



*From the National Security Adviser*

Dame Margaret Beckett,  
Chair, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy,  
House of Commons, London,  
SW1A 0AA

25 July 2022

Dear Dame Margaret,

**National Security Machinery**

Thank you for your letter dated 20 June concerning the Government's national security machinery. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I had hoped to provide you with a report of progress against the Integrated Review, including the government's priorities for the next phase of implementation, before the summer recess. I am sorry that, in the current circumstances, it has not been possible to do so. I will write to the committee in September to provide you with an update.

I am pleased to accept your invitation to give evidence in November. I very much hope it will be possible to meet in private before then so that I can provide you with a confidential briefing on progress against the IR; the situation in Ukraine; the lessons that we have learned from both Russia's invasion and the withdrawal from Afghanistan; and the reforms that we have made to the national security machinery. The Deputy National Security Advisers and I would also be happy to offer confidential briefings on topics of particular interest to the committee.

In your letter, you asked about the changes to the structures within the Cabinet Office and No10. The Prime Minister's Group was established to better coordinate and deliver efficiencies across the areas of the Cabinet Office and 10 Downing Street that most directly service the Prime Minister, including the National Security Secretariat. There are no planned changes that would impact

my ability or authority to give advice to the Prime Minister. The NSS Strategy Unit is working well and is driving a more strategic approach to national security across Government. Like the wider civil service, the Cabinet Office is undertaking a process to ensure it is the appropriate size to support the government's objectives. NSS is actively engaged in this process and I would be pleased to provide a briefing on the structure and the size of the secretariat, once this has concluded.

In my last letter, I confirmed the appointments of Sarah MacIntosh as Deputy National Security Adviser for International Affairs and Matthew Collins as Deputy National Security Adviser for Intelligence, Defence and Security. Sarah took up her post in June, having recently returned from her previous posting as the UK's Ambassador to NATO. Matthew also took up his post in June, having filled the role on an interim basis since January.

I look forward to meeting with you soon.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephen Lovegrove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

**STEPHEN LOVEGROVE**

Sir Stephen Lovegrove  
National Security Adviser  
Cabinet Office

*[via email]*

20 June 2022

Dear Sir Stephen,

### **National security machinery of Government**

I am writing to follow up on the JCNSS's September 2021 report on [the UK's national security machinery](#), and to communicate our full support for the Foreign Affairs Committee's (FAC's) recent [report on Afghanistan](#). We endorse the FAC's conclusion that the manner of the withdrawal revealed "systemic failures of intelligence, diplomacy, planning and preparation, which raise questions about machinery of Government, principally the National Security Council". We also welcome its recommendation that the JCNSS revisits the issue of the NSC's operation in times of crisis. This is consistent with our commitment to sustained scrutiny of the NSC and its sub-committees, and to continued follow-up of our national security machinery report.

Towards the end of our national security machinery inquiry, you communicated the changes resulting from your review of the NSC operating model, including the establishment of a National Security Ministers (NSM) group with a rotating Chair. We were also told later that an NSM (Resilience) group had been established. In advance of your next oral evidence session with us, we would be grateful if you could provide us with the following (in confidence as required):

- A detailed appraisal of the impact of the NSC changes implemented last year, including those arising from any changes to underpinning staffing structures and resources. It would be helpful if you could give concrete examples of instances in which those changes have led to more positive outcomes than would otherwise have been the case.
- An appraisal of the impact specifically of the NSM (Resilience) group, and a high-level summary of its discussions since its establishment.
- An update on resourcing for the National Security Secretariat's Strategy Unit: in [your letter in January](#), you told us that it comprised 45 roles, but that this was "under review".
- An update on DNSAs, confirming current role-holders and their responsibilities (the gov.uk website does not appear to be up-to-date).

- A copy of the central ‘lessons learned’ report on the UK withdrawal from Afghanistan – we note that [a summary of the FCDO’s report](#) was shared with the FAC and published – and an appraisal from you of how the NSC might operate differently during future crises of this nature, as a result of the changes that you have implemented.
- Notification of any instances in which COBR was convened as a substitute for NSC/NSM, or to carry forward NSC/NSM business.

As is now routine, we also request the following information in confidence:

- A full list of NSC and NSM thematic groups or sub-committees and their Chairs, and
- Their meeting dates and agenda topics since April 2021, extending to the next three scheduled meetings (for NSC and NSM, we only require this information from 16 December onwards).

You will be aware of recent [news reports](#) about plans to move the National Security Secretariat into a new Department for the Prime Minister, under the oversight of the Permanent Secretary for 10 Downing Street. We would welcome an update on any planned changes – at any stage of development – to your lines of reporting to the Prime Minister, and those of the DNSAs. Can you confirm that these plans are in development, outline how line management plans are likely to change, and confirm how the authority of the NSA will be maintained under such an arrangement? As you are no doubt aware, it will be vital for the Prime Minister to receive intelligence and security briefings directly from his NSA and DNSAs, minimising the risk of filtering or interpretation by those without adequate expertise and clearance, or by political appointees. Finally, we would welcome an explanation of how these changes will address the systemic failures identified in the FAC’s report.

We would be grateful for a full response by Friday 8 July.

Yours sincerely,



**Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP**

**Chair**

**Cc. Tom Tugendhat MP, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee**