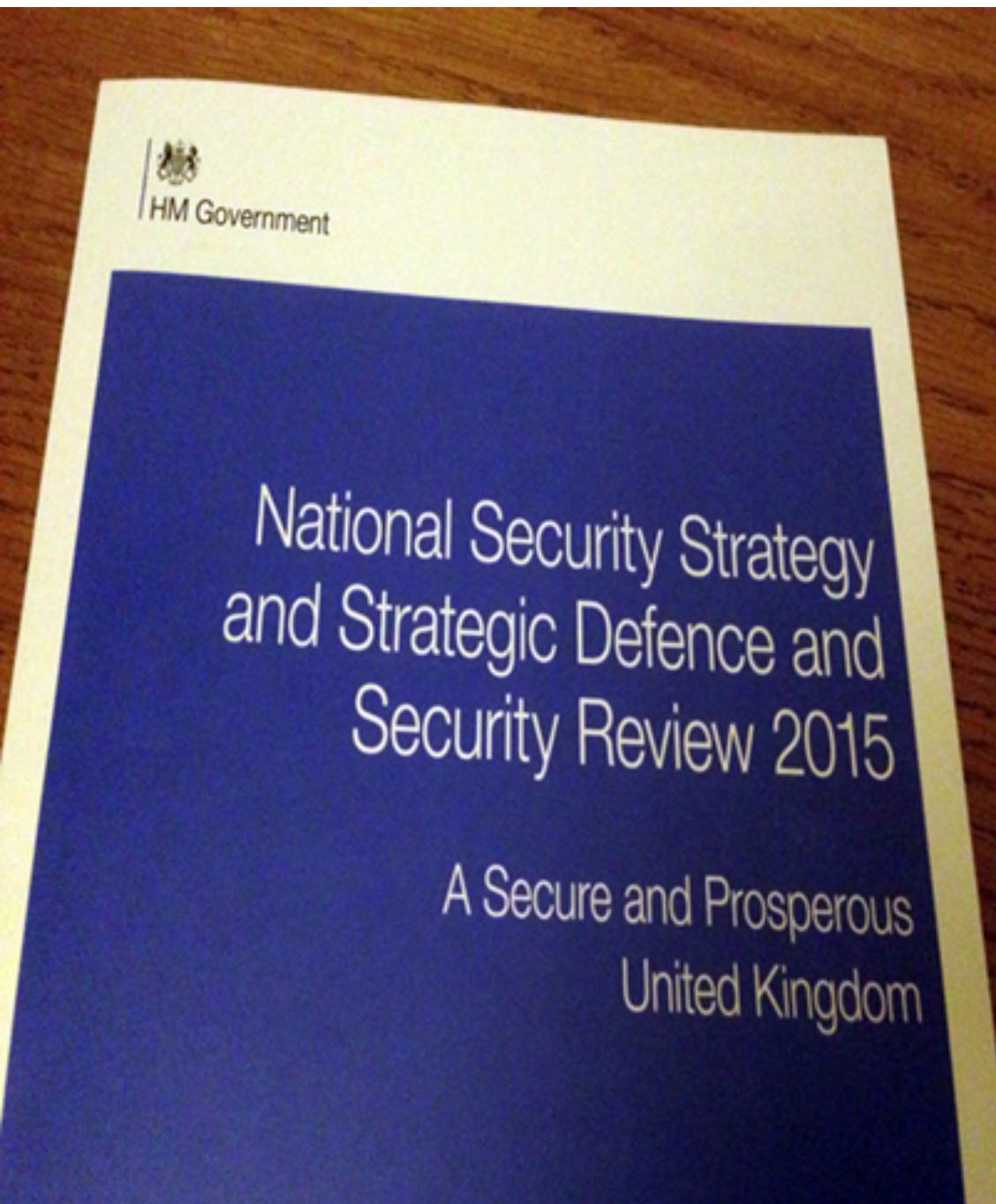# The 2015 UK National Security Strategy

By Jon Lunn and Eleanor Scarnell

Inside:
1. **Overview of the 2015 UK strategy**
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National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015

A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom

HM Government

Contents

Summary

The Commons Library has published a briefing which looks at the 2015 UK National Security Strategy (NSS). Published on 23 November, the NSS is incorporated into a single document with the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). The focus here is on the overarching strategy, rather than on the specific policies or capabilities that flow from this framework.

Overview of the 2015 strategy

This is a strategy in which three threats to the UK are highlighted: Russia, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and cyber.

The overarching strategy has been distilled into three "National Security Objectives":

- Protect our people

- Project our global influence

- Promote our prosperity

The strategy sets out four main challenges which "are likely to drive UK security priorities for the coming decade":

- The increasing threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability
- The resurgence of state-based threats; and intensifying wider state competition
- The impact of technology, especially cyber threats; and wider technological developments
- The erosion of the rules-based international order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats

The strategy also sets out a number of other risks "which remain important and need to be addressed": civil emergencies; major natural disasters overseas; energy security; the global economy; and climate change and resource scarcity.

An Annex summarises the 2015 National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) which has shaped the new strategy. This assessment places the domestic and overseas risks faced by the UK into three tiers, "according to judgement of both likelihood and impact".

Comparing the 2015 strategy with its 2010 predecessor

The most obvious difference between the two strategies is that fact that, whereas the NSS and SDSR were two separate documents in 2010, in 2015 they have been combined. This alone suggests that there is better integration between the overarching strategy and the specific policies and capabilities that flow from it than there was in 2010.

In terms of their risk assessments, there are many overlaps between the 2010 and 2015 strategy documents. Given that they were published only five years apart, it would be surprising if there were not. But there are a larger number of Tier One and Tier Two risks in the 2015 NSRA than there were in its 2010 counterpart.

Specifically, the 2015 NSRA gives greater weight in Tier One to non-state actors in international military conflict and introduces a wholly new heading, "instability overseas". This heading was in Tier Two in 2010. In addition, two Tier One risks that were combined in the 2010 NSRA, "public health" and "major natural hazards", have been given their own headings in the 2015 update.

There are also more Tier Two risks in the 2015 version than there were in 2010. There has been relatively little change between 2010 and 2015 in terms of Tier Three risks. Neither the 2010 nor 2015 risk assessments deploy the phrase 'climate change'.

Initial reaction to the 2015 strategy

Initial reaction to the 2015 UK strategy document has focused overwhelmingly on the specific policies and capabilities flowing from the overarching strategy. Indeed, the entire exercise has quickly come to be known publicly simply as the SDSR.

For some, the apparent semi-eclipse of the 2015 UK NSS could be interpreted as reflecting a sense that the overarching strategy agreed in 2010 has merely been 'refreshed', rather than transformed. For others, it might also flow from a feeling that, having invested considerable energy in debating what strategy is 'for' between 2010 and 2015, many politicians and commentators have decided that few solid conclusions arose out of that debate.

Critics have argued in the past that the British just don't 'do' strategy.

Comparing the 2015 UK strategy with other strategies

Debate has long raged about what a strategy is 'for', who should do it and what one should look like. Rather than rehearse these arguments again in this briefing, instead we explore the different approaches that can be taken by undertaking a brief comparison of the 2015 UK strategy document with two other important strategy documents that have been published in the last year or so:

- Global Strategic Trends – out to 2045, published in June 2014 by the UK Ministry of Defence
- The US Government's National Security Strategy, published in February 2015

In doing so, we also compare how the three documents address the 'threats and opportunities' posed by two very important countries: Russia and China. There is widespread consensus in security and intelligence circles that Russia and China raise important questions for the national security of Western countries, including the UK. But there is less consensus over the level of threat that they pose. Concern has been expressed in some quarters that, while suitably cautious about Russia, the UK today seems excessively inclined to give China the 'benefit of the doubt'.

Global Strategic Trends and the 2015 UK strategy

We find that the context and purpose of the two documents is clearly different. The second is an official policy document while the first is not. At the same time, it would be a mistake to view them as unconnected. Global Strategic Trends was one of the main contributions to the policy-making process that culminated in the 2015 UK strategy. Global Strategic Trends also has more to say than the 2015 UK strategy about its methodology.

One issue on which there is considerable overlap between the two documents is climate change; it features regularly as a risk factor in both but is not given headline status in either.

While avoiding any sense that Russia is destined only to be a threat, both documents are relatively pessimistic in emphasis about the country. The emphasis on China is predominantly positive.

For example, Global Strategic Trends does not discuss the issue of Chinese involvement in the building and running of the UK's critical national infrastructure. The 2015 UK strategy

document does briefly refer to China as a security risk in relation to its prospective involvement in the building of the new Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, but it is quick to reassure that appropriate steps have been taken to mitigate the risk.

Global Strategic Trends does not mention China at any point when talking about cybersecurity threats. The 2015 UK strategy document mentions China and cybersecurity once in the same paragraph, but it does so only to emphasise the improving cooperation on the issue between the two countries.

In neither document is there reference to implications arising from possible political or security crises within China during this period. The word 'Tibet' does not feature in either document; Xinjiang features in Global Strategic Trends but only in the context of Uighur terrorism.

The 2015 UK strategy and the 2015 US National Security Strategy

Like the UK, the US government publishes a NSS every five years. However, while there are certainly similarities, there are important differences between their respective 2015 strategies. Overall, the 2015 UK strategy document goes into much greater detail than its US counterpart and the UK's overarching strategy is linked within the document to a range of specific policies and capabilities.

Unlike the UK strategy, its US counterpart places "national interests" at its heart, carrying these over unchanged from its 2010 incarnation.

The US strategy also identifies eight "top strategic risks" to the country's interests. While there is plenty of overlap between the 2015 US and UK strategies in terms of the risks they identify, the latter goes into greater detail by setting out three tiers of risk.

There are other differences too: unlike the UK strategy, the US strategy does not explicitly feature cyber as a 'top risk'; on the other hand, the US strategy does feature climate change as a 'top risk', whereas the UK document does not use the phrase in any of its three tiers.

On Russia, there are plenty of points in common between the 2015 UK and US strategies. Both frame the country primarily as a major risk to their security. On China, the tone of the US strategy is less sharp than it is on Russia; nonetheless, it is considerably sharper than that found in the UK strategy.

An explanation put forward for this apparent divergence between the UK and US strategies over China is US determination to protect its current position as the world's only superpower-- a status which only China is likely to threaten over the years ahead. The UK, it has been argued, is in a "different strategic situation", preoccupied as it is mainly with deepening economic ties with China. However, some observers feel that the UK could face tough choices in future if relations between the US and China were to deteriorate seriously.

1. Overview of the 2015 UK strategy

The 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) is incorporated into a single document with the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). Henceforth, this document will be described as the '2015 UK strategy document' (or variations on this theme).

The document was published on 23 November 2015.[1]

The overarching strategy is primarily articulated in chapters 1-3 of the document, where it is distilled into three "National Security Objectives":

- Protect our people
- Project our global influence
- Promote our prosperity

An Annex to the document summarises the 2015 National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) which has shaped the new strategy.

Chapters 4-6 then describe the Government's "detailed strategy" through which each of these objectives will be met. They set out "the policies which we will pursue, and the capabilities in which we will invest."[2]

Finally, chapter 7 sets out how the strategy will be implemented.

Because the focus of this briefing is on the overarching strategy (the ends) rather than the specific policies and capabilities flowing from it (the ways and means), our attention in this briefing is mainly on chapters 1-3, along with the Annex summarising the outcome of the 2015 NSRA.[3]

However, we do also look briefly at chapter 7 before ending with some observations about how the 2015 document compares with the 2010 version.

Chapter 1 – "Our vision, values and approach"[4]

This chapter describes the vision, values and approach underpinning the 2015 strategy. It says that:

> Our vision is for a secure and prosperous United Kingdom, with global reach and influence.

One document but two interlinked elements: the 'overarching strategy;' and the 'policies and capabilities' that flow from it.

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[1]   National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015

[2]   Ibid., p12. The "detailed strategy" element of the 2015 strategy document will be discussed in a separate Library briefing to be published in the near future. In the meantime, several other briefings may be useful: The 2015 SDSR: a primer, 19 November 2015; A brief guide to previous British defence reviews, 19 November 2015; The 2015 SDSR: a reading list, 5 November 2015; Replacing the UK's Trident Nuclear Deterrent, 26 October 2015

[3]   This distinction between ends, ways and means was highlighted in the 2010 NSS. See A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy, Cm 7953, October 2010, paras 0.14-0.15

[4]   National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, pp11-12

It identifies nine priorities for the next five years. They are summarised below:

- Tackling terrorism "head on at home and abroad"
- Countering extremism, "including the poisonous ideologies that feed it"
- Remaining a "world leader in cyber security"
- Deterring "state-based threats"
- Responding to crises "rapidly and effectively"
- Strengthening the "rules-based international order and its institutions"
- Working with partners to reduce conflict
- Promoting "stability, good governance and human rights"
- Promoting the UK's prosperity

The chapter then sets out the UK's three "National Security Objectives". Under each objective, some of the key policy and capability decisions are briefly described. One example for each objective is provided below:

> National Security Objective 1 is to **protect our people** – at home, in our Overseas Territories and abroad, and to protect our territory, economic security, infrastructure and way of life.
>
> We have chosen to:
>
> Meet the NATO pledge to spend 2% of our GDP on defence in every year of this Parliament, guarantee a real increase in the defence budget every year of this Parliament, and create a Joint Security Fund which will grow to £1.5 billion by the end of this Parliament.
>
> National Security Objective 2 is to **project our global influence** – reducing the likelihood of threats materialising and affecting the UK, our interests, and those of our allies and partners.
>
> We have chosen to:
>
> Spend 0.7% of GNI on Official Development Assistance, which we have enshrined in law, and to make a new commitment to invest at least 50% of the Department for International Development's budget in fragile states and regions.
>
> National Security Objective 3 is to **promote our prosperity** – seizing opportunities, working innovatively and supporting UK industry.
>
> We have chosen to:
>
> Champion an open and rules-based international trading environment, to build sustainable global prosperity.

Chapter 2 – "The UK: strong, influential, global"[5]

This chapter briefly describes the UK's role in the world, focusing entirely on its strengths and assets.

It asserts that the UK has one of the "fastest growing developed economies" and adds that its armed forces and security and intelligence agencies are:

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[5] National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, pp13-14

respected around the world for their capability, agility, reach and ability to fight and work alongside our close allies.

It also hails the UK's "position as the world's leading soft power", emphasising the fact that the country is the second largest bilateral aid donor in the world, as well as its prowess in the "media, sports and arts", and in "science, technology, medicine, energy and the creative industries". It ends by extolling the range and depth of the UK's relationships with other countries, including with "growing powers" like China and India, and its role within "the rules-based international order".

UK strengths and assets: a fast growing economy; respected armed and security services; the world's leading soft power

Chapter 3 – "The National Security Context"[6]

This chapter is the analytical heart of the 2015 UK NSS. It places the UK within a changing national security context and then draws out the main "future implications" of these changes for its national security.

The chapter sets out four main challenges which "are likely to drive UK security priorities for the coming decade". It goes on to describe a range of other "continuing risks", which remain important.

Each of these is described below.

"The increasing threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability"

The main emphasis here is on the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the wide range of methods of attack that it and other Islamist terrorist groups deploy. There is reference to the way in which they use the Internet and social media to disseminate "sophisticated online propaganda".

ISIL the main threat – but instability has multiple causes

The continuing threat of Northern Ireland related terrorism also receives a mention.

Under the broad heading "impact of instability", the narrative briefly lists some of the factors (for example, social inequality and exclusion and climate change) that generate it and its multiple impacts, including:

- Humanitarian crises
- Mass migration and human trafficking
- Exploitation of weak governments by terrorists and criminals

The threat of money laundering through the City of London is also discussed.

Finally, there is an account of the growing risks to health security, citing the Ebola outbreak and rising Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).

"The resurgence of state-based threats; and intensifying wider state competition"

Russia's recent behaviour (for example, the annexation of Crimea and support to separatists in eastern Ukraine) and its programme of military

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[6]   National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, pp15-22

modernisation are given as the main reasons for this now being one of the main security challenges faced by the UK. However, reference is also made to the threat posed by the operations of foreign intelligence services, including through cyberattacks.

The narrative also mentions intensifying state competition in the Middle East and North Africa and in South and Southeast Asia.

North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is specifically cited as a major concern.

"The impact of technology, especially cyber threats; and wider technological developments"

Here the emphasis is strongly on cyber. It is asserted that the range of cyber actors has grown, with more states involved as well as non-state actors, including terrorists and criminals.

However, reference is also made to potential threats from "advances in medical technology, genetic engineering, biotechnology, materials science, big data and robotics."

Finally, there is brief mention of growing congestion and inter-state competition in space.

"The erosion of the rules-based international order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats"

Describing the UK as a champion of a rules-based order, the narrative paints a picture in which economic power is shifting to the south and east of the world and where the international order needs to adapt so that it reflects "the contribution of growing powers."

There is also an emphasis on the way in which "some powerful states and non-state actors […] are increasingly ignoring international norms that they believe run contrary to their interests, or favour the West."

Examples given include "Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, Assad's use of chemical weapons, and […] non-state actors' compliance with international humanitarian law".
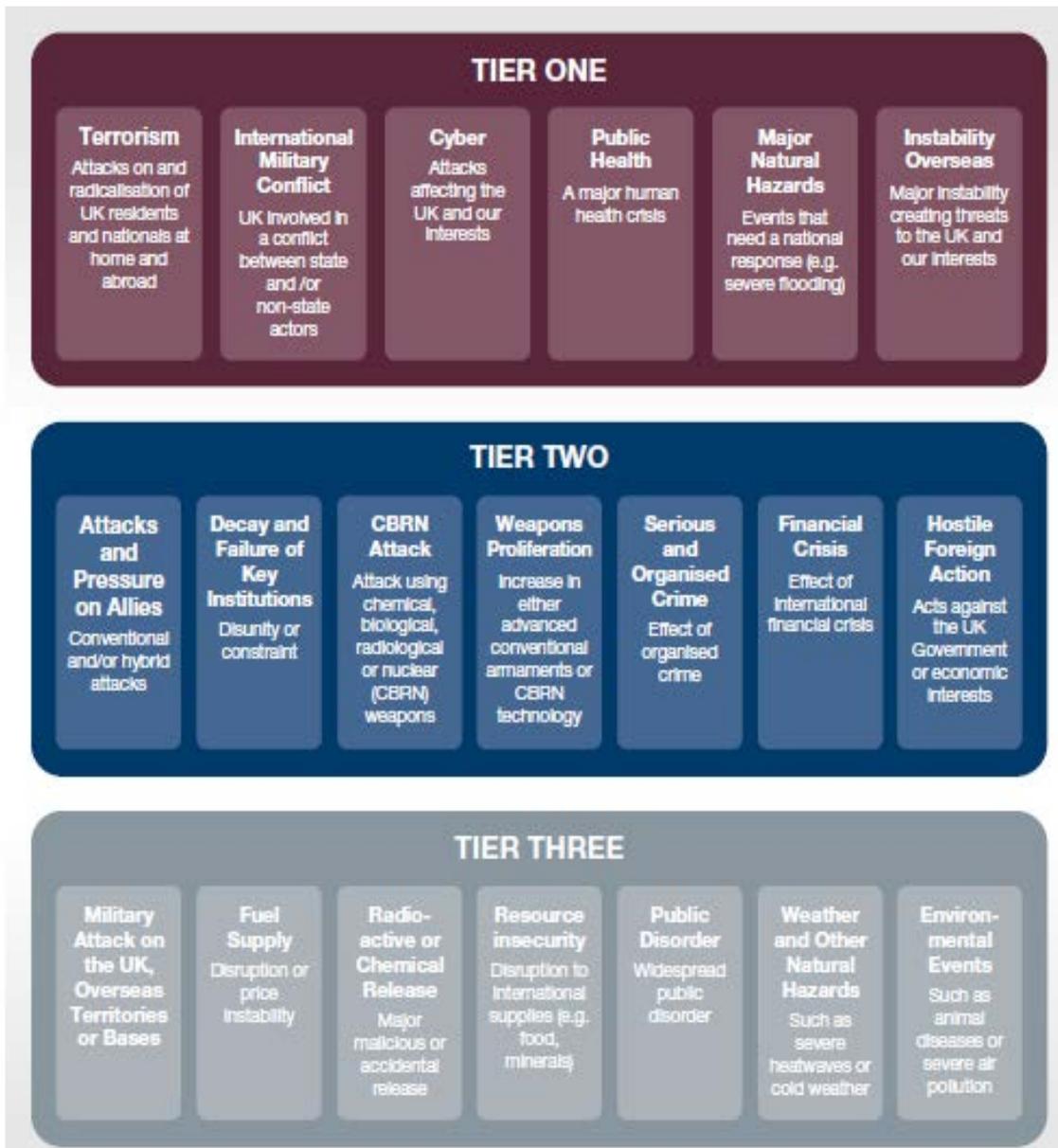
"Continuing risks"

The chapter ends by setting out a range of other risks "which remain important and need to be addressed". They are:

- Civil emergencies
- Major natural disasters overseas
- Energy security
- The global economy
- Climate change and resource scarcity

The National Security Risk Assessment 2015[7]

As we have seen, the NSRA features prominently at the start of chapter 3. It underpins the analysis offered there of the changing national security context. In its summary of the 2015 NSRA, the strategy document says that it "places the domestic and overseas risks we face into three tiers, according to judgement of both likelihood and impact", adding: "This is not, therefore a simple ranking of their importance."

TIER ONE

Terrorism	International Military Conflict	Cyber	Public Health	Major Natural Hazards	Instability Overseas
Attacks on and radicalisation of UK residents and nationals at home and abroad	UK involved in a conflict between state and /or non-state actors	Attacks affecting the UK and our interests	A major human health crisis	Events that need a national response (e.g. severe flooding)	Major instability creating threats to the UK and our interests

TIER TWO

Attacks and Pressure on Allies	Decay and Failure of Key Institutions	CBRN Attack	Weapons Proliferation	Serious and Organised Crime	Financial Crisis	Hostile Foreign Action
Conventional and/or hybrid attacks	Disunity or constraint	Attack using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weapons	Increase in either advanced conventional armaments or CBRN technology	Effect of organised crime	Effect of international financial crisis	Acts against the UK Government or economic interests

TIER THREE

Military Attack on the UK, Overseas Territories or Bases	Fuel Supply	Radio-active or Chemical Release	Resource insecurity	Public Disorder	Weather and Other Natural Hazards	Environ-mental Events
	Disruption or price instability	Major malicious or accidental release	Disruption to international supplies (e.g. food, minerals)	Widespread public disorder	Such as severe heatwaves or cold weather	Such as animal diseases or severe air pollution

The Annex also identifies "aspects of the Tier One and Tier Two risks" that "may become even more likely and/or have a greater impact over the longer term":

- Antimicrobial Resistance.

- A range of cyber related threats.

- Chemical and biological attacks against the UK or its forces.

7   National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, pp85-87

- Pressure on allies or undermining of our military and economic alliances and institutions.

- Emerging infectious diseases.

- Serious and organised crime, e.g. human trafficking.

- Proliferation: acquisition of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and advanced conventional weapons by state and non-state actors.

Chapter 7 —"Implementation and Reform" [8]

The 2015 document does not propose major reforms to the implementation, accountability and reporting processes that operated between 2010 and 2015. One change is the establishment of a new committee of the National Security Council (NSC), chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Oliver Letwin, to oversee implementation of the strategy. Reviews of how the NSC and the Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR) are supported during crises and of the "structure for strategic assessment within central government" were also announced.

A number of "new issue-focused cross government teams to remove duplication, consolidate national security expertise and make the most efficient use of it across government" are to be created. They are:

- A Euro-Atlantic Security Policy Unit, hosted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)
- An International Counter-Terrorism Strategy Unit, hosted by the Home Office
- An Arms Control and Counter-Proliferation Centre, hosted by the Ministry of Defence (MOD)
- An Export Controls Unit, hosted by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- A Gulf Strategy Unit, hosted by the Cabinet Office
- A UN Peacekeeping Unit, hosted by the FCO
- A single provider of National Security Vetting Services

A "virtual National Security Academy" will also be established, to act as a "hub" for sharing, developing and maintaining "critical knowledge and skills across the national security community".

Finally, the document claims that the Government has "ensured that this strategy is fully aligned with available resources", referring to over £11 billion of savings from the MOD, security and intelligence services and cross-government counter-terrorism spending that will be re-invested in the UK's "national security priorities".

A new NSC committee to improve implementation and initiatives to consolidate national security expertise.

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[8]   National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, pp81-84

1.1 Comparing the 2010 and 2015 strategy documents: brief observations

Greater clarity and coherence in 2015?

A few brief observations can be made.[9]

The most obvious difference between the two strategies is the fact that, whereas the NSS and SDSR were two separate documents in 2010, in 2015 they have been combined.[10] It has been claimed that the intention was to publish a single document in 2010 too, but this idea was abandoned because the two parts did not fit together as well as hoped.[11]

This suggests that there is better integration between the overarching strategy and specific policy- and capability-related actions than there was in 2010.

Despite this, discussion of the 2015 document since it was published has been conducted almost entirely in terms of policies and capabilities (the SDSR element). There was more discussion of the NSS in 2010 than this time around, although even then the SDSR received greater attention.

It does appear that the 2015 strategy document is more convincingly a 'whole-of-government' document than were its two 2010 counterparts. Another indication of this is the fact that the Treasury and the Department for International Development (DFID) published a new aid strategy document on the same date that the 2015 strategy document was published. In the run-up to the publication of the 2015 document, it became clear that UK Overseas Development Assistance will be placed increasingly at the disposal of the Government's wider pursuit of the "national interest" during this parliament.[12]

UK aid to serve the "national interest" over the next five years

Overall, it seems fair to say that the 2015 strategy document is leaner than its 2010 counterparts. It has less to say about the methodology used. The 2015 document has also dropped entirely the extensive discussion found in the 2010 documents of eight "cross-cutting National Security Tasks", along with supporting "detailed planning guidelines", which were described there as "the ways in which we will act to achieve our objectives".[13] Having said that, there are strong

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9   For more on the 2010 NSS and SDSR, see House of Commons Library briefing RP 11/10, "UK defence and security policy: a new approach?", 21 January 2011. Jane's published a brief comparison article soon after the 2015 strategy document was published. See: "SDSR 2015: Analysis offers perspectives on SDSR emphasis", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 25 November 2015

10   A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy, Cm 7953, October 2010; Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review, Cm 7948, October 2010. These documents together amounted to 113 pages, while the 2015 strategy document is 94 pages long.

11   M. Clarke, "Preliminary RUSI briefing: The National Security Strategy 2010", 18 October 2010

12   UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest, Cm 9163, 23 November 2015

13   Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review, Cm 7948, October 2010, pp9-12

echoes of all of the issues raised by these tasks (for example, "tackle at root the causes of instability", or "exert influence to exploit opportunities and manage risks") in the 2015 document.

Continuity and change in the 2010 and 2015 risk assessments

In terms of their risk assessments, there are many overlaps between the 2010 and 2015 strategy documents. Given that they were published only five years apart, it would be surprising if there were not. But there are a larger number of Tier One and Tier Two risks in the 2015 NSRA than there were in its 2010 counterpart.

Specifically, the 2015 NSRA gives greater weight in Tier One to non-state actors in international military conflict and introduces a wholly new heading, "instability overseas". This heading was in Tier Two in 2010. In addition, two Tier One risks that were combined in the 2010 NSRA, "public health" and "major natural hazards", have been given their own headings in the 2015 update.

There are also more Tier Two risks in the 2015 version than there were in 2010. Two that featured in 2010 (an attack using weapons of mass destruction, organised crime), reappear in 2015. One (attacks that disrupt satellites) has dropped out completely. It may have been reclassified as part of cyber. Five of the Tier Two risks that feature in the 2015 NSRA appear for the first time. These include the "effect of the international financial crisis", "attacks and pressure on allies" and the arguably somewhat cryptic "decay and failure of key institutions" and "hostile foreign action". The appearance for the first time of "weapons proliferation" is more straight-forward to interpret.

There has been relatively little change between 2010 and 2015 in terms of Tier Three risks. Perhaps most noteworthy is the appearance in 2015 of two new headings, "public disorder" (no doubt reflecting the impact of the 2011 urban riots) and "environmental events such as animal diseases or severe air pollution."

Neither the 2010 nor 2015 risk assessments direct use the phrase 'climate change' in any of their three Tiers.

More Tier One and Tier Two risks in the 2015 NSRA than in 2010 – but still no reference to climate change.

2. Initial reaction to the 2015 UK strategy

Initial reaction to the 2015 UK strategy document has focused overwhelmingly on the specific policies and capabilities (the ways and means) flowing from the overarching strategy (the ends). Indeed, the entire exercise has quickly come to be known publicly simply as the SDSR.

In the process, plenty of attention was also given to the settlements of the main government departments involved with national security issues under the 2015 spending review, which was announced two days after the 2015 strategy document was published.[14]

The 2015 US National Security Strategy prompted considerable public comment on the other side of the Atlantic after it was published in February. And much more was said and written about the 2010 UK NSS immediately after it was published.

For some, the apparent semi-eclipse of the 2015 UK NSS could be interpreted as reflecting a sense that the overarching strategy agreed in 2010 has merely been 'refreshed' – as the Prime Minister, David Cameron, suggested it might be when giving evidence in 2014 to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy – rather than transformed, and that, as a result, there is not much in the overarching strategy that is new and worth talking about.[15]

For others, it might also flow from a feeling that, having invested considerable energy in debating what strategy is 'for' between 2010 and 2015, many politicians and commentators have decided that few solid conclusions arose out of that debate, and that further deliberation at this level of abstraction might produce little benefit.[16]

More broadly, critics have argued in the past that the British just don't 'do' strategy.

In what follows, we survey briefly what reaction there has been so far to the 2015 NSS.

Eclipsed by the SDSR?

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[14]   For more on the outcome of the spending review, see Library briefing CBP 7401, "Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015: a summary", 30 November 2015. The Library also published a blog on spending issues ahead of the publication of the 2015 NSS. See: "The coming UK 2015 National Security Strategy – advance insights into the financial context", 6 November 2015

[15]   Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, "The next National Security Strategy", HC 749/HL 114, February 2015, paras 26, 28 and 30

[16]   Ibid. See also the Public Administration Committee's report, "Who does UK National Strategy?", HC435 , 18 October 2010

2.1 Parliament

23 November 2015: debate on the statement

Parliamentarians responded to the Prime Minister's statement to the House on 23 November 2015. Several MPs made interventions about the overarching strategy set out in the 2015 document.

Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the opposition, said:

> it is disappointing that there is insufficient analysis in the national security strategy of the global threats facing our country and people around the world, including inequality, poverty, disease, human rights abuses, climate change and water and food security […][17]

Bernard Jenkin, who as chair of the Public Administration Committee during the last parliament oversaw several inquiries into 'national strategy-making', welcomed the 2015 strategy document as

> a very welcome declaration of long-term strategic intent on behalf of our country to remain a global nuclear power with armed forces that have global reach.[18]

Phil Wilson agreed with the conclusion of a Defence Select Committee report published just ahead of the release of the new strategy on the "need for the SDSR to be flexible in its response to known and unknown threats".[19] The Prime Minister replied:

> I also agree with him that it is not possible to predict all the threats we will face over the coming period. That is why the report and my statement were so clear that we have to expect the unexpected and be flexible enough to prepare. That should not be an excuse, however, for not drawing together the threats we do know about and not making choices based on those threats […] he will see that we have set out tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 threats. They will provoke a great deal of debate among the experts about whether we have made the right choices, but at least we are setting out what the choices are.[20]

The need for flexibility "in response to known and unknown threats".

24 November 2015: Defence Committee evidence session

The day after the Prime Minister's statement to the House, the Defence Select Committee held an evidence session on the SDSR with five experts.

Peter Roberts from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) expressed disappointment that the Government's "grand economic strategy is

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[17]   HC Deb 23 November 2015 c1053

[18]   HC Deb 23 November 2015 c1068. For the Public Administration Committee's reports on strategy, see: Strategic thinking in Government: without National Strategy, can viable Government strategy emerge?, HC 1625, 24 April 2012; Who does UK National Strategy? Further Report, HC 713, 28 January 2011; Who does UK National Strategy?. HC 435,18 October 2010

[19]   Defence Select Committee, Flexible response? An SDSR checklist of potential threats and vulnerabilities, HC 493, 21 November 2015

[20]   HC Deb 23 November 2015 c1077

front and centre in this review", making "defence and security firmly subservient to those economic ends."[21]

Another witness, Dr Chris Tuck, described the SDSR as "very traditional-looking", adding:

> It focuses very much on the notion that Britain is a global power with global interests. I think it overstates the power that we have, particularly in the realm of things such as soft power.[22]

Professor Patrick Porter said:

> […] this document expresses a long-held view of the British Government that Britain is a co-defender of the liberal world order, led by the United States […] Finally, it does what Britain has tried to do since World War II, which is to exert a disproportionate level of power compared with its weight.[23]

When asked whether tackling the 'four main challenges' first outlined in chapter 3 of the strategy document would "sufficiently protect" the UK against tier 1 risks in the NSRA, Dr David Blagden replied:

> One of the issues that we confront with the NSRA is that creates very broad categories so it is hard to think what might not actually fall within these categories if we defined it in the right way […] Obviously it would be staggering if there was not instability overseas in the next five years, or military crises.[24]

Professor Porter added:

> If the architects of this kind of document believe that the document suffices to create a national security strategy, there does have to be something off-camera where people are having much more precise conversations about what really does count as a ranked threat and ranked priority.[25]

After a discussion about the pitfalls of trying to predict the future accurately and rank threats appropriately, Professor Gearson concluded that the document

> still seems to be trying to do a little bit of everything, as British defence policy has done for many years. I would like to see a clear articulation of what we think we should be able to do, but also an acknowledgement of things we will not be capable of, and to then place that in the template of the risk table.[26]

Madeleine Moon brought up the way in which the strategy document simultaneously portrays Russia as a partner and a threat. Professor Porter responded that:

> We are entering a period of diplomatic ambiguity, which is historically not that unusual, but we are not very comfortable with having people who are both partners and rivals […] at the same

Experts discuss whether the 2015 UK strategy is economically-driven, overstates British power, contradictory on Russia or unclear on China.

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21   Defence Select Committee, Strategic Defence and Security Review, HC626, 25 November 2015, Q1

22   Ibid.

23   Ibid.

24   Ibid., Q3

25   Ibid., Q5

26   Ibid., Q11

time, which means a lot more hard bargaining will have to be done at some point. [27]

Dr Tuck also raised the issue of China, arguing that:

> If you are keen, in order to develop Britain economically, to do trade deals with China, or to allow China to buy elements of your energy infrastructure, what does that then say about your ability to influence China in other environments? This is a long-running problem, and […] there will be a point at which at which we just have to apply an element of realpolitik, which will not sit well with the tone of some of what is in this current document. [28]

Dr Blagden added:

> The China one, which has been touched on, is very interesting in the sense that the UK is tying itself in knots somewhat in trying to sustain multiple bandwagoning relationships with major powers at once. We had the proud announcement of the development of the Bahrain naval base just recently. The expanded UK presence in the Gulf is an exercise in burden sharing with the US. Why is the US interested in burden sharing in the Gulf? Because it wants to pivot to east Asia. So implicitly, the UK is getting involved in the US's balancing – even containment, if you want to call it that – efforts vis-à-vis China, while throwing itself headlong into the economic relationship. [29]

The session ended with a discussion about whether the MOD has become marginalised as a more whole-of-government approach to national security has emerged since 2010. Professor Gearson expressed the view that this reflected an

> unwillingness to adopt military approaches to thinking about 'grand strategy'[…] There is a reluctance to bring the military in, because there is a concern that they will talk about strategy, and the rest of Whitehall does not want to. [30]

The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, the UK parliamentary committee with responsibility for scrutinising the strategy, was re-formed at the beginning of December 2015. It remains to be seen how it will approach its scrutiny role in the current parliament. [31]

The House of Lords also debated the 2015 UK strategy document on 23 November 2015 and held a further debate on the SDSR on 3 December. [32]

Has the Ministry of Defence become marginalised by the more whole-of-government approach to UK strategy-making?

2.2 Media and think-tanks

Media
There has been little substantive discussion to date by the British media of the overarching strategy set out in the 2015 strategy document.

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[27] Defence Select Committee, Strategic Defence and Security Review, HC626, 25 November 2015, Q20
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., Q37
[31] Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy
[32] House of Lords, 23 November 2015 debate; House of Lords, 3 December 2015 debate

The *Financial Times* published an opinion piece on the document by Jonathan Shaw on 25 November. He said, amongst other things:

> Have some sympathy for the mandarins of the civil service. Preparing a strategic defence and security review , like the one published on Monday, is a far more detailed and complex exercise. It demands a degree of alignment between departments that Whitehall is simply not structured to deliver.
>
> This week's announcement made some big promises, including an extra £12bn to strengthen Britain's defences against Isis and Russia over the next five years. But the real test is whether it has the answers to three key questions. First, what security and defence threats does Britain face? Second, what equipment programmes do we need to respond to them? And third, how should this response be delivered?
>
> The last defence review, in 2010, began by asserting that the UK faced no existential threats. The same cannot be said today. David Cameron, prime minister, has declared Isis an existential threat. Russia is growing more assertive; it borders on the Baltic states, allies to whose defence we are sworn. This also has to be planned for and resourced if Nato, the linchpin of our security, is to be seen as credible.
>
> But neither a return to the simple force-on-force calculations of the cold war nor a simple counter terrorism response will suffice. Nor is this a straightforward matter of counter terrorism. Both Russia and Isis pursue a strategy that has become known as "hybrid warfare", using a mixture of deception, coercion, corruption, subversion, ideology and third-party provocation to weaken targets in all corners of society. "Hybrid warfare" is now official Russian doctrine. As we saw in Crimea and Ukraine, Russia turns to military action last of all, when the battle is already largely won. The details are different, but Isis mirrors this hybrid approach.
>
> […]
>
> The threat of hybrid warfare should force Whitehall to recognise the importance of an observation made - but not acted on - in Gordon Brown's 2008 national security strategy**:** no single department can handle today's security challenges alone. It prescribed a "comprehensive" approach. Yet an "approach" proved inadequate in Iraq and Afghanistan; what was needed was a plan.
>
> In short, Whitehall has neither the structure nor the culture to tackle the threats we face. For once, this is a challenge that does not depend upon money. To cope with hybrid threats, what is required is a comprehensive plan. Whitehall needs an empowered Cabinet Office and a truly executive national security adviser to conceive and drive a comprehensive plan.
>
> Only if politicians amend the software of Whitehall will they achieve the effect they desire from their investment in the hardware of the defence review.[33]

ISIL and Russia: both exponents of 'hybrid warfare'?

Robert Fox in the *Evening Standard* on 23 November commented:

> The announcements on intelligence, security forces and their kit this past 10 days has had the ominous rumble of defence policy

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[33]   "Hybrid warfare has changed the rules of conflict", *Financial Times*, 25 November 2015

being made on the hoof. Half a dozen ministries have been involved, and the defence review drawn up by the Cabinet Office. Too many ministerial cooks do not a clear strategy make.[34]

The Russian English-language media noted the strong criticisms in it of Russia's behaviour in recent years.[35] One source quoted a Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson saying:

> Since even a basic official document sees Russia as a threat to British national security, apparently we will have to structure our line of behavior with London accordingly, based on purely pragmatic approaches […] A thesis that runs through [this document] is a postulate that Russia has become a more aggressive, authoritative and nationalist state in its opposition to the West. Allegedly, its possible aggression against NATO allies should not be ruled out. [36]

However, the Ministry spokesperson also noted that "there is an intention [in the document] to cooperate on issues of mutual interest".[37]

There was limited coverage of the 2014 UK strategy document in the Chinese English-language media and no response to date from the Chinese Foreign Ministry.[38]

Official Russian response to the 2015 UK strategy will be "purely pragmatic"

Think-tanks

As for UK-based think-tanks, although RUSI was represented at the 24 November Defence Select Committee evidence session (see above), it has not yet commented much on the overarching strategy of the 2015 document. The same is true of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Chatham House partially broke ranks – albeit in a piece described as being solely about the SDSR – at the beginning of December. Analyst James de Waal described the SDSR as being a successful political exercise but one which fell short as a strategy and which "distorted the national security effort":

> creating an imbalance between elements which need to be in harmony. It has put the emphasis on equipment rather than personnel, funding purchases in part through reductions in pay and manning. It has focused on inputs – of money, equipment or numbers of units – rather than outputs in terms of measurable improvements in security. It has concentrated on means rather than ends, by funding the military and intelligence capabilities but neglecting the diplomats and civil servants who consider how and why these capabilities should be used. New ships, planes or brigades look impressive and familiar, but do not in themselves

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[34] "Defence pledges have an air of policy made on the hoof", *Evening Standard*, 23 November 2015

[35] "UK to Seek Security Cooperation With Russia on Global Issues - Security Strategy", *RIA Novosti*, 23 November 2015; "UK Not Ruling Out Possibility of Russian 'Aggression' Against NATO", *Voice of Russia* (English), 23 November 2015

[36] "Moscow pledges pragmatic response to London's national security strategy seeing Russia as threat", *Russia & CIS Diplomatic Panorama*, 26 November 2015

[37] Ibid.

[38] "Britain announces 270-bln-dollar defense program to defeat modern security threats", *Xinhua Net* (English), 23 November 2015

say much about a country's approach to security, nor its likely success in keeping its citizens and territory safe.[39]

Andrew Dorman, the commissioning editor of *International Affairs*, Chatham House's in-house journal, also wrote in early December that the 2015 UK strategy document does "set out a vision for the United Kingdom", adding that it indicates "a level of thinking that many have said has been absent for more than a decade."[40]

A new 'level of thinking' in the 2015 UK strategy?

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[39]   J. de Waal, "This SDSR Hides Problems for the Future", Chatham House, 3 December 2015

[40]   A. Dorman, "Missing the mark?", *The House Magazine*, 4 December 2015

3. Comparing the 2015 UK strategy with other strategies

Debate has long raged about what a strategy is 'for', who should do it and what one should look like.[41] Rather than rehearse these arguments here, we have chosen instead to explore the different approaches that can be taken by undertaking a brief comparison of the 2015 strategy document with two other important strategy documents that have been published in the last year or so:

- Global Strategic Trends – out to 2045, published in June 2014 by the UK Ministry of Defence
- The US Government's National Security Strategy, published in February 2015

In doing so, we will also compare how the three documents address the 'threats and opportunities' posed by two countries that loom large in Western minds today – Russia and China.

In undertaking these comparisons, we mainly focus – as we did in section 1 – on chapters 1-3 of the 2015 UK strategy document, which set out the overarching strategy. However, other chapters of the document have been drawn upon where justified.

3.1 Global Strategic Trends – out to 2045

Different context and purpose

200-pages long and part of a continuous research programme, the purpose of the fifth edition of Global Strategic Trends, which was published in June 2014, is to provide a "strategic context for defence and security looking out to the middle of the century." It takes into account events up to April 2014. While it is published by the MOD, it does not represent official policy. It represents "the view of the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, a department within the MOD."[42]

By contrast, the 94-page long 2015 UK strategy document is a statement of official policy. It is also by its nature a 'political' document. The strategy has a five-year shelf-life, although the exercise that underpins it, the 'National Security Risk Assessment' (NRSA), begins by adopting a "20 year horizon".[43]

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[41] There was plenty of debate along these lines during the last parliament. See, for example, the Public Administration Committee's report, "Who does UK National Strategy?", HC435, 18 October 2010. In the new parliament, see the Defence Select Committee, Flexible response? An SDSR checklist of potential threats and vulnerabilities, HC 493, 21 November 2015. For a defence of British strategy-making, see A. Evans, "Organizing for British national strategy", *International Affairs,* May 2014. Also relevant are the articles by Edmunds, Gilmore and Gaskarth in the same edition.

[42] Global Strategic Trends – out to 2045, pii

[43] Defence Select Committee, Ministry Of Defence - written evidence, published 27 October 2015. For more on the methodology underpinning the NSRA process, see below.

So the context and purpose of the two documents is clearly different. At the same time, it would be a mistake to view them as unconnected. The MOD has said that Global Strategic Trends was one of the main contributions to the policy-making process that culminated in the 2015 UK NSS.[44] What is more, one expert has claimed that there can be limits to the independence of Global Strategic Trends from official policy:

> […] the draft Report is edited by Whitehall. Any trend that contradicts policy is liable to be removed. In the 2009 version the possibility that Iran would develop nuclear weapons was deleted because HMG policy was that Iran should not.[45]

One issue on which there is considerable overlap between the two documents is climate change; it features regularly as a risk factor in both but is not given headline status in either.

Different methodologies

Global Strategic Trends goes into considerable detail about the methodology employed in it. In the Foreword, the Director of the Centre stresses that "Global Strategic Trends":

> does not seek to predict the future, instead it describes plausible outcomes on the basis of rigorous trends analysis.[46]

However, it does seek to identify "long-term threats and opportunities" through the prism of 13 themes and nine geographic zones.

Within each of these themes and zones it also points out possible future "shocks" which, while only having a "low probability of occurring", could potentially have a high impact. In addition, it provides scenarios that "illustrate the ways in which trends and drivers from multiple themes could interact" and points out "alternative outcomes" boxes, which identify less likely but nonetheless feasible outcomes. [47]

At the end of each of the themes and zones, a number of "key defence and security implications" are set out. There are 28 in total. They have not been prioritised in the document. But they are a useful prism through which to compare the document with the 2015 UK NSS.[48]

The 2015 UK strategy document has much less to say about its methodology. However, some insights into the methodology underpinning the 2015 document have been shared publicly in recent

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[44] Another contribution came from "Future Operating Environment 2035", which has not been made public Government response to Defence Committee report, "Intervention: Why, When and How?", HC571, 29 July 2014, para 23

[45] See Sir Paul Newman's written evidence to the Defence Committee's recent enquiry, "An SDSR checklist of potential threats". Here is a link to the Committee's 23 November 2015 report.

[46] Global Strategic Trends – out to 2045, piii

[47] Ibid., pix

[48] Ibid., pxxi-xxiii. Table 1 at the end of this briefing summarises the 28 "key implications" that feature in "Global Strategic Trends" and then briefly assesses the extent to which they also feature in the 2015 UK NSS. The table also cross-references the 2015 US National Security Strategy, which is discussed below.

years. For example, the MOD has described how the NSRA, led by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, was conducted in 2014:

> Risk assessment involves assessing the relative impact and likelihood of risks in comparison with others. We have improved our approach over time. External risk experts, and internal specialists such as intelligence professionals, economists, and the Government policy and strategy community have all been consulted to make the methodology and process a more robust and representative basis for risk assessment. In particular, we have developed our approach to assessing the UK significance of risks occurring overseas.
>
> In the 2014 NSRA, and in common with previous versions, subject-matter experts, analysts and intelligence specialists were first asked to identify the full range of existing and potential risks to our national security, which might materialise out to a 20 year horizon.
>
> All potential risks of sufficient scale or impact so as to require action from government were then assessed in detail. Using a pre-agreed methodology and advice from economists, historians and the intelligence community, leads across Government departments worked with each other to assess the impact of risks (in terms of political and economic consequences, casualties and social/structural factors); and the likelihood of their occurring.
>
> We also assessed whether these risks would become more or less impactful and likely out to the twenty year horizon, asking risk leads to consider the influence of over ten strategic themes (such as military capability development) on their development. This provides a basis for long term planning.
>
> We ran a series of cross-Government and external workshops with the Joint Intelligence Organisation and the Met Office's Natural Hazards Partnership, risk professionals, academics, and industry contacts in order to moderate these assessments.
>
> Risk assessments were plotted on classified probability-impact matrix and conclusions about broad families of risk (like cyber) were drawn out in order to reach final conclusions and to make relative judgements about tiering.
>
> Generally speaking, risks assessed as both high likelihood and high impact are considered high priorities for action. Similarly, those risks judged to be low impact and low likelihood are considered lower priorities. However, careful judgements have to be made, as some risks – such as chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack – have low likelihood but are of sufficiently high potential impact as to warrant a priority response. The highest priority risks are generally those with the ability to cause direct or systemic harm to the UK's territories, economy, people, the institutions we rely on, and our infrastructure. [49]

Similar approaches to Russia and China

There is widespread consensus in security and intelligence circles that Russia and China raise important questions for the national security of

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[49]   Defence Select Committee, Ministry Of Defence - written evidence, published 27 October 2015. See also Dr David Blagden's written evidence to the Defence Committee's recent enquiry, "An SDSR checklist of potential threats". Here is a link to the Committee's 23 November 2015 report.

Western countries, including the UK. But there is less consensus over the level of threat that they pose. Concern has been expressed in some quarters that, while suitably cautious about Russia, the UK today seems excessively inclined to give China the 'benefit of the doubt'.[50]

So how do Global Strategic Trends and the 2015 UK strategy document deal with the two countries?

Russia

While avoiding any sense that Russia is destined only to be a threat, both documents are relatively pessimistic in emphasis.

Box 1: Global Strategic Trends and the 2015 UK strategy document on Russia

Writing as the crisis in Ukraine broke out, **Global Strategic Trends** offers up a picture predominantly of continuity. It says that Russia:

- is likely to remain a regional (and, to some extent, a global) power up to 2045;

- will remain preoccupied with restoring the country's 'great power' status, which could pose security challenges for Europe;

- will probably remain authoritarian even after President Vladimir Putin departs the political scene.

However, it also points to challenges such as an "ageing society, environmental degradation, corruption, under-investment and narrow democratic institutions", plus internal security challenges emanating from Russia's "growing Islamic population" and separatism in its peripheral regions.[51] It concludes that

> major reforms of the political system and the institutional economic framework are not likely unless there is a change in Russia's style of government. Without reform, however, Russia is likely to experience a gradual economic decline and there is the potential for extensive political and social unrest. A Russian collapse or fragmentation would have serious consequences for the global economy and would be likely to have severe implications for the stability of neighbouring countries, including those in eastern Europe.[52]

The **2015 UK strategy document** cites Russia as the main example of "the resurgence of state-based threats" since 2010:

> 3.19 At the NATO summit in Lisbon in 2010, we committed to work with our Allies to build a partnership with Russia. But since then Russia has become more aggressive, authoritarian and nationalist, increasingly defining itself in opposition to the West. The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and continuing support to separatists in eastern Ukraine through the use of deniable, hybrid tactics and media manipulation have shown Russia's willingness to undermine wider international standards of cooperation in order to secure its perceived interests.

> 3.20 Russia is mid-way through a programme of major investment to modernise and upgrade its military, including its nuclear forces. It has also increased its nuclear exercises and rhetoric, with threats to base nuclear forces in Kaliningrad and Crimea. Its military activity around the territory of our Allies, and close to UK airspace and territorial waters, is designed to test our responses. Russia's behaviour will continue to be hard to predict, and, though highly unlikely, we cannot rule out the possibility that it may feel tempted to act aggressively against NATO Allies.

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50   For a flavour of the debate on China which took place during President Xi Jinping's recent State Visit to the UK, see: "The Osborne doctrine", *The Economist*, 26 September 2015; Vince Cable, "It's risky, but we must welcome China as the new superpower", *Evening Standard*, 15 October 2015; "China and 'the Osborne Doctrine'", BBC News Online, 19 October 2015; "Spies guard nuclear sites from China cyberattack", *The Times*, 19 October 2015

51   Global Strategic Trends – out to 2045, pp121-2

52   Ibid.

3.21 Our commitment to collective defence and security through NATO remains as strong as ever. The 2014 Wales Summit, under UK leadership, delivered an effective and united response to Russian behaviour. NATO's commitments include the Allies' defence investment pledge and the Readiness Action Plan, which respond to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications, as well as to risks and threats to the south of Europe. With NATO Allies we have made the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force a reality and our contributions to the NATO Air Policing Mission in the Baltics will remain important to deter threats. At UK urging, the EU has imposed sanctions designed to change Russian behaviour.

3.22 Russia is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and notwithstanding our differences, we will seek ways of cooperating and engaging with Russia on a range of global security issues, such as the threat from ISIL.[53]

Later, while acknowledging Russia's role in the negotiations that led to the 2015 deal with Iran on its nuclear programme, the document is critical of Russia's wider lack of respect for a "rules-based international order":

Some powerful states and non-state actors, however, are increasingly ignoring international norms that they believe run contrary to their interests, or favour the West. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, Assad's use of chemical weapons, and the challenges around non-state actors' compliance with international humanitarian law are examples of this.[54]

In its discussion of the "global economy", it adds:

Russia's actions in Ukraine and continuing instability in the Middle East, North and West Africa illustrate the scope for political disputes adversely to affect global markets and regional growth prospects.[55]

China

While Global Strategic Trends acknowledges that China might be a security threat to the US over the coming decades, other Western countries, including the UK, do not feature particularly strongly in its analysis. The 2015 UK strategy document does not address this issue at all. Neither the South China Sea nor the East China Sea disputes are mentioned directly – nor is Taiwan; the document simply talks about cooperation to resolve "international and regional disputes in accordance with the UN Charter and international law".[56]

Global Strategic Trends does not discuss the issue of Chinese involvement in the building and running of critical national infrastructure. The 2015 UK strategy document does briefly refer to China as a security risk in relation to its prospective involvement in the building of the new Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, but it is quick to reassure that appropriate steps have been taken to mitigate the risk.[57]

Global Strategic Trends does not mention China at any point when talking about cybersecurity threats. The 2015 UK strategy document

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[53] National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, p18

[54] Ibid., p20

[55] Ibid., p21

[56] Ibid., p58

[57] Ibid., p44. Chinese involvement in the UK civil nuclear power industry may not have been as high on the agenda when Global Strategic Trends was being drafted in early 2014.

mentions China and cybersecurity once in the same paragraph, but it does only to emphasise the improving cooperation on the issue between the two countries.[58]

In neither document is there reference to implications arising from possible political or security crises within China during this period. The word 'Tibet' does not feature in either document; Xinjiang features in Global Strategic Trends but only in the context of Uighur terrorism.[59]

Box 2: Global Strategic Trends and the 2015 UK strategy document on China

Global Strategic Trends begins by talking positively about China's likely future relations with Europe, talking about "shared interests" and "partnership", as well as emphasising burgeoning economic ties. On the military side it says:

> Militarily, China and Europe are unlikely to see each other as direct threats, although European countries may continue to view China with caution because of differences on human rights, systems of governance and encroachment on intellectual property rights.[60]

However, when it comes to China's military modernisation and relation within its own neighbourhood, the document accepts that China (discussed here in tandem with India) could play a role in provoking regional conflict:

> […] the East and South China Seas are home to a number of disputed territories, and the likelihood of conflict could be increased if dwindling hydrocarbon reserves make the area a more important site for extractions. Similarly, China and India dispute areas of their border; […]. In short, the risk of a major state-on-state conflict in the region cannot be ruled out.[61]

The **2015 UK strategy document** also begins on a positive note, saying that the UK will "promote our prosperity, expanding our economic relationship with growing powers such as India and China".[62] The same point is repeated several pages later.[63] It also recognises China's contribution to the negotiations that led to the 2015 deal with Iran on its nuclear programme.[64] The only cautionary note comes when the document states that:

> Despite considerable progress, China still faces significant challenges in delivering the necessary reforms for a more sustainable growth model.[65]

On Hinkley Point C:

> we are modernising the UK's energy infrastructure, including by attracting inward investors, with appropriate assessment of any national security risks, and mitigation. This approach has resulted in the recent investment by China into the new Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, supporting our longer term energy security.[66]

Perhaps the most extended discussions of China come in chapters 5 and 6:

> Our relationship with China is rapidly expanding. We do not expect to agree with the Chinese Government on everything. In all our dealings we will protect the UK's interests vigorously. But our aim is to build a deeper partnership with China, working more closely

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[58]   Few will view the Chancellor's announcement – made at GCHQ just a matter of days before the 2015 UK NSS was published – that spending on preventing cyberattacks is to be almost doubled in the current parliament, as unrelated to China, even though no country was specifically mentioned in his speech.

[59]   Global Strategic Trends – out to 2045, p153

[60]   Ibid., p122

[61]   Ibid., p122

[62]   National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, p10

[63]   Ibid., p14

[64]   Ibid., p20

[65]   Ibid., p21

[66]   Ibid., p44

together to address global challenges, including climate change, AMR[67], terrorism, economic development in Africa, peacekeeping, and to counter North Korea's nuclear programme. We strongly support China's greater integration into more of the world's key institutions and organisations as its global role and responsibilities grow. The UK and China will establish a high level security dialogue to strengthen exchanges and cooperation on security issues such as non-proliferation, organised crime, cyber crime and illegal immigration. The agreement on cyber-enabled commercial espionage, announced during the Chinese State Visit in October 2015, shows the progress being made. We will work together to strengthen cooperation on settling international and regional disputes peacefully in accordance with the UN Charter and international law.

We are also strengthening our economic relationship with China, as set out in Chapter 6. Our ambition is that China becomes our second biggest export destination within the next decade. In addition we aim to establish London as the leading global centre for renminbi products and services, across banking, asset management and insurance.[68]

[…]

The UK was the first major Western country to apply to join the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This is an opportunity to build stronger links with Asian countries from China to Indonesia.[69]

[…]

Our engagement with China in recent years […] has led to direct financial benefits for the UK – and reflects our ambition for the UK to be China's leading partner in the West. The UK is now one of the most popular destinations for Chinese investment in Europe. Our goods and services exports to China increased by 84% between 2010 and 2014, and up to £40 billion of trade and investment agreements were reached at the China State Visit in October 2015 alone. But engaging in this way also reflects a much wider goal to work more closely on the global stage with the economies of the future, supporting global and UK prosperity.[70]

3.2 The US government's 2015 National Security Strategy

A different approach to strategy

Like the UK, the US government publishes a NSS every five years. However, while there are certainly similarities, there are important differences between their respective 2015 strategies. Overall, the 2015 UK strategy document goes into much greater detail than its US counterpart and the overarching strategy is linked within the document to a range of specific policies and capabilities.

At 29 pages long, the US strategy is fundamentally a "vision" document, a concise narrative that asserts and justifies, in its own words, "the power and centrality of America's indispensable leadership in the world".[71] An American academic recently unflatteringly described

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[67] AMR is short for antimicrobial resistance.
[68] National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review 2015. A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, Cm9161, 23 November 2015, p58
[69] Ibid., p71
[70] Ibid., pp71-2
[71] US National Security Strategy, February 2015, pp2 and 29

official documents such as the 2015 US NSS as "vapid products of committees".[72]

Both emphasise 'national interests'

The US strategy places "national interests" at its heart, carrying these over unchanged from the 2010 strategy:

> - The security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners;
>
> - A strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;
>
> - Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and
>
> - A rules-based international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.[73]

Each interest is subsequently given a chapter in which a little more detail is provided about how the US will protect and promote that interest between 2015 and 2019. For example, in relation to security, the US will:

> - Strengthen our national defence
>
> - Reinforce homeland security
>
> - Combat the persistent threat of terrorism
>
> - Build capacity to prevent conflict
>
> - Prevent the spread and use of weapons of mass destruction
>
> - Confront climate change
>
> - Assure access to shared spaces
>
> - Increase global health security

The 2015 UK strategy document also makes numerous reference to UK interests, sometimes using the term "national interests". However, the word is not used as an 'organising principle' of the document. Indeed, the word appears in the text of only one of the UK's three National Security Objectives – the second one, "projecting our global influence".

Doing 'risk' differently

The US strategy also identifies eight "top strategic risks" to the country's interests:

[72]   Testimony of Professor Elliot A. Cohen, Johns Hopkins University, to the Senate Armed Services Committee, 22 October 2015

[73]   US National Security Strategy, February 2015, p2

- Catastrophic attack on the U.S. homeland or critical infrastructure

- Threats or attacks against U.S. citizens abroad and our allies

- Global economic crisis or widespread economic slowdown

- Proliferation and/or use of weapons of mass destruction

- Severe global infectious disease outbreaks

- Climate change

- Major energy market disruptions and

- Significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including mass atrocities, regional spillover, and transnational organized crime).[74]

While there is plenty of overlap between the US NSS and the 2015 UK strategy document in terms of the risks they identify, the latter goes into greater detail by setting out three tiers of risk. There are other differences too: unlike the 2015 UK strategy document, the US strategy does not explicitly feature cyber as a 'top risk'; on the other hand, the US strategy does feature climate change as a 'top risk', whereas the UK document does not use the phrase in any of its three tiers.

A similar tone on Russia but a markedly different one on China

Russia

On Russia, the 2015 US strategy has plenty to say. "Aggression by Russia" features as one of several "serious challenges" to US national security in President Obama's Foreword. The same expression can be found on numerous occasions in the main body of the document.[75] Russia's willingness to use energy for "political ends" is also mentioned.[76]

On this count, there are plenty of echoes of the 2015 UK strategy document.

Box 3: The 2015 US strategy: extracts on Russia

[See Box 1 for extracts from the 2015 UK strategy document on Russia if you want to compare]

> Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity—as well as its belligerent stance toward other neighboring countries—endangers international norms that have largely been taken for granted since the end of the Cold War.[77]

> […]

> And we will continue to impose significant costs on Russia through sanctions and other means while countering Moscow's deceptive propaganda with the unvarnished truth. We will deter Russian aggression, remain alert to its strategic capabilities, and help our allies and partners resist Russian coercion over the long term, if necessary. At the same time, we will keep the door open to greater collaboration with Russia in areas of common interests,

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[74] US National Security Strategy, February 2015, p2
[75] Ibid., pp2, 4, 19, 25
[76] Ibid., p5
[77] Ibid., p10

> should it choose a different path—a path of peaceful cooperation that respects the sovereignty and democratic development of neighboring states.[78]

China

On China, the tone of the 2015 US strategy is less sharp; nonetheless, it is considerably sharper than that found in the 2015 UK strategy document.

Box 4: The 2015 US strategy: extracts on China

[See Box 2 for 2015 UK strategy document extracts on China if you want to compare]

Barack Obama writes positively in his Foreword:

> The scope of our cooperation with China is unprecedented, even as we remain alert to China's military modernization and reject any role for intimidation in resolving territorial disputes.

He goes on to refer specifically to US-China cooperation on climate change.

However, in the main body of the document, the tone is more nuanced:

> The United States welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China. We seek to develop a constructive relationship with China that delivers benefits for our two peoples and promotes security and prosperity in Asia and around the world […] While there will be competition, we reject the inevitability of confrontation. At the same time, we will manage competition from a position of strength while insisting that China uphold international rules and norms on issues ranging from maritime security to trade and human rights. We will closely monitor China's military modernization and expanding presence in Asia, while seeking ways to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation. On cybersecurity, we will take necessary actions to protect our businesses and defend our networks against cyber-theft of trade secrets for commercial gain whether by private actors or the Chinese government.[79]

Writing before the 2015 UK strategy document was published, one expert noted that a greater emphasis in its US counterpart on the security challenges posed by China is to be expected:

> I think that there is an awful lot in common between the US national security strategy and what I think we are likely to say in ours. In terms of the sort of challenges we face in the Middle East or Russia or elsewhere, we are absolutely right to say that the US puts more emphasis on the potential security challenges posed by China in Asia-Pacific than we are likely to do. It is partly a matter of geography, but it is also because the US national security strategy puts a lot of emphasis on the exceptional role of the United States as the world's single superpower and the world's predominant military power, and on the need for US leadership. None of that is appropriate for the UK because we are in a different strategic situation. That affects a lot of what is said.[80]

"[…] the US puts more emphasis on the potential security challenges posed by China in Asia-Pacific than we are likely to do."

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[78] US National Security Strategy, February 2015, p25
[79] Ibid., p24
[80] Oral Evidence (Q16) given by Professor Malcolm Chalmers to the Defence Select Committee's recent inquiry on "An SDSR checklist of potential threats"

Table 1   Comparing the 2014 Global Strategic Trends, the 2015 UK National Security Strategy and the 2015 US National Security Strategy[81]

2014 Global Strategic Trends: 28 "implications"	Mentioned in 2015 UK strategy?	Mentioned in 2015 US strategy?
People		
Technologically connected diasporas/lack of migrant integration	Yes	No
Role of women in combat set to rise, including in non-state groups	Yes	No
Armed/security forces provide humanitarian assistance and relief	Yes	Yes
Augmentation of humans with sensors and computing devices	No	No
Islamic fundamentalism-fuelled terrorist attacks continue	Yes	Yes
Technology		
Automated technologies and threats to transport systems	Yes	Yes
Interconnected ICT networks increase threats to day-to-day lives	Yes	Yes
Sensor data collection devices intensify levels of surveillance	No	No
Expansion of alternative currencies helps criminals/terrorists	No	No
Space-based technologies and large-scale disruption to satellites	Yes	Yes
Environment		
Extreme weather events increase in some regions	Yes	Yes
Resource and environmental tensions in sub-Saharan Africa	Yes	No

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81 This Table looks at the extent to which the 28 key "defence and security implications" set out in the 2014 Global Strategic Trends feature in the 2015 UK National Security Strategy and the 2015 US National Security Strategy. The Table involves no judgement as to whether any of these documents is superior to the others. As discussed in section 3 of this briefing, the context and purpose of the documents is different. Furthermore, because the documents are different, a subjective judgement has had to be made when assessing whether an issue or theme in Global Strategic Trends has featured in the UK or US strategies. Others might legitimately come to a different conclusion. In addition, others might choose headings different from the seven ('People' etc.) under which we have grouped the 28 "implications" – or, indeed, put a specific "implication" under another heading.

2014 Global Strategic Trends: 28 "implications"	Mentioned in 2015 UK strategy?	Mentioned in 2015 US strategy?
Countries		
Pressures of globalisation and shifting state-society relations	Yes	Yes
China's defence budget matches US budget and India's increases	No	China - Yes; India - No
US remains the most powerful military power in the world	Yes	Yes
Disputes may involve US and China in armed conflict	No	Implied but emphasis on prevention
Rising Chinese (with global reach) and Indian military capabilities	No	Yes
Potential state-on-state conflict in East, Southeast and South Asia	No	Yes
Organisations		
NATO remains key alliance but European burden-sharing may rise	Key alliance - yes; burden-sharing - No	Key alliance - Yes; burden-sharing - No
NATO remains the key organisation for military crisis management	Yes	Yes
Weapons		
Sexual violence in conflict and state violence leads to instability	Yes	Sexual violence – No; state violence - Yes
Non-state actors and rogue states acquire fissile nuclear material	Yes	Yes
Rise of unmanned systems in combat and replacement of humans	Unmanned systems - yes; replacement of humans - no	Unmanned systems - yes; replacement of humans - no
Non-state actors' access to cheaper unmanned systems	Yes	No
Increasing defence equipment costs	No	No
Places		
Failed and failing cities could pose major security challenges	Yes	No
Urban populations more vulnerable to disasters, disease, violence	No	No
Sovereignty disputes and commercial activity in the Arctic Ocean	No	Yes

Annex Global Strategic Trends and the 2015 US National Security Strategy: summary of main arguments[82]

Global Strategic Trends

- **Demography, Urbanisation and Corruption**: The decreasing age of a number of populations, the lack of integration with migrants and growing urbanisation and connectivity alongside poor governance in many areas of the world are likely to cause social unrest.

- **Resources and the Environment**: Food, water, rare earth elements and energy are all expected to be subject to greater competition. In some cases, such as crops and water, climate change is expected to exacerbate the problem whereas in the case of energy, it is thought that climate change may increase access to energy stores. Extreme weather events is also likely to increase the number of humanitarian events which armed forces are expected to respond to.

- **Information**: Advances in computing have the potential to leave genuine encryption of data impossible. As more of the world gains access to the internet and people and organisation become more reliant on that connectivity, the gains made by increased data collection may be outweighed by the vulnerabilities in these system and the greater potential for information of a covert nature to become public.

- **Automation and work**: Unmanned systems will have an increasing role in combat although decision-making responsibilities will likely be retained by humans. This may make combat more attractive to the public and politicians. As unmanned systems become more prevalent, access to them by non-state actors is likely to increase.

- **Identity and the role of the state**: Individual countries which have become reliant on a globalised system will find it more difficult to act unilaterally, potentially reducing conflict. The private sector and non-state organisations are likely to have a greater degree of influence, with some of them creating security forces which may be used for their own protection or which could potentially be leased to governments unwilling or unable to maintain their own security force. Advances in communications technology may increasingly enable those who are discontented with local forms of governance to challenge it, in pursuit of perceived betterment.

- **Defence spending and capability**: By 2045, the US and China are likely to reach parity in terms of defence budgets. It is possible that their joint spending will be as much as the rest of the world combined. India is also likely to increase defence spending to a point where its defence budget is equivalent to that of all the EU's nations combined. Defence equipment will become more expensive and so an increase in spending will not necessarily lead

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[82] Contributed by Eleanor Scarnell, Committee Specialist, Defence Select Committee.

to greatly increased capabilities. However, globalisation, in particular the spread of technology, information and ideas, is likely to give an increasing number of people (both state and non-state actors) access to sophisticated and technologically advanced capabilities. This is likely to increase the opportunity for unconventional attacks on technologically sophisticated nations, including by terrorists.

- **Latin America:** There will be an increase in armed forces capabilities with some countries having world-class capabilities. As a result, they are likely to become more active internationally. There is also the possibility that one or more Latin American country will become nuclear-armed.

- **Middle East and North Africa**: The region is likely to remain highly volatile for the next three decades and the potential for a major regional conflict cannot be discounted. Disparity in wealth, gender inequality and poor education, are likely to be the underlying causes of much of the unrest and sometimes violent conflict within the region. Identity politics, specifically sectarianism, will be used as a mobilising factor during conflict and the region will continue to be the source of a number of international terror threats.

- **Sub-Saharan Africa**: Instability and violence will continue to be a feature of the region for the next 30 years. Terrorist recruitment will be driven by youth unemployment, dissatisfaction with governing regimes and the mismanagement of natural resources. The combined challenge of an increased population, demands on resources and the effects of climate change (particularly drought) on food and water supplies are likely to lead to tension, which could result in conflict. Furthermore, there are likely to be an increased number of humanitarian events which will require an international response.

- **South & East Asia**: Increased demand due to a growing population and food and water shortages as a result of climate change are likely to occur. There are also likely to be an increased number of humanitarian events which will require an international response. The current threat posed by terrorism will continue, driven by high levels of inequality based upon class, ethnicity and religion. China's military capability could well match that of the US by 2045 and India will also significantly increase defence spending (although it will not rival the US or Chinese). The East and South China Seas may be flashpoints for confrontation between China and the US and allied countries. Similarly Kashmir, the Korean Peninsula and the border between China and India are likely to be areas of tension. The risk of a major state-on-state conflict in the region cannot be ruled out.

- **The Polar regions:** Commercial activity expansion in the Arctic Ocean may require extensive monitoring to safeguard Arctic countries' sovereignty. Arctic Council members, in general, are likely to continue to operate in accordance with its rules – the Arctic is likely to remain a largely well-governed space. Inter-country disputes within the Arctic, driven by access to, and control over, resources, are possible but are unlikely to result in military conflict. Russia will almost certainly remain the dominant power in the Arctic but, although unpredictable, is unlikely to take unilateral, aggressive steps to provoke conflict in the region.

Resource demands are likely to increase pressure on the Antarctic Treaty System, but large-scale military conflict is unlikely.

2015 US National Security Strategy

- **A change in international power dynamics** following the evolution in economic power, as evidenced by the rise of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The authors noted that "India's potential, China's rise, and Russia's aggression all significantly impact the future of major power relations."

- **A shift in power from the state downwards**. This was characterised as locally elected representatives, private industry and technologically savvy, young and increasingly middle class populations communicating their expectations for accountability, good governance and economic opportunity.

- **The increasing interdependence of the global economy**. Such interdependence encourages new forms of co-operation but also creates shared vulnerabilities "as interconnected systems and sectors are susceptible to the threats of climate change, malicious cyber activity, pandemic diseases, and transnational terrorism and crime."

- [The] **"struggle for power [which] is underway among and within many states of the Middle East and North Africa**. This is a generational struggle in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war and 2011 Arab uprisings, which will redefine the region as well as relationships among communities and between citizens and their governments. This process will continue to be combustible, especially in societies where religious extremists take root, or rulers reject democratic reforms, exploit their economies, and crush civil society."

- **A change in the global energy market**. As the US becomes the World's largest producer of oil and natural gas, this has softened the global impact of unrest in the oil producing countries of the Middle East. However, the reliance of Europe on Russian produced natural gas and the willingness of Russia to use energy dependence for political ends has created a different sort of instability in the market.

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