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Covid-19 has thrown into sharp relief a problem faced by all governments: how to successfully predict and prepare for a host of threats to citizens and to national security. Some threats, like Covid-19, are largely anticipated but not adequately planned for; others are not anticipated and, for the most part, not planned for; and some threats are planned for, but fail to materialise as predicted due to errors and biases in the analytic process. The *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development & Foreign Policy* presents a unique opportunity to evolve the growing but unstructured requirement in Britain for greater engagement with outside expertise.

We believe **the UK should pioneer a new vision of 'strategic awareness'** that goes beyond the simple idea of providing a long-term appreciation of the range of possibilities that the future might hold, to include the means of communication with governments about their receptivity to intelligence and the manner in which they act as a result. Strategic awareness should therefore be conceptualised in three ways: 1) looking more seriously and closely at threats; 2) investing in prevention and foresighted action; and 3) preparing for mitigation, crisis-management and bounce-back in case a threat cannot be wholly prevented or deterred. This will require a paradigm shift in how government practices strategic awareness, and **the academic community must play an integral part** in that.

We are not alone in recognising this lacuna. For instance, the Chief of MI6 has commented on the 'danger of group think' and the requirement to 'stimulate a contrary view.' Lord Butler's report *Review of Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2004) identified the need for 'challenge' to the government – a need that is still unmet. The *Blackett Review of High Impact Low Probability Risks*, commissioned by the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence in 2012, argued that greater use ought to be made of 'external experts to inform risk assumptions, judgments and analysis.' In January 2018, the British Government's 'areas of research interest' identified the need to 'align scientific and research evidence from academia with policy development and decision-making.' Yet, in spite of these calls, the system for connecting academic expertise on security issues with those in government is sporadic and irregular.

An effective security effort relies on the ability of the state to defend citizens' lives and to protect its vital interests through quick and effective identification, containment, and rolling back of threats from predominantly—but not exclusively—external actors and agents. Yet over the past two decades, technological advances, political and economic upheaval, as well as the diversifying and increasing rapidity of threats, have challenged the state's ability to fulfil its security obligations. New security challenges encompass cyber-attacks, climate change, economic fragility, intra-state war, emerging technologies, pandemics, sun-spots, and much more—not to mention the capacity for threat vectors to interact and connect in unexpected ways. Some challenges are man-made while others are environmental, but all pose a threat to the security of the state.

The intelligence studies literature emphasises the high cost of surprise to decision-makers and, ultimately, the citizens they serve; a view shared by the literature on disasters and emergencies in other areas. Surprised organisations and decision-makers are more likely to miss opportunities for preventing or pre-empting attacks and other threats, tend to be less well prepared for managing the unavoidable crises, and more likely to look ill-informed and

out-of-control in the eyes of citizens, taxpayers and voters. They are also less likely to see opportunities to advance peace, security and prosperity. A key function of intelligence, then, is to reduce the probability for such surprise by trying to anticipate what might happen, its likelihood, and the expected consequences for government interests.

In dealing with these challenges, intelligence agencies have always struggled with information acquisition and analysis. During the Cold War, intelligence services, embassies and field missions provided large states with a high degree of information superiority compared to private business, news media and civil society actors. Today, this monopoly on accessing different kinds of information has disappeared for most governments, largely as a result of information and communication technologies becoming much cheaper and far more widely dispersed. Mobile phones in the hands of individual citizens make events that happen far away much more accessible to a potentially global audience. Indeed, the landscape for non-state knowledge producers about foreign threats has radically transformed and internationalised. In the 1980s and 1990s, Western media organisations had vast correspondent networks with little competition from non-Western media. Today, with the news media business model in crisis, alongside safety concerns for journalists, we have less and lower quality foreign affairs coverage by Western media. Instead, non-Western media organisations, from Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera and state-owned broadcasters such as Russia Today, have entered the news market and created ‘alternative’ news, facts and narratives. Similarly, education and academic expertise has geographically diversified, evident in the rise of non-Western publications and the huge expansion of higher education world-wide. International and local civil society organisations have stepped in where embassies and conventional news media have retreated, allowing country experts, but also citizen journalists and activists to report from highly inaccessible or dangerous places. Risk management has become an integral part of governmental and business decision-making and is supported today by several large and well-resourced risk consultancies. New internet platforms and applications allow for crowd-sourcing of information from the ground. IBM contends that humans collected more data in the last year than in all of human history. In short, developments over the past two decades have enabled a revolution in the amount and use of open-sources for the assessment of threats.

Yet increased data does not necessarily equate to increased insight, knowledge or wisdom. While in the recent past, having power meant having access to data, in today’s world, with overwhelming amounts of data available, having power means knowing what to ignore, what to prioritise and how to analyse it. Challenges to be navigated include, among others, information overload, disinformation, information security vulnerabilities, and poorly understood biases in how data collection and analysis processes are designed and executed. The changes in how information is sourced, analysed and understood, combined with the new security challenges, have added exceptional complexity to the state’s capacity to adapt and respond effectively to the threat landscape.

We believe different ways of knowing about security threats can aid policymakers in threat assessment, preparedness, resource allocations and response efforts. This will require multidisciplinary, mixed methods approaches to provide more accurate current and anticipatory knowledge about threats. It will require spaces to generate new ideas, develop reflexivity about the strengths and weaknesses of various analytic approaches, identify best practices, and create lessons identified on key threats and how to translate them to government use, involving engagement with a variety of global experts in academia, industry, government, international organisations and society. By broadening out what strategic awareness encompasses, analysts and officials from security, defence, development & foreign

policy branches will be better equipped to assess and prioritise threats, and academic and external experts can provide a more effective challenge function to current governmental thinking.

King's College London is a public research university with a [vision](#) to make the world a better place. One of King's strategic priorities is to serve, shape and transform the local and international communities with which it engages. The [Department of War Studies](#) is one of the only academic departments in the world focused on understanding the complex realm of conflict, security and international politics through inter-disciplinary teaching, research and engagement. Dr Filippa Lentzos is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department focused on biological threat assessment and security; Dr Michael Goodman is Professor of Intelligence and International Affairs, and Head of the Department.

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