

## **The Strategic Defence and Security Review: a new Prime Minister's perspective?**

Bernard Jenkin MP

This is intended to convey the intellectual and political framework in which the new government should conduct the Foreign Defence and Security Policy Review.

Every generation or so, the British prime minister is faced with a decisive choice over the direction which the UK should take in world affairs. In 1940 Churchill turned his face decisively against a negotiated settlement with the Nazis; in the 1960s Harold Wilson decided to withdraw from east of Suez; while in 1982 Margaret Thatcher made the decision to stand and fight over the Falklands, thereby ending years of British decline in foreign affairs. Tony Blair followed the US into the Balkans, and coined the term “humanitarian interventionism”, on the back of the 1998 Strategic Defence Review. David Cameron and his new administration is confronted with just such a choice, which will determine the direction of the UK's foreign policy ‘base line’ for the next generation.

The crisis in spending and borrowing makes it inevitable that the government will have to accept severe limitations on the costs of foreign and defence policy in the short term, but this does not mean that the government cannot plan for growth in the medium- to long-term. Framing the questions at the heart of the Review will ensure that it emerges with the right answers.

I hope readers will forgive me if they recognise parts of their own work in this paper. I acknowledge and thank everyone who has helped me in this work.

Bernard Jenkin MP  
House of Commons  
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Dear Cabinet Secretary

## **Strategic Defence and Security Review**

### **Instruction**

1. I wish you to let me have detailed proposals and a timetable that will enable a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) to be completed within the next six months. Proposals for the conduct of the review should be ready for approval by full cabinet within the next month. The review should also draw upon the widest possible body of advice, in the same manner as SDR in 1998, within the shorter timeframe. This memorandum defines the broad scope of the review, which should make the timetable achievable. This will also represent the first of the Quadrennial Defence Reviews, to be conducted in analogous fashion. I wish you to set up a Cabinet Committee to oversee the review, chaired by myself, and including the Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, International Development Secretary, Business Secretary, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Min DE&S, and the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser.

### **Afghanistan**

2. The most immediate and pressing concern is the future of UK military operations in Afghanistan. This should be treated immediately and separately from the Review. In accordance with the accompanying memo, please make arrangements to convene a War Cabinet under my chairmanship at the earliest opportunity. NSID (the Cabinet Committee for National Security, International Affairs and Development, or its successor) will continue to handle non-War Cabinet business. The War Cabinet will be supported by a Cabinet Office secretariat and will include MoD, including the CDS, with the other chiefs to attend as required, FCO, DfID, Home Office and the Cabinet Office (including JIC). The War Cabinet will also lead on Pakistan. I will appoint the Foreign Secretary as notionally Secretary of State for Afghanistan and he will chair the war cabinet in my absence.
3. Assuming that the UK's continued and extended military engagement in Afghanistan is indispensable to the national interest, we must be fully committed and can no longer be half-hearted. Whitehall needs to be placed upon a war footing. The War Cabinet should conduct a two-month review of the campaign. The results of this review should then feed into the SDSR Committee process. Achievable objectives must include; that the coalition can realistically look forward to handing over to an Afghan government that can sustain its own security within 2-5 years; that the coalition will contribute to the stability of the region, particularly in Pakistan; that the UK's contribution will be decisive; and that we could not maintain faith with our key ally, the US, if we were to withdraw now.
4. For as long as British forces are committed to the NATO operation in Afghanistan, I want it to be understood that Afghan operations must be

afforded every resource necessary to minimise both civilian and military casualties and these resources must be provided independently of the Review. I require all major resource decisions affecting our operations in Afghanistan to be referred to the War Cabinet if agreement cannot be reached between the MoD and HM Treasury.

5. If it is considered that military operations are likely to continue at scale for more than three years, MoD must cease to treat Afghanistan as a Contingent Operation (as defined by SDR 1998) conducted in peacetime, but as a Standing Commitment (while not losing access to the Treasury Reserve for UORs) and the main Review must reflect this. The British effort in Afghanistan and Pakistan needs to be co-ordinated better across all relevant departments and this must also be reflected throughout the Review.

### **Structure of government**

6. The Review will be cross departmental and involve MoD, FCO, DfID, Business Department, the Home Office and Cabinet Office and will include a review of the cabinet committee structures so that the apparatus which oversees the Review (possibly NSID) will become the means of supervision of ongoing foreign, defence and security policy. The review needs to look at all parts of government that bear upon national security in the widest possible terms. A cabinet committee should be a decision-making body. There is no purpose in cabinet committees that hardly ever meet, or which meet only at official level, as appeared to be the case under my predecessor. The new structure should also reflect our stated intentions to set up a National Security Council, as a Committee of the Cabinet, chaired by me or by the Foreign Secretary in my absence. The National Security Council will replace NSID. OGDs may be also involved in the Review, as appropriate.
7. To inform and support the National Security Council, we should establish the National Security Strategy HQ, headed by a senior officer from the Armed Forces. Like Whitehall, this HQ should be placed on a war footing and be manned by MoD and the leading government departments.

### **Key questions**

8. There are two questions at the heart this Review. The first is how best to secure the safety, security and prosperity of the UK and, in the medium-to-long term, how the UK will remain a major diplomatic and military force in global affairs, rather than becoming a third-rank power, comparable to similar-sized European nations. The second is how best to articulate what our national interests are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Clearly, it is not in our national interest for a further permanent shrinkage of our role.<sup>1</sup> The Review will cover the Home Office-led counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST), the role of the intelligence and security services and the police. The SDSR will mark the ending of the differentiation between 'home' and 'overseas' security policies, with the focus being on placed National Security. It will also set out the consequences of

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<sup>1</sup> Rt Hon William Hague MP, 'The future of British foreign policy', 21 July 2009.

continuing to downsize our diplomatic and military capability on UK security. This would encourage US unilateralism and allow other nations to seek to supplant the UK as their most useful ally. The Review should explore the risks of allowing this course to occur by default. Loss of influence in Washington would undermine UK influence elsewhere, particularly in Europe and the Middle East, reduce US interest in sustaining NATO and thereby undermine European security and stability.

### **Financial constraints**

9. The Review will establish the spending priorities for the UK's foreign, defence and security policy across all the departments concerned. The overseas aid budget, where it overlaps with defence and security policy, must also be considered in the Review. The first task of my SDSR Committee will be to issue guidance on the financial parameters within which the review must be conducted, in terms of a number of alternative resource assumptions. In the short to medium term, restoration of the public finances is the government's main effort and will remain the primary strategic concern. This must inevitably be reflected in spending on foreign, defence and security policy, but in the long term we will wish to spend whatever is necessary to secure the UK's safety and vital long-term national interests. The review must be mindful of our commitment to protect the DfID budget, but that does not preclude the aid budget being directed towards CONTEST objectives and the creation of more integrated post-conflict reconstruction capability, under military leadership where appropriate.

### **The Role of the UK in the world**

10. The Review should emphasise the decisive role the UK has to play in the world in maintaining the free trading system, and in containing potential state and non-state threats.<sup>2</sup> The UK will continue to play a full role in the UNSC, in the EU, in NATO and the Commonwealth, but must also look to exploit our full potential of our bilateral relations with the key powers, particularly with Russia, China, the South Americas, India, Pakistan, the Gulf and the Anglosphere. The Review should set out and cost the options for strengthening the capacity of the FCO, MoD and OGDs to deal directly with our other national partners, recognising that, in the final analysis, foreign, defence and security policy is a national responsibility. We should restore the number of Defence Attachés to manage bilateral relationships so we can exploit our unique capacity for defence diplomacy to the full. DBIS must rebuild expertise to participate actively in international trade negotiations sector-by-sector, even if the UK legally continues to be represented by the EU. DfID must increase the proportion of aid delivered through bilateral programmes.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Our "enlightened national interest" requires British global engagement...Britain will be safer if our values are strongly upheld and widely respected in the world. Nor would Britain ever be happy as a nation if we partly or largely retired from trying to influence world events.', Rt Hon William Hague MP, **'The Future of British Foreign Policy'**.

## **The United States**

11. The UK's most important relationship will continue to be with the United States of America. This will be solid but not slavish.<sup>3</sup> Enhanced diplomatic (especially in matters of trade) and military capacity will improve our influence in Washington in the long run, and by strengthening our bilateral relations with other countries, we will strengthen our own role in European and global affairs and to help to sustain US engagement in European and global security. This is particularly important at times like the present<sup>4</sup>, during a period of international uncertainty and when the United States may be more reluctant to maximise her power and influence in the interests of European and global security. Our intelligence relationship with the US is sacrosanct but we need to find ways of developing new, less formal, complementary and open intelligence networks as mandated by both the Butler and 9/11 commissions – for example within / across Europe. If we are to be involved in post-conflict operations with the US, then DfID, FCO and MoD must be capable of delivering the Comprehensive Approach alongside US and other allied forces.

## **Types of future conflict**

12. The Review should examine the likelihood and readiness for the various different types of conflict in which the UK might become involved in the foreseeable future. While many assume that the risk of state-on-state warfare as a direct threat to UK territory may have receded since the end of the Cold War, that eventuality cannot be dismissed; the present 'hot peace' may well be untypical. The Falklands War and the First Gulf War were both entirely unexpected conflicts, as was Russia's incursion into Georgia. Moreover, aspects of the Balkans conflicts and the war in Helmand have both shown characteristics of state-on-state conflict. Types of conflict should be ranked in order of seriousness: an existential war along the lines of that prepared for during the Cold War; a terrorist-style attack on the homeland or our allies, carried out by non-state actors, with or without the active backing of a hostile state; a military attack on the UK's sovereign territories overseas, such as the Falklands; inter-state conflict, particularly over energy supplies in the Middle East and North Africa; conflicts in failed states, where we are requested to restore order, as in Sierra Leone, or remove a hostile regime, as in Afghanistan, or where a major natural disaster in a friendly country renders its government unable to restore order or deliver aid effectively; cyber attacks, whether conducted by hostile or semi-hostile states or by non-state actors.

## **Military capability: types of operation the UK must/should/might undertake**

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<sup>3</sup> Rt Hon William Hague MP, **The Special Relationship**, 16 January 2006.

<sup>4</sup> In recent years there is evidence to suggest that the Special Relationship has come under great strain including between our militaries. Too much has arguably been promised without understanding the true costs. The present *British* Petroleum (as opposed to BP) oil crisis is perhaps illustrative. Yet our enemies would consider the damaging of the US-UK relationship a singular success. In which case, post Afghanistan, we must ensure the relationship strengthens – which will require re-investment in our fields of political, economic, security exchange and proper strategic socio-techno research.

13. At present, the UK armed forces have insufficient capability and too much responsibility; a capability-capacity crunch. The Review must recognise: that it will not be possible for the UK to prepare for every type of military operation at short notice; that it is better and more cost-effective to Prevent conflict; that deterrence is an essential component of Prevent, but that conflict in the absence of credible and capable deterrence is inevitable; and that it would be too risky to attempt to settle UK military capability in favour of “war among the people” at the expense of overall defence or *vice versa*. The Review should rank conflict types according to those we must, should or might wish to undertake and then establish what notice period it is safe to assume before different types of deployment.
14. The Review should develop the principle of ‘core defence’<sup>5</sup>, whereby standing military capacity reflects what is needed immediately, but other capabilities are capable of build-up according to a balance<sup>6</sup> of cost and risk, because it is essential that we understand the timescales required for the development of military capabilities. It must set out the basic assumption of how long it would take to be prepared for various types of conflict. Some capacity will be available for immediate use, while other capacity will require substantial investment if only to be ready at, say, 3 years’ notice (e.g. aircraft, ships, tanks). Particularly in the immediate lean years, but perhaps into the future as well, educating our people to be flexible, adaptable force multipliers will be ever more important.
15. We should develop equipment for our armed forces that is versatile and modular, enhancing the flexible, adaptable force multiplier people concept. This also needs to address the question of dual use (civil, industry, military, across services); scaling; composition; stand-off-systems (applicable to both Prevent and Cyber) and adaptation. In modern war, scaling is essential in terms of physical size (to survive attack) and, where size is not possible, in terms of networked numbers (to prevail). This applies equally to systems as it does to our people. We need to find ways and means of growing our manpower and fleets within affordable constraints – so that the ends do not become the means. For example, at present we may not afford to use exceptional assets (such as carriers) for fear of losing them. No Armed Forces can hope to succeed on such a basis. These aggregations are not impossible and there is sound historical precedence. Delivery, however, can only be achieved by step change and through recombination of government, academe, industry and finance; properly led and in strategic partnership (not consultancy).
16. Defence of UK homeland, an attack on overseas territories and the defence of NATO allies must rank at the top (‘standing commitments’). Some military capacity will have to be on permanent alert (e.g. air intercept); some on longer notice. This means not only maintaining an effective nuclear deterrent (e.g.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a concept for defence planning advocated by Adm. Sir Sandy Woodward.

<sup>6</sup> It needs also to be recognised that balance has been used hitherto to prevent decisions being taken. In other words, the answer is the always the same; just fewer. Adaptation is about selection and selection of the fittest – it is antithetical to balance. This is not well understood.

Trident), but also sufficient conventional capacity with the necessary ‘network enabled capability’ (C4ISTAR<sup>7</sup>) infrastructure and logistical support, ready to be expanded given notice, to avoid the need to resort immediately to WMD, to include sufficient infantry, artillery and armour; airborne intercept and ground strike capability; naval/ coastal defence; and long range conventional strike capability (submarine-launched Tomahawk) for additional deterrence/retaliation. Some expeditionary capability would appear to be indispensable to deter threats to overseas territories, perhaps to defend vital food or energy networks. Interoperability with allies is essential, particularly with the US. We therefore cannot afford to lose access to the necessary technology when it is required.

17. We should remain capable of participating in inter-state warfare away from the home base (such as Gulf 1, Serbia-Bosnia, Gulf 2) on the assumption that we will be in coalition with the US. We should or might wish to intervene in less urgent situations (e.g. naval training in Iraq, anti-drug Caribbean patrol ship, anti-piracy operations off Somalia), as much to enhance our influence with allies as to contribute to our own and to global security (‘contingent operations’). We also need to provide capacity for new types of conflict, like cyber warfare. Given the financial constraints, the Review should establish what capabilities can be temporarily drawn from the standing military capacity for such interventions, and what operations we will have to avoid, until resources allow for re-establishment of a fuller role. Where such operations are of sufficient priority to justify medium- to long-term engagement, they must become treated as standing commitments, or we risk compromising the more essential foreign defence and security priorities.
18. We should also remain capable of conducting small-scale humanitarian interventions, along the lines of Sierra Leone, in order to alleviate suffering caused either by natural disasters or poor governance.

### **Acquisition of Equipment/ Defence Procurement**

19. The Review should also cover all government programmes to acquire equipment and materiel for defence and security purposes. This may be covered by a separate review, which may take longer. The Review must establish, regardless of current programmes, what equipment is truly needed; in what priority; and when, respecting the principles of ‘core defence’ (see above). In future, the UK should avoid political, multilateral projects (eg. Eurofighter Typhoon, Horizon Frigate, A400M) in favour of bilateral projects, which have proved much less subject to delay and cost increases. The Review should look at more efficient methods of procurement, which keep industry on standby for the production of certain defence equipment when required at shorter notice, rather than by keeping high cost equipment itself on long-term standby. This is particularly important in high technology, which can be decisive in all types of conflict but can quickly become out-of-date. We also need a ready method for balancing whole-life-cost vs. capability compromise;

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<sup>7</sup> Command, Control, Communications and Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance

and bespoke purchases vs. off-the-shelf. There must be a new simple, approval process. Too many layers of approval and scrutiny have led to excessive complexity, delay and increased cost. The process must reflect the lessons highlighted by the Bernard Gray Report<sup>8</sup> and recent successful experience commissioner/ provider contracts in defence and elsewhere (i.e. getting other people to do what needs to be done), and from the experience of UORs, with a view to hiving off the activities of Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S).

20. Existing projects shall be subject to scrutiny by a team of commercial advisers employed by the MoD answerable solely to Min DE&S. Their objective will be to enable ministers to take decisions about them according to the cost/ priority criteria established by the Review (eg. A400M could be cancelled in favour of C17/C130; carrier construction could be aborted/ suspended/continued; Astute submarine programme could be extended to delay costs of Trident replacement subs; etc). Far too much money has been wasted on external firms of advisers as means of avoiding decisions and accountability. This should no longer continue.
21. The Review should build upon the Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS), which seeks to maximise jobs and technology for the UK. This is not justified for its own sake, but to ensure the UK possesses battle-winning technology and because maximising the benefit to the UK economy of defence spending will maximise support for it. The UK is the world's second largest defence exporter by value. As technology develops, the cross-over of defence R&D into civilian industry is growing. The UK retains a technological lead in key niche areas (eg. Sonar, helicopter rotors, avionics, defence software, counter IED capability) and DIS2 should seek to develop these.

## **Conclusion**

22. The Review must reflect the kind of country that we are and which we wish to be as we move through the first half of the present century. It must reflect the unalterable will of the UK to remain safe, secure and prosperous. In the absence of sufficient other friendly powers to provide for our security, we must remain alert to the dangers of the modern world and new emerging threats. We must be committed to doing what we can for ourselves and for our allies. The UK is fortunate to be uniquely placed by history for this role. There will always be some who regard the additional cost of foreign defence and security policy compared to other nations as an unnecessary drag upon UK prosperity and competitiveness, even though as a percentage of GDP it is historically very low. There will be others who will point to the rise of new great economic powers as proof that military and diplomatic power lacks relevance in modern world. However, there can be no prosperity worth enjoying without security; and no security if we have no means of facing down those who are ready to use force to achieve their ends. Who will defend our interests if we are unprepared to defend them ourselves? There are many countries which will move into our diplomatic and military space if we vacate

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Gray, **Review of Acquisition for the Secretary of State for Defence** (October 2009).

it. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that this never happens; I want this spirit to infuse all the work on this Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Yours sincerely

Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Prime Minister