

Written evidence submitted by Professor Andrew Dorman (DIS0044)

Defence in Scotland: the North Atlantic and the High North

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Context

1. Russia's illegal invasion of the Ukraine has provided added impetus to the UK's focus on the North Atlantic and the High North. This impetus needs to bear in mind a number of, at times, conflicting trends.
2. First, the application of Finland and Sweden to join NATO will increase substantially the amount of border that Russia shares with a NATO member. Upon acceding to NATO both Finland and Sweden will be covered by the same collective security guarantee that the other NATO members have, and NATO will need to develop plans to defend these states as well as well as extending the nuclear guarantee to them.
3. Secondly, the accession of Sweden and Finland will substantially change the security situation in the Baltic and provide alternative reinforcement options to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.
4. Thirdly, Russia's actions have reinforced the view that it sees the current liberal international order as a threat and one it is likely to continue to confront via a variety of mechanisms.¹ Whilst much academic and policy attention was focused on debates about conflict short of war - Grey Zone, hybrid warfare, or however we chose to name the ongoing competition between Russia and the West – what is clear is that the Russian leadership sees itself in a strategic competition with the west and that it is prepared to devote significant resources and sacrifice large numbers of military personnel in pursuit of what it sees as its' best interests.
5. Fourth, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also highlighted the poor state of many of NATO member's armed forces. Several decades of defence reductions have left many with a dearth of spares, reduced munition stocks and personnel lacking the necessary training for a more conventional style of warfare.
6. Fifth, not only has this competition or conflict been seen in a variety of forms short of conflict, we have also seen discussions about the potential use of nuclear weapons. Debates about deterrence, ladders of escalation etc which many had hoped were consigned to the history books are being revisited and it is clear that NATO's nuclear options are currently quite limited.²

¹ Tracey German, 'Harnessing protest potential: Russian strategic culture and the colored revolutions', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41(4), 2020, pp.541-563, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13523260.2020.1757251>, Harald Edinger, 'Offensive ideas: structural realism, classical realism and Putin's war on Ukraine', *International Affairs*, 98(6), 2022, pp.1873-1893,

² Andrew M Dorman, Written Evidence, Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Refreshing our approach? Updating the Integrated Review', *HC.882*, fifth report of session 2022-23, London, TSO, 2022, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/33283/documents/180231/default/>

7. Sixth, Russia's illegal invasion of the Ukraine also highlighted how dependent much of Europe had become on Russian fossil fuels. Here it is worth noting that this even applied to the UK which had sort, as part of the Integrated Review, to reduce its' dependence of fossil fuels from the Persian Gulf.

8. Seventh, the conflict in the Ukraine has also highlighted how inter-connected much of the world is. Not only have we seen heightened energy costs, but the conflict has also highlighted how dependent the rest of the world is on Russia and the Ukraine for in a variety of areas ranging from wheat to potash. The basic cost of food has risen globally and inevitably it is the least well off who are hit hardest.

9. Eighth, the economic consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine when added to those of Covid-19 mean that securing additional resources for defence will be politically and economically challenging.

10. Lastly, both the Covid and Russia challenges have highlighted the vulnerability of existing supply chains and an over dependence on countries such as China for key components.

Current UK policy

11. Current UK policy is based on the 2021 Integrated Review, the accompanying Defence Command Paper and the MoD's policy paper on the High North published in March 2022.³

12. From a defence perspective the Integrated Review identified three main threats to the United Kingdom. Terrorism and Russia had been previously identified in the combined 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review.⁴ New in 2021 was the shift of China from a potential partner to a strategic competitor. This, in part, accounts for the Indo-Pacific tilt announced in the Integrated Review.

13. The High North paper provides a sensible outline of British interests and the strategic context prior to Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. Published a month after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it does not really address the consequences of this action.

Problems with current policy

14. In many respects the Integrated Review was the least strategic and most uncoordinated defence or national security strategy review that there has been. It was strong on rhetoric Even without the Russian action it would have needed revising and it is hardly surprising that soon after assuming his post of Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Patrick Sanders felt the need to give the army a mission.⁵ In other words, he felt that the army had been largely ignored by the Integrated Review, despite the Integrated Review's identification of Russia as a threat.

³ These can be found at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974661/CP411_-_Defence_Command_Plan.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063855/The_UK_s_Defence_Contribution_in_the_High_North.pdf

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478936/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_PRINT_only.pdf

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACtuO43YO3I>

15. Moreover, despite all the rhetoric to the contrary, the Defence Command Paper also assumed that the UK would, in the short term, seek to free-ride on NATO as defence assets were either re-tasked towards the Indo-Pacific or promised for delivery by the end of the decade. For example, two River-class offshore patrol vessels have been deployed to the Indo-Pacific pending the construction of the Type 31 frigates. Russia's invasion of the Ukraine has meant that the idea of free-riding in NATO is no longer an option.

16. More broadly, what the Integrated review did was to continue with the de facto 10-year rule first adopted by the Cameron administration in 2010. This concluded that the UK would not face a conventional threat before 2020. This allowed it to make significant short-term cuts to Britain's armed forces in 2010 with plans to rebuild them from 2015 onwards.

17. However, the subsequent 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review revised this, saying that the threat posed by international terrorism and Russia was now immediate. Yet, it perpetuated the 10-year rule looking to create the requisite defence capabilities by 2025. The Integrated Review repeated this policy of mismatch by adding China as a threat and looking to develop the necessary defence capabilities by 2030. Russia's invasion is forcing a major rethink within NATO with calls for a major and urgent upgrade in NATO's capabilities.

18. Inevitably in tilting towards one region there is, by implication, a tilt away from another region. In this case, in a similar way to the Obama Administration's planned pivot a decade before, the Integrated Review assumed that the UK would devote less attention to the Persian Gulf as it ought to ween itself off Gulf oil and gas in favour of other providers and green solutions. The Russian invasion has unpicked the British tilt out of the Persian Gulf as then Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, rapidly sought to secure sources of gas and oil supplies from the Gulf states.⁶

A Revised Integrated Review and the potential implications for Scotland

19. The Integrated Review was correct to highlight the three principle threats to the United Kingdom. The danger in responding to the Russian invasion of the Ukraine is that all defence resources were be earmarked to counter the Russian threat in the short term whilst the challenge posed by China in the medium term is deferred until it is too late. A revised Integrated Review will therefore have to seek a balance between short- and medium-term threats.

20. With the revised Integrated Review underway, rumours are already beginning to emerge about potential defence reductions as the current lack of affordability of the Integrated Review and the need to respond to Russian aggression conflict with one another. The potential cancellation of the Type 32 frigates raises important questions about the medium-term future of the refurbished Rosyth shipyard and the future of Scotland's shipbuilding industry.⁷

21. Whilst there have already been calls for the re-establishment of British land forces in Germany as a means of reinforcing NATO's eastern border, it is important that the United Kingdom along with its NATO partners look to develop a coordinated response. Any response should not be merely to try and replicate the structures and forces of the Cold War without serious consideration of their applicability.

⁶ Rowena Mason, 'Boris Johnson plans Saudi Arabia visit to seek oil supply increase', *The Guardian online*, 14 March 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/mar/14/boris-johnson-saudi-arabia-visit-oil-supply-output>

⁷ Craig Williams, 'Rosyth: Cancelling £2.5 billion frigate order would be 'catastrophic'', *The Herald*, 15th January 2023, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/23252126.rosyth-cancelling-2-5-billion-frigate-order-catastrophic/>

22. Sweden and Finland's application to join NATO has effectively changed the focus within the High North region which, assuming both parties are admitted, will include substantially increasing NATO's border with Russia. The United Kingdom's geographical position suggests that its focus within NATO will need to be on the High North and, in particular, developing the requisite capabilities to reinforce the Scandinavian and Baltic states. Moreover, Finland and Sweden joining NATO offers alternative reinforcement routes for British forces to Estonia that do not pass through Germany and Poland and then via the Baltic states.

How might this impact on defence in Scotland?

23. For the forces currently based in Scotland this could mean a number of changes. First, the Royal Marines are likely to have to rebalance their focus to one that not only retains the global raiding focus but also looks to return to brigade level reinforcement to Scandinavia and acting as the forward reconnaissance screen for US Marine reinforcements.

24. Second, the army may well see a return to its pre-Integrated Review planned size in order to help develop more combat forces for reinforcing NATO's eastern border. As part of this a case could be made for an increased presence based in Scotland taking advantage of the training experience the Highlands offer.

25. Third, the Royal Air Force's current fast jet force of roughly 100 Eurofighter and 30 F-35B Lightning will struggle to deploy reinforcement squadrons to the High North whilst also maintaining Britain's own air defence region. With additional funding the F-35B force can be grown beyond the current plans for 2 operational squadrons to provide aircraft that can both deploy aboard the navy's two aircraft carriers or deploy to Scandinavia in support of Britain's NATO allies. It would inevitably mean that the RAF will need to look for a second home base for the F-35 force with Scotland being an option.

26. The Eurofighter force is likely to decline in numbers as the Integrated Review's planned withdrawal of the Tranche 1 aircraft is completed. Again, if the RAF is to deploy forces in support of NATO either to the Scandinavian countries, Baltics or Iceland it will need further aircraft. Currently there are no plans to order a 4th tranche of aircraft but this could be reversed. Here again there would be a requirement for additional basing.

27. The Integrated Review had already announced plans to grow the navy's surface fleet through the current acquisition of Type 26 and 31 frigates along with the development of Type 83 destroyers and Type 32 frigates. If resources can be found, then the navy would want to see the entry into service of the planned force of eight Type 26 frigates advanced anti-submarine warfare frigates brought forward. This would have a direct impact on the Glasgow based shipyards. Whether the navy can successfully make the case for additional Type 26 frigates is another matter. In practice there is also an argument to be made to have an enlarged force based in home waters as well as seeing this capability deployed in support of the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt. There is also a case to be made that the UK's need to focus on the High North would benefit from the basing of some of these ships in Scotland and thus closer to their potential area of operation.

28. The navy's limited number of dedicated anti-submarine warfare platforms is matched by the RAF's small force of 9 Poseidon P-8A maritime patrol aircraft based at Lossiemouth. This force is insufficient to maintain any long-term deployment to the Indo-Pacific whilst also undertaking its support to the High North and protection of the nuclear deterrent. It is therefore an obvious area for expansion.

29. A case can also be made that the navy's current force of seven attack submarines is far too small to support deployments to the High North, protection of the nuclear deterrent and a deployment to the Indo-Pacific. However, this is unlikely to happen in the short- to medium-term because of the UK's limited building capacity and the urgent need to replace the navy's four nuclear deterrent boats.

30. Both the Indo-Pacific tilt and Russia's nuclear threats vis-à-vis Ukraine have highlighted Britain's limited nuclear capability. Along with the United States it is one of only two states providing a nuclear guarantee within NATO. At the same time, it is the only permanent member of the United Nations Security Council that relies on a single nuclear delivery system.

31. In terms of the Indo-Pacific tilt and a move towards looking to deter China the obvious omission in the Integrated Review was the nuclear element. If the UK is to adopt a deterrent strategy towards China then this would logically include a nuclear element.

32. Interestingly, when the UK initially planned to acquire the Polaris system in the 1960s it planned to build five submarines in order to maintain one East of Suez as a deterrent to China. The fifth boat was subsequently cancelled and plans for a nuclear force East of Suez were dropped. Resurrecting this plan would have an impact on both the Coulport and Faslane bases.

33. At the same time, Russia's various nuclear threats have highlighted that the UK's nuclear options are limited to those provided by the existing force of Trident equipped boats. If NATO wants further options as part of a ladder of escalation then probably the easiest solution would be to reinstate an air-launched capability similar to France. Again basing and cost will be important issues for consideration.

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