

Defence Committee of the House of Commons
Written Submission on
The Integrated Security, Defence & Foreign Policy Review

Submitted by Bath's New Vision group, April 2020

Who we are

We are a group of active citizens in Bath and North East Somerset, from variety of backgrounds and with a variety of perspectives and areas of concern related to different aspects of human and planetary security, and how they can best be furthered both within the UK and in the role it plays in the world. We believe that there needs to be a much greater space for public involvement in government decision making, both locally and nationally. Hence this submission.

The following are our responses to the some of the questions listed in your call for evidence.

What is the purpose of a security, defence and foreign policy review?

Essential to such a review is a definition of the word Security and thereafter an evaluation of past policy followed by a serious estimation of what will be needed in the immediate and longer term. We are concerned by the absence in the Prime Minister's announcement ¹ of any definition or vision of security. There is no reference made to the daily needs of the human beings who make up the nation's population. 'National prosperity' is, as we have learned, no guarantor of strong public services or individual wellbeing. Risks and threats are mentioned, but not the wellbeing and peace that are axiomatic in *human* security, as encapsulated in the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights ², and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 ³, now a key addition to the UN's human rights framework, promoting 'freedom from fear'. It is chilling to learn that, in the midst of the 2020 global pandemic, UN chief António Guterres needed to call for measures to address a 'horrifying global surge in domestic violence' directed towards women and girls, linked to lock-downs imposed by governments responding to COVID-19 ⁴.

We are encouraged that there is mention in the announcement of 'problem-solving and burden-sharing' but dismayed that these are to be limited to current allies, at a time when,

¹ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2020-02-26/HCWS126/>

² <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

³ <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>

⁴ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>

in the face of pandemics, climate emergency and ecological crisis, building inclusive global cooperation is required, rather than contests for geopolitical dominance. While the strengthening and democratisation of the UN is urgently needed, its role and authority must be a central reference point for any national security strategy, which should be set within a wider framework of global security and focussed on inclusive international cooperation.

The 'underpinning' of the review with the pre-determination to 'continue to exceed the NATO target of 2% of GDP on Defence and to maintain the nuclear deterrent' severely limits the review's scope and runs counter to the needs of our time. Moreover it disregards the UK's obligation under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty to work for multi-lateral nuclear disarmament. The commitment of 0.7% of GNI to international development can be regarded as positive but, at a time where global as well as national inequalities are so great, an increase in that figure should be considered, especially given the impact of the industrially developed world on climate change and the fact that the rest of the world will pay the highest price and lack the financial resources to cope with its impact.

There was no mention by the PM of reviewing the outcomes of past policies and strategy which, given the state of extreme insecurity in today's world, would seem an important starting point. Two policy outcomes that demand serious scrutiny are the conduct and outcomes of military interventions in other countries in recent decades, and the promotion and subsidising of the sale of weaponry and other military equipment to other countries, regardless of their likely or known use: a policy whose deadly effects⁵ are well known to the UK government and public alike.

The exclusion from the review process of departments whose work has or will have a real impact on the degree of security experienced by those living in the UK must be challenged, given that this is a rich country in which many suffer poverty, social isolation and discrimination, where knife crime is rife and gender violence is endemic. Surely the Home Office should be included, for instance. The fact that DfID is not now to be part of the inner circle, will mute the voices of those who would represent the daily needs and fears of people elsewhere.

This is a defining moment in how the UK relates to the rest of the world, and this review needs to take seriously the privilege of the UK's permanent seat on the UN Security Council, which is *the* body charged with the purpose of maintaining global peace and security. Our position on that body provides the UK with the opportunity to construct a new post coronavirus framework for global leadership designed to lead our inter-dependent world into a more stable and secure state: through a programme of inter-state trust-building based upon cooperation and collaboration.

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/18/the-saudis-couldnt-do-it-without-us-the-uks-true-role-in-yemens-deadly-war>

The UK needs to use all its influence to lead the world away from the limited oppositional focus on – and the consequent generation of – risks and threats, into building a transformed future vision for the world, through the positive implementation of progressive risk reduction and conflict resolution measures. The UK is also particularly well positioned to lead the UN Security Council - and thereby the whole world - away from the expensive and constraining reliance upon the long-outdated doctrine of nuclear deterrence towards the higher emerging new global vision embraced by the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In summary, the UK, in this Review, should be working to achieve the highest possible vision and purpose in global leadership, not the lowest possible focus on the defence of limited perceptions of national interest.

Finally, and fundamentally to this review process, there is no mention in the PM's announcement of genuine public consultation, which is vital in a democracy. The whole process, as presented, is narrow, hierarchical and exclusive. As we are discovering in the current Covid 19 crisis, we are all responsible for the safety and wellbeing of our nation. We are experiencing the full force and power of human interdependence. We are learning to work together again as local communities and a national society. That lesson needs to be at the forefront of this review's work, if it is to build more security for us all.

How often should a review be scheduled? How should such an assessment be communicated and to whom?

Given the rate of change in global and national circumstances, reviews should be ongoing and always aimed at addressing both immediate problems in the UK which, given the will, can be addressed within the UK, and impending global crises that must be addressed with great urgency as part of an ongoing programme of concerted international action.

Throughout, they should draw on direct input from Parliamentary select committees and individual MPs, and also public bodies and individuals. Their findings should be summarised and presented to Parliament annually for agreement.

What is the purpose and appropriate scope of cross-Government collaboration in the review process?

The purpose should be to examine all the basic human needs and human rights of the UK population and to work with all the departments and other institutions that serve them – including local governments – to establish how those needs can be met, both now and in the future; then to devise the policies and implementation plan that will meet them. The current exclusion of all beyond the current narrow focus of the process will not serve the wellbeing of the nation. Where is the expertise on health, social services or environment, for instance, all of which are vital to such a review? Where is the recognition that problem-solving and burden-sharing can also be addressed by the UK by investment in education, research and culture?

What external stakeholders should be engaged in the review process? How?

Within the UK, the consultation process should be open to the public and opportunities widely advertised, to invite the participation of individual, organisations and local authorities. Given that the Covid 19 pandemic has caused a necessarily substantial pause in the review's completion, there is plenty of time for this to be done, using online mechanisms and, since the time of completion has not yet been fixed, the new date should allow for preparatory face-to-face meetings too, allowing for community voices to be heard and represented. It will be vital to engage the perspectives of minority, marginalised or disempowered groups in every part of the UK. Citizens' assemblies, random sample polling (with open questions) and other representative mechanisms could be used, alongside focus groups in which the participants have something in common.

There must also be transparency about how submissions from the public are used. The input of all of these individuals and groups will need to be taken seriously into account, not least when it comes to determining spending priorities.

The process should also be open to submissions from those in other countries who have been affected by UK policy and resultant action, such as military interventions, responses to refugee crises, and economic sanctions. Such submissions could also include insights from those living in areas afflicted by violent conflicts, regarding how those conflicts can be best addressed, and what British diplomacy could contribute to the resolution of conflict. Though in recent years the strength of the diplomatic service has been sadly reduced, the UK has a strong history in this area. We have only to think of the transformative Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement to be reminded of its power for good in the world.