Business and Trade Committee

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Rt Hon Lord Robertson of Port Ellen KT
[by e-mail]

10 July 2025

Dear Lord Robertson

Warmest congratulations on the publication of the Strategic Defence Review. Our country will be safer and stronger for the recommendations you have provided.

I followed closely your important evidence to the Defence Committee and following our correspondence earlier this year, I write to invite you to share your analysis with the Business and Trade Sub-Committee on Economic Security, Arms and Export Controls.

We strongly endorse your conclusion that the security of the realm is inseparable from our economic strength — and that protecting that economic strength now demands a whole-of-society approach to economic security and resilience.

The Sub-Committee intends to produce its first report, a baseline analysis of UK economic security, shortly after the summer Parliamentary recess and our aim is to rest this analysis on a well grounded summary of the threats our country now confronts. I would be grateful therefore if you could provide information on:

- What in your view are now the principal threats that the UK confronts, both to our security in general and our economic security in particular;
- The Review Team's assessment of economic security threats (sources of threat and ways these currently manifest and/or might do so in the future), primarily but not only from the four main state threat actors identified in the SDR;
- To what extent you believe economic tools might be used against us by our adversaries, including as sub-threshold and potentially hybrid action[1]; and
- Whether the Review Team learnt anything specifically on economic security through the SDR process that was not deemed relevant to a report for implementation by the Ministry of Defence, but which might have been of importance to wider Government.

To enable the Sub-Committee to fulfil its duties in informing the public and Parliament, I would be grateful if you could provide publicly as much information as possible.

[1] Where the Strategic Defence Review describes "hybrid" as kinetic/military action in combination with sub-threshold attacks.

I would be grateful for a response by 24 July. I would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss further. I attach the terms of reference for our inquiry as an annex to this letter.

Yours sincerely

Chair, Business and Trade Committee

Annex: UK economic security inquiry – terms of reference

1. Economic security:

- How should the UK Government define "economic security", and what are the advantages and disadvantages of particular definitions?
- Does the UK need a clear strategy for economic security, and what are the risks of not having one?
- What are the main economic security threats, and what principles should underly the UK's response to them?
- Specifically, what are the challenges of new technologies, such as AI, for economic security, and how can the UK's economic security be resilient in the face of technological change?
- What can the UK learn from other international actors such as our allies in the United States, Europe and Japan, about how to develop an effective approach to economic security?
- How can economic security be best integrated with the Government's growth mission, industrial strategy and trade strategy. What trade-offs are required between security and efficiency?

2. Opportunities to enhance economic security:

- What are the most important gaps in the UK's economic security regime? How should these be addressed? What is the right level of tolerance for risk?
- What are the implications of managing these risks for public spending? Is HMG resourcing the management of these risks appropriately?
- How should the Government work with business to safeguard the UK's economic security? What is the cost to business of this approach?
- How should the effectiveness and success of the UK's economic security regime be measured?

3. Working across Government:

- How should work across multiple Government departments and public bodies be co-ordinated to achieve economic security objectives?
- What governance structures could be put in place to ensure that economic security informs Government decision-making?
- What capabilities will the UK Government need to develop in order to be able to respond rapidly and effectively to economic security threats?
- What governance mechanisms and powers might be necessary to ensure that UK industry can respond effectively to national security threats - for example through defence production?

4. International partnerships:

- How should the UK ensure that economic security factors into decisions around international partnerships, including trade agreements and security co-operation?
- How can the UK most effectively work with international partners to deter and respond to economic security threats, including economic coercion?