



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:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Second Report of
Session 2012–13**

**First Special Report of Session
2013–14**

*Ordered by the House of Lords and the House of Commons
to be printed 14 October 2013*

**HL Paper 58
HC 179**

Published on 31 October 2013
by authority of the House of Lords and the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£3.50

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 Clark of Windermere (*Labour*)
Lord Fellowes (*Crossbench*)
Lord Harris of Haringey (*Labour*)
Lord Lee of Trafford (*Liberal Democrat*)
Lord Levene of Portsoken (*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), Julia Labeta (Lords Clerk), Emma Graham (Committee Specialist), 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 3267; the Committee's email address is JCNSS@parliament.uk

First Special Report

Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012–13

The Committee published its *Second Report of Session 2012–13, The work of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy in 2012* (HL Paper 115, HC 984) on 28 February 2013. The Government response was received in the form of a memorandum on 10 May 2013. After further correspondence with the Committee, a revised Government response was received on 2 August 2013: it is published as an appendix to this Special Report.

Appendix: Government Response

1. The NSC appears to have focused on operational matters and short-term imperatives, rather than strategically on “long-term and blue skies topics”.

National security is the first priority of government. The National Security Council (NSC) brings together senior Ministers to address urgent policy priorities and develop long term strategy across the full range of national security issues. Since the NSC’s establishment in 2010, agendas have tried to strike a balance between the operational and the strategic.

For example, the NSC continues to be responsible for the oversight and collective development of the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review. The NSC has also looked at longer term and broader issues such as relations with and policy towards the emerging global economic powers. But the NSC also needs to be ready to respond to developing crises such as the conflict in Syria, or the request from the French government for support in Mali.

Overall, therefore, the Government believes it has been broadly successful in achieving the right balance in NSC work. But there is always scope for improvement, and the Government will reflect on these views from the JCNSS.

2. The Committee is not convinced that the NSC is making the contribution to enabling HMG to work as a coordinated whole in the way it should, and questions how much extra value is derived from having the NSC as opposed to the preceding systems of Cabinet Committees.

The Government does not share this assessment. The Prime Minister established the National Security Council on his first day in office, to ensure cross-government support for national security priorities and decisions, and more effective follow up and implementation. The Government believes it has been a successful addition to the machinery of government. In two-and-a-half years it has established itself as the central forum for national security policy decision-making. It brings together Government’s national security departments to set strategic direction and to ensure the delivery of our domestic, foreign policy and security objectives in a coherent and coordinated way. It provides for the first time the regular, top-level direction which these complex issues require.

3. Major strategic policy changes appear to have been made by individual Government Departments without discussion at the NSC: most notably, the big policy decisions made by the MoD last year on *Future Reserves 2020* and *Army 2020* without NSC either giving a steer or considering the wider implications for security strategy.

By long-standing convention, HMG does not disclose the detailed agenda and timing of Cabinet Committees. The Cabinet and NSC agendas are decided case-by-case in the context of wider business priorities. National security policy decisions arising from the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) do not all necessarily require cross-Government ministerial attention through the NSC or by the full Cabinet. Guidance on the type of issues discussed at Cabinet Committees and Cabinet itself is set out in the Cabinet Manual.

The NSC guided, discussed and endorsed the 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) and SDSR. In so doing, the NSC set the UK's overarching strategy and directed individual government departments to implement their respective elements within an agreed resource envelope. The Future Reserves and Army 2020 initiatives were developed in accordance with this direction, in order to transform and deliver effective Armed Forces able to meet the UK's future security and defence needs.

Departments have a range of mechanisms available for consulting across government, including the NSC. In adjusting the Regular-Reserve balance and in determining the future scale and range of tasks for the Reserve Forces, the Government was broadly guided by an Independent Commission. The Future Reserves 2020 consultative Green Paper, published in November 2012, recognised the Commission's findings and also considered the wider implications of this initiative. The Green Paper was endorsed by the NSC. Army 2020 did not change the strategic direction agreed by the NSC in the SDSR.

4. The NSC appears to have neglected, or only recently discussed, some very central questions:

a. The strategic and security impact of the Eurozone crisis and of efforts to save the Euro.

The Government fully acknowledges the strategic impact of the Eurozone crisis and has undertaken extensive contingency planning to deal with all potential outcomes. This government has considered it more appropriate to do this work in other structures and Cabinet Committees.

b. The planned referendums on Scottish independence and EU membership.

The Government's position on Scottish independence is clear: Scotland benefits from being part of the UK and the UK benefits from having Scotland within it. The Government is not planning for an independent Scotland, nor are we prepared to "pre-negotiate" a deal on independence with the Scottish Government ahead of the referendum (by the end of 2014). We are confident that the people of Scotland will choose to remain part of a strong, successful UK.

In the build-up to the referendum on Scottish independence, the UK Government is undertaking a programme of analysis on Scotland as part of the UK, and how it contributes to and benefits from being part of the UK. On the European Union, the Prime Minister made clear in his speech that HMG remains committed to EU membership.

On both these issues, work has been taken forward in structures and Cabinet Committees other than the NSC.

c. The significance of the US pivot to Asia-Pacific.

The National Security Council has looked at relations with the Asia-Pacific region in its work on UK priorities in relation to the emerging global economic powers.

On the US "pivot to Asia", the Government of course continues to examine the impact of any adjustments to US strategic focus. The US/UK relationship remains strong, deep and

central, particularly across the breadth of national security issues, including intelligence and defence.

The UK also is “re-balancing” towards Asia, moving diplomatic resources to that region. In particular, the UK is opening up eight new diplomatic missions in the region and 42 new jobs across SE Asia as part of the Emerging Powers Initiative.

5. The Committee has 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.

Initial preparatory work is now under way. This centres on defining the scope of the review, and the options for external engagement. The review itself will formally be conducted after the General Election in 2015. The Government recognises the need to undertake in advance as much analysis as practicable; for example, as stated in responding to the House of Commons Defence Committee on 12th July 2013, the Ministry of Defence is currently undertaking a programme of studies.

A decision has yet to be taken on the precise nature, extent and process of any external engagement. The Government would plan to consult the JCNSS as the forward work programme takes shape. The Government will be developing ideas for wider consultation, including with external academics, think tanks and experts.

6. Lessons from the 2012 National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA), which covered the process and method for assessing risks over 5 and 20 years, will be used to inform the next NSRA review in 2014. The 2014 edition of the NSRA will inform the next NSS and SDSR. The review of the NSRA will look at how the scientific and technical inputs into the NSRA might be strengthened, drawing on both internal and external expertise.