus; it is not clear in which areas of the world the UK is seeking to exercise influence and what form—military, cultural, economic—that influence might take. While the NSS stresses the importance of the UK's relationship with the US, it does not address which forms of influence are most successful in this relationship.

34. The NSS makes several mentions of aid, and states that its purposes include poverty reduction⁵⁵ and the reduction of the causes of potential hostility.⁵⁶ The SDSR expands on this by arguing that “We must focus on those fragile and conflict-affected countries where the risks are high, our interests are most at stake and where we know we can have an impact”.⁵⁷ The Government is committed to using 30% of Official Development Assistance

⁵⁴ Cabinet Office 05.

⁵⁵ NSS, para 2.11.

⁵⁶ NSS, para 3.4.

⁵⁷ SDSR, para 4.B.2.

to support fragile and conflict-affected states. We welcome this commitment, and the publication of the Building Stability Overseas Strategy last year.⁵⁸

35. We are concerned that the Government has not done enough in the NSS and SDSR to articulate its concept of what influence is, why it is needed, or what the most cost-effective way is of achieving it in different circumstances and regions. The NSS mentions many different forms of “soft power” but could do more to spell out the different roles of organisations such as the BBC World Service and British Council. We believe that greater clarity over exactly what we are seeking, and why, could enable resources to be better targeted.

Adaptable posture

36. The SDSR states that, based on the NSS, the NSC has decided on an “adaptable posture” (the phrase does not appear in the NSS).⁵⁹ The definition it gives is long and descriptive. “Principal elements” include tackling the four tier one risks identified in the NSS (terrorism, cybersecurity, natural hazard or accident, and an international military crisis drawing in the UK), maintaining a nuclear deterrent, “ensuring, in partnership with allies, the ability to regenerate capabilities given sufficient strategic notice” and:

to respond to growing uncertainty about longer-term risks and threats, we will pursue an over-arching approach which:

- identifies and manages risks before they materialise in the UK, with a focus on preventing conflicts and building local capacity to deal with problems
- maintains a broad spectrum of defence and other capabilities, able to deter and contain, as well as engage on the ground, developing threats
- ensures those capabilities have in-built flexibility to adjust to changing future requirements
- strengthens mutual dependence with key allies and partners who are willing and able to act, not least to make our collective resources go further and allow nations to focus on their comparative advantages
- coordinates and integrates the approach across government, achieving greater effect by combining defence, development, diplomatic, intelligence and other capabilities.⁶⁰

37. In written evidence the Cabinet Office explained how the decision had been made:

The [NSC] considered two alternative posture options to the adaptable approach. One option placed more emphasis on protecting the UK from imminent threats. The Armed Forces would have been configured for protecting the homeland and for short, sharp interventions overseas but would not have been capable of conducting

⁵⁸ *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, Department for International Development, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Defence, July 2011.

⁵⁹ SDSR, p 9.

⁶⁰ SDSR, Para 1.5.

stabilisation operations. There would have been cuts to all military capabilities. The other option placed more emphasis on protecting the UK by acting at distance. The Armed Forces would have been configured for long-term stabilisation operations but not for interventions.⁶¹

The three options presented required the same financial resources, but would have allocated them differently.⁶²

38. From Oliver Letwin's perspective the adaptable posture went beyond the armed forces. He told us that:

We have set out to create the basis for adaptability, flexibility and the ability to recognise that we are a kind of world which changes faster than the world did a few years back. [...] So the strategy is about maximising opportunity, minimising visible threat and maintaining maximal degrees of flexibility and adaptability. We then carry that into the SDSR, which is all about not plumping for this or that but rather having a range of possibilities and giving ourselves maximum military flexibility. The same is true of the way in which we administer the DfID budgets and programmes. The same is true of our direct foreign policy goals.⁶³

He went on to say that:

The most important thing about this strategy is what we are not doing in it. We could have had a strategy which said that we are devoted to having an alliance exclusively with A and B, or that we are devoted to ensuring that X and Y are achieved in the next three years.⁶⁴

He was asked if the NSS could be summed up by saying, "We will do what we can that looks sensible at the time, with rather limited resources". He replied that "That is not a bad description".⁶⁵

39. When we asked Oliver Letwin how the NSS had influenced the differing responses to Libya, Bahrain and Syria, he replied that:

It is important not to see the National Security Strategy as if it were a sort of recipe book, from which one can draw how to make eggs Benedict [...] What is really important is the functioning of the National Security Council itself and the way in which it considers things in the round [...]. That is really much more important than the very words of the National Security Strategy itself.⁶⁶

Sir Peter Ricketts felt that the NSS had influenced capability decisions:

Without trying to produce a recipe that tells us exactly where the next crisis will happen, the National Security Strategy has been helpful in directing work to produce

⁶¹ Cabinet Office 02.

⁶² Cabinet Office 02.

⁶³ Q 92

⁶⁴ Q 92

⁶⁵ Q 92

⁶⁶ Q 97

our capability to deal with the crisis wherever it happens. I think it has been worthwhile.⁶⁷

40. We welcome the idea of an “adaptable posture” in principle. But in a world in which it was deemed right in principle to intervene militarily in Libya but not, for instance, in Syria, we would welcome more clarity on how this principle shaped decisions on the mix of capabilities to be maintained. We call on the Government to elaborate on the thinking linking the NSS, the “adaptable approach” and the capabilities decided upon.

41. We accept that the NSS is not a “recipe book” which dictates our response to every event, but we would have expected to have seen some evidence that it had influenced decisions made since the SDSR, including the Government’s responses to the Arab Spring. We have found no such evidence. As the NSS states, “a strategy is only useful if it guides choices”; it is about thinking in the longer term, and not simply doing what is in the UK’s short-term interest. If the current strategy is not guiding choices then it needs to be revised.

An overarching strategy

42. The Public Administration Select Committee’s further report into *Who does UK National Strategy?* described the NSS as “more ‘review’ or ‘plan’ than ‘strategy’”.⁶⁸ It said that:

What is [...] missing is recognition that strategic aims cannot be set or adjudicated without an articulated account of who ‘we’ are and what we believe, both about ourselves and the world.⁶⁹

It called for a National Strategy, which it equated with “grand strategy”.⁷⁰

43. In oral evidence we asked our witnesses for their views on the merits of “grand strategy”.⁷¹ Lord West told us that “I am a great believer in the UK having what I always used to call a grand strategy”.⁷² He wanted the NSS to address questions such as, how the UK saw its place in the world, whether the Government believed in the “sovereignty” of certain industries, and whether the UK still considered itself to be a maritime nation and what the consequences were of that.⁷³ In contrast, Oliver Letwin told us that “We are not devotees of what I believe is called “grand strategy””.⁷⁴

44. There are varying definitions of the term “grand strategy”, as both the Public Administration Select Committee and the Defence Committee noted.⁷⁵ We use the term “overarching strategy” and define this as a common understanding about the UK’s

⁶⁷ Q 144

⁶⁸ HC 713, para 7.

⁶⁹ HC 713, para 7.

⁷⁰ HC 713, para 8.

⁷¹ Q 44, Q 55, Q 94

⁷² Q 44

⁷³ Q 45, Qq 50-51, Q 59, Q 74, Q 85

⁷⁴ Q 94

⁷⁵ HC 713, para 6; HC 761, para 214.

interests and objectives that guides choices on investment across government departments, as well as guiding operational priorities and crisis response. An overarching strategy should be based on a realistic vision of the UK's future place in the world, which will both shape, and be shaped by, the UK's interests and objectives.

45. The NSS does have some elements of an overarching strategy. Its statements on no reduction in influence⁷⁶, the primacy of the UK's relationship with the US,⁷⁷ the focus on bilateral relationships,⁷⁸ the Government's belief in free trade,⁷⁹ the importance of values in our foreign policy⁸⁰, and desire for an increased role for international law⁸¹ are all elements of this. An overarching strategy should require the Government to look at any tensions and contradictions between departmental policies, and prompt questioning of the underlying assumptions underpinning present policies. It could be argued that the Government has other documents which taken together make clear its overarching security strategy, but these would benefit from being brought together in a coherent and accessible form. Baroness Neville-Jones was clear that one of the advantages of an NSS "is that it brings the departmental priorities together in a single document and in a sense forces the Government to put them in order and to choose between them".⁸²

46. In the NSS, the Government has started to set out crucial statements which can guide future policy. However it does not yet present a clear overarching strategy: a common understanding about the UK's interests and objectives that guides choices on investment across government departments, including domestic departments, as well as guiding operational priorities and crisis response. Such a strategy must be based on a realistic vision of the UK's future position in the world. This vision will both shape, and be shaped, by the UK's interests and objectives.

Bilateral relationships

47. The NSS had a chapter on "Britain's distinctive role" which says that: "We have a web of relationships across the globe, with a unique position as a key member of multilateral fora as diverse as the UN Security Council, NATO, the EU, the G8, the G20 and the Commonwealth"⁸³. The NSS makes brief references to specific countries and geographical areas such as predicting the rise of India and China as global powers,⁸⁴ and the US remaining the world's most powerful country.⁸⁵ It also says that the UK must strengthen its network of bilateral ties with new partners as well as traditional allies, recognising that many emerging powers put a premium on direct relationships.⁸⁶

⁷⁶ NSS, para 0.8.

⁷⁷ NSS, para 1.16.

⁷⁸ NSS, para 1.17.

⁷⁹ NSS, para 1.19.

⁸⁰ NSS, p 23.

⁸¹ NSS, para 1.16.

⁸² Q 21

⁸³ NSS, para 2.10.

⁸⁴ NSS, para 1.18.

⁸⁵ NSS, para 1.10.

⁸⁶ NSS, para 1.17.

48. The SDSR also sets out the Government's approach to bilateral co-operation:

We are developing deepened bilateral security partnerships with Turkey, India, Japan, the Gulf Cooperation Council states and others; we share crucial security interests with Pakistan; and we are building up our political and security dialogue with China, with Russia, and with fast growing economies like Brazil and Indonesia.⁸⁷

Clearly this list includes countries with which the UK has very different relationships. Unlike some of our allies, the Government does not set out which countries it sees as friends and which countries could potentially pose a threat. In contrast the US has said explicitly in its recent publication *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st-Century Defence* that “the growth of China's military power must be accompanied by greater clarity of its strategic intentions in order to avoid causing friction in the region”.⁸⁸ It is also explicit that the US's collaboration with the Gulf Cooperation Council is aimed at countering Iran.⁸⁹ The latest *Livre Blanc* from France also contains more geographical prioritisation than the NSS.⁹⁰

Alliances

49. The SDSR contains a section (part 5) entitled “alliances and partnerships”.⁹¹ It sets out the plans for the UK's relationships with US, France, UN, NATO and the EU. The pages on France and the US set out very specific ways in which the UK hopes to strengthen ties between the nations. For example, with France the UK will be “developing joint military doctrine and training programmes relating for example to noncombatant evacuation operations, and responses to counter-improvised explosive devices”.⁹² It also says that “we will focus our planned forces on what we judge will be of greatest utility to our allies as well as the UK”.⁹³ The sections on UN, NATO and the EU imply some criticism. For example it states the UK will work to “ensure that NATO has the political will and ability to respond to current and future threats”.⁹⁴

50. The SDSR gives little attention to regional alliances. The Economic Community of West African States, and the Arab League are not mentioned at all. The sole comment on two other major regional organisations is “We also support regional organisations such as the African Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations.”. None of these organisations are mentioned in the NSS, despite the key roles that they all play in their regions. The African Union has intervened in Somalia, suffering considerable casualties, and (since the NSS was written) the Arab League has played a key role in Libya, Yemen and Syria.

⁸⁷ NSS, para 5.8.

⁸⁸ *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st-Century Defence*, p 2

⁸⁹ *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st-Century Defence*, p 2.

⁹⁰ Défense et Sécurité nationale Le Livre Blanc, June 2008, <http://archives.livreblancdefenseetsecurite.gouv.fr>

⁹¹ SDSR, part 5.

⁹² SDSR, para 5.7.

⁹³ SDSR, para 2.9.

⁹⁴ SDSR, para 5.11.

51. We are concerned that the NSS’s focus on bilateral relations with large emerging powers—and concomitant investments in diplomatic and capacity-building activities—should not be at the expense of strengthening relations with the Commonwealth and with key regional organisations such as ASEAN, the Arab League and African Union.

52. The SDSR says that “we will maintain our ability to act alone where we cannot expect others to help”⁹⁵ but overall it stresses the role of the UK’s allies. It notes that Sierra Leone in 2000 is the only significant operation the UK has conducted alone since the Falklands Conflict in 1982. It goes on to say that:

If, in the context of multilateral operations, we agree with other nations that we will rely on them to provide particular capabilities or conduct particular military roles or missions, and they will likewise rely on us, then we will be ready to underpin this understanding with legally binding mutual guarantees.”⁹⁶

The SDSR does not mention any areas where the UK might sometimes have different interests or priorities from its allies, or limits (including geographical ones) to the UK’s cooperation with them. And it does not expand on what it means by situations “where we cannot expect others to help”. For example, the possibility of a recurrence of the Falklands conflict is not mentioned.

53. Lord West was concerned about this reliance on allies: “over the past 15 years even well established alliances and partnerships have looked decidedly discretionary when pressure has come from either internal or external forces”. He gave the example of the Germans abstaining during the Libya conflict, but said there were many other examples.⁹⁷

54. We are concerned that the NSS and SDSR have avoided some of the difficult questions about alliances. There does not appear to have been a fundamental assessment of the extent to which the UK can rely on its allies, and the extent to which it needs the capacity to operate independently. The SDSR states that “we will maintain our ability to act alone where we cannot expect others to help”. We call on the Government to set out in response to this report in what situations it thinks the UK may need to operate alone and what capabilities they would require.

The US

55. While the NSS is based strongly on the UK’s relationship with the US, it appears that the US’s focus is moving away from Europe. In January 2012 the US published *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for the 21st-Century Defence*. The document states that:

US economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean region and South Asia, creating a mix of evolving challenges and opportunities. Accordingly

⁹⁵ SDSR, para 2.10.

⁹⁶ SDSR, para 5.4.

⁹⁷ Q 49

while the US military will continue to contribute to good security globally, *we will of necessity rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region.*⁹⁸

The document goes on to say that:

Most European countries are now producers of security rather than consumers of it. Combined with the drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan, this has created a strategic opportunity to rebalance the US military investment in Europe, moving from a focus on current conflicts towards a focus on future capability. *In keeping with this evolving strategic landscape, our posture in Europe must also evolve.*⁹⁹

The UK is not mentioned by name in the document. The document also sets out that “US forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stabilisation operations”. Instead it will emphasise non-military means and military-to-military cooperation.¹⁰⁰

56. There are already questions about the ability of the UK, and even NATO to act without the support of US military assets, particularly ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance capabilities). It is also claimed that in Libya operations some European countries ran out of precision guided missiles and were reliant on the US for air-to air refuelling.¹⁰¹

57. The need for a clear strategy as to how the UK (possibly along with other European states) can act without the US is heightened by the US’s recent announcement. If the US is moving its focus eastwards there is the possibility it will become involved in conflicts in which the UK has little direct interest. Conversely the US may be less interested in situations involving UK interests. The US view of Europe as a producer of security suggests that it may be increasingly unwilling to meet the costs of conflicts primarily affecting Europe.

58. While emphasising the importance of NATO, neither the NSS nor SDSR acknowledge that it will require commitment and resources to maintain our influence within the partnership. The NSA’s report on the handling of the Libya crisis drew attention to the need to obtain key command positions in those parts of a reformed NATO Command Structure that are likely to be relevant to the conduct of future operations,¹⁰² something not mentioned in the SDSR. The Government must also ensure that key positions in alliance structures are not left vacant.

59. The Defence Committee has expressed its concerns that UK defence cuts will have repercussions for other NATO countries:

If the UK’s influence in the world is to be maintained, we are concerned that the impact of defence cuts on the UK’s defence commitments and role within NATO and other strategic alliances does not appear to have been fully addressed. UK defence does not operate in a vacuum and decisions taken in the UK have

⁹⁸ *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st-Century Defence* p2 (Original emphasis).

⁹⁹ *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st-Century Defence* p 3 (Original emphasis).

¹⁰⁰ *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st-Century Defence* p 6.

¹⁰¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2010-12, *Operations in Libya*, HC 950, paras 87-91, 107-110, 117-125.

¹⁰² *Libya crisis: national security adviser's review of central coordination and lessons learned report*, para 96.

repercussions for the spending commitments and strategic posture of allies and alliances.¹⁰³

The outgoing US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has warned that “if the current trends in the decline of European defence capabilities are not halted and reversed, future US political leaders....may not consider the return on America’s investment in NATO worth the cost”.¹⁰⁴

60. We recognise that there are limits to what can be said in a public document. However we believe that the USA’s publication of *Sustaining US Global Leadership* provides an opportunity to open up a debate on a number of crucial issues. We call on the Government to reflect deeply on the long term implications of the geographical and functional shifts in US policy that are now taking place. It raises fundamental questions if our pre-eminent defence and security relationship is with an ally who has interests which are increasingly divergent from our own. The Government needs to decide if the UK will continue to be as involved in US military action as we have been in the past if the US focuses on Asia-Pacific. If the US is moving towards viewing Europe as a producer rather than a consumer of security, and reducing its capability to mount long term stabilisation missions, it raises more questions as to what we can expect from the US and what the US expects from the UK.

The Economy

61. An area of concern largely omitted from the NSS is the consequences of international economic instability for national security. The NSS was written before the Eurozone Crisis but makes only brief mention of the impact of the 2008-2009 banking crisis.¹⁰⁵ Economic problems or the collapse of the Euro were not in the NSS’s “priority risks”. Because of the lack of detail received from the Cabinet Office we do not know if they were included in the NSRA.

62. The SDSR is also focused on prosperity rather than potential problems. It says that the FCO will:

maximise the economic opportunities provided by the [Foreign Office’s embassy and consulate] network with a new emphasis on commercial diplomacy including more effort on creating exports and investment; opening markets; ensuring access to resources and promoting sustainable global growth.¹⁰⁶

63. The Public Administration Select Committee said in its report that:

An inability to think effectively about wider National Strategy in government presents a continuing risk to the UK’s future prosperity and safety. Getting it right

¹⁰³ HC 761 para 65.

¹⁰⁴ HC Deb, 26 January 2012, Col 485. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/10/nato-dismal-future-pentagon-chief>

¹⁰⁵ NSS, para 1.19.

¹⁰⁶ SDSR, p67.

matters. The failure to anticipate the risk of the banking collapse and take remedial action, for example, has affected the lives of every citizen.¹⁰⁷

64. In oral evidence in October 2011 we raised with the Minister the already unfolding crisis in the Eurozone. Oliver Letwin told us that:

We are certainly concerned about many aspects of the global economic situation, but we do not think that it threatens our security at the moment. It simply makes life more difficult for us.¹⁰⁸

We asked Mr Letwin if, with hindsight, he thought that the NSS gave enough weight to the consequences of an economic crisis. He told us that:

under certain very extreme circumstances, economic events could generate security risks. Undoubtedly, one could imagine such things, but they would need to be very severe indeed. We are, notwithstanding all the difficulties in the world around us and the difficulties that we ourselves face today, still a rich nation and capable of defending and securing ourselves. Even quite severe economic misfortunes in the world leave us able to do that.¹⁰⁹

Sir Peter Ricketts told us, in December 2011, that the Government was undertaking contingency planning across a whole range of scenarios relating to the full or partial collapse of the Euro but that the NSC was not involved in that work. He added that “we would obviously keep in view, in terms of horizon-scanning, any potential implications for national security”.¹¹⁰

65. Some commentators believe that the consequences of economic instability have much broader strategic implications. Chancellor Merkel said in October 2011:

Another half century of peace and prosperity in Europe is not to be taken for granted. If the euro fails, Europe fails. We have a historical obligation: to protect by all means Europe’s unification process begun by our forefathers after centuries of hatred and blood spill. None of us can foresee what the consequences would be if we were to fail.¹¹¹

66. There could also be strategic implications if the Euro is saved. On 8 and 9 December the EU held a meeting to discuss its response to the Eurozone crisis. It was reported that at that meeting the UK had effectively vetoed changes to EU treaties aimed at tightening fiscal requirements (although other countries said that they needed to consult their parliaments or possibly hold referendums). As a result it was decided that Euro zone members and others would adopt an accord with penalties for breaking deficit rules. It will be backed by a treaty between governments, not an EU treaty. The long-term consequences of the UK’s

¹⁰⁷ HC 713, para 13.

¹⁰⁸ Q 105

¹⁰⁹ Q 105

¹¹⁰ Q 138

¹¹¹ <http://www.infiniteunknown.net/2011/10/27/bilderberg-merkel-warns-of-war-in-europe-if-euro-fails-eu-summit-seals-1-trillion-euro-deal-banks-agree-on-50-write-off-of-greek-debt/>

decision are not yet clear, and will probably depend on how the Euro zone crisis continues to unfold. In February 2012 we were told that the NSC had still not discussed the matter.¹¹²

67. We are not convinced that the Government gave sufficient attention in the NSS to the potential risks that future international economic instability might pose for UK security. These go beyond the UK being unable to afford to defend itself. International economic problems could lead to our allies having to make considerable cuts to their defence spending, and to an increase in economic migrants between EU member states, and to domestic social or political unrest. The NSC needs to take all of this into account.

68. We hope that the problems within the Eurozone can be resolved. However we believe that, even in 2010, the potential threat to UK security from a full, or partial, collapse of the Eurozone was one of the plausible scenarios which a prudent NSRA should have examined. We call on the NSC to address the potential impacts on the UK and NATO (and how the Government would respond) were this to happen, as a matter of urgency. It also needs to examine the long term strategic impact for the UK of any measures to save the Euro, such as further Eurozone political integration or the exit of some states from EU membership.

Scotland

69. One of the surprising facts which emerged from our inquiry was that, even by February 2012, the NSC had given no consideration to the potential impact for UK security of Scottish independence.¹¹³ Sir Peter Ricketts told us that the NSC had not considered the issue and that “I have no current intention [to advise the NSC] to do so”.¹¹⁴ Oliver Letwin told us that the future of Scotland was for the people of Scotland to decide and that “we have not come across any practical difficulties arising at the moment and we do not anticipate at the moment any arising”.¹¹⁵

70. While the UK coalition Government opposes Scottish independence, it is a fact that the Scottish National Party won a majority in the Scottish Parliament while promising a referendum on independence by 2015. Scottish independence could have a range of impacts from potential disputes over the response to security threats and the division of resources,¹¹⁶ to questions about basing of forces and the future of the UK’s nuclear deterrent.

71. The fact that the potential impact of Scottish independence was not brought to the NSC’s attention strengthens our concern that the horizon-scanning carried out on the NSC’s behalf is inadequate and that the NSC’s oversight of security issues is not sufficiently broad and strategic.

¹¹² Cabinet Office 05, A4

¹¹³ Cabinet Office 05, A4.

¹¹⁴ Q 158

¹¹⁵ Q 118

¹¹⁶ Q 118

Annual progress report on the NSS and SDSR

72. The NSS promised an “annual report of progress on implementation” of the NSS and SDSR.¹¹⁷ We were expecting it in October 2011 (a year after the publication of the NSS and SDSR) and so hoped to have it in advance of our final evidence session. Despite postponing the session by a month the Cabinet Office was unable to supply it in time. The Cabinet Office also failed to give us notice of the publication of the *Libya Crisis: lessons learned* report¹¹⁸ in December 2011, which limited our ability to be fully briefed on the document before the final session. Sir Peter Ricketts apologised to us and we trust that his successor will honour his assurances that the Cabinet Office will keep us informed of relevant publications in future.¹¹⁹ However we have been left with the strong impression that the National Security Secretariat is either under resourced or simply disorganised and we thus have concerns about the level of service it is providing to the NSC.

73. The annual progress report was eventually published¹²⁰ in December 2011 as *The Strategic Defence and Security Review: First Annual Report*. It focuses on the Government implementation of the SDSR, for example progress in reducing defence capabilities and bringing troops back from Germany. There is some coverage of recent events, for example the conflict in Libya, work in Afghanistan and the deaths of Osama Bin Laden and Anwar Al Awlaki, but these are covered very briefly. It also looks at domestic issues such as the new CONTEST and Prevent strategies, and security for the Olympics. It reports on developments in the FCO network and the DFID aid programme and there is also an update on the UK’s alliances (although the report was published before the US published *Sustaining US Global Leadership*).

74. The report is almost unrelentingly positive. It contains no details on areas where there have been delays or problems even where those have been very high profile (such as at the UK Border Agency). It also contains no lessons learned, not even those already set out in the *Libya crisis* report. There is no mention of the Euro zone crisis, or the military lesson from Libya, or the withdrawal date for Afghanistan, or any comment on how the operation there is progressing. There is also very little on the work of the NSC, any challenges it may have faced, or changes it may have made to the way it works. This is despite Oliver Letwin’s comments that the functioning of the NSC was much more important than the words of the NSS.¹²¹

75. The 2011 progress report is a relatively uninformative implementation report on the SDSR. Next year we expect a rounded and insightful update on both the NSS and the SDSR. It should include a summary of the main events of the year that were of relevance to national security, how the UK responded to them, and the longer term strategic implications. For example this year’s report could have included the problems at the UK Border Agency, the Eurozone crisis (and the strategic implication of measures to resolve it), an update on the US-UK joint strategy board, on the Anglo-

¹¹⁷ NSS, paras 0.12, 4.12-13.

¹¹⁸ Libya crisis: national security adviser’s review of central coordination and lessons learned; see HC Deb, 1 December 2012, col. 75WS.

¹¹⁹ Qq 122-3

¹²⁰ www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2011/DEP2011-1996.pdf

¹²¹ Q 97

French alliance, on Iran, and on commitments in Afghanistan and the adjacent area after 2015. It should also include a summary of the work of the NSC that year. The Libya Crisis report, with its identification of problems faced and lessons learned, provides a good model.

3 Government decision-making on national security

The National Security Council

Establishment

76. On 12 May 2010 the Government announced that the Prime Minister had appointed Sir Peter Ricketts as the first National Security Adviser, a new role based in the Cabinet Office. Sir Peter was charged with establishing the new National Security Council (NSC) structures, to “coordinate and deliver the Government’s international security agenda”.¹²² The NSC is chaired by the Prime Minister and made up of Cabinet ministers (although in the past it has included non-Cabinet ministers). Others can be invited to attend, including the Chief of the Defence Staff, the Heads of the Security and Intelligence Services, the Attorney General, the Leader of the Opposition or outside experts.

77. The Cabinet Office’s written evidence states that the NSC had several sub-committees: NSC (Threats, Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies), NSC (Nuclear), NSC (Emerging Powers), and NSC (Libya) each with a different membership and including some Ministers who are not members of the NSC. The NSC meets weekly. Lord West noted that the NSC consisted of similar people and had a similar meeting schedule to the NSID (National Security International Relations and Development Cabinet sub-Committee) which operated under the previous Government (although NSID did not have an official with the title of National Security Adviser).¹²³

78. The 2010 NSS and SDSR were prepared by the NSC’s staff. The NSC decided what “priority risks” the NSS would cover.¹²⁴ It also agreed the NSS, and the “adaptable posture” set out in the SDSR.¹²⁵

Role of the NSC

79. We were told that the NSC’s role was to look at “strategic questions of Government policy, including those related to our active deployments”. It has a separate role from COBR (Cabinet Office Briefing Room—the Government’s crisis management facility), which focuses on crisis management and co-ordination.¹²⁶ While there are clearly strategic implications to some decisions made in a crisis, we were told that this distinction worked well in practice.¹²⁷ Oliver Letwin told us that COBR was:

there to receive information, to make operational decisions.... That is completely separate from the NSC except in so much as the NSC will have, with the approval of

¹²² <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/establishment-of-a-national-security-council/>

¹²³ Qq 66-8

¹²⁴ NSS, para 3.14.

¹²⁵ SDSR, p9.

¹²⁶ Cabinet Office 02.

¹²⁷ Oliver Letwin Q109 and Lord West Qq 70-1

Cabinet, determined the resources that are being used to deal with the operational questions that are before COBR and will have set the main policy lines that may be being applied.¹²⁸

Lessons from Libya

80. The NSA's *Libya crisis* report made it clear that NSC (Libya) (NSC(L)) looked at both strategic and tactical issues.¹²⁹ NSC(L) alone met 62 times¹³⁰ and in addition there were meetings of the NSC and NSC(Officials). The report said that "A clear lesson is that the conduct of modern conflicts [...] requires Ministers to be abreast of the tactical as well as strategic issues".¹³¹ Real time military, intelligence and diplomatic assessment (including from theatre) was made available to Ministers. NSC(Officials) co-ordinated implementation of decisions and development of policy, including holding video conferences with key UK missions overseas.¹³²

81. Sir Peter Ricketts told us that in a new conflict like Libya there were far more decisions to make policy on than with a more established conflict (such as Afghanistan) where the policies and structures were settled.¹³³ He described NSC(L) as a "more operational forum" and said that this was how things had been done during the Second World War.¹³⁴ He said that:

Ministers are very careful to respect the operational responsibilities of, say, the senior police commander of a terrorist operation or the Chief of Defence Staff in relation to the Armed Forces, but they want to set the political direction on each of the operational issues that come up.¹³⁵

82. It is clear to us that any committee meeting over 60 times in a relatively short period to discuss one topic is doing far more than looking at the strategic direction of the campaign. We have not taken detailed evidence on the management of the Libya campaign, and so we are not in a position to pass judgement on how it was handled, or on whether the NSC (or NSC(L)) was the correct organisation to take the lead. What we can say is that the NSC, through its Libyan sub-committee, has clearly devoted considerable time and resources to non-strategic issues, and that this inevitably must have increased pressure on the time, resources, and focus available to devote to strategic issues.

83. We welcome the introduction of an NSC to give strategic direction to the Government's national security agenda, but we are not convinced that the NSC has successfully maintained its strategic focus. We are left with the distinct impression that it has been deeply involved in operations and this may have reduced its ability to think strategically.

¹²⁸ Q 109

¹²⁹ *Libya crisis: national security adviser's review of central coordination and lessons learned*, p 7.

¹³⁰ *Libya crisis: national security adviser's review of central coordination and lessons learned*, p 19.

¹³¹ *Libya crisis: national security adviser's review of central coordination and lessons learned*, p 19.

¹³² *Libya crisis: national security adviser's review of central coordination and lessons learned*, p 3.

¹³³ Q 155

¹³⁴ Q 155

¹³⁵ Q 155

Horizon-scanning

84. We asked the Cabinet Office for examples of longer term strategy work carried out by the NSC (and a guide as to what was considered long term) and were told “NSC discussions regularly look at strategic issues —HMG’s policy position for Afghanistan post 2014, for instance, and its strategy for managing a range of bilateral relations.”¹³⁶ We also asked for examples of “blue skies thinking”, and were advised that:

The NSC draws on a wide range of advice and analysis produced by departments on the NSC. Departments frequently engage outside experts and consider alternative approaches when formulating policy advice to the Council. Separately, the NSC Officials (non-ministerial) group meets quarterly in an informal setting to reflect on issues outside the rhythm and routine of the regular NSC schedule.¹³⁷

85. We asked how the agenda was shaped and were told that:

The NSC agenda is produced by the Secretariat of the National Security Council on a quarterly basis for submission to the Prime Minister. The agenda is shaped by proposals from departments, as well as in consultation with Number 10 and the Deputy Prime Minister’s office, and is kept sufficiently flexible to respond to urgent priorities and enable the NSC to oversee HMG’s policy response to national security crises.¹³⁸

The Cabinet Office told us that, while the NSC shaped intelligence collection priorities through the annual Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) Requirements and Priorities round, there was “no comprehensive process for the NSC itself to identify emerging risks”.¹³⁹

86. We are concerned that the Cabinet Office was unable to provide us, either in public or in confidence, with concrete examples of “blue skies” discussions by the NSC. Coupled with its failure to discuss the national security implications of either the Eurozone crisis or the possibility of Scottish independence, it is apparent that there are major problems in the way that the NSC selects topics for discussion.

The National Security Adviser

87. Sir Peter Ricketts was NSA from May 2010 to the end of 2011 when he was replaced by Sir Kim Darroch. As the first NSA, Sir Peter was charged with establishing the new NSC structures and helped produce the 2010 NSS. He told us about his role:

I have three hats. One is I am the secretary of the National Security Council and I prepare the meetings; [...] I have a meeting of Permanent Secretary representatives of all the departments on the NSC; we meet before the NSC to prepare the papers and the agenda; and then I am secretary of the meeting and responsible for implementation and follow up. [...] The second role is effectively as a foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister. Because of my background, he looks to me for advice;

¹³⁶ Cabinet Office 05.

¹³⁷ Cabinet Office 05.

¹³⁸ Cabinet Office 05.

¹³⁹ Cabinet Office 05, A11

I attend his meetings in London; I travel with him when he goes overseas; and I act as his senior adviser on foreign affairs. The third function is heading the [National Security] Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.¹⁴⁰

88. It is notable that both Sir Peter and his successor, Sir Kim Darroch, have been drawn from the FCO. Lord West said that this was “probably quite a damaging thing”.¹⁴¹ Baroness Neville-Jones thought the Civil Service needed deliberately to develop a pool of people with experience in various departments who could be considered for the role because “it will not happen by accident”.¹⁴²

89. Oliver Letwin did not see it as a problem that both NSAs were from the Foreign Office. He told the Committee that Sir Peter’s background had not led to:

any prejudice against being concerned with domestic security. On the contrary, he has been very concerned indeed with domestic security, as well as international security. [...] I have dealt a good deal with his successor in his capacity as the UK Representative to the EU and my impression is that he is of the same cast of mind—I am sure that the Prime Minister would not have appointed him if he had not been.¹⁴³

In his evidence Sir Peter Ricketts drew attention to the range of experience that both he and his successor had, and the impossibility of any candidate having a range of experience covering the whole national security spectrum.¹⁴⁴ In its written evidence the Cabinet Office said that “future appointments [as NSA] could be drawn from a range of Departments and Agencies.”¹⁴⁵

90. We also discussed the ideal length of appointment for an NSA (Sir Peter Ricketts was in post approximately 20 months). Baroness Neville-Jones said that she thought that a parliament [five years] was a good length for the appointment of a NSA.¹⁴⁶ Sir Peter Ricketts told us that: “I suspect that Sir Kim will spend longer [as NSA]. I came to this job having already done four years as Permanent Secretary in the FCO; he will come back fresh from a posting overseas”.¹⁴⁷

91. We acknowledge Sir Peter Ricketts’ significant contribution as NSA in setting up the NSC and launching the 2010 NSS. Sir Kim Darroch also brings a distinguished record to the office. We hope that Sir Kim Darroch will be able to remain in post long enough to complete the next NSS.

92. We welcome the appointment of a National Security Adviser, though we still have questions about the nature of the role, and its status. We have concerns too that the current and former NSA both have a FCO background. The Government has assured us that this has not led to a lack of focus on domestic issues, but this was not a view that

¹⁴⁰ Q 125

¹⁴¹ Q 84

¹⁴² Q 31

¹⁴³ Q 110

¹⁴⁴ Q 129,131

¹⁴⁵ Cabinet Office 02.

¹⁴⁶ Q 31

¹⁴⁷ Q 130

all our witnesses shared. In addition we noted a lack of military focus in the NSA’s Libya Crisis report. We welcome the Government’s commitment that future appointments could be drawn from a range of Departments and Agencies. We shall be monitoring this.

Line management of the Security and Intelligence Agencies Heads

93. Baroness Neville-Jones told us in her evidence that the Heads of the three Security and Intelligence Agencies “are in attendance at the NSC and are invited to speak, and they speak frequently”.¹⁴⁸ Oliver Letwin told us that the NSC had given the Heads of the Agencies greater opportunity to talk to Ministers and the Prime Minister.¹⁴⁹ Under the governing legislation, the Heads are required to provide an annual report to the Prime Minister.¹⁵⁰

94. Sir Peter Ricketts told us in oral evidence that “I hold the budget for the intelligence agencies; I am the principal accounting officer for that, and I do the line management, the annual appraisal and oversight of the three agency heads.”¹⁵¹ He also told us that: “I have a responsibility for the intelligence community; while each of the three agency heads has their own responsibilities in their own fields, I have the responsibility to make sure they are working effectively together.”¹⁵² The Cabinet Office told us in written evidence that Sir Peter Ricketts was responsible for writing the personal annual staff reports for the three Heads.¹⁵³ We asked if Sir Kim Darroch would have the same responsibility and were told that he would and the job had been passed from the Cabinet Secretary to the NSA when the role was created.¹⁵⁴

95. It is important that the Heads of the Security and Intelligence Agencies have access to, and are directly accountable to Ministers, and we have been told that this remains the case. We think it wrong that the performance of the three Agency Heads should be reported on by anyone other than the relevant Minister.

A National Security Minister?

96. Lord West was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Security and Counter-terrorism), a role based at the Home Office under the previous Government. Baroness Neville-Jones was Minister of State for Security and Counter-Terrorism, at the Home Office from the Election until May 2011; she was not replaced. She had a seat on the NSC but was not in the Cabinet. The current situation is that there is an International Security Minister at the Ministry of Defence (Mr Gerald Howarth MP), and a Counterterrorism Minister at the Home Office (Mr James Brokenshire MP).¹⁵⁵ Neither sits on the NSC. Sir

¹⁴⁸ Q 19

¹⁴⁹ Q 111

¹⁵⁰ The Security Service Act 1989 states that the Director-General will make an annual report to Prime Minister and the Secretary of State and may at any time report to either of them on any matter relating to its work. The Intelligence Services Act 1994 has similar provisions for the Chief of the Intelligence Service and the Director of GCHQ.

¹⁵¹ Q 125

¹⁵² Q 125

¹⁵³ Cabinet Office 05.

¹⁵⁴ Cabinet Office 05.

¹⁵⁵ Q 133

Peter Ricketts told us that James Brokenshire had taken over most of Baroness Neville-Jones's role at the Home Office but that Francis Maude had taken over responsibility for cyber security at the Cabinet Office (he also does not sit on the NSC).¹⁵⁶ He assured us that there was a Minister responsible for all the different parts of Baroness Neville-Jones's portfolio.

97. In oral evidence we heard arguments for a National Security Minister, rather than, or in addition to, an official as NSA. Lord West told us that “the Prime Minister is so tied up with other things that I felt that you needed someone who had his eye on the ball all the time”, and that the job required someone with “political antennae” as well.¹⁵⁷ The minister's job would be to make sure the Prime Minister was aware of important issues, but that the person needed to be a minister because he “just felt that one would have much more ability to make sure that departments worked together”.¹⁵⁸ The House of Commons Defence Committee has said that:

we believe that a dedicated, powerful and independent long-term voice for national security should exist within Government and recommend that the Prime Minister appoint a National Security Minister, separate from the Home Office, to act as National Security Adviser with a seat on the National Security Council.¹⁵⁹

98. Sir Peter Ricketts saw potential problems in having a cross-cutting security Minister:

If you have a Minister, they will inevitably overlap at ministerial level with the responsibilities of the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Development Secretary and the Home Secretary. I have great respect for Ministers, but my experience is that, if you give two Ministers overlapping responsibilities for the same thing, it is not always a recipe for harmony.¹⁶⁰

Baroness Neville-Jones felt that there could be constitutional problems, as well as the risk of damaging the Foreign Secretary's status abroad.¹⁶¹ Even Lord West, who was in favour of a minister, recognised that a National Security Minister would have to be carefully chosen to ensure that he or she did not become overly powerful and upset the current system of ministers being responsible for departments.¹⁶²

99. The current Prime Minister takes a keen interest in national security and regularly chairs the NSC. The Government does not see the need for a National Security Minister at present, and we can see the clear advantages to the NSA being an official. However, the Prime Minister's active involvement is a key element of the current arrangements. Were this to change, and were the right person available, the question of appointing a National Security Minister would need to be reconsidered.

¹⁵⁶ Q 135

¹⁵⁷ Q 81

¹⁵⁸ Q 81

¹⁵⁹ HC 761, Para 34

¹⁶⁰ Q132

¹⁶¹ Q31

¹⁶² Qq 77-84

Clarity of responsibility

100. We took evidence from Oliver Letwin, Minister for Government Policy Advice at the Cabinet Office, as we were advised that he was the most appropriate minister to give evidence. He told us that:

I have no direct reporting relationship to the National Security Secretariat, which reports to the Prime Minister. The National Security Adviser, whom I am sure you will be interviewing in due course, reports directly to the Prime Minister

He went on to say that “I suppose that my role there is to look across the pattern of policies that emerge from the National Security Council and to observe how they connect with the rest of our strategies and policies, because my role in the Government is to do that in general”.¹⁶³

101. Sir Peter Ricketts told us that the Government had noticed that there was a lack of a ministerial lead on cyber security once Baroness Neville-Jones had left and that that had led to the appointment of Francis Maude. It had also organised a ministerial lead for space strategy. He was unable to tell us who was the ministerial lead on electromagnetic pulses.¹⁶⁴ We were subsequently told that there was no ministerial lead; different elements were handled by different departments.¹⁶⁵

102. We are not convinced that all involved in Government are clear on which Minister is accountable for which elements of the NSS and NSC. It is even harder for those outside Government, including Select Committees, to identify who is accountable. This confusion over responsibility is not indicative of a well functioning organisation and the Government needs to address this.

The National Security Secretariat

103. The NSA leads a secretariat (NSSec) comprised of approximately 200 individuals across several teams (although around 70 of these work in the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, dealing with domestic resilience).¹⁶⁶ The rest of NSSec “coordinates the development and implementation of policy for decision-making at the NSC, delivers specific projects, for example on cyber security”. The Cabinet Office told us in its submission in February 2011 that structural changes were underway, which would see a reduction in staff by around 25%. The NSC and its subcommittees are supported by a small Council Secretariat (with a core of two people) responsible for coordinating operational matters. As a result:

The National Security Secretariat (NSSec), has a limited capacity to undertake analysis and commission wider work. But the primary role of the Secretariat is to support the NSC rather than to duplicate the work of other departments.

¹⁶³ Q 88

¹⁶⁴ Q 136

¹⁶⁵ Cabinet Office 03.

¹⁶⁶ The NSS was drawn up by a team who also prepared the SDSR. After both were completed the team was disbanded and NSSec reverted to the pre-SDSR structure. (HC 761, para 36).

104. Lord West thought that the current level of resources was not acceptable saying that, despite the potential to draw on the work of departments, “you probably need a slightly stronger secretariat within the Cabinet Office [...] with more authority to do certain things and to draw on this information”.¹⁶⁷

105. Other Select Committees have raised concerns about the current arrangements. The Defence Committee noted that if work was commissioned from departments there was a danger it would not be independent and would push departmental agendas.¹⁶⁸ It called for more “resources to undertake its own analysis and commission research”.¹⁶⁹ The Public Administration Select Committee made a similar point:

We remain concerned that without this capacity the NSC can only broker compromises between departmental views based on incompatible principles [...] The NSC is not “a powerful centre of strategic assessment” as the [Government’s] response claims because it lacks virtually any staff to undertake such work.¹⁷⁰

106. Sir Peter Ricketts told us in oral evidence that the NSC could draw on other resources:

we have recently formed a team in the Cabinet Office bringing together experts from the MoD world, the commercial space world and other civil servants to produce a national space strategy under the leadership and co-ordination function of the Cabinet Office. That is an ad hoc team that has come together, will produce a strategy and will then disperse again.¹⁷¹

He described the current capacity as “limited” but “extremely high quality” and noted that “provided you can bring together the really good people thinking about research and policy in the Home Office, in DfID, the MoD and the FCO, and draw on the best of them, you do not actually need a large staff in the Cabinet Office to do it as well”.

107. Baroness Neville-Jones felt that it was important that the departments did the work:

It is very important that other departments are also thinking. I would like to see all departments have some think-tank element within them. [...] it is important that departments should maintain an open dialogue and allow themselves to talk to experts in their area so that the Government do not cut themselves off from expertise.¹⁷²

She went on to stress that it was important that departments did policy thinking to ensure that Secretaries of State were in charge of that thinking and that Cabinet Government remained vibrant. She also wanted departments to be able to stand up to the NSC.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Q 55

¹⁶⁸ HC 761, Para 57.

¹⁶⁹ HC 761, Para 37.

¹⁷⁰ HC 713, paras 8-9.

¹⁷¹ Q 36

¹⁷² Q 22

¹⁷³ Q 29

108. We share Baroness Neville-Jones's view that the departments should maintain the primary responsibility for thinking within Government. However we do not see that departments are at any risk of not being able to "stand up to" the NSC. The NSC has relatively few resources to develop a view different from that of departments.

109. We accept that the NSC should primarily draw on, and synthesise, the work of other departments, rather than seek to duplicate the analytical capabilities of other departments and agencies. However, the NSC was set up to ensure that things do not fall into the gaps between departments, and in this context we recommend that the NSC should have some resources to undertake its own analytical studies and to commission research from outside Government. It may need to provide alternative viewpoints to those of departments.

Outside expertise

110. We examined what use the NSC had made of outside experts, both during the completion of the NSS and since. The House of Commons Defence Committee has said that "given the speed of the [SDSR] we are not convinced that the best use was made of experts from outside the Department"¹⁷⁴. Similarly the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee has expressed concern that the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser had not been adequately involved in drawing up the NSRA.¹⁷⁵ Baroness Neville-Jones told us that the UK's allies were consulted, and suggested that for the next NSS the then Government might like to consult experts.¹⁷⁶

111. Sir Peter Ricketts told us that there had been consultation with experts: "when we were doing the National Security Strategy or the SDSR, [...] we drew heavily on the expertise of RUSI, Chatham House, IISS and a number of other outside commentators and researchers in the national security area."¹⁷⁷ We challenged the Minister on this and in written evidence after his oral evidence, Oliver Letwin told us that during the development of the NSS "There were extensive and ongoing discussions with key think tanks and academic institutes, NGOs, industry organisations and international partners (notably the US and France)".¹⁷⁸ Specifically he told us that there had been three meetings with "senior representatives from Chatham House, RUSI, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and Kings College London, as well as other influential individuals within the national security community".

112. The current Government discontinued the National Security Forum, which was introduced by the previous Government, consisting of outside experts chaired by a Minister.¹⁷⁹ Lord West, who chaired it, told us that "we were able to have debates about

¹⁷⁴ HC 761 para 217

¹⁷⁵ House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, Third Report of Session 2010-12, *Scientific advice and evidence in emergencies*, HC 498.

¹⁷⁶ Q 30

¹⁷⁷ Q 137

¹⁷⁸ Cabinet Office 03.

¹⁷⁹ Q 73

that with a fantastic mix of people—Nobel Prize winners, previous diplomats, the military, top industrialists et cetera”.¹⁸⁰ As well as holding debates it:

set tasks to these people to come up with papers on how important sovereignty is in certain areas, such as in crypto or in nuclear submarines or whatever it might be. They would go away and not just do the work themselves but the deep specialists who had friends within academia, and so on, would go and get work sucked in from them and you would get some very useful input.¹⁸¹

113. In written evidence the defence and securities industry trade body ADS said that:

ADS’s principal recommendation is that the NSC should develop stronger mechanisms of engagement with the UK-based defence and security industries. [...]There would be value in the National Security Adviser and/or his deputies engaging with the defence and security industries on a regular basis; taking account of the risks and opportunities that industry sees in the area of national security.

114. We discussed with witnesses whether Ministers were being “protected” from the views of outside experts. We asked how often the NSC heard from outside experts in person. Sir Peter told us that it was “not day to day but from time to time we have drawn on, for example, outside experts in talking about Afghanistan. We have brought in experts who are knowledgeable about Afghanistan to participate and make sure that we are taking the full range of views that are available on Afghanistan policy.”¹⁸² We asked again for examples in written evidence and were again given the example of Afghanistan and told that “Ministers on the NSC may of course consult experts in preparation for the NSC and the normal conduct of their business”.¹⁸³

115. Given the timescale of the 2010 NSS, it is perhaps not surprising that the involvement of outside experts was limited. However, given the much longer lead time for the next NSS, we would expect more detailed input throughout the process.

116. We have concerns about the limited extent to which the NSC has in practice drawn on non-governmental advice. Clearly some good work has been done but we are not convinced it is varied or frequent enough. Given the decision to abolish the National Security Forum, measures must be put in place to ensure that Ministers have regular exposure to advice from outside experts.

¹⁸⁰ Q 51

¹⁸¹ Q 55

¹⁸² Q 137

¹⁸³ Cabinet Office 05.

4 Conclusion

117. The evidence we have taken in this inquiry supports the view that the publication of the NSS and the establishment of the NSC are right in principle and have started to make a contribution to the security of this country. However we have identified ways in which the NSS, and the decision-making processes which underpin it, should be improved. In this report we have made a number of recommendations which taken together would make the next NSS a very different document. It should be an overarching strategy, a document designed to guide (but not constrain) government decision-making both at home, and on the international stage. We believe that the next NSS could be more candid, more explicit than the current one. It should address the difficult questions about potential problems in our relationship with our allies and European partners, and be realistic about the UK's level of influence in the medium to long term.

118. We understand that the timescale for the last NSS made wider public consultation impractical. **We believe that the next NSS should be the product of much wider public debate and an attempt at a political consensus. If (as we have suggested) the next NSS addresses more fundamental questions about the UK's role in the world, and its relationship with the USA, as well as developments in the Eurozone and the potential impact of Scottish independence, then these are questions that the wider public will engage with. The Government will need to start planning for this now.**

119. Our next step is to hold an evidence sessions with the new NSA and then we plan a series of evidence sessions with the Ministers responsible for security Departments. We intend to inquire further into many of the issues raised in this report and will pursue with the Government our requirement for better information on the NSRA. We will also continue to scrutinise the work of the NSC. We await the Government's response to this report with interest.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. It is significant that the NSS and SDSR were produced in parallel with the Spending Review—rather than guiding or following it—and after a review of just five months. (Paragraph 6)
2. We welcome the Government’s decision to produce the SDSR at the same time as the NSS. In principle, this should allow us to see, alongside the Strategy, what impact it will have on policy priorities and resource allocation. (Paragraph 10)
3. We also welcome the Government’s commitment to review the NSS and SDSR regularly. A five yearly review cycle, as is currently proposed, seems to us appropriate. However, producing a new Strategy shortly after a General Election—as this timetable suggests—raises the danger of a hurried review process, particularly if there is a change of Government. (Paragraph 11)
4. The order in which the NSS, SDSR, and CSR are begun is not particularly significant. What is crucial is that all three are able to influence each other, in a process which is begun in plenty of time. The timing of the Election led to the 2010 NSS, SDSR and CSR being completed in a relatively short timescale, with little consultation. We urge the Government to plan for a much longer lead time for the 2015 review. (Paragraph 12)
5. We welcome the decision of this Government and the last to publish an NSS. We believe that producing and publishing an NSS can help to play an important role in identifying likely future threats to, and opportunities for, the UK. This allows the UK to prepare for them and, in an era of scarce resources, to prioritise effectively. This is important to maintaining the security of the country. (Paragraph 16)
6. We regret that the Government’s unwillingness, to date, to provide us with all the information we requested about the NSRA, means that we are not in a position to give the two Houses any assurance about its adequacy. We urge the Government to reconsider its position on this. We need this information if we are to do our job properly, as a Joint Committee tasked with scrutinising the NSS. (Paragraph 23)
7. We remain to be convinced of the Government’s reasoning for not including Afghanistan in the NSRA. The Government has said that it is not including “immediate security issues” but terrorism, accidents, flooding and cyber attack are included, though they are all current threats. While the date of troop withdrawal may be a firm policy, we take the view that Afghanistan and the surrounding region remain an area of risk for the UK’s security and this ought to be reflected in the NSRA. (Paragraph 24)
8. In principle, we welcome the development of the NSRA but the Government must ensure that it does not lead to a false sense of security. Any forecasting tool, however well designed, is imperfect and speculative, and the results produced should be treated with caution and used as a support for, not a substitute for, good judgement. The NSRA will not always predict the next big problem: resources must be allocated

to continual horizon-scanning, and must be available to deal with unpredicted risks as they emerge. (Paragraph 25)

9. A key point of the NSS is to set priorities, and to guide choices in an era of diminished resources. While such a strategy may contain aspirational elements it must also be realistic. The NSS simultaneously recognises the rise of new global powers, shifts in the centres of economic activity, and reduced resources in the UK, while at the same time asserting “no reduction in influence”. This is wholly unrealistic in the medium to long term and the UK needs to plan for a changing, and more partnership-dependent, role in the world. (Paragraph 30)
10. We are concerned that the Government has not done enough in the NSS and SDR to articulate its concept of what influence is, why it is needed, or what the most cost-effective way is of achieving it in different circumstances and regions. The NSS mentions many different forms of “soft power” but could do more to spell out the different roles of organisations such as the BBC World Service and British Council. We believe that greater clarity over exactly what we are seeking, and why, could enable resources to be better targeted. (Paragraph 35)
11. We welcome the idea of an “adaptable posture” in principle. But in a world in which it was deemed right in principle to intervene militarily in Libya but not, for instance, in Syria, we would welcome more clarity on how this principle shaped decisions on the mix of capabilities to be maintained. We call on the Government to elaborate on the thinking linking the NSS, the “adaptable approach” and the capabilities decided upon. (Paragraph 40)
12. We accept that the NSS is not a “recipe book” which dictates our response to every event, but we would have expected to have seen some evidence that it had influenced decisions made since the SDR, including the Government’s responses to the Arab Spring. We have found no such evidence. As the NSS states, “a strategy is only useful if it guides choices”; it is about thinking in the longer term, and not simply doing what is in the UK’s short-term interest. If the current strategy is not guiding choices then it needs to be revised. (Paragraph 41)
13. In the NSS, the Government has started to set out crucial statements which can guide future policy. However it does not yet present a clear overarching strategy: a common understanding about the UK’s interests and objectives that guides choices on investment across government departments, including domestic departments, as well as guiding operational priorities and crisis response. Such a strategy must be based on a realistic vision of the UK’s future position in the world. This vision will both shape, and be shaped, by the UK’s interests and objectives. (Paragraph 46)
14. We are concerned that the NSS’s focus on bilateral relations with large emerging powers—and concomitant investments in diplomatic and capacity-building activities—should not be at the expense of strengthening relations with the Commonwealth and with key regional organisations such as ASEAN, the Arab League and African Union. (Paragraph 51)
15. We are concerned that the NSS and SDR have avoided some of the difficult questions about alliances. There does not appear to have been a fundamental

assessment of the extent to which the UK can rely on its allies, and the extent to which it needs the capacity to operate independently. The SDSR states that “we will maintain our ability to act alone where we cannot expect others to help”. We call on the Government to set out in response to this report in what situations it thinks the UK may need to operate alone and what capabilities they would require. (Paragraph 54)

16. We recognise that there are limits to what can be said in a public document. However we believe that the USA’s publication of *Sustaining US Global Leadership* provides an opportunity to open up a debate on a number of crucial issues. We call on the Government to reflect deeply on the long term implications of the geographical and functional shifts in US policy that are now taking place. It raises fundamental questions if our pre-eminent defence and security relationship is with an ally who has interests which are increasingly divergent from our own. The Government needs to decide if the UK will continue to be as involved in US military action as we have been in the past if the US focuses on Asia-Pacific. If the US is moving towards viewing Europe as a producer rather than a consumer of security, and reducing its capability to mount long term stabilisation missions, it raises more questions as to what we can expect from the US and what the US expects from the UK. (Paragraph 60)
17. We are not convinced that the Government gave sufficient attention in the NSS to the potential risks that future international economic instability might pose for UK security. These go beyond the UK being unable to afford to defend itself. International economic problems could lead to our allies having to make considerable cuts to their defence spending, and to an increase in economic migrants between EU member states, and to domestic social or political unrest. The NSC needs to take all of this into account. (Paragraph 67)
18. We hope that the problems within the Eurozone can be resolved. However we believe that, even in 2010, the potential threat to UK security from a full, or partial, collapse of the Eurozone was one of the plausible scenarios which a prudent NSRA should have examined. We call on the NSC to address the potential impacts on the UK and NATO (and how the Government would respond) were this to happen, as a matter of urgency. It also needs to examine the long term strategic impact for the UK of any measures to save the Euro, such as further Eurozone political integration or the exit of some states from EU membership. (Paragraph 68)
19. The fact that the potential impact of Scottish independence was not brought to the NSC’s attention strengthens our concern that the horizon-scanning carried out on the NSC’s behalf is inadequate and that the NSC’s oversight of security issues is not sufficiently broad and strategic. (Paragraph 71)
20. The 2011 progress report is a relatively uninformative implementation report on the SDSR. Next year we expect a rounded and insightful update on both the NSS and the SDSR. It should include a summary of the main events of the year that were of relevance to national security, how the UK responded to them, and the longer term strategic implications. For example this year’s report could have included the problems at the UK Border Agency, the Eurozone crisis (and the strategic

implication of measures to resolve it), an update on the US-UK joint strategy board, on the Anglo-French alliance, on Iran, and on commitments in Afghanistan and the adjacent area after 2015. It should also include a summary of the work of the NSC that year. The Libya Crisis report, with its identification of problems faced and lessons learned, provides a good model. (Paragraph 75)

21. We welcome the introduction of an NSC to give strategic direction to the Government's national security agenda, but we are not convinced that the NSC has successfully maintained its strategic focus. We are left with the distinct impression that it has been deeply involved in operations and this may have reduced its ability to think strategically. (Paragraph 83)
22. We are concerned that the Cabinet Office was unable to provide us, either in public or in confidence, with concrete examples of "blue skies" discussions by the NSC. Coupled with its failure to discuss the national security implications of either the Eurozone crisis or the possibility of Scottish independence, it is apparent that there are major problems in the way that the NSC selects topics for discussion. (Paragraph 86)
23. We welcome the appointment of a National Security Adviser, though we still have questions about the nature of the role, and its status. We have concerns too that the current and former NSA both have a FCO background. The Government has assured us that this has not led to a lack of focus on domestic issues, but this was not a view that all our witnesses shared. In addition we noted a lack of military focus in the NSA's Libya Crisis report. We welcome the Government's commitment that future appointments could be drawn from a range of Departments and Agencies. We shall be monitoring this. (Paragraph 92)
24. It is important that the Heads of the Security and Intelligence Agencies have access to, and are directly accountable to Ministers, and we have been told that this remains the case. We think it wrong that the performance of the three Agency Heads should be reported on by anyone other than the relevant Minister. (Paragraph 95)
25. The current Prime Minister takes a keen interest in national security and regularly chairs the NSC. The Government does not see the need for a National Security Minister at present, and we can see the clear advantages to the NSA being an official. However, the Prime Minister's active involvement is a key element of the current arrangements. Were this to change, and were the right person available, the question of appointing a National Security Minister would need to be reconsidered. (Paragraph 99)
26. We are not convinced that all involved in Government are clear on which Minister is accountable for which elements of the NSS and NSC. It is even harder for those outside Government, including Select Committees, to identify who is accountable. This confusion over responsibility is not indicative of a well functioning organisation and the Government needs to address this. (Paragraph 102)
27. We accept that the NSC should primarily draw on, and synthesise, the work of other departments, rather than seek to duplicate the analytical capabilities of other departments and agencies. However, the NSC was set up to ensure that things do not

fall into the gaps between departments, and in this context we recommend that the NSC should have some resources to undertake its own analytical studies and to commission research from outside Government. It may need to provide alternative viewpoints to those of departments. (Paragraph 109)

28. Given the timescale of the 2010 NSS, it is perhaps not surprising that the involvement of outside experts was limited. However, given the much longer lead time for the next NSS, we would expect more detailed input throughout the process. (Paragraph 115)
29. We have concerns about the limited extent to which the NSC has in practice drawn on non-governmental advice. Clearly some good work has been done but we are not convinced it is varied or frequent enough. Given the decision to abolish the National Security Forum, measures must be put in place to ensure that Ministers have regular exposure to advice from outside experts. (Paragraph 116)
30. We believe that the next NSS should be the product of much wider public debate and an attempt at a political consensus. If (as we have suggested) the next NSS addresses more fundamental questions about the UK's role in the world, and its relationship with the USA, as well as developments in the Eurozone and the potential impact of Scottish independence, then these are questions that the wider public will engage with. The Government will need to start planning for this now. (Paragraph 118)

Formal Minutes

Declarations of Interests

11 January 2011

The following members declared interests as recorded in the Commons Register of Members' Interests and the Lords Register of Interests:

Mr James Arbuthnot MP	Lord Cope of Berkeley
Margaret Beckett MP	Lord Fellowes
Sir Alan Beith MP	Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Malcolm Bruce MP	Lord Harris of Haringey
Mr Paul Murphy MP	Lord Lee of Trafford
Richard Ottaway MP	Baroness Manningham-Buller
Mark Pritchard MP	Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale
Keith Vaz MP	Lord Sterling of Plaistow
	Baroness Taylor of Bolton
	Lord Waldegrave of North Hill

1 March 2011

Fabian Hamilton MP declared interests as recorded in the Commons Register of Members' Interests.

4 April 2011

Adrian Bailey MP declared interests as recorded in the Commons Register of Members' Interests.

A list of all interests declared is available at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/formal-minutes/>

Monday 27 February 2012

Members present:

Margaret Beckett MP
Sir Alan Beith MP
Malcolm Bruce MP
Paul Murphy MP

Lord Cope of Berkeley
Lord Fellowes
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Lord Harris of Haringey
Baroness Manningham-Buller
Lord Sterling of Plaistow
Baroness Taylor of Bolton
Lord Waldegrave of North Hill

The Joint Committee deliberate.

Draft Report, *First review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 119 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to each House.

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

Ordered, That the following memorandum be reported to both Houses and published on the internet:

Letter from Sir Kim Darroch and Supplementary evidence from the Cabinet Office
(Cabinet Office 05)

Ordered, That the Joint Committee be adjourned to Monday 26 March 2012 at 4pm.

List of oral and written evidence

(published on the Committee's website

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/>)

Oral Evidence

Monday 4 July 2011

Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones DCMG, Minister of State for Security and Counter-Terrorism, Home Office, 2010-11

Monday 12 September 2011

Admiral Rt Hon Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Security and Counter-Terrorism) and Government Spokesperson, Home Office 2007-10 and formerly Chief of the Naval Staff and First Sea Lord

Monday 24 October 2011

Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, Minister of State, Cabinet Office

Monday 5 December 2011

Sir Peter Ricketts KCMG, National Security Adviser, Cabinet Office

Written Evidence

- 1 Cabinet Office 01—First memorandum (February 2011)
 - 2 Cabinet Office 02—Supplementary memorandum (September 2011)
 - 3 Cabinet Office 03—Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP
 - 4 Cabinet Office 04—Sir Peter Ricketts
 - 5 Cabinet Office 05—Sir Kim Darroch
 - 6 ADS Group Limited
 - 7 Dr Jim Broderick, Daneshill Associates LLP
 - 8 Professor Nigel Lightfoot
 - 9 Mark Phillips, RUSI
 - 10 Dr Sue Robertson
 - 11 World Vision UK
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