

Monday 22 March 2010

Statement on National Security strategy

A Written Ministerial Statement by the Prime Minister on the National Security Strategy Progress Report submitted to Parliament on 22 March.

Read the statement

The safety and security of our citizens is the most important duty of Government. In March 2008, I announced the publication of the UK's first ever National Security Strategy (NSS) and today, two years on, I am pleased to deliver a progress report, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. This report outlines the range of work that has been done since March 2008 to ensure that we are best placed to respond to the broad range of national security risks identified in the first NSS, from terrorism, nuclear proliferation, conflict and stabilization, organized crime, domestic emergencies, to new challenges including piracy and cyber security.

The report explains how the comprehensive framework provided by the NSS, and the first annual update in 2009, has mobilised government to work together to strengthen our response across a range of fast moving and interconnected security issues, and to meet rising public expectations about what Government should be doing to protect citizens, while also increasing transparency and accountability on security issues. The new framework ensures that our response is coordinated and flexible and that we are able not only to tackle threats as they arise, but also to act early to deal with the drivers of threats and the environments in which they arise.

This work is overseen by the new Cabinet Committee on National Security which was established in 2007, which includes all the relevant Ministers, police Chiefs, as well as the heads of the agencies, the Chief of Defence Staff, and others. It has met very frequently on Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as a wide range of other issues. It is supported by the new National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office. The Secretariat also coordinates national security policy work across Government, including contributing to the Defence Green Paper published in February, and the Development White Paper 'Building our Common Future', published in 2009. The National Security Forum established in 2009 ensures that government work on national security is informed by independent expertise, and the new Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, which will take evidence from Ministers later today, has improved parliamentary oversight.

As a result of this comprehensive whole-of-government approach, we are better equipped to respond effectively to the immediate threats we face, including terrorism, conflict, serious organised crime and civil emergencies. Today, the Government has published the CONTEST annual report (Cm 7833) which sets out progress against our counter terrorism strategy, updated a year ago and recognised as one of the most sophisticated in the world. We have continued to increase investment - from £1bn a year on domestic counter-terrorism in 2001 to over £3bn now, doubling the size of the security service and recruiting thousands more counter-terrorism police. We have set up a single Border Agency with police-level powers, and the new electronic border controls will be covering 95% of travel by the end of 2010. Watch list arrangements and aviation security more widely are subject to continuous review. But we are committed to combining strong defences at home with decisive action abroad with allies to tackle terrorism and extremism, including building up other countries' capacity to deal with terrorism themselves. Our priority remains the Afghan-Pakistan border areas - still the largest source of terrorist threat to the UK - but we have also had to respond to the diversifying threat from other countries such as Yemen and Somalia, which are covered in the progress report.

We have developed a Comprehensive Approach to stabilisation and development in failed and fragile states. In Afghanistan we were the first country to set up in 2008 a joint military-civilian

headquarters to integrate the security and stabilisation aspects of our strategy – this team is now leading the stabilisation efforts following on from Operation Moshtarak in Helmand. In February this year we launched the new group of 1150 skilled and experienced civilians constituting the Civilian Stabilisation Group from which up to 200 can be deployed at any one time. After the recent tragedy in Haiti, a team from the Stabilisation Group was in the air just 12 hours after receiving a request from the UN.

Building on the successful work of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, established in 2006, we published an updated strategy for tackling organised crime in July 2009, strengthening the shared assessment of harm and risk across SOCA, the police and other agencies, and set up a new Strategic Centre for Organised Crime in the Home Office to drive activity across Government. A new Ministerial Committee devoted specifically to organised crime will meet for the first time this month.

In relation to work to improve our resilience against domestic emergencies, the preparations put in place by the Government, National Health Service and local responders allowed the UK to respond quickly and minimise the disruption caused by the H1N1 pandemic, and the World Health Organisation has described the UK as “in the vanguard of countries worldwide in preparing for a pandemic”. Work continues on our Critical Infrastructure Resilience Programme as a response to Sir Michael Pitt’s review of the floods in the Summer of 2007. We today publish the first products of that work: a Strategic Framework and Policy Statement; the Sector Resilience Plan for Critical Infrastructure 2010; and Interim Guidance to the Economic Regulated Sectors. This work forms part of our wider efforts to reduce the vulnerability of national infrastructure and essential services to disruption from natural hazards. Copies of these documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

One of the fundamental principles underlying the NSS is the commitment to tackling long-term challenges early by paying attention to the drivers of insecurity, such as poverty, inequality and poor governance, climate change, and competition for energy and other natural resources. The 2009 Development White Paper identified the need to focus more of our development efforts in conflict-affected and fragile states, and on state-building and peace-building objectives in these countries. The Department for Energy and Climate Change, established in October 2008, plays a critical role in leading our response to climate change and in developing a strategic approach to energy security. The Government’s response to Malcolm Wicks’ review of International Energy Security will be published shortly.

The NSS also covers work to secure the UK’s interests in a range of environments where security challenges may arise, including the cyber, maritime and space domains. Last summer, we published the first ever Cyber Security Strategy and, in September, established the Office for Cyber Security and the Cyber Security Operations Centre. These new structures coordinate efforts across government to ensure both that public sector systems are fully protected, and that citizens and businesses can take full advantage of the huge opportunities presented by cyberspace while reducing the risks that it poses to the UK, including from foreign actors or criminal, negligent or reckless activity. We are also developing a new national partnership to inspire talented young people to take up careers in information security to meet the need for highly skilled cyber security specialists.

As announced in the 2009 NSS update, we have been reviewing the security of the maritime domain, including piracy and counter-terrorism. A key area where we can strengthen our response to potential maritime incidents is through the integration and central coordination of maritime surveillance systems. I can today announce that work is beginning to establish a new multi-agency National Maritime Information Centre (NMIC) based at the Ministry of Defence’s joint headquarters in Northwood. The Cabinet Office is also currently leading a review of the security of the UK’s strategic interests in space.

In relation to nuclear security, the Road to 2010 White Paper, published in July 2009, set out our response to the full range of nuclear challenges the UK faces, in preparation for President Obama's Nuclear Security Summit in April, and the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in May. The Government is putting in place a package of enhanced nuclear security measures to demonstrate the UK's commitment to tackling the threat of nuclear terrorism, and to encourage other nations to follow suit. These include confirming our commitment to renew the G8 Global Partnership beyond 2012, with a renewed focus on nuclear and biological security; inviting an IAEA International Physical Protection Advisory Service (IPPAS) mission to Sellafield; providing further funding to the IAEA Nuclear Security Fund, to address the most urgent nuclear security needs overseas; and ratifying the two key international instruments for nuclear security (the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism; the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material). We have also just launched the UK's National Nuclear Centre of Excellence.

As the first NSS explained, the global security context is dynamic, interconnected, and unpredictable, and we are committed to strengthening our capacity to monitor risks, anticipate future threats, and respond accordingly. We have increased our horizon scanning capacity and better coordinated its use across Government to help us anticipate and prepare for future threats. We are today publishing the 2010 edition of the National Risk Register (first published in 2008), copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. It reflects our latest assessment of the risks of terrorism, natural hazards, and man-made accidents which may significantly affect human welfare in the UK. Alongside this, we are publishing updated Crisis Response Arrangements (copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House) and beginning a public consultation on community resilience.

In the two years since the publication of the first NSS, we have made important progress, working together across Government and backed up by the hard work and dedication of the armed forces, security services, police and others. The nature of the threats we face, from piracy and cyber crime to terrorism and nuclear proliferation, is varied and ever changing, but we will continue in our endeavours to secure the UK, its values, its interests and its people.