Written evidence submitted by Rethinking Security

About Rethinking Security

Rethinking Security is a network of UK-based organisations, academics and campaigners with expertise in peacebuilding, conflict and security research, disarmament and demilitarisation.[1] We have a shared concern that the current approach to national security in the UK and beyond often hampers efforts for peace, justice and ecological sustainability. We are committed to building a much richer understanding of what security really means, and of what is required to build sustainable security. For further information, please see www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk.

1. **Executive Summary**

1.1 This evidence submission seeks to address how national security policy-making functions in the UK, including how it approaches climate security, international development, conflict and peacebuilding. It is an outsider's perspective on the national security machinery and focuses on the management of the current and recent national security strategy reviews rather than the 'black box' of the National Security Council (NSC) itself. It draws upon the collective knowledge and experience of Rethinking Security's membership as well as insights from a comparative study made by Rethinking Security of 20 European and North American national security strategies.[2] It focuses on two of the aspects suggested by the Committee in its Call for Evidence:

- The role of key Government departments and agencies in national security policy-making;

- How well funding/resources are linked to national security decisions.

1.2 Parliamentary and public scrutiny of past national security strategies and policies has been poor and significantly constrained by opaque government practice. The 2020 attempt to conduct a strategic review without a constituted Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) is particularly concerning. Citizens also ought to be brought into discussions on policy-making and review. The miss-match between departments treated as stakeholders of the Integrated Review, those represented on the NSC, and the department (Health and Social Care) leading the response to the current human security crisis is remarkable.

1.3 The resourcing of responses to risks rated by the government as Tier One in the last National Security Strategy (2015) is illustrative of a lack of rigour in matching funding to

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[1] Rethinking Security's organisational affiliates include Campaign Against Arms Trade, Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Conciliation Resources, Forces Watch, International Alert, Medact, Movement for the Abolition of War, Northern Friends Peace Board, Oxford Research Group, Peace Direct, Quaker Peace And Social Witness, Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, Saferworld, Scientists for Global Responsibility, United Nations Association – UK, and War on Want.

[2] McKeon, Celia (2018) Contrasting Narratives: A Comparative Study of European and North American National Security Strategies, *Rethinking Security*.
https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/contrasting-narratives-march-2018.pdf

security risks. Public health is the obvious current example. Climate-induced natural hazards such as flooding are also a Tier One risk but mitigation of climate security issues has received something like 15 times less funding than military risks in the same tier. This is despite climate change, major international armed conflict and pandemic disease potentially having similar catastrophic consequences.

2. The role of key Government departments and agencies in national security policy-making

2.1 We do not have data about the level of participation in NSC discussions by government departments other than knowing the official membership of the NSC and other Cabinet committees as disclosed by the government on its website.[3] However, it may be illustrative to look at the experience of government engagement with various departments, as well as Parliament and its various committees, in the development of national security policy via the ongoing Integrated Review.

2.2 According to the Secretary of State for Defence, speaking in March 2020, the only four stakeholders in government for the Integrated Review are the FCO, Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Office and the MoD.[4] This is surprising and concerning given that other departments have clear stakes in delivering security and development. Despite the review's extended title referencing International Development, there was no mention of DFID, even before it was merged into the FCO. Despite Mr Wallace stating that Homeland Security was one of the four "main workstreams" of the Review, there was no mention of the Home Office or Department of Justice. If, as it must be, tackling climate breakdown is one of the "Global Issues" referenced as another workstream, why is BEIS not included as a primary stakeholder? Similarly, how can health security be promoted without the Department of Health and Social Care as a stakeholder? The latter, of course, is not represented on the NSC either.

2.3 This is not simply a question of asking a range of departments to devise strategies to respond to or mitigate a range of threat scenarios devised by the Cabinet Office/Number 10. It is also imperative that a wide range of departmental perspectives and expertise is utilised in the assessment of what actually or realistically threatens people's security. The wording of the Prime Minister's announcement of the Review, stating that it will consider "the totality of global opportunities and challenges the UK faces and [determine] how the whole of government can be structured, equipped and mobilised to meet them"[5], as well as Mr Wallace's statement on stakeholders, suggests that the role of non-stakeholders is simply to plan and implement responses.

2.4 The role of parliamentary committees is critical to national security policy-making. Recent UK national security strategies have been notably lacking in transparency and

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[3] Cabinet Office, *Guidance: List of Cabinet Committees*, last updated 19 Nov 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-cabinet-committees-system-and-list-of-cabinet-committees
[4] Answers by Ben Wallace, Sec of State for Defence during Defence Questions in Parliament, 16 March 2020, Hansard, Vol 673, Col. 647. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-03-16/debates/CFA44CE2-22D9-45E1-A9C1-33FAA9DB49C7/IntegratedReview
[5] Prime Minister's Office, *PM outlines new review to define Britain's place in the world*, Press Release, 26 Feb 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world

accountability in relation to Parliament. We welcome the activism of the Defence, Foreign Affairs and International Development select committees in engaging with the Integrated Review. However, it has been apparent throughout the process that the government has sought to avoid scrutiny by the committees, which have had to chase it or publicly shame it in order to obtain basic information, and originally set a timeline that aimed to conclude the Review's findings before parliamentary committees could feed in their recommendations. This obviously affected the JCNSS, which was not reconstituted until mid-May 2020, mid-way through the Integrated Review's original timescale, and thus would have had no opportunity to comment on process, scope or mandate.

2.5 A review of and strategy for national security should not be considered as a one-off activity but part of an ongoing conversation between people and government on what can maximise their own security, resilience and happiness, as well as that of the wider world. There are many precedents of how this can take place. Mass civic education on societal security has been pursued in, among others, Finland and Austria as part of their strategic approach.[6] Canada also has an encouraging model in its Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security, which is mandated to engage all its diverse communities in a long-term dialogue on security policy.[7] Ireland has also recently put public dialogue at the heart of the development of its first national security strategy.[8]

3. Linkage of funding/resources to national security decisions.

3.1 The resourcing of responses to national security risks that relate to military risks to the integrity or interests of the UK, including from state and non-state actors, appears to be greatly out of proportion to the resources allocated by this and previous governments to tackling other types of risk that are ranked as similarly concerning in the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA).[9] This most acutely applies to the UK's preparedness for a major public health emergency such as the Covid-19 crisis. It also applies glaringly and chronically to the UK's response to the climate and ecological emergency.

3.2 Dr Oliver Scanlan has analysed the UK's financial commitments to military security (MoD budget) and climate security (a range of financing instruments) and concluded that the UK spent the equivalent of just 6.6% of its military budget on climate security measures in 2015/16.[10] This is despite both being assessed as posing risks of catastrophic

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[6] McKeon (2018), pp.27-28.

[7] See Public Safety Canada (undated), *Connecting with Canadian Communities*. https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrt/crss-cltrl-rndtbl/index-en.aspx

[8] O'Keeffe, Cormac (2019), Public asked for views on Ireland's first national security strategy, Irish Examiner, 06 December 2019. https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/public-asked-for-views-on-irelands-first-national-security-strategy-968892.html

[9] See National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015:A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, HM Government, Nov 2015, p.87. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf

[10] Scanlan, Oliver (2018) A Tale of Two Puzzles: Accounting for military and climate change expenditures, ORG Research Paper, *Oxford Research Group*, June 2018. https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=adfeac52-02fd-4b85-

impact to the UK and catastrophic climate change being assessed as of higher likelihood in the longer term. The UK is about average among major global economies in its imbalance of security resourcing, Scanlan suggests. Germany appears to have a significantly more balance approach to resourcing that might be learned from, as do Japan and China to lesser extents.[11]

3.3. While it is hard to evaluate and cross-compare climate and military security spending with data currently available, and Scanlan's figures are from several years ago, it does appear that the imbalance persists. That the Prime Minister has provided very limited new funding for climate security and slashed international development spending, including for upstream conflict prevention, while giving a very significant boost to the MoD's budget in the absence of an updated NSRA or security strategy tends to suggest that there remains no robust linkage between risk assessment and resource allocation in the UK.

3.4 Providing this linkage could be the key role of the NSC and national security machinery in government but it would require the evidence-based political support of the Prime Minister and Chancellor. Recent development of the Integrated Review and its sequencing of financial settlement before risk assessment suggests that this remains far from current practice.

This submission was written for Rethinking Security by Richard Reeve, its Coordinator.

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[11] Ibid, pp.4-5.