

## Written evidence submitted by the United Nations Association – UK (INR0086)

### Introduction

1. UNA-UK is Britain's only charity dedicated to building support for an effective United Nations. Over the past 75 years we have built a network of members, local branches, youth groups and partner organisations in all four nations of the UK. In 2015 UNA-UK was one of the most active civil society supporters of the National Security Strategy – Strategic Defence and Security Review (NSS/SDSR) process; around 10% of submissions received to the public consultation were as a consequence of our outreach and communication with the public.
2. This submission will concentrate on two questions from your call for evidence. We would like to discuss the **process** of the review, so answering your questions on "*The process of the Integrated Review, including: the efficacy of the Review's process*"; and we would like to discuss the **content** of the review, so answering your questions on "*strategy in UK foreign policy, including: the priorities for UK foreign-policy strategy*".

### The review - process

#### Consultation

3. We believe the process by which the UK conducts this review is vitally important – both in terms of signalling the Government's broader approach to public consultation, and in strengthening the resulting strategy's effectiveness. A Rethinking Security comparative study of various nations' security strategies<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that other nations have taken a much more holistic, and we believe effective, view of security. This starts with the concept of human security and thus proceeds on the basis that the security strategy of a democracy is a security strategy of the people; it therefore must be developed alongside and with those people. Ownership of the strategy by the people, and the integration of the peoples' hopes and fears into that strategy, itself represents a strong element of national security – guarding against the immediate threat of domestic extremism, and the longer term but equally dangerous risk posed by feelings of alienation and disillusionment and the delegitimization of core institutions and elements of our security apparatus that can result<sup>2</sup>. An engaged citizenry that feels its views are heard is more likely to be cohesive and publicly-minded, and more likely to play its part in times of crisis. It is therefore vital that the review include a comprehensive and open process of consulting with civil society and the general public.
4. In 2015 we were concerned that the review consultation was cosmetic, and did not genuinely influence the drafting process. We were further concerned that the lack of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/contrasting-narratives-march-2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> In January The UN Secretary-General warned that this feeling of alienation was one of his "four horsemen" – major threats to our global system <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-01-22/secretary-generals-remarks-the-general-assembly-his-priorities-for-2020-bilingual-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-english-version>

proactive outreach meant that the review process only heard from certain sections of well-connected society, while other voices were excluded. That is why we mounted a large outreach initiative, in particular to our youth and community groups.

5. To this end we have been campaigning since 2017 for a new NSS/SDSR process with a more comprehensive and proactive consultative element. We have had exchanges of letters with successive National Security Advisors, and have met Cabinet Office officials. We were assured that there was an intent to do at least the same amount of consultation in the course of the next review process and hopefully more. Unfortunately, this was not the case with the “National Security Capability Review” (NSCR),<sup>3</sup> or the “Modernising Defence Programme” (MDP), but were hopeful that a full security review would follow a more comprehensive process.
6. We were delighted when the Government announced the Integrated Review, and their intention for this to be the “largest review of the UK’s foreign, defence, security and development policy since the end of the Cold War”.<sup>4</sup> On 3 March 2020, we wrote to the Prime Minister, to make recommendations with respect to the conduct of the review. We copied this letter to Chairs of relevant select committees including the Foreign Affairs Committee<sup>5</sup>. To repeat core recommendations contained in this letter:
  - The consultation should be public and be open to all (rather than an exclusive group of Government-identified “best minds”).
  - Citizens’ assemblies and other representative feed-in mechanisms should be considered to ensure marginalized communities are included in the process.
  - The consultation should be launched with sufficient time for the inputs to be given meaningful consideration by those drafting the document.
  - The consultation should be transparent and accountable with clarity over how submissions from the public are used.
  - The Government should spearhead a national conversation to raise awareness for the consultation and foster a nationwide debate around the major threats facing the UK.

As of this date, we have not received a response.

7. We were therefore disappointed by the process and timings the review has followed. It is a matter of concern that there has been even less consultation for this review than for the smaller-scale 2015 NSS/SDSR. We would like to highlight the following specific areas of concern:

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<sup>3</sup> <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/national-security-strategy-committee/national-security-capability-review-a-changing-security-environment/written/78224.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world>

<sup>5</sup> Email “United Nations Association UK on the Integrated Review” sent 3 March 2020 from [info@una.org.uk](mailto:info@una.org.uk), copy available on request

- It is unclear why the process had to be initiated at this time, given the uncertainty surrounding: the nature of our relationship with Europe following the end of transitional arrangements; the size and health of our economy in the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic; and the political trajectory of the United States, with whom our security strategy is currently closely intertwined. A few months could bring greater clarity on all these fronts and would therefore appear to be a more apposite time for a review.
  - Key decisions, most notably the decision to merge the FCO and DFID, were taken before the review had concluded, raising questions as to the review's purpose.
  - Information regarding the review was incredibly difficult to ascertain, and key information was only made available in invitation-only briefings to which only a select few, primarily private sector, organisations were invited.<sup>6</sup>
  - There appeared to be no plan to consult the public or civil society at all until very late on in the process, with senior officials indicating in a briefing<sup>7</sup> that participants should use "usual channels" to influence the process – a term which has no meaning for the vast majority of the public or for elements of civil society that are not connected to policymaking
  - When a consultation portal was belatedly opened it was released without fanfare on the backwaters of the Cabinet Office's website, with no outreach, official announcement, media work or proactive communication.
  - Those lucky enough to be aware of the opportunity to contribute were then given less than a month to respond and were required to do so through a cumbersome and unwieldy mechanism which both limits the ability of the public and civil society to participate and would, we assume, make it harder for the Cabinet Office to monitor what level of engagement they have had.
  - The timeline of the review also undermines our confidence that the consultation can or will meaningfully contribute to UK strategic thinking. We have heard that a preliminary draft of the strategy will be prepared internally by the beginning of September, before the online portal even closes, and we have also heard that officials have asked for comments on draft statements of position they have prepared before the summer bank holiday.
8. We understand that the unprecedented challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic presented difficulties for the government in implementing an effective process. However, we feel that this leads to a greater, not lesser, need to ensure effective strategic decisionmaking and that more attention, not less, should therefore be given to facilitating participation. If the government do not feel able to provide such a mechanism at the current moment then it would be prudent to postpone the review until such a process becomes possible.

**9. UNA-UK recommends that the Foreign Affairs Committee challenge the government on the apparent procedural shortcomings with respect to the**

<sup>6</sup> For example core information was announced by Deputy National Security Advisor Alex Ellis in a closed-door invitation only briefing on 6 July. The briefing was organised by the Whitehall and Industry Group, an independent charity with a mandate to facilitate government access for the private sector.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

**Integrated Review, particularly with regards to the lack of consultation, and that they urge the government to commit to an extension of the review’s timetable in order to allow for a representative, society-wide programme of outreach. The government should also assure appropriate transparency and accountability around how the outcomes of the consultation will be used. If this cannot be achieved then we urge the Committee to press the government to learn lessons for future strategic reviews.**

### *Follow up*

10. The 2015 NSS/SDSR envisaged a light touch and static process of annual reporting back against a fixed set of benchmarks. However, the first annual report was the only one to be published as expected (in December 2016). The second annual report was notionally incorporated within the NSCR, which did not appear until March 2018 and due to the format of that document the reporting element was limited to a simple annex indicating that progress was on track. A third and final “annual” report was published in July 2019.
11. While it is likely that any reporting process would have struggled with the enormity of the changes that took place during that time – which is why UNA-UK argued from 2017 onwards that a new NSS/SDSR was required – we feel that in any instance a more stringent reporting process may be prudent.

**12. UNA-UK recommends that the government consider a more stringent but flexible approach to reporting back whereby the UK’s strategic documents can be both reviewed and updated more frequently. This should include formal opportunities for public and parliamentary appraisal of the UK’s performance against the agreed-upon strategy, and a discussion about updating the strategy itself as circumstances dictate.**

### **The review - content**

#### *Strengthening the rules based international system*

13. In 2015 UNA-UK welcomed the analysis of the NSS/SDSR inextricably linking Britain’s security to the health of the rules-based international system and identifying the need to “help strengthen the rules-based international order and its institutions”. We feel there is a powerful self-interest argument for multilateralism as well as a principled one. Challenges such as climate change, extremism and cyberwarfare do not respect borders and require international cooperation; national interest and global stability are thus inseparable. Further, while the UK is by some measures now mid-level power, it still holds a seat at the top table of the United Nations as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council and wields influence due to its international development programmes. The UN is therefore an irreplaceable lever for UK influence. We trust future defence and security strategies will continue to recognise this.

14. However, for the UK to make an effective commitment to multilateralism and benefit from the corresponding increase in global influence, it must address the disconnect that can arise when Government actions do not live up to the commitments made in national security doctrines, for example when it comes to arms export licencing<sup>8</sup> or the use of language about senior UN officials by senior government officials.<sup>9</sup>
15. These are not isolated examples and they demonstrate the need for greater, cross-government acknowledgement of responsibility with respect to national security objectives. Domestic actions can and do affect the perceptions that underpin Britain's diplomatic weight.<sup>10</sup> The Review should therefore have a cross-governmental scope and incorporate (for example) the Home Office, Department of Justice, Department of Education, Department of Health, as well as the FCDO and MOD.
16. Over the past several years UNA-UK have made a number of recommendations for how the UK could strengthen the rules based global system, and its standing within it, through its own actions. We reiterate key recommendations here:

**17. The UK should make greater troop contributions to UN Peacekeeping, building upon its positive commitments in South Sudan and Mali. UN Peacekeeping provides unmatched training and enrichment opportunities for the UK's armed forces, as well as helping coalition building and increasing the UK's influence both at the UN and with host and fellow troop contributing states. Troop contributions by western donor states such as the UK help bridge the damaging divide within peacekeeping between "those that lead and those that bleed". UN Peacekeeping missions are also a highly effective way of delivering the UK's conflict prevention, Building Stability Overseas, atrocity prevention and Protection of Civilians work.**

**18. The UK should work to agree a treaty to ban Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems – or "killer robots" – so positioning themselves in a lead role and on the right side of history with respect to this major and emerging global threat**

**19. The UK should commit to earmarking 1% of its Official Development Assistance budget, 0.007% of GNI, to human rights. This amount is readily affordable, and indeed might seem inconsequential, but would represent a tripling of current budgets. In addition to the important work that these funds would do in protecting the most vulnerable, making this commitment would demonstrate UK leadership and send a powerful signal as to the importance of the agenda.**

**20. The UK should live up to its commitments under the Arms Trade Treaty and refrain from trading arms from parties to conflicts where the UN has determined there is**

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.una.org.uk/news/yemen-cant-wait-campaign-una-uk-end-conflict>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.una.org.uk/news/un-briefings-special-rapporteur-extreme-poverty-and-human-rights%E2%80%99-visit>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.una.org.uk/keeping-britain-global>

**credible evidence they have committed gross human rights violations – such as parties to the conflict in Yemen.**

**21. More broadly the UK should look to follow the advice of the Lords' International Relations Committee<sup>11</sup> and diversify its alliances in the Middle East with a view to reducing tensions between regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran rather than supporting any one side against the other.**

**22. The UK should adopt a cross-governmental atrocity prevention strategy supported by an analysis unit in the FCDO.**

23. We have further argued that the UK will be better able to “punch above its weight” if its foreign policy articulates a clear set of values. To this end we welcome the Government’s commitment to “being a force for good in the world”<sup>12</sup> and as part of this commitment we urge the UK to adopt an explicitly feminist foreign policy. Such an approach, as described in detail by the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy<sup>13</sup>, would help the UK move towards a more coherent, historically informed, interpretation of security based on solidarity, equality and collaboration.

#### *Reforming the rules based international system*

24. Our global system is far from perfect. The Coronavirus pandemic has laid bare pre-existing tensions and challenges and demonstrated the urgency of reform. Fortunately, there is a mechanism for these reforms to occur: the process mandated by member states on the occasion of the UN’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which tasks the Secretary-General with presenting reform proposals to the UN General Assembly by September 2021<sup>14</sup>.

25. The UN Secretary-General has identified “four horsemen”<sup>15</sup> that threaten our shared future:

- Geopolitical tensions
- The climate crisis
- Global mistrust
- The dark side of technology.

In more conceptual terms these four horsemen speak to two challenges the United Nations faces: a crisis of legitimacy caused by an increasing number of people feeling alienated and disenfranchised by a global system they no longer feel speaks for them, and a crisis of performance caused by a failure to reach agreement with regards to action on the primary challenges we face. Reforms must address these four horsemen, and both sets of conceptual challenges.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldintrel/159/159.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-introduction-to-queens-speech-debate>

<sup>13</sup> <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.una.org.uk/news/una-uk-statement-finalisation-un75-declaration>

<sup>15</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/01/1055791>

**26. UNA-UK gave evidence to your recent inquiry on multilateral institutions<sup>16</sup>, and would commend those recommendations once again, in particular with regard to the importance of the UK articulating a clear agenda for UN reform, making the case for universalist multilateralism over values-based unilateralism, and ensuring the tone of reform is appropriate, constructive, and cognisant of historical context.**

### *Nuclear security*

27. The heart of the UK's approach to nuclear security is the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The NPT is under siege, primarily due to the frustration of non-nuclear states at the nuclear five's (N5)<sup>17</sup> failure to meet their Article 6 obligations to engage in good faith negotiations towards disarmament. This frustration contributed to a number of non-nuclear states establishing the process culminating in the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

28. The UK has a number of objections to the TPNW, and we accept that it is unlikely that the UK will sign up to the Treaty any time soon. But it is important for the health of the NPT that the government acknowledge the legitimate frustration of non-nuclear states that the TPNW represents. The UK should therefore follow the advice of UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu: "don't ignore it, don't attack it".<sup>18</sup>

**29. UNA-UK recommends that the UK help restore trust with non-nuclear states by adopting a constructive approach towards the TPNW. The UK should announce its ultimate intention to join the Treaty, and in the meantime, work constructively with the Treaty's supporters (both state and civil society). The UK could further announce a commitment to attend conferences of parties of the TPNW as an observer, offer its privileged technical expertise and other input within the TPNW framework where relevant, and voluntarily implement Article 6 of the TPNW on victim assistance and environmental remediation.**

30. UNA-UK held a roundtable event as part of the UN's "UN75 dialogues" process on the subject of the UK's nuclear future. A virtual discussion was held with representatives from civil society and with the FCO and European ambassadors. UNA-UK also participated in the civil society section of the P5 process in London in February 2020. From these events it became clear that one of the primary frustrations of non-nuclear states have with the N5 is that while many of them, the UK included, insist that their long-term objective is to disarm, non-nuclear states no longer believe this is the case.

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<sup>16</sup> Yet to be published written evidence to the inquiry "The UK's role in strengthening multilateral organisations", submitted on 03/08/2020 at 22:35:09

<sup>17</sup> The US, UK, France, Russia, China. These are the five states the NPT allows to possess nuclear weapons. Four further states – India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan – possess nuclear weapons but are not parties to the NPT.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.una.org.uk/news/un-disarmament-chief-urges-states-build-common-ground-nuclear-disarmament>

31. It is therefore vital for the health of the NPT and thus for the UK's nuclear security that the government restore confidence in the fact that the UK's long-term objective is to disarm. UNA-UK believes the way to do this would be to announce a planning assumption that it will not renew its nuclear deterrent beyond the life-span of the current Dreadnought programme. Scenarios should also be considered for denuclearising our national security strategy sooner.
32. The UK's Dreadnought programme is expected to last well into the 2060s, therefore such an assumption would not commit the UK to a firm timeline for disarmament; future governments would still have time to reverse this decision if they saw fit. But by changing the default position to one where the UK's strategy for disarmament is successful, the UK would send a powerful signal to non-nuclear states that it intends to deliver upon its NPT obligations to disarm.
33. Such an assumption would also allow the UK to plan for the success of its disarmament strategy, and to start work on the scenario planning, strategic development, adaptation of conventional armed forces, and diplomatic work to develop the preconditions the government feels would be required to allow the UK to initiate disarmament. It would also allow the UK to start planning how best to utilise the economic and diplomatic dividend that disarmament would bring.

**34. UNA-UK recommends that the UK announce a planning assumption that the Dreadnought programme will be the UK's last nuclear deterrent, and that at this time they have no intention of replacing it at the end of its lifecycle. This announcement should be accompanied with the publication of a clear vision for a security strategy free of nuclear weapons.**

*August 2020*