

# Written evidence from the Royal Aeronautical Society (NSS0006)

## 1. Executive Summary

- The NSS and SDSR 2015 aims to correct some of the more serious capability gaps created by the 2010 Review and enhances areas that required growth, particularly intelligence provision, which is key to contingency planning and response.
- The Government rightly broadens the definition of 'national security' to encompass the full suite of national threats but this should not result in a rigid prioritisation of force personnel involvement in domestic emergency response over overseas front-line operations.
- The NSS and SDSR 2015 rightly places greater emphasis on cross-Departmental operations and response to deal with a comprehensive range of domestic and international threats and challenges.
- The NSS and SDSR 2015 does not sufficiently explain nor explore how identified threats will alter over time and what impacts these will have on operations, and current and existing future capability. Against the backdrop of changing threat situations, regular interpretation of the Strategy is required, and more frequently than at five-year intervals when the Strategies are formally updated.
- The biggest threat to the implementation of SDSR 2015, the realisation of NSS 2015 ambitions and maintaining the balance of the current defence model is the planned sharp fall in Civil Service personnel employed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), as well as reductions in other Departments.
- Industry might need to expand its capability to cover areas of work traditionally performed by the Civil Service and the absence of an up-to-date Defence Industrial Strategy to accompany SDSR 2015 could be a critical weakness to implementation of Joint Force 2025.
- The NSS and SDSR 2015 does not resolve the tension between UK ambition to be globally influential and a limited budget. Regardless of commitments to increase defence spending, this is assuming a certain level of national economic performance that could be downgraded in the face of current economic headwinds and uncertainty.

1.1 The Society would be pleased to provide verbal evidence to the Committee on the issues raised here.

## 2. About the Royal Aeronautical Society

2.1 The Royal Aeronautical Society (the Society) is the world's only professional body dedicated to the entire aerospace community. Established in 1866 to further the art, science and engineering of aeronautics, the Society has been at the forefront of developments in aerospace ever since. The Society seeks to: i) promote the highest possible standards in aerospace disciplines; ii) provide specialist information and act as a central forum for the exchange of ideas; and iii) play a leading role in influencing opinion on aerospace matters.

## 3. Whether the NSS & SDSR 2015 is a practical guide to investment choices across Government Departments, to operational priorities and to crisis response

3.1 The NSS & SDSR 2015 provides a guide to the principles and practice of national defence and security under this Government, and is an important corrective to some of the more serious capability gaps created by the 2010 Review, most notably in Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA), and enhances areas which required growth, especially intelligence provision. It offers sufficient detailed direction for individual departments to recognise where they are already responsible for implementation and to allocate resource accordingly.

However, SDSR 2015 places greater emphasis on cross-Departmental effort. Where activities cut across more than one department, programme boards will need to agree with the National Security Council (NSC) the details of delivery plans in order to minimise the risk of duplication and to maximise efficient and cost-effective implementation.

- 3.2 Improvements to the decision-making architecture and unity of effort, gradually implemented with initiatives like the establishment of the NSC, the establishment of Joint Forces Command, the direct responsibility of the single-service chiefs for their respective HQs, and the reformation of inefficient defence procurement have gone some way to achieving better investment choices across Government.
- 3.3 Some specific cross-Government funds were created in SDSR 2015 to support a cross-Departmental approach to delivery, specifically addressing cross-Government threats, such as terrorism and cyber-crime. These include the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and the Joint Security Fund (JSF). The latter will amount to £1.5 billion a year by 2020 to fund newly announced investments in special forces and unmanned aerial vehicles, as well as cyber-security and counter-terrorism.
- 3.4 Despite an increase to priority capital and operational budgets, Departments are required to continue to make large scale savings. Pay restraint, reducing the number of civilians employed by up to 30 per cent, ending military commitment bonuses, and reducing travel expenditure and professional fees are all part of the plan to cut costs. The plan requires that the MoD makes savings of £11.5bn, although as yet details of how this will be achieved are not in the public domain. HM Treasury (HMT) has confirmed that it will allow the MoD to reinvest the proceeds of its cost savings, which creates incentives for the most cost-effective investment choices. This is necessary because the only new money available to fund planned new capability, in addition to the £500 million increase in the annual defence budget, will need to be funded from savings. That said, the challenge that the MoD faces to meet the assumed SDSR 2015 savings means that any further savings are likely to be marginal at best.
- 3.5 The Society is concerned that the MoD does not have a distant enough horizon – currently 2025 – on which to be planning new capability, given the long-lead times for delivery. Any large scale capability required for 2030 should already be in development.
- 3.6 The Government's threat analysis and response plans provide a snapshot of the world as it is today. However, it does not explain how these threats are likely to change over time and at what speed, and what interdependent effects they will have on other situations and priorities. The NSS and SDSR 2015 will require constant interpretation against the backdrop of continuously changing situations, and even unplanned threats, and responses prioritised accordingly. It does not seem wise only to do that at five-year intervals; there is a need for a more frequent review and a more flexible re-prioritisation process.

#### **4. How the NSS & SDSR 2015 address risk and contingency planning**

- 4.1 In an increasingly dangerous security environment, the UK will require flexible interoperable capabilities of sufficient capacity and depth that are able to respond to the terrorist threat, for example, whilst continuing to meet our international obligations of collective security to our allies in NATO and the EU. Key to risk mitigation and vital for timely contingency response will be intelligence provision.
- 4.2 The NSS and SDSR 2015 set out a range of ambitions for the procurement of new capability and equipment, but as it is increasingly evident that all new capability announced in SDSR 2015 will need to be funded from the £11.5 billion of savings, it is clear that little new equipment will be delivered within the life of the SDSR 2015 review period. While Future Force 2025 strategy appears less hollowed out than its predecessor Future Force 2020, the UK will remain vulnerable in the short to medium term particularly in areas such as Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) capability and through the delayed upgrade of Sentry E-3D capability until 2020.

4.3 The delivery of NSS & SDSR 2015, and the attainment of the minimum NATO target of 2 per cent of GDP on defence, are dependent on what could now be overly-optimistic economic assumptions that the UK will grow at an average of 2.4 per cent per annum over the next five years. With economic headwinds such as the Chinese economic slowdown and the uncertainty of the outcome of the European Union referendum in June, and if downgraded economic growth forecasts become a reality over the next five years, there is a possibility that programmes might need to be delayed, potentially well beyond the next Parliament, unless more funds are made available. It should be noted that it is not completely transparent how the NATO minimum 2 per cent of GDP figure is being constructed.

4.4 One of the biggest threats to the successful delivery of the Government defence and security ambitions is the very small increase in military personnel afforded to both the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Royal Navy (RN). The main elements of saving that HMT is seeking is planned to come from a further sharp fall in Civil Service personnel directly employed by the MoD. We consider that, following the near 30 per cent cuts to MoD civilian staff since 2010, removing another 30 per cent will be unachievable without damaging the balance of the current defence model. The announcement of new equipment and cross-Government units would traditionally have required a net increase in the number of personnel required, though we consider that the small number (400) of additional personnel for the RN is insufficient if the service is to provide what is required of it. Although SDSR 2015 identifies uplifts in some areas, there are also significant reductions in headcount in others, potentially leaving forces hollowed out and easily over-extended depending on the number and nature of threats and the responses required.

## **5. Whether the NSS & SDSR 2015 defines "national security" in sufficiently broad terms and achieves an appropriate balance between military, economic and environmental risks**

5.1 The NSS & SDSR 2015 continues the move away from a traditional defence force to incorporate a comprehensive range of domestic and international defence and security issues, including flood risk management, organised crime, the space environment and national prosperity. National security threat mitigation is focused more heavily on data and intelligence analysis, hence the allocation of additional funds for the security and intelligence services, to provide early warnings. The response, coordinated through the NSC, appears to also follow a more co-ordinated and comprehensive approach.

5.2 However, with limited increases in military personnel – in the case of the Army there will be no uplift in numbers – there is a risk that the broader definition will expect more for less from defence personnel and will leave the armed forces stretched if they are helping with domestic emergencies that would not have otherwise been regarded as priority in comparison with front line operations.

5.3 Due to the changing threat landscape since 2010, particularly the growing threat from international terrorist groups on domestic society, the UK military will now be expected to contribute up to 10,000 personnel to help with the management of domestic security crises – effectively doubling the previous requirements to somewhere in line with the French deployment in response to the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015. In this case, the NSC must regularly balance and rebalance response relative to resource available at any given time and difficult decision might have to be made.

## **6. Whether the military voice is sufficiently represented**

6.1 Military capability received a much needed boost in the NSS & SDSR 2015 following the creation of strategic and operational gaps by the 2010 Review. Strategic emphasis was rightly placed on air (and maritime) power, particularly on aerial strike and reconnaissance for use against terrorist and re-emerging conventional threats identified within NSS and SDSR 2015, including two additional Typhoon squadrons of 12 aircraft each, the accelerated delivery of 42 F-35s for the RAF and Fleet Air Arm by 2023/24, which will primarily be used on the new Queen Elizabeth II (QE2) Class Aircraft Carriers. In addition, the majority, although not all existing, C-130J Hercules are to be retained mainly for use by special forces. The commitment to the purchase of nine Poseidon P8 Maritime Patrol aircraft is a very welcome military development, as MPA is an

essential complement to the operation of the future carrier-strike force, the ability to search for would-be aggressor submarines off UK shores and to underpin the covert deployment of a Successor-deterrent.

6.2 While it is clear that the military voice has been heard in respect of capability, there are serious concerns about personnel levels, detailed above, which have not been fully addressed. Indeed, not all planned savings have yet been identified by the MoD.

## **7. The implications of merging the National Security Strategy with the Strategic Defence and Security Review**

7.1 The NSS and SDSR should be distinct, but linked, entities – the former setting the strategic ambition based on an assessment of the changing security environment over the long term and the latter proposing how to implement it over the five-year period of the Review. The UK's defence and security ambitions must be affordable, and the NSS and SDSR 2015 does reasonably well at balancing affordability with strategy, ambition and capability, which has resolved the most significant problems with NSS & SDSR 2010; however, the mix of a rapidly changing security environment and a downturn in national economic performance could undermine the equilibrium.

## **8. The extent to which the NSS & SDSR 2015 is founded on a realistic assessment of the UK's future goals, position in the world and uncertain future relationships with international organisations and nation states**

8.1 Since the NSS and SDSR 2010, the UK has exercised a reduced role in the world principally due to budget cuts, and political reluctance to provide UK 'boots on the ground'. The end of operations in Afghanistan in 2014, the initial refusal to engage in Syria in 2013 and the absence from the Ukraine crisis, all gave the UK's international partners, particularly the US, the impression that the UK wished to take a step back from the world. The UK's involvement in the 2011 Libyan air campaign is a notable exception, even if not fully sustained.

8.2 In response to these perceptions of decline, the Government placed considerable emphasis on the UK achieving the NATO 2 per cent target, as well as the UN 0.7 per cent international aid spending target, and set out a more assertive role for the UK in the NSS and SDSR 2015. A deteriorating security environment added considerably to the pressure to act.

8.3 The UK still aims to maintain global influence. Indeed, SDSR 2015 reflects a more assertive and less isolationist nation. However, the UK continues to wrestle with the predicament of funding the achievement of its national security ambitions and its desire to be at the centre of key international partnerships. It is not clear whether the UK can achieve the types of global ambitions the NSS aspires to with a limited budget, which is inextricably dependent on potentially variable economic performance, and the targeted £11.5 billion of savings, of which the main effort will be focused on Civil Service-based personnel numbers. There is a high probability of UK involvement in contingency operations similar to that of Libya 2011, but involvement could be undermined by disinvestment in various parts of the world without more thought put into the viability of the sustainment of such operations.

## **9. Whether the links between domestic security and international security are sufficiently developed in the NSS & SDSR 2015**

9.1 Analysing current and future threats, the NSS & SDSR 2015 reflects an understanding that security threats have little respect for national boundaries, particularly in relation to the terrorist and cyber-crime threat.

9.2 Pertinent to anti-terrorism efforts, at home and abroad, has been the decision to double spending on UK special forces equipment over the next decade.

## **10. How the UK NSS & SDR 2015 compares with similar strategies in other countries, notably the United States and France**

- 10.1 There is an inherent risk in comparing the UK NSS & SDR 2015 directly with strategies of other countries. Often the UK is not seeking to replicate ambition, strategy and capability directly. In the case of the US, its strategic ambition (tilted more towards the Pacific of late in which the UK has less direct interest in having a presence), capability and budget is significantly larger in scale than those of the UK. It is more worthwhile to look at how the UK fits in with these strategies, which the NSS & SDR 2015 does consider. For instance, the realisation of the UK's ambition to project power is dependent in many respects on US strategy and capability.
- 10.2 Some pivotal capabilities do define UK credibility in the eyes of the US – particularly the nuclear deterrent and carrier strike capability. Should the UK have run down its capability any further, or should it not deliver on SDR 2015 commitments to prioritise and increase our key capabilities, the UK's relationship with the US would be in jeopardy. Our intelligence relationship would have been affected if we had dispensed with Trident replacement.
- 10.3 Maintaining the vibrancy of the enhanced relationship with France is to the UK's benefit, especially in relation to security threats emanating from North Africa and east of Europe's borders. Indeed, it is necessary to separate intra-European issues and expeditionary activity beyond its borders, and on the latter in particular the UK is in reasonable alignment with France.
- 10.4 There is one significant deficiency with the NSS & SDR 2015 in that it fails to cover in sufficient detail the joint French and RAF programme for an unmanned Future Combat Air System (FCAS) that could in time replace the current generation of European fighters by 2030, potentially providing the UK and France with the most advanced vehicle of its kind in Europe.
- 10.5 It is also worth stating at this point that in an extremely fluid strategic context, reinvesting in NATO by all partners is back on the agenda, hence the strenuous efforts by the UK to address this situation after having disinvested in many NATO posts, especially NATO South.

## **11. Whether Joint Force 2025 will meet the strategic requirements set out in the NSS & SDR 2015**

- 11.1 Future Force 2020, the previous incarnation of Joint Force 2025, was designed to be implemented over a ten-year period, so it is rational to see the original objective through to completion. Future Force 2020 was, however, still to be fully funded and there will be challenges to achieving Joint Force 2025 depending on the successful delivery of planned procurement programmes, such as the purchase in due course of all 138 F-35s.
- 11.2 Unlike the 2010 NSS & SDR, which significantly reduced military personnel numbers, the 2015 iteration pledged to maintain British Army numbers at the current 82,000 level, and the size of the RN and RAF are set to increase slightly. However, as detailed above, civilian staff will be cut significantly, especially within the MoD, placing pressure on the achievement of the Whole Force approach, unless SDR 2015 is implemented in conjunction with a coherent industrial strategy to ensure that industry expands its capability to cover areas of work previously performed by the Civil Service. The absence of an up-to-date Defence Industrial Strategy to accompany SDR 2015 could therefore be a critical weakness to implementation of Joint Force 2025.

---

**14 March 2016**