



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

First Report of Session 2013–14

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

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Report

In this report conclusions are presented in **bold**, and recommendations in *bold italics*.

Introduction

1. Our Committee was established with a broad role: “to consider the National Security Strategy”. In practice we have considered not only the National Security Strategy (NSS) document¹ published by the Government in 2010 but also the wider strategy that underlies, or should underlie, government decision-making on matters affecting national security. We have considered the relationship between the NSS and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR),² which was published alongside the NSS, since the two are inextricably linked. We have also considered the way in which the NSS is implemented and monitored within Government, and particularly the work of the National Security Council (NSC), the Cabinet Committee which oversees national security matters. And, as we get nearer to the end of the Parliament, we have increasingly been focusing on the next NSS, which the Government is expected to publish after the General Election in 2015.

2. Our Committee has been referred to as a “super-committee” because its membership includes the Chairs of relevant departmental select committees in the House of Commons, and our approach has been to draw on, rather than duplicate, the work of other committees. Over the past year, we have drawn particularly on the reports which the Defence Committee has published as part of its multi-part inquiry *Towards the next Defence and Security Review*.³ We have also followed with particular interest the Foreign Affairs Committee’s inquiry into UK Government policy towards the United States⁴ and the work of the Lords Committee on Soft Power.⁵

3. We published our last report, *The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012*, in February 2013.⁶ That report described our work in 2012, highlighted five areas of significant concern and announced our next phase of work. The purpose of this report is similar: we give an account of our activities over the past year, highlighting in particular our evidence session with the Prime Minister in January 2014; draw attention to areas of continuing concern; and outline our objectives for the remainder of the Parliament.

4. We would like to record our thanks to our specialist advisers, Professor Malcolm Chalmers of the Royal United Services Institute and Professor Sir Hew Strachan, Chichele

1 [A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy, Cm 7953, October 2010](#)

2 [Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review, Cm 7948, October 2010](#)

3 See [Seventh Report of the Defence Committee, Session 2013–14, *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One*, HC 197](#); [Eleventh Report of the Defence Committee, Session 2013–14, *Deterrence in the twenty-first century*, HC 1066](#).

4 See [Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2013–14, *Government foreign policy towards the United States*, HC 695](#).

5 See [Report of the Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Session 2013–14, *Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*, HL Paper 150](#).

6 [Second Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2012–13, *The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012*, HL Paper 115 / HC 984](#)

Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford, for their continuing important contributions to our work.

Our work in 2013–14

Evidence from outside Government

5. In our February 2013 report we said that next we intended to focus on the future, and on the big strategic questions which the 2015 NSS would need to address, and to take evidence from outside Government.⁷ One of our concerns has been that the Government has not drawn sufficiently on external advice in its policy-making, and we wished to bring in a broader range of expertise, from within the UK and from further afield. Between April and June 2013, we held three evidence sessions with different panels of witnesses on the UK's national security and the European Union, on the role of NATO, and on the UK's relationship with the United States.⁸ In July 2013 we took evidence on energy security from Dr Fatih Birol, Chief Economist and Head of the Economic Analysis Division, International Energy Agency (based in Paris). Other witnesses also submitted written evidence.⁹ We highlight some key points from this evidence in this report and will reflect on it in our further work on the next NSS. **We commend to the Government the evidence we have received, both on its own merits and to underline the value of hearing from outside experts.**

6. In addition to our public evidence sessions, we held an extremely informative private meeting with HM King Abdullah II of Jordan in June 2013. The meeting covered a wide range of issues, and we appreciated his unique insight into developments in the Middle East and global security issues.

Engagement with the Prime Minister

7. We received the Government's response to our February 2013 report in May 2013. It gave us no confidence that the Government was taking the concerns we highlighted in our report seriously, and it reinforced our fears that the Government was putting very little effort into planning for the next NSS. Instead of reporting again, we asked our Chair to seek a meeting with the Prime Minister to make our concerns plain in person.

8. Our Chair met with the Prime Minister on 3 July 2013. It was a constructive and plain-speaking meeting and had three positive outcomes.

9. First, the Government made a modest revision to its response to our report to clarify the extent to which work had already begun on the NSS review process. We published the revised response without comment in October 2013.¹⁰

7 [HL Paper 115 / HC 984 \(2012–13\)](#), paragraph 15

8 A list of witnesses is printed on page 20. For evidence see [National Security Strategy \(Third Review\) – Evidence Volume](#)

9 A list of written evidence is printed on page 21. For evidence see [National Security Strategy \(Third Review\) – Evidence Volume](#)

10 [First Special Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2013–14, The Work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012–13, HL Paper 58 / HC179](#)

10. Secondly, the Prime Minister agreed to provide us, on an in confidence basis, with the NSC's agendas so that we could monitor whether it had been sufficiently strategic in its focus. **It is most unusual, if not unprecedented, for a select committee to be given access to a Cabinet Committee's agendas, and we welcome the access we have been given to the NSC's agendas as a signal that the Prime Minister is committed to ensuring that the NSC is operating to best effect.** We present our conclusions on the focus of the NSC's agendas in paragraphs 20 to 22 below.

11. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the Prime Minister offered to give oral evidence to our Committee in public, to make clear his views on the National Security Strategy and to respond to our concerns. This took place on 30 January 2014.¹¹ We highlight some of the key issues raised in the evidence in the second part of this report. **The Prime Minister normally appears only before the Commons Liaison Committee and his agreement to appear before our Committee demonstrates the personal interest he takes in national security matters. We found our evidence session with the Prime Minister helpful and informative: it gave us a clearer understanding of the Prime Minister's personal vision and of the rationale for some of the Government's decisions.** We return below to some concerns about the Strategy.

Briefings from officials

12. In parallel to our public evidence, we have been assisted by background briefings from Civil Service officials.

13. Since October 2012 we have been provided in confidence with the Government's six-monthly Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) summary reports to the NSS and SDSR Implementation Board (a body of officials chaired by the Deputy National Security Adviser, Julian Miller). In March 2013, we received a briefing from Cabinet Office officials on the methodology behind these summary reports, the role of the Implementation Board, and the progress made to date in implementing the SDSR. This was helpful to our understanding of the information supplied.

14. We have in previous reports expressed concern about an apparent lack of horizon-scanning or "blue skies thinking" in Government, at least at NSC level.¹² In October 2013, we had a very useful briefing from the team at the Ministry of Defence (MOD) who produce the *Global Strategic Trends* publications. These are public documents setting out likely trends in the world over the next 30 years which are designed to aid the MOD's medium and long-term planning.¹³ They cover everything from climate and population, to social media and cultural changes, as well as topics more specific to MOD interests such as developments in weapons technology. We appreciated being told of their work, which makes extensive use of outside academic and industry experts, and is subject to a rigorous peer review process. We have commended this approach to the Cabinet Office officials involved in producing the next NSS. ***We look to the Government for assurance in the***

11 [Oral evidence from the Prime Minister, 30 January 2014](#)

12 [First Report of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Session 2010–12, First review of the National Security Strategy 2010, HL Paper 265 / HC 1384](#), paragraphs 84–86

13 [Global Strategic Trends out to 2040](#), 4th edition, 17 October 2013, Ministry of Defence. For information on the work of the MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, see <https://www.gov.uk/development-concepts-and-doctrine-centre>

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.

15. In March 2014, we were briefed by the Cabinet Office officials tasked with planning for the next NSS. In advance of this meeting, we shared with the Cabinet Office an illustrative list of questions which we thought the review ought to address. Our continuing concerns about the Government's plans for the NSS review process are set out in paragraphs 48 to 51 below.

Annual Report on the NSS and SDSR

16. As in previous years, we have awaited with interest the Government's latest *Annual Report on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review*, published in December 2013.¹⁴ The report publishes information on the progress of implementation of commitments made in the SDSR (in much the same form that they are reported to the Implementation Board in the sixth monthly summary reports mentioned in paragraph 13 above) but with more narrative explanation for an external audience. We are pleased to note that the criticisms of the Annual Report we have made in previous reports have been acted upon, at least in part. We criticised the 2011 Annual Report as "unrelentingly positive":¹⁵ there is now more acknowledgement of things that have not worked so well, with references to recent flooding, and events in Syria, for example. There is also a section on lessons learned, which, though not hugely illuminating, is a welcome addition. However it is surprising that a number of significant events of strategic importance (or potential strategic importance) are not mentioned: the leaks of intelligence data by Edward Snowden, tensions with the Spanish over Gibraltar, and the continuing problems with the UK Border Agency / Border Force, for example. Like previous editions of the *Annual Report* it contains very little information on what the NSC has done, or on what it has learned. **We commend the improvements made to the Annual Report on the NSS and SDSR in 2013 but suggest there is still more that could be done to make the Annual Report into a genuinely useful document for Parliament and the public.**

Areas of continuing concern

The operation of the National Security Council

17. In our 2013 report we set out five key concerns, four of them about the way the NSC operates. We said that the evidence suggested:

- the NSC had focused on short-term imperatives and operational matters, and showed little sign of considering long-term and blue skies topics
- the NSC was not making the contribution it should, in enabling the Government to work as a co-ordinated whole

14 [HC Deb, 19 December 2013](#), columns 130–133WS, and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-strategy-and-strategic-defence-and-security-review-2012-to-2013-report>.

15 [First Report of Session 2010–12, First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010, HL Paper 265 / HC 1384](#), para 74; [HL Paper 115 / HC 984 \(Session 2012–13\)](#), paragraph 5

- that major policy decisions were being made by individual departments (notably MOD) without discussion at the NSC, and
- the NSC had not discussed central questions such as the Eurozone crisis, the uncertainties posed by the planned referendums on Scottish independence and the EU, and the US pivot to Asia-Pacific.¹⁶

18. In our evidence session with the Prime Minister in January, we began by asking how he saw the role of the NSC. He told us:

What I hope to gain is to make sure that we analyse better the threats to Britain and the opportunities for our country, that we plan better across government and that we make better decisions. I would say that, three and a half years in, it has been a real success, because you are bringing together the relevant departments, you are considering national security from a domestic perspective as well as an overseas perspective, and you are making sure that the great fiefdoms of Whitehall—Defence, the Foreign Office, DfID—play together rather than separately. I think it has proved itself across a number of subjects. I am hugely enthusiastic about this reform. I think it works very well. I think it joins up Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor, Home Secretary and others in a way in which perhaps they have not been joined up in the past, and I hope it is a reform that will endure.¹⁷

19. We accept that the Prime Minister has found the NSC a useful forum for getting Ministers and Departments to work together, and believes that it has improved collective decision-making. It is, of course, for the Prime Minister to arrange the machinery of government in the way that works best for him. However, we continue to believe that the NSC could be more effective in helping the Government achieve its strategic objectives.

20. In previous reports we have recorded our impression that the NSC tended to focus on operational matters at the expense of longer-term strategic issues, and on foreign and defence policy to the neglect of domestic concerns.¹⁸ Access to the NSC agendas for 2013, on a confidential basis, has been very helpful in giving us a better understanding of the frequency of the NSC's meetings, and the range of topics discussed, but it has, if anything, reinforced our impression that the NSC is largely foreign policy focused and rarely looks at longer-term strategic issues. We put this to the Prime Minister who said:

I would argue that it has been a reasonable mixture. I have the figures with me. In 2011, we had 36 NSCs, we covered 50 foreign policy topics and nine domestic policy issues but 14 security-related issues, such as counterterrorism and defence. I think there is an argument that it could do more domestic subjects, and the Home Secretary is always keen that we discuss more.¹⁹

16 [HL Paper 115 / HC 984 \(2012–13\)](#), paragraphs 9–12

17 [Q1](#)

18 [HL Paper 115 / HC 984 \(2012–13\)](#), paragraph 9. Also [HL Paper 265 / HC 1384 \(2010–12\)](#), paragraphs 71, 83 and 86.

19 [Q2](#)

21. At the time of our first report in 2010 we were told the NSC met weekly when Parliament was in session.²⁰ From the agendas we have seen, the NSC appears to have met only 20 times in 2013, and—while the focus of some of the agenda items is not self-evident from the title—domestic topics appear to represent only around 15% of the total. We have seen no evidence that the meetings have become more strategic in focus or that sufficient time is being provided to consider issues in depth.

22. 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.

23. In our earlier reports we have also questioned whether the NSC makes sufficient use of expertise from outside Government.²¹ Outside experts can challenge the assumptions or work of departments, and bring new ideas or perspectives to issues. We raised this with the Prime Minister who said:

On outside advice, we have on occasion brought outsiders in, but we have also occasionally had seminars that NSC members attend in order to hear from outside experts. We had a particularly good session on Pakistan and Afghanistan for which some experts came. We had a special NSC in August last year on Syria. For our G8 agenda on tax and transparency and all of that, we had a whole series of experts in to address those issues²²

24. 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 future. We recommend that in future this Committee should be provided, together with the NSC agendas, with details of outside experts attending the NSC.

Lessons from recent events

25. Recent events have underlined the importance of long term and strategic thinking, both domestically and on foreign policy matters.

26. Recent events in Ukraine may not have been precisely predictable but the fact that Ukraine was unstable and Russia might react to that instability was widely recognised. The impact of EU policy towards Ukraine on stability in the region appears to have been overlooked, perhaps in part because EU matters are considered not in the National Security Council but in another Cabinet Committee. **The crisis in Ukraine is the type of event we had in mind when calling on the NSC to give time to horizon-scanning and longer-term, strategic issues.**

27. The impact of recent severe weather in the UK provides a second example. At the time of our evidence session with the Prime Minister in January 2014, the Christmas floods and

20 [HL Paper 265 / HC 1384 \(Session 2010–12\)](#), paragraph 77. [Cabinet Office 01, paragraph 4 i](#). See also <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-security/groups/national-security-council>

21 [HL Paper 265 / HC 1384 \(2010–12\)](#), paragraph 116; [HL Paper 115 / HC 984](#), paragraph 13

22 [Q12](#)

power cuts were fresh in everyone’s mind, though the further flooding in February on the Somerset levels and elsewhere was still to come. The Prime Minister told us that the NSC had discussed flooding in the context of the national risk register and threats to critical national infrastructure, and had a sub-committee that looked at resilience, threats and hazards.²³ However, discussion of the risk does not appear to have led to more investment in flood protection. The Prime Minister told us that the NSC did look at resource choices—notably the intelligence budget—but did not directly measure up the arguments for investment on flooding, as opposed to, say, terrorism.²⁴

28. The lessons from the recent severe weather are being considered by other committees, and we await their conclusions with interest.²⁵ However, **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.**

29. The recent experience of flooding and the Prime Minister’s comments about resource choices lead us to question whether enough is being done to ensure that the National Security Risk Assessment steers decisions on Government expenditure. *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.* This would enable the Government to take a view on whether the resources deployed to cope with, say, a cyber threat were proportionate to the risks when compared with the resources deployed to mitigate the risk of, say, a pandemic or volcanic eruption.

The US “pivot to Asia”

30. We took evidence on the UK’s relations with the US in June 2013 and with NATO in May 2013. There have been a number of key events since then, with recent changes to plans on EU defence, and the crisis in Ukraine. However, much of what we heard is still pertinent, particularly on the issue of the US Government’s so-called pivot to Asia or Asia-Pacific.

31. The Defence Committee concluded earlier this year that “there can be few developments more fundamental to the UK’s strategic position than the US pivot to the Pacific.”²⁶ The Government’s response to our 2013 report assured us that “the Government, of course, continues to examine the impact of any adjustments to US strategic focus” and added that the UK was also “re-balancing” towards Asia, by moving diplomatic resources to the region.²⁷ In his evidence to us in January, the Prime Minister made a similar point:

23 [Q20](#)

24 [Q20](#)

25 Inquiry of the [Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee into winter floods](#) and inquiry of the [Energy and Climate Change Committee into power disruption due to severe weather](#).

26 [Seventh Report of the Defence Committee, Session 2013–14, Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One, HC 197](#), paragraph 43

27 [HL Paper 58 / HC 179 \(Session 2013–14\)](#), page 4

The first thing I would say is that we are doing our own pivot. If you look at the amount of Foreign Office activity in south-east Asia—I mentioned the ASEAN countries—and what we are doing in China and India, there is real evidence that William is changing that department and focusing it on high-growth emerging powers and all the rest of it. [...] So I think we are doing our own pivoting.²⁸

It may well be in the UK's interests to increase its diplomatic presence in South East Asia, but this rather misses the point of our concern about the US pivot. The key question is whether the pivot will lead the US to decrease its commitment, military and diplomatic, to the security of Europe and in Europe's "near abroad", the Middle East and North Africa, in particular. Recent indications from Washington are that this may be a less significant shift than it initially appeared.²⁹ ***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.***

The UK's relationship with the EU

32. Our external witnesses stressed to us that whether the UK was in the European Union was of central importance to the UK's place in the world, wider strategic posture and alliances.³⁰ The Prime Minister told us:

My strategy, which is linked in with the national security strategy, is that we secure for Britain a reform in the European Union and a referendum. I want to recommend that we remain part of a reformed European Union, and I plan on the basis of success rather than on the basis of anything else. This goes to the broader point that we have not dealt with European issues in the National Security Council; we have dealt with them elsewhere in government. I accept that this has important implications for the UK, but, as I say, I think we should plan on the basis of what we want to achieve.³¹

The 2015 National Security Strategy will need to take account of the continuing uncertainty about the UK's role in Europe.

33. In 2012, the Foreign Secretary William Hague told us that the Cabinet Committee which dealt with the EU did not look at the national security aspects of the Eurozone collapse because "the questions here are so overwhelmingly economic that the national security implications are not the prime considerations".³² As noted in respect of the Ukraine crisis, EU matters are dealt with by the European Affairs Committee, and not by the NSC, with the risks that their security implications are neglected. **The UK's future relationship with the EU is vital to the UK's national security. It worries us that the NSC does not consider EU matters as this risks crucial connections being missed.**

28 [Q28](#)

29 [See Eighth Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Session 2013–14, Government foreign policy towards the United States, HC 695](#), paragraphs 41 to 48.

30 Eg [Niblett Q17](#), [Dormandy Q32](#)

31 [Q31](#)

32 National Security Strategy (Second Review) – Evidence Volume: [Hague Q76](#)

Contingency planning

34. We were struck by the Prime Minister’s statement that he believes in “planning on the basis of what you want to achieve”.³³ Clearly it is sometimes necessary or advisable not to contemplate failure publicly and to assert that you have “no Plan B”. However, in our work we have become concerned that in some areas the Government seems genuinely not to have any contingency plans. This is dangerous and unwise.

35. 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 national security is 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.*

Energy security, resilience and critical national infrastructure

36. In our evidence session on energy security in July 2013, Dr Fatih Birol, Chief Economist and Head of the Economic Analysis Division, International Energy Agency, was asked about the resilience of UK energy infrastructure. He told us that “I think the UK is definitely one of the countries that need to look at adaptation to climate change and increasing the resilience of the infrastructure very carefully.”³⁴ He went on to say that the *World Energy Outlook* publication³⁵ identified the UK’s North Sea as one of the three energy producing areas in the world most vulnerable to climate change; in the case of the North Sea from cyclones and storms.³⁶

37. While the Government has an *Energy Security Strategy*³⁷ it is a Department of Energy and Climate Change document, and does not address issues outside that department’s remit such as planning consent, or the numerous foreign policy implications of energy security. The strategy itself is focused on “keeping the lights on” in the short term. Virtually nothing is said about improving the resilience of the energy system to electromagnetic pulses (EMP), severe weather, flooding, or (surprisingly) climate change. ***It is crucially important that energy security and domestic resilience are fully addressed in the next NSS.***

38. We pressed the Prime Minister on the acceptability of foreign ownership of critical national infrastructure. He told us that:

there is going to be a proper NSC consideration of this because we have slightly different procedures for some slightly different parts of our infrastructure, and it would be good to have a proper collective discussion about whether we are happy

33 [Q31](#)

34 [Birol Q63](#)

35 A lengthy analysis published annually by the International Energy Agency: www.worldenergyoutlook.org

36 [Birol Q63](#)

37 [Energy Security Strategy](#), CM 8466, November 2012

when it comes to telecoms, electricity networks, gas networks and what have you that we have all the rules that we need in place.³⁸

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.

The role of the National Security Strategy

39. We asked the Prime Minister about his views on the 2010 NSS and his ideas for the next NSS, due in 2015. When asked what he meant by strategy, he said:

To me, strategy is about setting out a very clear series of goals that you want to meet and then making sure that you have sensible means for achieving those goals. I do not have to look at a bit of paper to tell us what our strategy is: it is to restore Britain's economic strength, it is to tie us to the fast growing parts of the world, it is to refresh and enhance the great alliances that we have, it is to tackle the threats that could threaten our country—and it is to make sure that we do this right across government and it is not just the Foreign Office fighting for us abroad but every single bit of government working together. That is the strategy.³⁹

But he also made clear that his interest, once the NSS had been agreed, was to focus on its implementation:

Of course in the NSC we discuss strategy, but I want us to determine policy, I want us to agree action, and I want us to check that we have done what we said we were going to do. ... I find that the problem all too often is that people love sitting around talking about strategy. Getting people to do things and act and complete on the strategy is often the challenge.

40. In our view, **there is a balance to be struck between implementing the old strategy and keeping up to date with a fast changing world. We think that the Government is too worried about being distracted and needs to try and balance both. By now the strategy is nearly four years old and has in some areas been made less relevant by events, or events have revealed gaps (such as on flooding). It is therefore necessary to balance implementing and updating the strategy, especially as the strategy gets older.**

41. We pressed the Prime Minister on how he would define his strategy for the UK's national security. He told us:

I would say that the strategy is about Britain engaging in the world in order to protect its interests but also to promote British values such as democracy, freedom of speech and human rights.⁴⁰

He strongly emphasised the importance of trade and prosperity.⁴¹ While we welcome that the Prime Minister was able to give a clear and impassioned vision for how he saw the UK's

38 [Q36](#)

39 [Q7](#)

40 [Q14](#)

41 [Q30](#)

place in the world we did not recognise much of what he was saying from the 2010 NSS. This was a document which we have previously described as “lacking an overarching strategy, a common understanding about the UK’s interests and objectives that guides choices”.⁴²

42. A clear vision of the UK’s goals and role in the world is essential for a good NSS. The Prime Minister expressed a clear vision for the UK and its place in the world in his oral evidence, but it is not one we recognised from the 2010 NSS. It is important that the vision of the Government of the day is more clearly reflected in the next NSS.

43. When asked about the next NSS, the Prime Minister told us:

The national security strategy needs a refresh. I do not think it will be a complete overhaul. ... if I am responsible for its eventual outcome I think it will have that trade/prosperity agenda perhaps even more strongly at its heart, but I would not expect a huge change in either the national security strategy or, indeed, the SDSR.⁴³

We are concerned that by the Prime Minister’s statement that the NSS only “needs a refresh”. The document definitely needs a significant rethink even if he believes the strategy underlying it does not. An NSS addressing everything that needs to be addressed would be a much longer document, but more importantly it would take a very different approach, tackling the difficult questions with honesty, rather than assuming that everything the Government wishes to happen will occur. And it would convey the Prime Minister’s priorities more effectively. **We stand by our recommendation from our first report that the UK needs an overarching strategy, clearly expressed, that the public can engage with. As we said in 2012, the next NSS should be “a very different document”.**

A realistic NSS—no shrinkage in influence?

44. The 2010 NSS stated “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”.⁴⁴ In our first report in March 2012 we concluded that with the rise of new powers and the shift in centres of economic activity eastwards this was “wholly unrealistic in the medium to long term”.⁴⁵ The Defence Committee has also pointed to the unrealism of expecting no reduction in influence if defence and other capabilities are significantly reduced, concluding that “a period of strategic shrinkage is inevitable”.⁴⁶ We were therefore surprised that the December 2013 *Annual Report on the NSS and SDSR* used an even more bullish phrase: the Government’s objective is now said to be to “ensure that Britain’s influence in the world is expanding”.⁴⁷ The Prime Minister did not accept that this aspiration was unrealistic and told us that:

42 [HL Paper 265 / HC 1384 \(Session 2010–12\)](#), paragraph 46

43 [Q30](#)

44 [Cm 7953](#), paragraph 0.8

45 [HL Paper 265 / HC 1384 \(Session 2010–12\)](#), paragraph 30.

46 [Sixth Report of the Defence Committee, Session 2010–12, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review and the National Security Strategy*, HC 761](#)

47 [Annual Report on the National Security and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), December 2013, paragraph 32.

I also reject the idea that you can only measure how engaged you are and how successful you are in projecting influence by how much money you spend. No business goes about its life like that.⁴⁸

45. We agree with the Prime Minister that influence is not just about money spent, influence is a complex mixture of capabilities (both hard and soft), diplomacy, relationships, and reputation. As in any area of government it is possible to spend less money more effectively, but there is also a limit to what can be cut without impacting on the end result. Willingness to use capabilities, particularly military ones, is also a key part of influence.

46. More importantly however, influence is about the overall global picture. The 2010 NSS admits the global balance of power is shifting. It notes that America will not remain the only global power, and Asia is rising both economically and in terms of influence while Europe is in relative decline.⁴⁹ It is clear to us that no amount of spending money more effectively and/or improving our relations with emerging powers will change this underlying picture.

47. We repeat that expecting there to be no shrinkage in the UK's influence is wholly unrealistic. Any national security strategy based on this is wishful thinking rather than credible strategy. While the Government should seek to maximise its influence, no amount of spending money carefully can change the overall picture; in the long term, the UK and its allies are in relative decline on the global stage.

Planning for the next NSS

48. The fifth concern we raised in our 2013 report was the fact that the Government was showing no sign of pressing ahead with planning for the next NSS, or of giving serious consideration to consulting outside Government in its development.⁵⁰ It had been the central conclusion of our first report in 2012 that the next NSS should be the product of a much wider public debate and an attempt at a political consensus, and that planning for this should start immediately.⁵¹ The Government has shown no sign of wanting to engage in this wider debate. The Government's response to our last report, in August 2013, said merely that "initial preparatory work is underway": the MOD was carrying out a programme of studies for the next SDSR, but the review of the NSS would not be conducted until after the 2015 Election.⁵² The Prime Minister was quite open with us in saying that his focus was now on implementing the 2010 strategy and he did not want work on the next NSS to distract his officials from getting on and delivering their current objectives.⁵³

49. After our meeting with the Prime Minister we arranged a briefing with Cabinet Office officials to discuss plans for the 2015 NSS in more detail. This confirmed what we feared:

48 [Q5](#)

49 [Cm 7953](#), paragraphs 1.13 to 1.20

50 [HL Paper 115 / HC 984 \(Session 2012–13\)](#), paragraph 13

51 [HL Paper 265 / HC1384 \(Session 2010–12\)](#), paragraph 118

52 [HL Paper 58 / HC179 \(Session 2013–14\)](#), page 4

53 [Q7; Q29](#)

very little work is being done at the centre to steer a review of the NSS. In the absence of a clear steer from above, a bottom-up process seems to be developing with departments being asked for suggestions. There appears to be no intention to publish any proposals in draft for consultation before the Election.

50. We understand the Prime Minister's desire to ensure that the Government maintains focus on implementing the 2010 NSS. But we believe he is missing an opportunity to build a broader consensus for his vision for the UK's future, and to make decision-making more coherent across Government. We have given the Cabinet Office some idea of the issues that we think need to be addressed in the review of the NSS and aim to provide further suggestions before the election.

51. We urge the Prime Minister to reconsider his approach to the next NSS and to give a clear steer to his officials that they are expected to produce a radically different NSS in 2015, tackling the big (and politically difficult) questions and which will guide decisions going forward. The current 'bottom-up' process will not deliver a document with a clear vision, and suggestions from departments are likely to result in important issues falling in the gaps between departmental responsibilities.

Our next phase of work

52. Meanwhile, in order to stimulate public debate and in the hope of provoking Government into action, we have decided that in our next phase of work we will focus on what we believe the next NSS should contain. Clearly we do not have the resource at our disposal that is available to the Government, so we anticipate that it will be a high level document, focusing on the big issues, and perhaps posing questions as well as offering answers. We will be seeking views on the development of our proposals later this Summer.

Conclusions and recommendations

Recommendations are in *italics*.

Our work in 2013–14

1. We commend to the Government the evidence we have received, both on its own merits and to underline the value of hearing from outside experts. (Paragraph 5)
2. It is most unusual, if not unprecedented, for a select committee to be given access to a Cabinet Committee's agendas, and we welcome the access we have been given to the NSC's agendas as a signal that the Prime Minister is committed to ensuring that the NSC is operating to best effect. (Paragraph 10)
3. The Prime Minister normally appears only before the Commons Liaison Committee and his agreement to appear before our Committee demonstrates the personal interest he takes in national security matters. We found our evidence session with the Prime Minister helpful and informative: it gave us a clearer understanding of the Prime Minister's personal vision and of the rationale for some of the Government's decisions. (Paragraph 11)
4. *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)
5. We commend the improvements made to the *Annual Report on the NSS and SDSR* in 2013 but suggest there is still more that could be done to make the Annual Report into a genuinely useful document for Parliament and the public. (Paragraph 16)

The operation of the National Security Council

6. We accept that the Prime Minister has found the NSC a useful forum for getting Ministers and Departments to work together, and believes that it has improved collective decision-making. It is, of course, for the Prime Minister to arrange the machinery of government in the way that works best for him. However, we continue to believe that the NSC could be more effective in helping the Government achieve its strategic objectives. (Paragraph 19)
7. 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)
8. 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 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)

Lessons from recent events

9. The crisis in Ukraine is the type of event we had in mind when calling on the NSC to give time to horizon-scanning and longer-term, strategic issues. (Paragraph 26)
10. 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)
11. *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 US “pivot to Asia”

12. *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 UK's relationship with the EU

13. The 2015 National Security Strategy will need to take account of the continuing uncertainty about the UK's role in Europe. (Paragraph 32)
14. The UK's future relationship with the EU is vital to the UK's national security. It worries us that the NSC does not consider EU matters as this risks crucial connections being missed. (Paragraph 33)

Contingency planning

15. 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 national security is 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)

Energy security, resilience and national critical infrastructure

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

17. *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 role of the National Security Strategy

18. There is a balance to be struck between implementing the old strategy and keeping up to date with a fast changing world. We think that the Government is too worried about being distracted and needs to try and balance both. By now the strategy is nearly four years old and has in some areas been made less relevant by events, or events have revealed gaps (such as on flooding). It is therefore necessary to balance implementing and updating the strategy, especially as the strategy gets older. (Paragraph 40)
19. A clear vision of the UK's goals and role in the world is essential for a good NSS. The Prime Minister expressed a clear vision for the UK and its place in the world in his oral evidence, but it is not one we recognised from the 2010 NSS. It is important that the vision of the Government of the day is more clearly reflected in the next NSS. (Paragraph 42)
20. We stand by our recommendation from our first report that the UK needs an overarching strategy, clearly expressed, that the public can engage with. As we said in 2012, the next NSS should be "a very different document". (Paragraph 43)

A realistic NSS

21. We repeat that expecting there to be no shrinkage in the UK's influence is wholly unrealistic. Any national security strategy based on this is wishful thinking rather than credible strategy. While the Government should seek to maximise its influence, no amount of spending money carefully can change the overall picture; in the long term, the UK and its allies are in relative decline on the global stage. (Paragraph 47)

Planning for the next NSS

22. We urge the Prime Minister to reconsider his approach to the next NSS and to give a clear steer to his officials that they are expected to produce a radically different NSS in 2015, tackling the big (and politically difficult) questions and which will guide decisions going forward. The current 'bottom-up' process will not deliver a document with a clear vision, and suggestions from departments are likely to result in important issues falling in the gaps between departmental responsibilities. (Paragraph 51)

Formal Minutes

Monday 7 April 2014

Members present:

Margaret Beckett, in the Chair

Lord Clark of Windermere	Sir Malcolm Bruce
Lord Fellowes	Sir Richard Ottaway
Lord Harris of Haringey	
Lord Lee of Trafford	
Baroness Neville-Jones	
Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale	
Lord Sterling of Plaistow	
Baroness Taylor of Bolton	

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Draft Report, *The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2013–14*, proposed by the Chair, brought up and considered.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 52 agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First 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.

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[Adjourned till Monday 12 May 2014 at 4 pm]

List of oral and written evidence

(published on the Committee's website as the [National Security Strategy \(Third Review\) - Evidence Volume](#), and the [Prime Minister's evidence, 30 January 2014](#))

Oral Evidence

22 April 2013

Charles Grant CMG, Director, Centre for European Reform, **Dr Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer**, Director of the Paris Office, German Marshall Fund, and **Dr Nicolai von Ondarza**, Senior Associate, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs)

[Qq1–13](#)

20 May 2013

Professor Mike Clarke, Director General, RUSI, **Sir Stewart Eldon**, former UK Permanent Representative to NATO; and **Dr Robin Niblett, Director**, Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House)

[Qq14–30](#)

17 June 2013

Professor Michael Cox, London School of Economics, **Xenia Dormandy**, Senior Fellow, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, and **Professor Anatol Lieven**, King's College London

[Qq31–49](#)

15 July 2013

Dr Fatih Birol, Chief Economist and Head of the Economic Analysis Division, International Energy Agency

[Qq50–67](#)

30 January 2014

Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Prime Minister

[Qq1–45](#)

Written Evidence

(published on the Committee's website as the [National Security Strategy \(Third Review\) - Evidence Volume](#))

- 1 Cabinet Office
- 2 Professor Robert Cooper
- 3 Major General (retired) Vincent Desportes
- 4 Xenia Dormandy
- 5 Professor Keith Hartley
- 6 Dr Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer
- 7 Sir David Manning
- 8 Dr Robin Niblett
- 9 The Polish Institute of International Affairs
- 10 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (German Institute for International and Security Affairs)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/national-security-strategy/>.

Session 2013–14

First Special Report	The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012-13	HL Paper 78 / HC 179
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Session 2012–13

First Report	Planning for the next National Security Strategy: comments on the Government response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2010–12	HL Paper 27 / HC 423
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Second Report	The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012	HL Paper 115 / HC 984
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First Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2012–13	HL Paper 65 / HC 758
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Session 2010–12

First Report	First review of the National Security Strategy 2010	HL Paper 1384 / HC 265
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