

## Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review

The UK Government has announced that it will this year carry out an Integrated Security, Defence and Foreign Policy Review. (It will, allegedly, be led by Dominic Cummings.)

The last such review took place in 2015 and was published under the wordy title, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* – you can see it [here](#). Its tone is positive and determined, its statements sweeping, but the scope of its attention is narrow, in line with its implicit understanding of security. That word is not defined but is clearly regarded as something requiring ‘robust’ responses, a great deal of military hardware, ‘projecting power’, alliances based on self-interest rather than ethics, and furthering British prosperity (among other things through the export of military know-how and weapons).

Rethinking Security’s excellent comparative study ([here](#)) reveals that, even within NATO (an essentially military body), some countries take a somewhat broader view of security:

*‘There is also a strong emphasis in some strategies on the importance of enabling domestic socio-economic development, including poverty eradication and the provision of a “social security” system.’*

Is there a chance that in the latest UK policy review state ‘security’ will be understood in terms of meeting human needs, at home and beyond, and the major threats to those, globally and nationally? What does security mean for most of us and how can it best be created, in increasingly insecure times?

Globally speaking, the existential threats are from the heating of the atmosphere and oceans and rapid extinction of species, along with the all too real possibility of geopolitical conflict that leads to nuclear war. Addressing those would entail a huge move away from current policies. Yet there is no hint of any radical shift and indeed, as regards climate crisis and the Government’s commitment to make the UK carbon neutral by 2050 (which in any case is too late), the Queen’s Speech in which the security review was announced contained the announcement that *‘Within three years, we aim to cover 80% of our trade with free trade agreements. This will start with the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan’*. The environmental cost of trading with such far-distant countries will be immense.

If, as we should and must, we care about the security of fellow human beings wherever they live, especially those in poorer countries that reap the whirlwind of pollution by the rich, while new demands are placed on them to green their own economies and infrastructure, we will understand that our own interests are both morally and practically bound up with the needs of others. And if we look at what our ‘defence’ policy does, we will see that it consists very largely in threatening entire populations, killing civilians, destroying homes, crops and animals, polluting the atmosphere and driving people to embark on perilous journeys to escape the hell they live in.

Meanwhile, in our rich country, security is denied to countless thousands of UK citizens who no longer know where their next meal is coming from, where they can sleep, when they will be able to get urgently needed hospital treatment, or who will take care of them when they can no longer look after themselves. It is denied to those in danger of being knifed on their way home from school, or who cannot find reliable or timely support to cope with mental health problems. It is denied to migrants escaping from the most desperate circumstances – victims of the conflicts in which the UK is embroiled.

Such insecurity cannot be allowed to continue and a security review should be a time for serious rethinking. How can that message be conveyed to our government?

The comparative study referred to above reveals that the governments of some countries, unlike the UK's, make serious efforts to consult with their populations, to discover and be informed by their citizens' security priorities, while here such reviews come and go beneath the radar of most. Even when they are spotted by the aware few, the window of opportunity for input is brief, and even 'expert' contributions have little chance of a hearing, let alone any likelihood of influencing an already written strategy. That is a disregard of our right to democratic participation and we must say so, formulating our own contributions and making other voices heard. The outcome of the exercise that is soon to begin here in the UK is of vital interest to the entire nation and should be a public affair.

For the future, we need a campaign for the whole process to be conducted under public scrutiny, with multiple opportunities for consultation at every level. Right now, we can make the review known and gather the views of those who are suffering the worst insecurity so that they can be highlighted. We can make all our voices heard in whatever ways are available to us: via social media, in the press, local and national, and via the different organisations we belong to. Our parliament does have the right to contribute the views of its members and accept or reject the proposed package that emerges from the review. We can therefore call on our MPs to represent us.

Wherever we live, let's start planning now.

***Bath Stop War, February 2020***