



**Joint Committee  
on the National  
Security Strategy**

Monday 3 March 2025

**Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP  
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster  
Cabinet Office, 70 Whitehall  
London, SW1A 2AS**

[By email]

Dear Pat,

Thank you for your letter dated 24 February on a number of issues relating to JCNSS's role in scrutinising the national security strategy. I look forward to our upcoming introductory meeting but, in the meantime, I would be grateful for your further attention on the below questions.

**National Security Adviser accountability**

The Committee does not agree with the Government's assertion that our repeated invitation for the National Security Adviser (NSA) to appear before the Committee is not an appropriate request.

As noted in my letter of 6 February, since the role's creation it is the case that every NSA has appeared before the Committee to give evidence on 'The work of the National Security Adviser. It would be about more than simply the role and to better understand how the position operates, how it interfaces and its priorities for example.

Your letter states "longstanding practice is that Special Advisers currently in post do not give evidence to Select Committees". The Government's own Ostmotherly Rules state:

"When a Select Committee indicates that it wishes to take evidence from any particular named official, including special advisers, the presumption is that Ministers will seek to agree such a request."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office, [Osmotherly Rules](#) (2014), para 12



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I also put it to you, and the Government, that Mr Powell is not an ordinary Special Adviser. Special Advisers are backroom advisers to Ministers, and they have no executive function and no independent status. Mr Powell, as National Security Adviser, has both. He is at the forefront of discussions with international counterparts, as demonstrated in recent weeks, including his widely reported visit to Washington to meet with Mike Waltz earlier this month. He was also with the PM in the Oval Office last week. If Mr Powell does not have executive and independent authority, we would equally like to understand how the important functions of the NSA are being provided under the new arrangements.

The Committee is unanimous in its opinion that the role of National Security Adviser should be subject to direct Parliamentary scrutiny, regardless of the method by which its incumbent has been appointed. Mr Powell holds a position of accountable authority.

Will the Government reconsider its position, and facilitate the appearance of the National Security Adviser before the Committee as soon as possible? I would like to take this opportunity to remind the Government that the Committee has alternative formal recourse available to it, should a witness continue to refuse to give evidence.<sup>2</sup>

### National Security Council agendas

Your letter states that there is a longstanding precedent of not sharing information relating to meetings of Cabinet and its committees. In the case of JCNSS's request for continued access to National Security Council (NSC) agendas, this statement is incorrect.

As stated in my letter of 14 January, the arrangement of sharing the documents with the Committee, in confidence, has been in place with all previous Governments in every Parliament since 2013. Indeed, in its response to the predecessor JCNSS's report on the National Security Machinery, then-Government committed to it publicly:

"The Government welcomes the request for an open relationship with the Committee and we will endeavour to build and maintain this. We will continue to share, periodically and in confidence, materials including the topics on the agenda for NSC and NSM, at the discretion of the PM, but this will not extend to attendee registers."<sup>3</sup>

The Committee also requested [summaries of the meetings](#) of the NSC sub-committees, with the exception of NSC Nuclear. Again, the arrangement of sharing these documents with the Committee in confidence has been in place with all previous Governments in every Parliament since 2018.

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<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Office, [Osmotherly Rules](#) (2014), para 13

<sup>3</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/8138/documents/83424/default/> p 7



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If the Government intends to diverge from this long-established practice, I would be grateful if you could explain what has changed since the last Parliament, and how preventing this Committee from having this essential insight corresponds with your statement that the Government is “actively pursuing greater transparency with Parliament”? I am sure we agree that effective scrutiny makes for better Government.

The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy comprises senior members of both Houses of Parliament, including, of course, a recent NSA. The Committee is becoming increasingly concerned that its ability to carry out its core function – scrutiny of the Government’s national security strategy – is being stifled. I look forward to assurances that the Government has reconsidered its position.

Best wishes,

**Matt Western MP**  
**Chair, Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy**