

International Development Committee of the House of Commons

Written Submission on

Effectiveness of UK Aid

Submitted by Rethinking Security

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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 interests have been approached in security reviews conducted by the UK and peer states, as well as how the government should be held to account for the formulation and execution of such strategies. 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 questions posed by the Committee in its Call for Evidence:

- How should the national interest be defined, and what weight should it be given, in relation to targeting UK aid?
- Accountability of the 'Government systems and structures' recommended by the Integrated Review (including arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny)

1.2 Defining the national interest as that of the people of the UK, rather than the interest of the state and a narrow elite, is a crucial first step in redefining the UK's approach to security policy. It is also important to extend this 'interest' from that of the nation to that of humanity given the interdependence of people's interests in the UK and overseas.

1.3 The apparent exclusion of DFID as a primary stakeholder in the Integrated Review is troubling. Nor is it clear what type or scale of policy or strategy the Integrated Review is supposed to

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>

develop. The current pause in the Review is an important opportunity to rethink and clarify its remit.

1.4 Parliamentary and public scrutiny of past national security strategies and policies has been poor and significantly constrained by opaque government practise. The current attempt to conduct a strategic review without a constituted Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy is particularly concerning. Citizens at home and overseas also ought to be brought into discussions.

2. How should the national interest be defined, and what weight should it be given, in relation to targeting UK aid?

2.1 National security strategies are public documents that define their government’s ambition for its place in the world. They are best understood as an articulation of a state’s public position, rather than necessarily as an accurate reflection of how it behaves in practice. They are primarily rhetorical public statements with a political purpose, intended to make a persuasive argument for, and convey a positive impression of, the government’s chosen approach. They are instrumental in defining the tone and focus of public and political narratives about security but they do not necessarily convey how that country’s people define or feel about their own security.

2.2 The question of ‘security for whom’ is paramount in national security strategies. While the idea that the security of its people is the first responsibility or interest of the state is oft repeated, most national security strategies are preoccupied with the security of the state itself. In the case of the UK, there is an additional element of exceptionalism in that the 2015 Strategy talks freely of the security of UK “interests”, which, though undefined, are clearly meant more broadly than territory and people. The focus on “prosperity” clearly indicates a preference for economic security with an emphasis on promoting UK businesses and protecting access to markets and global commons.

2.3 For whom security strategies are designed has important ramifications for how security is, or is not, defined. The UK, along with half of other countries surveyed by Rethinking Security, gives no definition or vision of security in its current strategy.³ This matters because a definition can provide the fundamental conceptual clarity essential to any document that purports to be ‘strategic’. In turn, it increases state accountability for the vision of security it is trying to achieve, and its effectiveness in working towards that outcome.

2.4 The proper purpose of a national security strategy should be to maximise the wellbeing and potential of the nation, its citizens and residents. This should include not just the role and responsibility of the state but also of society as a whole since security is a shared responsibility. This is much more usefully seen as a shared responsibility to build ‘positive peace’ - attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful and resilient societies - rather than collective mobilisation against articulated threats.⁴

2.5 In a world of increasingly transnational security challenges – of which pandemic disease and climate breakdown are only the two most currently obvious – states should also consider setting out their vision of both ‘national’ and ‘global’ security. This means understanding and measuring the impact of UK actions on global security, not just the impact of the world on the

³ McKeon (2018), pp.8-9.

⁴ See Visions of Humanity (2017), *An introduction to Positive Peace*, International Institute for Economics and Peace. <http://visionofhumanity.org/introduction-positive-peace/>

UK. It also means applying similar definitions of security in the global context as in the domestic sphere; security at home and stability overseas is unacceptable and unsustainable. Thus, the purpose of the review should be to maximise human security within a global framework of shared security. Prioritising UK security over and at the expense of global security should not be an option.

- 2.6** The definition of Prosperity as one of three core UK national security interests in the 2015 National Security Strategy is of particular concern in regard to the targeting of UK aid, as well as the influence on policy of private commercial interests. We note a rise in recent years in rhetorical commitments that aid should be used as a means to promote access to markets for UK exports. While the economic security of UK residents is certainly a key concern of the state, it should not supersede the imperative to target aid to those in far less secure countries whose needs may be far more immediate than consuming goods or contributing to UK supply chains.

3. Accountability of the ‘Government systems and structures’ recommended by the Integrated Review (including arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny)

DFID as a stakeholder in the Integrated Review and NSC

- 3.1** According to the Secretary of State for Defence, the only four stakeholders in government for the Integrated Review are the FCO, Prime Minister’s Office, Cabinet Office and the MoD.⁵ 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. 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 as a stakeholder?
- 3.2** 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”⁶, as well as Mr Wallace’s statement on stakeholders, suggests that the role of non-stakeholders is simply to plan and implement responses.
- 3.3** The apparent exclusion of DFID from the Integrated Review is of particular concern in the context of questions over the future independence of the Department. Given that the Integrated Review appears to be concerned primarily with UK international policy and influence, it will be unbalanced as long as Development lacks a seat at the table equal to the

⁵ 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>

⁶ 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>

other 2 of 3 'D's, Diplomacy and Defence. We are concerned about this due to the special, world-leading expertise that DFID has in understanding and measuring the impact of conflict, fragility and UK activities across the world as well as in responding to the longer term drivers of conflict through (upstream) conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Parliamentary Scrutiny of National Security Policy

- 3.4** Recent UK national security strategies have been notably lacking in transparency and accountability in relation to Parliament. The role of parliamentary committees is critical to a well-formulated and accountable security strategy. We welcome the activism of the three committees in engaging with the Review. However, there needs to be due time within the process for the government to engage with inquiry findings. This was unlikely under the original February-July timeline and we believe there is now an encouraging opportunity for the government to engage with the findings of this and other inquiries.
- 3.5** It is particularly concerning that the parliamentary committee mandated to scrutinise the National Security Strategy (the JCNSS) is unlikely to be reconstituted until mid-way through the Integrated Review's original timescale and thus would have had no opportunity to comment on process, scope or mandate. The avoidance of consultation or communication with opposition parties that characterised the 2010 and 2015 security reviews should also not be repeated. Any national strategy ought at least to aim for national consensus.
- 3.6** 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.⁷ 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.⁸ Ireland has also recently put public dialogue at the heart of the development of its first national security strategy.⁹
- 3.7** External stakeholders in UK security and international development policy also include people outside the UK. This applies particularly to countries where the UK is active both militarily and as a humanitarian or development actor, or where it defines its own critical 'national' interests. Communities affected by conflict often have the most sustainable solutions for addressing conflict and their views are vital to informing the UK's understanding of what works, including in places where the UK has minimal diplomatic presence.

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

⁷ McKeon (2018), pp.27-28.

⁸ See Public Safety Canada (undated), *Connecting with Canadian Communities*.

<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrtr/crss-cltrl-rndtbl/index-en.aspx>

⁹ 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>