



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 2012

Second Report of Session 2012–13

Report, together with formal minutes

*Ordered by the House of Lords and the House of Commons
to be printed 11 February 2013*

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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.

Membership

HOUSE OF LORDS

Lord Fellowes (*Crossbench*)
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (*Labour/Co-operative*)
Lord Harris of Haringey (*Labour*)
Lord Lee of Trafford (*Liberal Democrat*)
Baroness Manningham-Buller (*Crossbench*)
Baroness Neville-Jones (*Conservative*)
Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale (*Labour*)
Lord Sterling of Plaistow (*Conservative*)
Baroness Taylor of Bolton (*Labour*)
Lord Waldegrave of North Hill (*Conservative*)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Margaret Beckett MP (*Labour*) (*Chair*)
Mr James Arbuthnot MP (*Conservative*)
Mr Adrian Bailey MP (*Labour/Co-operative*)
Sir Alan Beith MP (*Liberal Democrat*)
Sir Malcolm Bruce MP (*Liberal Democrat*)
Fabian Hamilton MP (*Labour*)
Paul Murphy MP (*Labour*)
Richard Ottaway MP (*Conservative*)
Mark Pritchard MP (*Conservative*)
Sir Malcolm Rifkind (*Conservative*)
Keith Vaz MP (*Labour*)
Mr Tim Yeo MP (*Conservative*)

Powers

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), Christopher Clarke (Lords Clerk), Emma Graham (Second Clerk), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), Susan Ramsay (Commons Committee Assistant), Rita Logan (Lords Committee Assistant) and Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Commons Clerk of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Committee Office, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 2712; the Committee's email address is JCNSS@parliament.uk

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Report

Our work in 2012

1. Our Committee was first established in 2009, just before the end of the last Parliament, and was not reappointed after the General Election until December 2010. It was not until 2011 that the Committee got underway. The role given us by the two Houses is broad: “to consider the National Security Strategy”. We were determined to avoid duplicating the work of other Committees, and a key consideration from the start has been to focus on where we think we can best add value.

2. In 2011 we concentrated on the new National Security Strategy (NSS) published by the Coalition Government in October 2010¹ and on the newly formed National Security Council (NSC) — the Cabinet Committee established to co-ordinate and deliver the Government’s international security agenda. We published our first report, *First review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, in March 2012.² The Government responded, positively in some respects but failing to engage with many of our arguments. We were particularly concerned that the Government was not pressing ahead with planning for the next NSS. We published the response with a short report bringing those concerns to the attention of the two Houses.³ We published the Government’s response to that report as a Special Report in November 2012.⁴

3. Our focus in 2012 was to explore in more detail the impact of the NSS and the NSC on Government Departments and on departmental policy-making. We began by taking evidence from the new National Security Adviser, Sir Kim Darroch, in March 2012. We then held a series of evidence sessions with the senior Secretaries of State who serve on the NSC. We took evidence from the Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon William Hague MP in April; from the then Secretary of State for International Development, Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP in June; and from the Secretary of State for Defence, Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, and from the Home Secretary, Rt Hon Theresa May MP, both in December 2012. The oral evidence, and the supplementary written evidence provided, is published on our website.⁵

4. During the year, we also had two in-confidence briefings, one from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Integrated Country Strategies, and one from the Cabinet Office, on the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA). In our first report we had been critical of the Government’s initial unwillingness to provide us with the information requested about the NSRA: we welcome the change of heart.

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

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

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

4 Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, *Government Response to the Committee’s First Report of Session 2012–13*, First Special Report of Session 2012–13, HL Paper 65 HC 758

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

5. In November, the Government published its annual update: the *Annual report on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review*.⁶ We welcomed this as broader and more wide-ranging than last year's report, but not yet as complete, transparent, and strategic as it could be.⁷ We were provided in confidence with the internal *SDSR Implementation: Summary Report* and have arranged a briefing from the Cabinet Office to answer our further questions on this.

6. Throughout the year, we were ably assisted by our specialist advisers: Professor Malcolm Chalmers, Research Director/Director, UK Defence Policy at the Royal United Services Institute, and Professor Sir Hew Strachan, Chichele Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford.

7. We are grateful to all those who have assisted us in our work over the past year.

Key concerns

8. The information we have received this year from the Government has given us some reassurance about the NSRA process and our evidence from Ministers confirms that the NSC is valued and an important forum for collective discussion. However we continue to have a number of significant concerns.

9. First, we are not convinced that the NSC has maintained its strategic focus since completing the NSS and SDSR in 2010. It appears to have focused on operational matters and short-term imperatives. We have continued to look for evidence of the NSC considering long term and blue skies topics and have found little.

10. Secondly, we are not yet convinced that the existence of the NSC is making the contribution that it should: enabling Government to work as a co-ordinated whole. In other words, we question how much extra value is derived from having the NSC as opposed to the preceding systems of Cabinet Committees. It is clear that Ministers derive benefit from their regular exchanges around the NSC table but much more could be gained.

11. Thirdly, major strategic policy changes appear to have been made by individual Government Departments without discussion at the NSC. Most notably, the big decisions made by the Ministry of Defence last year — the policy shifts set out in *Future Reserves 2020*⁸ and *Army 2020*⁹, in particular — do not appear to have been steered by the NSC; nor have we seen any evidence that the NSC has considered the implications of those decisions for wider security strategy.

12. Fourthly, the NSC appears to have neglected, or only recently discussed, some very central, and uncomfortable questions:

6 <https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/121128-Annual-Report-to-Parliament-on-NSS-and-SDSR.pdf>; and HC Deb, 29 November 2012, col 26WS

7 JCNS Press release 7 December 2012: www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/news/committees-response-to-governments-2012-annual-report/

8 *Future Reserves 2020: Delivering the Nation's Security Together*, Cm 8475, November 2012: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm84/8475/8475.pdf>

9 HC Deb, 5 July 2012, col 1085; *Transforming the British Army*, July 2012: http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/Army2020_brochure.pdf

- the strategic and security impact of the Eurozone crisis and of efforts to save the Euro;
- the strategic and security uncertainties posed by the planned referendums on Scottish independence and EU membership;
- the significance of the US pivot to Asia-Pacific.

13. Finally, we have not yet seen evidence of the Government pressing ahead with planning for the next NSS or giving serious consideration to engaging outside experts, politicians across the political parties and the public in its development.

14. We recommend that the Government address these five concerns as a matter of urgency. We look forward to seeing evidence in the next Annual Report on the NSS and SDSR that the NSC is maintaining focus on long-term strategy, as well as responding to operational imperatives; and that it has reviewed the cumulative strategic impact of policy changes and external events since 2010.

Looking ahead

15. In the next stage of our work we plan to focus on the future, on the big strategic questions which the next NSS must address, and to take evidence from outside Government. We plan to hold a series of evidence sessions on the UK's relationship with NATO; national security and the EU; the nature of our alliance with the United States; energy security; and food security: topics which the Government appears a little unwilling to address, at least in public. In doing this we are not seeking to do the Government's work for it: instead, we hope the Government will take forward work on the issues identified, drawing on expertise from outside of Government as well as from within.

16. We would welcome views from other members of the two Houses of Parliament, and from the public, as well as from the Government, on the issues listed above, and on other issues which the next NSS should address.

Formal Minutes

Monday 11 February 2013

Members present:

Margaret Beckett, in the Chair

Lord Fellowes	Mr James Arbuthnot
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock	Sir Alan Beith
Lord Harris of Haringey	Sir Malcolm Bruce
Lord Lee of Trafford	Fabian Hamilton
Baroness Neville-Jones	Paul Murphy
Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale	Mark Pritchard
Lord Sterling of Plaistow	
Baroness Taylor of Bolton	
Lord Waldegrave of North Hill	

* * *

Draft Report, *The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012*, proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 16 read and agreed to.

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

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

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

* * *

[Adjourned till Wednesday 20 March 2013 at 10 am