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As part of their Inquiry into HM Government's upcoming Integrated Security, Defence, and Foreign Policy Review (ISDFPR), the House of Commons Defence Committee solicited external evidence on the purposes, design, and conduct of this wide-ranging reappraisal of UK strategic posture. The ISDFPR will be the third iteration in a quinquennial cycle of National Security Strategies and accompanying Strategic Defence and Security Reviews (NSS/SDSRs) established in 2010, albeit now with a widened purview to explicitly incorporate foreign policy in the round. This submission addresses the Committee's core questions (highlighted in bold), drawing on our academic research in the fields of international politics and British national security strategy. We do not have all the answers, naturally, but we try to identify at least some considerations of relevance to each question.

Since we address the Committee's many queries in summary form, this document is necessarily limited in its answers. We would therefore be happy to elaborate on any of these points via subsequent follow-up evidence if required. We will also continue to engage with the Committee as you transition from scrutinising the ISDFPR's design and purpose to assessing its substantive priorities and policy choices.

1. What is the purpose of a security, defence, and foreign policy review?

An ISDFPR is fundamentally an exercise in aligning the ends, ways, and means of the state to safeguard its population's survival and wellbeing in an anarchic international system defined by the ever-present possibility of violent harm. If grand strategy is, in essence, a state's theory of how it causes security for itself,[3] then an ISDFPR should lay out what that strategy is and provide a blueprint for its implementation using all levers of national power. While the "ends/ways/means" formulation is a truism regurgitated in every Staff College essay ever written, it captures an important truth: that the state must only choose political goals that it can afford to deliver, but equally, that it must allocate the resources required to achieve those tasks that it judges necessary. So, to give a contemporary example, if HM Government decides that it wants a permanent naval commitment in East Asia to help contain China (often couched as "upholding rules-based order") while *also* balancing assertive Russian power in our Northeast Atlantic home region, it must pay – at opportunity-cost to other areas of state expenditure – to expand its Navy. Equally, if HM Government decides that the state can*not* bear the opportunity costs of expanding the Navy, then it must choose whether to adequately balance Russia *or* forward-project in East Asia.

The ISDFPR is therefore most basically an exercise in prioritisation, both *among* security/defence/foreign policy tasks and *between* such tasks and other areas of public

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[3] Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.

resource allocation.[4] 2015's NSS/SDSR proclaimed three 'National Security Objectives' – 'protect our people', 'project our global influence', and 'promote our prosperity' – that were defensible on their own terms, but potentially contradictory among themselves. For example, the desire to project influence – which should really be understood just as a means to other ends, rather than an end in itself – could lead us into overseas military entanglements that jeopardise people-protection. Likewise, the determination to promote our prosperity could see us embracing economic relationships – such as those with foreign powers' technology providers, e.g. Huawei – that similarly imperil people-protection and/or influence-projection. The next ISDFPR is free, then, to again specify multiple objectives – indeed, it is only realistic that it should do so, because no state has a single, unitary 'national interest' – but it must move beyond 2015's effort to ensure that they are properly prioritised if we are to survive and thrive in a decade of intensifying great-power competition.

For this reason, the explicit incorporation of foreign policy within the purview of the review is a positive development.[5] Deciding where in the world Britain should be committed, and to what, is central to achieving a functional alignment of ends, ways, and means.

2. How often should a review be scheduled and how should different aspects be sequenced?

The quinquennial scheduling of NSS/SDSRs instigated in 2010 has value in ensuring that national ends, ways, and means are regularly recalibrated vis-à-vis one another.[6] In the absence of such a 'regularised' review, the disconnect between a growing laundry-list of inadequately-prioritised ends and an ever-more-pressured pool of finite means can widen to store-up deeper problems, as happened between 1998 and 2010. The annual 'update reports' instituted after the 2015 NSS/SDSR also provide a valuable shorter-term check on the fitness for purpose – or otherwise – of the last 'full' review's assumptions, causal claims, and policy recommendations, providing opportunities for revision when and where necessary.

At the same time, however, the quinquennial cycle can itself become an artificial source of rigidity in what should be a continuous cycle between waxing/waning threats and national strategic responses. Furthermore, five-year gaps in this cycle can necessitate further intra-period revisions, leading to a seemingly continuous process of near-permanent review that risks never finalising anything. This is especially true when (a) the initial review is insufficiently resourced to deliver on its ambitions and (b) major strategic shocks manifest themselves within the five-year cycle (as seen after the 2015 SDSR, which was followed by a National Security Capabilities Review as early as 2017, which itself spawned the Modernising Defence Programme (MDP) of 2018, which was itself making way for the ISDFPR by early 2020).

In terms of sequencing, any formulaic application of linear progression is likely to collapse into absurdity. For example, if a Comprehensive Spending Review assigns resources to national security before the severity of the UK's threat environment has been established, then this is a back-to-front allocation of means with no reference to the ends that they are actually supposed to serve. Conversely, if a National Security Strategy were to select an expansive array of grandiose ambitions without prior reference to the state's capacity to pay,

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[4] This is the so-called "guns versus butter" trade-off between 'goods' that populations actually want to consume, be they social services or tax cuts, and the means of safeguarding the ability to continue consuming in future.

[5] Whether it needed renaming from "NSS/SDSR" to "ISDFPR" is a different question, given that any credible "national security strategy" should cover foreign policy anyway.

[6] Such timing was also originally intended to align with the five-year-long governments anticipated by the Fixed Term Parliaments Act (FTPA), and the comprehensive spending reviews that new governments bring with them, although such alignment has since slipped in the face of political contingencies that yielded non-quinquennial general elections.

that would be an indulgence of ends in denial of limited means. For this reason, an ISDFPR is not just a 'normal' bureaucratic function of politics, characterised by bargaining between HM Treasury and any given Department of State – under the auspices of Cabinet, of course, and thereby reflecting HM Government's distributional priorities – resulting in some assignment of resources for the purchase of schools, roads, or nursing homes. Rather, an ISDFPR must review the state's very ability to secure its continued existence in an anarchic international system defined by the ever-present possibility of violent harm. For this reason, the *severity* of the threat environment, national priorities *within* such a threat environment, and the state's willingness and ability to *resource* such priorities must be a decision for the highest level of Government, namely Cabinet – and the salient Committee thereof, i.e. the National Security Council – under scrutiny from the relevant organs of Parliament. Only if Cabinet is willing to undertake such prioritisation can fiscal policy and national strategy hope to proceed in anything approaching complementarity.

The UK's current 'formal' architecture therefore remains broadly adequate, in terms of quinquennial reviews augmented (since the 2015 NSS/SDSR) by annual 'update reports'. What is more important, however, is that all levels of Government – up to and including Cabinet – are engaged in continual (re)appraisal of the optimality of Britain's means/ends strategic alignment, rather than viewing it as a periodic 'task' that is 'solved' once every five years. This also necessitates ongoing, institutionalised scrutiny and interrogation of such choices beyond Government, rather than treating ISDFPRs as discrete 'events' on which outsiders are consulted twice a decade before 'handing strategy back' to a bureaucratic cadre.

As for this *particular* ISDFPR's scheduling, meanwhile, the Government's ambition for a summer 2020 completion was always too hasty to ensure meaningful consultation and rigorous analysis, coronavirus notwithstanding. And even a more 'typical' NSS/SDSR publication date (i.e. November 2020) is now likely to prove a stretch. To be sensible about still delivering an effective Review, therefore, the Government should now push the ISDFPR into 2021 while the MOD, FCO, and others spend 2020 simply coping with COVID-19.

3. What leadership, personnel, and decision-making structures are required to ensure a review is effective?

A successful ISDFPR must achieve balance across several fronts. It requires its most fundamental choices to be taken by the elected Head of Government – the Prime Minister, his Cabinet, and the relevant Cabinet Committee (the NSC) – as discussed above. It must be led on a day-to-day level by a team in the Prime Minister's Policy Unit and the Cabinet Office capable of ensuring that its subordinate analytical functions are working in the service of these fundamental strategic priorities while also recognising that the deep expertise on the ISDFPR's constituent policy areas resides outside Number 10. It will require the assemblage of expert teams in the relevant Departments/agencies, and that these teams be given appropriate intellectual time and space to debate, reconsider, and innovate, as well as leadership that provides a healthy transmission belt between the centre's priorities and subordinates' specialist analysis. Finally, while recognising that those inside Whitehall are often those with a clearest sense of the feasible and access to the most specific details, it will require engagement with external experts that goes beyond the merely tokenistic (e.g. a "consultation" after all of the major decisions have already been taken) and/or nepotistic (i.e. "external" experts that are really just quasi-governmental Whitehall insiders anyway). Such engagement would recognise that those outside Government often have the greatest intellectual space to critique/reconsider UK strategic priorities on a fundamental level, even if they are also less attuned to political sensitivities, current fads, or official technicalities.

4. **What is the purpose, and appropriate scope, for cross-Government collaboration in the review process? What is the best way to ensure it is effective?**

'Cross-Government' working is too often held up as a panacea or 'silver bullet' for national strategy even though, by itself, the mere existence of collegial inter-Departmental working does nothing to deliver meaningful strategic prioritisation. Such prioritisation must come from the ultimate 'inter-Departmental' organisation at the centre of Government – Cabinet – based on a deep and wide-ranging assessment of the UK's threats and capabilities. But of course, the expertise and judgements that guide and support such a "deep and wide-ranging assessment" have to come from somewhere. And it is clearly valuable to the effective progress, completion, and implementation of such reviews when the various concerned organs of state pull in the same direction. As academics who do not primarily focus on the effectiveness/otherwise of bureaucratic processes, we are not well qualified to comment on what makes for effective cross-Governmental collaboration of this kind. What is clear, however, is that the existence of a 'formal' NSS/SDSR process can be a useful handrail to the *in*formal inter-Departmental conversations that help strategy work better.[7]

5. **What methodology and analytical capability is required to ensure that assessments of threats and risks to the UK are future-proofed?**

The aspiration to full 'future-proofing' of threat assessments is itself an unachievable dream that risks instilling dangerous over-confidence in the state's predictive powers. Such over-confidence is often followed by strategic shock, shortage of capacity, and the opposing dangers of under- or overreaction when unforeseen contingencies inevitably arise.[8]

That said, the UK's post-2010 National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) methodology has been a positive development, to a point, in its attempt to weigh likelihood against impact. It is certainly a more systematic effort at prioritisation than what came before. However, the NSRA still suffers from nine significant flaws.[9] These include (1) its reliance on inherently unknowable quantitative data, (2) the qualitative differences within its risk categories, (3) the endogeneity of current threat levels to past policy choices, (4) the different causal pathways (with different policy implications) that can bring about the 'same' risk outcome, (5) the intrinsic linkages between its risk categories that render them intellectually prohibitive silos when taken individually, (6) the political subjectivity of the UK interests being advanced, (7) the cognitive biases and groupthink that determine the very contingencies that even get considered, (8) the international political effects generated by its public dissemination, and (9) the political incentives to widen categories such that policymakers cannot subsequently be proven wrong. Furthermore, as the COVID-19 crisis has recently shown us, a 'success' for the NSRA – correctly identifying influenza-like pandemics as a 'Tier 1' Risk in both the 2010 and 2015 NSRAs – does not necessarily result in greater preparedness unless strategic attention and resources are subsequently allocated.

Some version of the NSRA should therefore continue to be used, in our view; a handrail for prioritisation is valuable, the probability versus severity equation is a useful heuristic, and a published NSRA can be a beneficial source of transparency within and beyond Government. But it should be refined to improve upon the most readily addressed of the nine limitations identified above, for example by restoring the language of 'threat' (politically

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[7] David Blagden and Catarina P. Thomson, 'A Very British National Security State: Formal and Informal Institutions in the Design of UK Security Policy', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 20:3 (2018), 573-93.

[8] Patrick Porter, 'Taking Uncertainty Seriously: Classical Realism and National Security', *European Journal of International Security* 1:2 (2016), 239-60.

[9] David Blagden, 'The Flawed Promise of National Security Risk Assessment: Nine Lessons from the British Approach', *Intelligence and National Security* 33:5 (2018), 716-36.

relational) alongside 'risk', instituting more robust 'red teaming' and net assessment of threats within and outside Government, and greater explication of the operative measures of harm. Simultaneously, Government should proceed with less faith in its predictive powers than the 2010 and 2015 NSS/SDSRs displayed (despite their protestations to the contrary). This in turn necessitates retention of the intellectual capacity to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, along with a large and flexible enough pool of material capabilities – a balanced suite of military/intelligence power, most crucially, as the final backstop to national survival – to respond and prevail when danger threatens.[10]

6. How should such an assessment be communicated and to whom?

HM Government's threat assessments should obviously be based on the best available information on others' intentions and capabilities, which in turn necessitates the use of classified data (alongside a wide range of open sources). As such, it is right and proper that there should be a classified analysis underpinning the NSRA that is restricted on an appropriately cleared need-to-know basis within Government.

That said, much of the purported value of an NSRA lies in its ability to communicate assessed concerns across and beyond Government, and that necessitates a publicly releasable version. Certainly, the ISDFPR will be a public document, and if the review is to claim to follow some version of threat assessment then it needs at least a summary of the NSRA's estimates (as happened in 2010 and 2015, although how well the NSRA and NSS/SDSR were actually aligned in either case is up for debate). Furthermore, the NSRA's extant flaws identified in the previous section are not solved simply by the existence of more detailed classified analytical underpinnings. Rather, if they are to be reduced at all, it will be through constructive input from – and rigorous critique/interrogation across – the wider UK national-strategic ecosystem. For that reason, there must be genuine communication – of the two-way kind – between the next NSRA's drafters in the Cabinet Office[11] and wider stakeholders within/beyond Government, both prior to its publication and afterwards, so that it can be continually iterated and refined (perhaps via inclusion in the ISDFPR's annual 'update reports') as opposed to being issued downwards twice a decade by seeming bureaucratic fiat.

7. How should existing and in-development defence capabilities be reviewed? Do assessments of equipment, non-equipment, and personnel require different approaches?

The likelihood versus severity calculation is once again central here. For example, it is highly likely that the UK will continue to be involved in attempted counter-terrorist, humanitarian, and 'stabilisation' missions across the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia as long as HM Government keeps opting into them (imprudently, in our view). But the severity of possible harm to our interests at stake in such operations pales into insignificance next to the potential devastation of great-power conflict. Such considerations are therefore central to assessing the merits of various extant versus in-development capabilities.

[10] As an aside pertaining to the quality of our democracy, the NSRA would also ideally become less – or at the very least, no more – opaque in its conduct, since reducing threat assessment to a seemingly apolitical quasi-science outsourced to a bureaucratic cadre (however public-spirited) can impede open contestation over what the polity construes as a danger and the costs we are willing to bear in the countering thereof.

[11] In past iterations, the NSRA – as a relation of the National Risk Register – has been a product of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat. There have been questions over whether this produces a particular focus on domestic dangers – terrorism, flooding, cyber-crime, etc – to the detriment of sufficient focus on the threat posed by hostile foreign powers (similar concerns have been raised when the NSC's SDSR Sub-Committee has been chaired by the Home Secretary). Of course, we do not know exactly what bureaucratic configurations will be used to support the forthcoming NSRA/ISDFPR.

Beyond that, there are the inevitable constraints of path-dependency. It may be that both hypersonic missiles *or* well-handled submarines can be effective ways of denying sea control to an adversary, for example, but since the UK already has submarine expertise and technology that most states can only envy, it makes sense to consolidate an existing strength (at least unless/until resources can be found to deliver *both* capabilities well). Likewise, while the Royal Navy of 1998 expected to fall from 35 frigates/destroyers to 32 in exchange for two large aircraft carriers to replace their three smaller predecessors, it has actually fallen to 19. If a near-50% cut in the escort fleet had been the original proposal, a different choice might have been prudent – but the path-dependent reality is that the new carriers are now paid for, operational, and UK naval strategy must therefore be configured to utilise them optimally for an era of great-power competition on a contested maritime commons.

As for how to assess the human versus material dimensions, these present important balancing acts. Unlike people, the state does not owe a moral debt to machines for the sacrifices they make on the polity's behalf; unlike machines, people require morale and motivation to perform. In that sense, therefore, the two *do* need to be reviewed differently. At the same time, however, *all* material and human inputs to national capability are complementary, partially substitutable elements of a whole. As such, while the 'Whole Force Concept' can too easily just become cover for ever more private contracting of important logistical and technical functions – with ill-considered implications for morale, combat resilience, and fighting purpose – the core sentiment is a defensible one. In a capital- and technology-intensive, (relatively) labour-scarce economy such as the UK, utilisation of capital- and technology-intensive equipment to maximise the fighting power of costly, precious labour does indeed make sense. But we must also recognise mission-critical tasks that remain relatively labour-intensive (such as holding territory, repairing battle damage, or sifting intelligence). For this reason, the personnel and materiel needed to deliver a mandated level of national power should indeed be reviewed as one.

On existing versus in-development capabilities, meanwhile, this too presents a high-stakes trade-off. Defence ministries are often accused – and not just in the UK – of being institutionally conservative. But this is not just cultural inertia; rather, it has a sound strategic basis: as the final guarantors of national survival, gambling on new ways/means – to the detriment of established capabilities – can be fatal if proven wrong. Offensive penetration and defensive shielding oscillate, moreover, but not always in linear or predictable ways. For example, techno-revolutionaries have been forecasting the obsolescence of the main battle tank since the advent of the earliest man-portable anti-armour weapons. Yet tanks' operators have themselves countered with technological and tactical innovations, and their qualitative and quantitative centrality – along with other 'old' technologies, such as massed artillery – to the Russian ground doctrine once again causing NATO such concern highlights their enduring salience.

At the same time, however, states that do not switch from merely exploiting technologies/tactics with which they are already comfortable to exploring new ones[12] cannot expect to remain at the 'combat productivity' frontier, i.e. the maximum available fighting power for a given level of financial/human/material inputs. And left too long, 'sunset' capabilities can become wholly obsolescent forces. Unsurprisingly, therefore, those states that make the largest amount of resources available for defensive purposes find this trade-off least onerous, because they have the wherewithal to both experiment with the new possibilities *and* preserve existing strengths. States without such a fiscal cushion, by contrast, *can* reach an outsized level of combat power through focusing predominantly on

[12] Theo Farrell, 'Improving in War: Military Adaptation and the British in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2006-2009', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33:4 (2010), 567-94.

technological innovation, but at greater downside risk. For if established capabilities have been abandoned in pursuit of promising fads that do not ultimately deliver, then they have placed themselves in a perilous position. There is thus much to be said for 'hedging' or preserving 'strategic latency', i.e. preserving seemingly inefficient pockets of a wide range of capabilities – some novel innovations, some 'legacy' iterations – through peaceful years of uncertain future threat to ensure that a base exists for scaling back up once a future threat crystallises.[13] We contend, meanwhile, that a more dangerous era of resurgent great-power threats has arrived and the time for some modest scaling back up of UK defence spending – which would allow exploration of new capabilities *and* consolidation of existing strengths – is therefore now. But that is more a topic for the Committee's subsequent scrutiny of the ISDFPR's substantive priorities than this initial inquiry into its design and process.

8. What evidence base is required to determine future capabilities?

Attempting to precisely "determine" required future capabilities is a hiding to nothing. But we *can* aspire to a suitably sized, balanced, and focused toolkit. To that end, as stressed above, the expected-value equation between likelihood and severity is once again central. In light of our research findings,[14] our assessment is that capabilities suitable for deterring – or, if necessary, scaling-up to fight – interstate conflict against hostile major powers should be the top priority, given that its severity is such that it could render all other fields of human endeavour moot. Britain could get away with neglecting such capabilities in the post-Cold War US-dominated unipolar system precisely because there *were* no meaningful great-power threats, but that is no longer the case. Furthermore, capabilities geared towards major war can deliver utility – sub-optimal, admittedly, but still non-zero – in lower-intensity contingencies, whereas the same is not always true in reverse. Extant platforms can also be enhanced to better face an emerging threat environment, thereby maximising the combat power delivered by a given stock of assets (for example, by adopting the US concept of "distributed lethality" across platforms to complicate great-power adversaries' calculations).

In terms of optimising capabilities to meet a great-power threat environment, meanwhile, the key – as ever – will be maximising our own relative advantages while countering and thereby nullifying those of potential adversaries. The previous section contains a brief identification of some of the trade-offs that that entails.

9. To what extent should defence reviews address defence procurement?

An ISDFPR is obviously not the place for granular choices about specific procurement programmes. Nonetheless, if it is to fulfil its strategic purpose in terms of ends/ways/means alignment, it cannot avoid certain fundamental questions over the state's methods of acquiring the means of advancing its multiple competing interests. For example, the choice over just what capabilities the state should produce for itself versus what we can afford to purchase 'off-the-shelf' from the wider world – and the trade-off between financial efficiency and strategic autonomy that that choice can entail – is a strategically fundamental one. Certainly, as the COVID-19 crisis has been reminding us, reliance on 'just-in-time' resupply from global markets can bring substantial downsides in the event of shocks to that supply (which an astute adversary and/or a breakdown in alliance relations could bring about). Conversely, pursuing complete autarky in every aspect of economic life would be grossly

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[13] Paul Cornish and Andrew M. Dorman, 'Complex Security and Strategic Latency: The UK Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015', *International Affairs* 91:2 (2015), 351-70.

[14] For example: David Blagden, 'Global Multipolarity, European Security, and Implications for UK Grand Strategy: Back to the Future, Once Again', *International Affairs* 91:2 (2015), 333-50; Patrick Porter, 'Advice for a Dark Age: Managing Great Power Competition', *The Washington Quarterly* 42:1 (2019), 7-25.

inefficient and thereby result in an inferior output of combat power for a given level of available inputs.

Such a question also then entails further corollary choices, such as whether and how far to provide state support to private industry when that industry is a necessity to retain sovereign production capacity. There are also further choices between maintaining just enough productive capacity for current needs (efficient in the present, but with little scope to scale-up when danger threatens) or a more substantial level of productive capacity (inefficient vis-à-vis routine needs, but providing the resilience to scale-up when required).

The trade-off between quantity and quality in procurement is also very much a concern for the highest levels of strategy, and thus for the ISDFPR. Britain's post-1945 strategic history has generally been characterised by forces getting ever smaller in terms of numbers of platforms and personnel, but with an ever greater level of combat capability per unit – which makes sense, to a point, for the reasons stated above (i.e. an economy in which labour has increased in scarcity, and thus price, relative to technology). Nonetheless, at some point, differences in quantity themselves become differences in quality, when assets cease to exist in sufficient numbers to actually meet required taskings (especially the expanded taskings that a dangerous international system may thrust upon us). The MOD's effort with the Type 31 frigate has therefore been an encouraging exploration of an alternative approach, in terms of its determination to hold costs down to a stated ceiling in the hope of eventually re-growing the escort fleet.

Yet another question of procurement with implications for strategy more broadly lies in logistical supply and technical support. Since the Cold War, stocks of fuel, munitions, spares, and technical expertise have been run down to unprecedently low levels, premised on 'just-in-time' resupply from global markets, with results that were cruelly exposed by even the very modest campaign conducted against Libya in 2011. Ever more support services, from mess catering to infrastructural maintenance, engineering expertise to communications pathways, have been outsourced to private contractors or – in the case of functions like military hospitals – other arms of the state. And force operating bases and command/control (C2) hubs have been consolidated downwards in terms of numbers, again in the name of fiscal efficiency, while suffering some glaring vulnerabilities (e.g. the absence of meaningful UK defences and relative paucity of infrastructural hardening against standoff missile strike). Such choices may have seemed financially optimal in an era of power-projection against weak states without the capabilities to exploit such dependencies. But they could be exploited to potentially grave effect by more powerful adversaries with the means to do so.

10. How can Government ensure capability decisions reflect financial realities*?*

First of all, it is important to recognise that "financial realities" are not conditions exogenous to the state. Government can *choose* how large a share of national economic resources to allocate to the procurement of "guns" at the expense of "butter" (i.e. how much self-protection capability it judges necessary today, at the expense of foregone present consumption, to ensure a secure and prosperous tomorrow). To use a different metaphor, the state decides how generous an insurance policy to buy at how premium a price. Government also creates the conditions for economic growth, and therefore not only determines relative "slices" of the national economic "pie", but also plays an important role in helping to make the pie itself as big as possible. As such, the UK's reification of NATO's 2%-of-GDP defence spending target gets things precisely the wrong way around, assigning a set amount of resources to defence and then encouraging national strategy to work backwards to establish some rationales consistent with this level of expenditure, rather than working forward from an assessed threat environment and associated strategic tasks to establish an appropriate level of expenditure (which might be more *or* less than 2% of GDP).

This all said, however, the size of the national economic base clearly does determine the state's ability to procure strategic capabilities; there is a reason that Portugal cannot sustain US levels of military expenditure, even if it wanted to. Furthermore, in the contemporary UK political context, it is clear that the ISDFPR must work within parameters bounded by other competing demands on the state's fiscal capacity, some of which are more electorally salient than security/defence/foreign policy (at least under peacetime conditions). Furthermore, while military and diplomatic capacity has been an essential component of HM Government's response to COVID-19, it is clear that the debt burden taken on by the state in its bid to support the economy through the coronavirus crisis will reduce its subsequent room for fiscal manoeuvre. This may well curtail the ISDFPR's overall scope to spend, as well as producing political pressure to focus on capabilities with clear applications to domestic civil resilience.

For these reasons, and to reinforce a theme of earlier answers, it is all the more important that the ISDFPR delivers clear prioritisation between rank-ordered commitments, to avoid attempting to spread a modest amount of available resources too thin. As stressed above, deterrence/defence against great-power threats must be the top priority, given the stakes, with overseas commitments ranked by proximity and severity. Among the capabilities that are procured, meanwhile, we must ensure as much combat power as possible from a finite stock of platforms/people – hence the value of 'distributed lethality' and a more resilient supply/C2 chain discussed above – as well as choosing capabilities that can be utilised across a range of different operational intensities as far as possible to enhance that force fungibility.

11. Which external stakeholders should be engaged in the review process? How?

Unsurprisingly, we argue that the ISDPFR's drafters should consult widely and deeply with scholars of relevant disciplines. This will necessitate recognition that many academic inputs will be of limited utility, either because of a lack of familiarity with the policy context, ideational proclivities (which we all bring), or indeed, inexpert or ill-considered preparation. But it is still better to hear a wide range of views on the ISDPFR's various dimensions, even if some are of mixed quality, rather than solely the same echo-chamber of the 'usual' Whitehall voices.[15]

Think-tanks and similar organisations certainly have value in providing a 'transmission belt' for academic findings into policy contexts, meanwhile, and they should be engaged with too. They also track current policy developments, fashions, and concerns more closely than research universities have the capacity or need to. But the reality is that think-tank analysts, while proximate and readily available to Government, tend to hold more 'applied' expertise (e.g. on current policies or capabilities) rather than on the foundational bases of national security and strategy. Their research also often lacks the verification of external peer-review and must have at least one eye on the preferences of funders. Industry is also an important stakeholder, of course, insofar as the capacity to deliver new capabilities resides in large part in the private-sector. But again, and rather obviously, such firms' prime concerns are sales rather than national strategy. Meaningful external engagement on the ISDFPR must therefore incorporate all such perspectives while recognising their limitations.

The 2015 NSS/SDSR was the first to run an open, accessible public consultation, which was a promising step and should be repeated. But the ISDFPR would ideally go further, involving scholars and analysts of strategy/security in regularised, institutionalised knowledge exchange. An organisation like UK Research and Innovation could assist with that, insofar as they have good reach into universities' "impact" directorates and may

[15] On the tensions involved in this academic-policy interface, see: David Blagden, 'Politics, Policy, and the UK Impact Agenda: The Promise and Pitfalls of Academic Engagement with Government', *International Studies Perspectives* 20:1 (2018), 84-111.

therefore be able to ask scholars to participate in a way that mere press release from the MOD itself (say) might not. The CDS' Strategy Forum (convened by the MOD's Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre), the Defence Policy Board (created by 2018's MDP), and/or the MOD's Strategic Net Assessment Unit (similarly created by the MDP) could provide the necessary institutional vehicles. Indeed, an open application process could be instigated for the DPB and/or CDSSF, rather than a murkier process of invitation by reputation/connection. Ideally, this would extend to enabling relevant scholars/analysts to obtain security clearances, thereby permitting them to bring their expertise to bear on the ISDFPR's analysis and choices at a level beyond the vague and general.

Finally, it is worth noting that in addition to *ext*ernal stakeholders, the ISDFPR must also strive to engage as well as possible with *int*ernal stakeholders too. HM Government is full of relevant expertise in dispersed locations, from mid-career diplomats in frontline embassies to watch-keeping officers in military HQs, from historical analysts at DSTL to encryption specialists at GCHQ. All hold knowledge and experience that might be invaluable to the ISDFPR, but the reality of large, dispersed bureaucracies is that those insights may never be harvested by the centre. So, in addition to external engagement, the relevant Departments of State should also strive to create internal processes that allow anyone who wants to feed into the Review process to do so.

12. What role should international allies and multinational alliances play?

First of all, it is important to recognise that neither multilateral nor bilateral alliances are ends in themselves. Despite the UK propensity to reify alliances as permanent 'goods' in their own right, they are merely means to other ends – security, prosperity, influence – and we should remain aware that other countries will treat them as such. Yes, the US-UK 'Special Relationship' and the Anglo-French 'Entente Cordiale', like NATO and the 'Five Eyes', come with a veneer of social affinity attached. But fundamentally, any alliance is simply an exercise in combining national capabilities to direct them at a shared third-party threat – what scholars call 'external balancing' – to be prudently abandoned by either party once its benefits no longer exceed its costs. The US attitude to the 'special' relationship is illustrative on this point. While American policymakers may wax lyrical about Churchill, the 1940s, or Thatcher and Reagan at social gatherings, their professional behaviour is to simply utilise the UK as a cog in the broader machine of US grand strategy – and to quite rightly disregard our preferences/interests when required.

As such, it is right and proper that the ISDFPR should consult with major allies on the configuration of UK forces and orientation of our external posture. This will obviously include the United States, the attempted 'binding in' of which to UK/European defence has been an enduring effort of British strategy since 1945. It will also include the major European powers that will remain central to the balancing effort in our home region regardless of Brexit. And it may also involve weaker powers whose defence we interpret as valuable to our own security, be that the 'Eastern Flank' states of NATO or FPDA partners in East Asia. But with all such allies, it is also important to recognise that we are ourselves merely tools of their own national strategy. As such, they will obviously want us to focus on capabilities or commitments that suit their interests, whether that be East Asian states seeking a permanent UK presence to add to their own deterrence, Americans pushing us to take more of the US burden in the Middle East so they can 'pivot' to the Pacific, African states wanting the maximum available DfID aid for the minimum amount of policy conditionality, or Eastern Europeans seeking expanded UK garrisons against non-NATO threats. It is therefore the job of strategy in general – and the ISDFPR in particular – to rank and prioritise such commitments to assess which ones Britain has greatest (a) need and (b) ability to positively affect.

13. **What level of detail should be provided to Parliament and the public once the review is completed?**

The bias should be toward transparency wherever possible. Of course, much specific detail of force capability or availability (for example) cannot be publicly disseminated, because doing so would constitute a valuable source of intelligence for prospective adversaries. Nonetheless, openness should be the default where possible, for three key reasons.

First, open debate around what the polity construes as dangers and the resources we are willing to allocate to their mitigation is essential to healthy democracy. And this matters not only as a domestic constitutional 'good' in its own right, but also because public embrace of national strategy is essential to its effective delivery. Second, Parliamentary and public scrutiny will enable the ISDFPR's underpinning assumptions and causal claims to be more rigorously tested and interrogated. Such interrogation leads to better reasoning, and thus better policy. Third, public dissemination of the ISDFPR has value for external signalling. Specifically, open dissemination of strategic commitments can reassure allies, reinforce deterrence against potential adversaries, and reduce 'security dilemmas' (the situation in which others' uncertainty over our intentions leads them to fear the worst and strengthen their balancing against us, leading to unnecessary spirals of mutual animosity).

14. **How can the results of the review best be reflected in a spending review?**

As stressed in previous answers, strategy can only be effective if means and ends are married-up. This means that strategic priorities (identified by the ISDFPR) and the resources to be made available for their discharge (allocated by a CSR) must be considered together at the top of Government. To be more usefully prescriptive, an appropriate order would be threat assessment and the identification of corresponding need (ISDFPR), followed by a Governmental decision on just which such needs can be resourced versus which cannot vis-à-vis other domestic policy priorities (CSR), followed by a commitment to fulfil prioritised tasks while recognising that others must remain on the 'wish-list' (ISDFPR again).

15. **What is required to ensure that the findings and outcomes of a review are implemented?**

Cabinet needs to ensure that HM Treasury actually resources the commitments that the ISDFPR makes, even if that risks taking expenditure over arbitrary caps (such as the 2% of GDP threshold applied to Defence). Otherwise, the means/ways/ends alignment is revealed as nothing but a figment, with the available 'means' decreed by one single-issue Department of State and the various 'ends' simply left to manage as best they can. The quid pro quo, of course, is that the delivery Departments – such as the MOD – must actually align their commitments to the ISDFPR's priorities instead of spreading themselves ever thinner in a bid to service each and every whim of both internal and external stakeholders.

At times, this will entail hard conversations with the centre of Government – the very organs of state that directed the ISDFPR in the first place and now want to 'play with the toy set' – to make clear that there are tasks that we unfortunately do not have the capacity to fulfil. If priorities change, of course, then other previously-prioritised commitments can be abandoned and/or additional resources can be allocated. This is why – returning to an earlier answer – the ISDFPR must not be seen as a discrete quinquennial 'event', but rather a valuable structural support to an ongoing process of strategic assessment and prioritisation. And it is also why external scrutiny is so important, to shed official light on tasks that are going under- or wholly unperformed. While the Government and its Departments will always

attempt to present an appearance of full competence and adequate coverage, as is right and proper, this can lead strategy into vacuous circularity – for example, when they state that we have an adequate number of warships for ‘current taskings’, as if such taskings had not themselves been revised ever downwards to align with dwindling numbers of warships.

In a world that is once again returning to multipolar major-power competition and all of the conflictual possibilities that such a condition brings, UK strategy may once again have to confront scenarios in which merely fulfilling ‘current taskings’ – which have been defined narrowly enough to fit with the slender realities of extant force size – is no longer sufficient to safeguard national survival. Rather, the public – which lacks the expertise, information, and time to fully scrutinise the adequacy of the ‘insurance policy’ purchased on their behalf – needs others to do this for them. We therefore applaud the Committee for its current Inquiry, are grateful for being given the opportunity to contribute, and hope to do more to support your scrutiny of the ISDFPR’s subsequent progress in future.

10 April 2020