



House of Lords
House of Commons
Joint Committee on the
National Security Strategy

**The work of the Joint
Committee on the
National Security
Strategy in 2013–14:
Government response
to the First Report of
the Committee, Session
2013–14**

**First Special Report of Session
2014–15**

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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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The Committee has the power to require the submission of written evidence and documents, to examine witnesses, to meet at any time (except when Parliament is prorogued or dissolved), to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom, to appoint specialist advisers, and to make Reports to both Houses. The Lords Committee has power to agree with the Commons in the appointment of a Chairman.

Publications

The Report of the Joint Committee is published by The Stationery Office by Order of the two Houses. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/>

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Philippa Helme (Commons Clerk), James Whittle (Lords Clerk), Charlotte Littleboy (Commons Second Clerk), Emma Graham (Committee Specialist), Christine Randall (Commons Senior Committee Assistant), Susan Ramsay (Commons Committee Assistant), Nicola Barker (Lords Committee Assistant) and Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

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First Special Report

Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2013–14

The Committee published its First Report of Session 2013–14, *The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013–14* (HL Paper 169, HC 1257) on 30 April 2014. The Government response was received in the form of a memorandum on 7 July 2014: it is published as an appendix to this Special Report.

Appendix: Government Response

1. We look to the Government for assurance in the response to this report that the findings of the Global Strategic Trends work are being well communicated outside the Ministry of Defence and will be drawn on in the development of the next NSS. (Paragraph 14)

Findings of the Ministry of Defence's studies of Global Strategic Trends have now been published and, together with other evidence, will help to provide broad contextual analysis to inform work for the next National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review.

2. We are concerned by the decline in the number of NSC meetings since 2011 and by the extent of the dominance of foreign affairs topics on the 2013 agendas. We urge the Prime Minister to increase the number or length of NSC meetings to allow the NSC time for thorough discussion of domestic resilience issues and horizon-scanning, as well as immediate foreign affairs matters. (Paragraph 22)

The NSC generally meets once a week when Parliament is sitting. As the Prime Minister set out in January, the NSC discussed a broad range of national security topics in 2013. The NSC addresses homeland security implications within each foreign policy discussion, with the appropriate Ministers and officials present. The Government is confident that it has the balance about right, especially given the fast-moving pace of world events, but we will continue to keep the balance of topics on the NSC agenda under review. For example, there were an exceptional number of meetings in 2011 specifically during the Libya crisis, when the NSC (Libya) met 62 times.

Additionally, the NSC Officials group of Permanent Secretaries, which supports the NSC, has met weekly including in Parliamentary recess, to ensure that existing and longer-term issues are addressed, and advice provided to the NSC. Furthermore, collective Ministerial agreement can be sought outside the weekly meeting through the NSC write round process.

3. We welcome the Prime Minister's assurance that outside experts had been brought in by the NSC, and we would encourage this to happen more regularly in the future. We recommend that in future this Committee should be provided, together with the NSC agendas, with details of outside experts attending the NSC. (Paragraph 24)

Government officials will continue to brief the Committee on the NSC's engagement with outside experts.

4. The indications are that there was a lack of joined-up working between Government Departments both in planning for flood prevention and in the response once problems arose. The NSC should examine the risks to the UK's resilience from the likely longer-term impacts of climate change, and consider whether the Government should be allocating more resources to this area. (Paragraph 28)

Severe flooding was identified as a priority in the National Security Strategy. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) leads the Government's strategy for flood prevention and, through its agencies, manages a major programme of

work aimed at reducing the risk of flooding. Defra is also the lead Government department for responding to flooding. Earlier this year the UK experienced historically unprecedented extreme weather, bringing flooding to the coast and causing rivers to burst their banks. In total, some 1.4 million properties were protected by pre-existing flood defences.

The Government is spending more than £3.2 billion over the course of this parliament on flood and erosion risk management (between 2010/11 to 2014/15) compared to £2.7 billion in the previous 5 years, and making an unprecedented 6-year commitment to record levels of £2.3 billion capital investment in improving defences right up to 2021.

In light of the severity of the weather, the Government's emergency committee, COBR, brought together those departments with a responsibility for managing the response to the floods, meeting more than 30 times in 10 weeks to ensure that the risks were understood; central Government resources were coordinated; and that local respondents had the resources they needed.

The Prime Minister has created a dedicated committee, the Ministerial Committee on Flooding, to ensure that the lessons were identified and implemented.

The Government has also discussed flooding in the context of the National Risk Register and the National Risk Assessment. The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) highlighted the broad range of risks which climate change could exacerbate. In 2012, the Government published the UK's first Climate Change Risk Assessment, which assessed the risks from longer-term climate change. The evidence base for the 2015 NSS will include consideration of climate.

5. We recommend that, as part of its planning for the next NSS, the National Security Secretariat should develop a methodology which enables the impact and likelihood of risks to be considered alongside the amount of Government effort and resources that are being deployed to mitigate it. (Paragraph 29)

The Government recognises the importance of resource choices in risk management and notes the Committee's recommendation for the next National Security Strategy.

6. In response to this report the Government should set out how significant it thinks the US pivot to be and what this means for the UK's longer-term strategy and capability requirement. (Paragraph 31)

The Asia-Pacific region remains an area of growing interest for both the UK and the US, and we enjoy close cooperation and dialogue on the policy challenges and opportunities.

The UK welcomes the US strategic rebalance to the region, which is in line with the UK's diplomatic network and broader Government resource shift towards the Emerging Powers. The UK has refocused diplomatic resources towards the Asia-Pacific region to strengthen our presence and build durable and wide-ranging bilateral relationships with the Emerging Powers in the Asia region. This includes increasing our staff resource in the region through the Network Shift; increasing the Defence Attaché Network and expanding defence sections in key Posts. By 2015, we will have deployed over 100 extra staff across the Asian network, including 60 working in and on China alone; and will have resident Defence

Attachés in Australia, Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, ROK and Singapore.

We are well placed to capitalise on renewed US engagement to further our own major security and economic interests in Asia. We are working increasingly closely with the US in policy areas relevant to Asia where we have common aims. Issues on which we co-operate include the South China Sea, North Korea and Burma. Further, the US and the UK cooperate closely to shape Chinese approaches to transparency, good governance, corruption, intellectual property and open markets. We have regular UK-US discussions at working and Ministerial level and our missions in the region work closely together, coordinating on policy and sharing best practice.

At the strategic level, the UK and US will continue to work together to advance our shared values and interests across the globe. We will work together to support and enhance regional stability and the international rules-based system, bolster our partnerships in the region, and promote the resolution of disputes — whether they be economic, territorial or otherwise — peacefully and in accordance with international law. In this area there is no doubt that the UK and US are and remain each other's partner of choice.

However, we do not see the US' rebalancing as representing disengagement from Europe, but as a move that is in direct support of our interests. The US commitment remains strong. President Obama has recently announced a \$1 billion European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) to ensure a continued US military presence in Eastern Europe through 2015, and contribute to NATO reassurance and deterrence in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. In making the request, President Obama said that "our commitment to ... the security of our allies in central and eastern Europe is a cornerstone of our own security, and it is sacrosanct".

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation, and will consider fully the implications of US policy towards Asia in the course of the 2015 SDSR. But in the interim the UK is enhancing real and important partnerships in the region, including inward summit visits of Chinese Premier and the Japanese Prime Minister, the State Visit of President Park, and the Prime Minister's successful visit to China in December 2013. The UK continues to demonstrate to partners in the region through our defence engagement our advanced military capabilities, including the recent tour of HMS Daring, and UK assets used in the disaster response to Typhoon Haiyan and the search for missing MH370 plane.

7. We reject the Prime Minister's assertion that we should "plan on the basis of what we want to achieve". The Government plans for many things it does not want to happen; pandemics, flooding, and terrorism, for example. An attitude of "no Plan B" is dangerous when there is national security at stake. *The last NSS should have included the impacts of possible Scottish Independence and the next one should include, either in the published version or in private, the impact were the UK's relationship with the EU to change.* (Paragraph 35)

The Government's position on Scottish independence is clear: Scotland is better off as part of the UK and the UK is better off with Scotland in it. We are confident that people in Scotland will vote to remain part of the United Kingdom in the forthcoming referendum, and as such we are not planning for Scotland's separation from the UK. Both the UK

Government and the Scottish Government have said that there can be no ‘pre-negotiations’ on what the terms of independence might be before the referendum takes place. The UK Government has been very clear about the reasons for this. It is one of Scotland’s two Governments. It acts in the interests of all the people of the UK, delivering security and prosperity for all, including those who live in Scotland. As both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister have made clear, the UK Government believes that membership of the European Union is in the national interest and is committed to playing an active and influential role including on EU reform.

8. It is crucially important that energy security and domestic resilience are fully addressed in the next NSS. (Paragraph 37)

Energy security and domestic resilience have played an important part in the 2010 National Security Strategy. The Government notes the Committee’s recommendation for the next National Security Strategy.

9. We welcome the fact that the NSC will look at foreign ownership of critical national infrastructure and urge the Government to err on the side of caution. (Paragraph 38)

The Government notes the Committee’s recommendation on Critical National Infrastructure. The process for dealing with such issues falls under the auspices of the NSC. Since the creation of the NSC in 2010, the Government has put in place an approach which enables it to assess the risks associated with foreign investment and develop strategies to manage them. The NSC brings together the economic and security arms of the Government and is the forum that ultimately balances the risks and opportunities of inward investment decisions and exercises the appropriate level of caution. The NSC is supported by a number of sub-committees which work with the relevant departments to identify and assess any risks in pipeline investment opportunities and bring these to the attention of Ministers. The Government recognises this is a fast changing environment and will continue to review these processes regularly.