

# **Ministry of Defence Green Paper: Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review**

## **Comments from the Nuclear Information Service**

### **Headline points**

- The scope of the Strategic Defence Review should extend to reviewing the broader range of security issues, and should not just be a defence review.
- Future security and defence policy should be underpinned by a 'sustainable security' approach towards identifying threats and responses.
- Future defence spending must focus on realistic and foreseeable threats rather than vague long-term uncertainties, and must support foreign policy goals.
- The review should consider the need for and role of UK nuclear weapons, and should analyse a full range of options for the programme to replace Trident, ranging from like-for-like replacement to renunciation and decommissioning of nuclear weapons.

### **Introduction**

1. The Nuclear Information Service (NIS) is a not-for-profit, independent information service which works to promote public awareness and debate on nuclear weapons and related safety and environmental issues (see our website at <http://nuclearinfo.org> for more information). Our research work is supported by funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.
2. NIS welcomes the government's decision to undertake a Strategic Defence Review, which is long overdue, and welcomes the opportunity to give feedback on issues for the Strategic Defence Review through consultation on this Green Paper. Our comments are as follows.

### **Chapter 1 – Context: Uncertainty and Affordability**

3. With annual military expenditure totalling over £35 billion, the United Kingdom ranks fourth in the world for national spending on defence. Among European nations we spend the highest in absolute terms, and have the third highest defence burden as a proportion of GDP (2.4% - well above the European average). This level of spending is a reflection of the international military roles that Britain has chosen to adopt, which in many cases go well beyond the scope of purely defending the homeland.
4. Regardless of the need to reduce the national deficit which has resulted from the global financial crisis, NIS considers that there is a strong case for reducing military spending. This spending comes with a cost – the sacrifices and lost opportunities in other areas of public spending, such as improving the nation's health and educating our children.

5. The forthcoming Strategic Defence Review should address the military roles which the UK wishes to play in future. It should not be taken for granted that the nation will continue to play a major role in offensive overseas operations with a tenuous link to domestic defence, such as our involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Military spending should reflect clearly stated security and foreign policy goals which are based on the aim of protecting the UK population so that people can go about their lives freely.
6. We must also accept that defence and security budgets will not be able to hedge against every future threat or provide insurance against every risk. Defence commitments must be affordable and realistic, and focus in the main on immediate known threats, rather than long-term uncertainties which by definition are poorly understood. We support the concept of a rolling five yearly defence review process which we consider will be able to adapt to address 'over the horizon' threats as they emerge.
7. It is generally accepted that the drivers of the international environment and the nature of the security challenges in the world today means that military responses may no longer be relevant in addressing certain threats. This is acknowledged in the Green Paper. For this reason, the scope of the Strategic Defence Review should be extended to address broader security issues, and should aim to develop a 'sustainable security' approach towards building resilience and the ability to respond in a number of ways to threats rather than focus on purely military responses. A growing body of work has been undertaken in this area recently, including, for instance, a research programme on sustainable security by the Oxford Research Group and work by the Institute for Public Policy Research's Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, which is documented in IPPR's 'Shared Responsibilities' report.
8. The Green Paper mentions that the UK should use its armed forces as a 'Force for Good' in the world. However, the presence of British armed forces may not be seen by others in the international community as a force for good, as their deployment is usually as much a reflection of the political aspirations of the government as it is of any humanitarian mission. The need for military humanitarian interventions should therefore be based around a set of defined criteria, similar to the 'Responsibility to Protect' principles established by the Canadian government, which should be outlined as part of the Strategic Defence Review process.
9. We agree with the Green Paper's view of the importance of a rules-based international system, and consider that military intervention by the UK's armed forces must always be seen as being within the rules and must always be strictly governed by international law. Unfortunately, recent government decisions have been interpreted by others in the international community, and also by significant numbers of the British public, as falling outside the rules. These include the invasion of Iraq, which was widely perceived as lacking legitimacy, and the decision to renew the Trident nuclear weapons system, which can be interpreted as contrary to the UK's commitments under the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. Such actions undermine the rules-based system and are contrary to the UK's long-term interests.

## **Chapter 2 – Context: Complexity and the Use of Force**

10. The Green paper states: “The use of force as an option is becoming more complicated. It is likely to become more difficult to use force in the way in which we have used it in the last two decades.”
11. We would see this as a good thing. In the past force has been used too often as a first resort for dealing with conflict – possibly as a legacy of the UK's imperial history. As we state above, it is necessary for future security strategies to be built around the concept of sustainable security, adopting a broad range of techniques to insulate against threats and resolve conflicts and crises.
12. This means that the armed forces would be one of a number of institutions responsible for maintaining security. Many of the roles that are important in preserving security – for example, building community resilience and combating radicalism; post-crisis reconstruction programmes; and long term peace-building programmes – are not roles which military institutions are best placed to deliver. For reasons of effectiveness and resource conservation, the armed forces should focus on their core military role and other agencies with suitable expertise should address these wider issues. Extending the scope of a future Strategic Defence Review to cover a broader security remit rather than purely addressing defence issues would allow the interfaces between the military and other agencies to be considered in a systematic manner.

## **Chapter 3 – Adaptability and Influence**

13. We agree with the Green Paper's position that, “Against the combined challenges of uncertainty, affordability and complexity, we will not be able to develop capabilities against every eventuality”. For this reason it is important to focus resources on the areas of the highest risk. Many of the most serious security threats that the UK will face over the decades ahead, for example, risks posed by global climate change; diminishing resources; pandemic disease; or cyber-warfare, will differ fundamentally from the threats of the past, and it is difficult to see how they can be tackled by conventional military means. It will therefore be important to ensure that resources are targetted appropriately to address these threats – if necessary, by reallocating money from armed forces budgets to other agencies.
14. However, conventional military threats will remain, and we support the approach recently outlined by General Sir Richard Dannatt for allocating resources to address these threats: focus firstly on the immediate known threats, and only then on longer term threats, as far as resources allow. A rolling five-yearly defence review process would enable government to implement such a strategy.
15. The Green Paper also states that “we must also expand the options available to prevent conflict and achieve our objectives without the use of force – including through deterring conflict and contributing to the UK's soft power.” It is important to remember that the concept of deterrence can be based on a range of techniques, including the use of conventional military force and political and economic action. The threat made to deter an adversary must also be clear and credible.

16. The notion of deterrence is commonly advocated as an argument for the UK retaining its nuclear weapons. It is argued that nuclear weapons act as insurance against future uncertainty and would serve to deter a potential aggressor in the future. However, it is hard to justify this argument at a time when resources are likely to be seriously constrained. Spending to insure ourselves must be focused on threats which are realistic and likely, and within limits which we can afford. Insurance against vague future uncertainties is a luxury which squanders resources that could be used to better purpose elsewhere.
17. For this reason NIS considers that the need for and the role of the UK's nuclear weapons system, Trident, must be included within the scope of the Strategic Defence Review. It is difficult to see how any meaningful review can be conducted if a weapons programme which has major influence on defence and foreign policy, and is a major consumer of resources, is excluded.
18. The review should explore the situations which Trident is designed to protect against – outlined in the Green Paper as to “deter and prevent nuclear blackmail and acts of aggression against our national interests that cannot be countered by other means” and give specific examples of such scenarios, together with an assessment of their likelihood. As well as helping with a logical assessment of the need to replace Trident, such a study would also help in explaining to an increasingly sceptical public, and also to the international community, why the UK needs to retain nuclear weapons.
19. The Green Paper notes that the government has decided to replace Trident because not to do so would effectively commit the nation to disarmament in future. The Strategic Defence Review should consider a range of options for replacing Trident, including like-for-like replacement at the earliest date; a delay in replacement and extension of the life of the current Vanguard class submarines; and all options short of like-for-like replacement, up to and including renunciation and decommissioning of nuclear weapons.
20. The Review should also clarify the UK's nuclear deterrence policies, which are at present said to be around engendering uncertainty in the mind of a potential aggressor. However, an ambiguous approach to deterrence can be risky if it encourages the aggressor to consider that the threat of retaliation is not credible, or conversely, if it is interpreted as a threat of a first strike against a potential enemy.
21. The Strategic Defence Review should explicitly recognise that the UK has an obligation under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to take steps towards disarmament, and that government policy is to work to achieve a world without nuclear weapons. In this context, it is a question of when, not whether, the UK will decommission its nuclear weapons. The Review should outline the government's criteria for assessing when it might be appropriate to renounce nuclear weapons.
22. The Green Paper also, rightly, highlights the importance of reassurance as a complement to deterrence. The Strategic Defence Review should consider what reassurances the UK can give to other states in relation to its nuclear weapons, such as agreeing to binding negative security assurances or giving a commitment to no first use.

## **Chapter 4 - Partnership**

23. The Green Paper outlines a number of options for working in partnership with others to achieve mutual defence objectives. NIS would support such an approach, with the qualification that military action as a member of a partnership or coalition must always be within the framework of international law and legitimacy – and must be seen to be so.
24. Other EU states, and particularly France, represent natural partners for the UK on defence matters. There is considerable scope for defence co-operation with France and NIS would be keen to see this potential realised – including on the issue of sharing the burden of continuous at sea nuclear patrols between each country, a topic which has recently received attention in the press.
25. The UK should also be willing to work in partnership beyond its traditional NATO allies and, where appropriate, seek to work with emerging world powers on security issues, rather than against them.

## **Chapter 5 – People, Equipment, and Structures**

26. Much has already been said and written about the need for flexibility and realism in the defence equipment programme, and NIS broadly supports the conclusions of Bernard Gray's Review of Acquisition for the Secretary of State for Defence.
27. We are concerned that in the past the defence equipment programme has been driven as much by the aspirations of the defence industry rather than the needs of the armed forces. Future equipment purchases must avoid being influenced by vested interests of this kind, and subsidies, direct and indirect, to the defence industry must cease. Equipment must also be purchased at a fair and competitive prices.
28. We should be grateful if the Ministry of Defence would keep us informed about the outcome of this consultation programme, and we would wish to be involved in any further consultation programmes during the Strategic Defence Review.