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Intelligence Design

UK National Security in a Changing World

A target paper by Dr. James D. Boys with a foreword by Rt. Hon. Dr. Liam Fox MP



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Executive Summary

The Government is to be commended for implementing changes to the national security architecture of the United Kingdom following the election in 2010. However, whilst these initial changes are welcomed, further alterations are recommended as a matter of urgency to ensure that the national security architecture remains fit for purpose.

- The Government was correct to implement changes to the United Kingdom's national security architecture but changes are required to ensure that security is not compromised due to unnecessary and avoidable bureaucratic intransigence.
- The ad-hoc nature of COBR needs to be replaced with a new National Security Operations Centre designed as a hub for operational command and control of missions and crisis management.
- A full study of the role conducted by National Security Councils around the world should have revealed a model to follow and using the expression 'National Security Council' carries implications that are not yet being delivered upon in the UK.
- The National Security Secretariat should be recalibrated to bring in recognised experts from the private sector. Consulting only with civil servants bypasses outside elements that could bring fresh insight and reduce the politicisation of foreign policy decision-making.
- The Joint Strategy Board should be retained, strengthened and institutionalised. It should be extended beyond its initial mandate and be incorporated more fully into strategic decision-making on both sides of the Atlantic.
- The approach taken by the National Security Secretariat towards the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy must improve dramatically. Materials should be produced on time and the committee shown more respect. It is currently a woefully under-utilised resource.
- Joint Strategy Board meetings should be scheduled on a regular basis. Failure to meet will result in atrophy; regular meetings will promote unity and increase the flow of intelligence and communication.
- The preparation of the National Security Strategy needs to be institutionalised and be seen as a priority for every future incoming government. This requires a dedicated national security secretariat that is tasked with horizon scanning and the requisite long-term analysis.

The initial efforts by Her Majesty's Government to implement changes to the national security architecture demonstrate a willingness to challenge the status quo and to initiate reform. However, reform has not gone far enough. Having commenced the process, the Government should continue to effect reforms to ensure the safety and well being of the nation and the stability of its foreign relations.

Foreword



Rt. Hon. Dr. Liam Fox MP

Protecting its citizens at times of crisis should be a top priority for any government. In order to protect citizens effectively, decision-making structures in the executive must be both efficient and robust. Yet, surprisingly little research has been conducted in this area. I welcome this Bow Group target paper, which provides a meaningful analysis of the current status of the U.K.'s intelligence architecture and places recent alterations in a broad historical narrative, revealing the benefits of these reforms and highlighting where further alterations are required. It will be a valuable contribution to a necessary debate.

The role of U.K. intelligence is one that has a direct bearing on every man, woman and child, for it is the unseen first line of defence and offence, in a continuing struggle with those forces who would inflict harm on our people, our nation and its institutions. The recommendations presented in this paper have nothing to do with sentiment. Instead they are based upon an urgent need to recognize the more meaningful of the reforms that have been made to date and of changes still required.

As the report stresses, the changes introduced by the Coalition Government are a welcome step in the right direction, but further changes are required to ensure that our intelligence community remains fit for purpose in the 21st century. The Coalition Government has done a great deal to implement change in a system that is notoriously change averse. However, whilst this is to be welcomed, these reforms should be seen as the first in a series of steps taken to make sure that the U.K. intelligence architecture can cope with the demands placed upon it in a constantly changing and challenging geopolitical environment.

The fact that the Bow Group is firmly housed within the body of the Conservative Party debars any suggestion that there might be political reasons for the recommendations that are made here. Indeed the report is quick to note the moves taken in the right direction by the previous Labour Government, as well as to lament the problems that the present Government inherited. The report's author, Dr. James D. Boys, is to be applauded for adopting a non-partisan approach to this vital area of national security and for noting advances and errors by the two main political parties. Labour clearly made an inappropriate use of COBRA for political gain, but did initiate a National Security Strategy report and a National Security Forum; the Coalition Government has enacted serious reforms but has abandoned the aforementioned forum and has so far failed to confirm the continuing status of the Joint Strategy Board.

As this report notes, this is clearly a time of evolution and change within the U.K.'s national security architecture. Having initiated bold moves, it is in the long-term interest of the country for the Coalition Government to urgently address the current system and I hope that it notes the recommendations made in this paper.

Liam Fox

House of Commons, July 2012

The Bow Group

The Bow Group is a leading think tank based in London. It is the oldest centre-right think tank in the United Kingdom and celebrates its 60th Anniversary this year. Founded by a group that included Lord (Geoffrey) Howe and Lord (Norman St. John) Stevas, its past chairmen have included Sir Christopher Bland and Lord (Norman) Lamont.

Since its foundation, the Bow Group has been a significant source of policy ideas and many of its papers have had a direct influence on Government policy and the life of the nation. Many of the Bow Group's alumni currently sit in Parliament, including five former officers who were elected at the 2010 General Election. The Bow Group Council is presided over by Sir John Major and Lords Howe, Howard and Heseltine and chaired by Ben Harris-Quinney.

If you are interested in writing for the Bow Group, please contact the Research Secretary, Richard Mabey, at research@bowgroup.org.

Rt. Hon. Dr. Liam Fox MP

Liam Fox was born in 1961. He was educated at St Bride's High School, East Kilbride and University of Glasgow where he studied medicine. Liam is a member of the Royal College of General Practitioners. He worked as a Civilian Army Medical Officer and also worked in the voluntary sector as a divisional surgeon for St Johns before working as a GP in Buckinghamshire and Somerset. Liam was elected as the Member of Parliament for Woodspring (renamed North Somerset for the 2010 General Election) in April 1992.



Liam was a Minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from 1996 until the 1997 General Election. In June 1997, Liam was appointed Opposition Front Bench Spokesman on Constitutional Affairs. For four years from May 1999 to November 2003 he served as Shadow Secretary of State for Health before being appointed Co-Chairman of the Party in 2003. Subsequently, from May 2005 to December 2005, he served as Shadow Foreign Secretary, and then as Shadow Secretary of State for Defence from December 2005 to May 2010.

He was Secretary of State for Defence from May 2010 to October 2011.

Dr. James D. Boys

James Boys is a recognised expert on American foreign and domestic politics. He is a regular contributor to both television and radio on issues pertaining to American politics and international affairs. He is a familiar face to viewers of BBC News, Sky News and Al Jazeera English, and to listeners of LBC 97.3 in London, ensuring he regularly brings his analysis to a worldwide audience of 140 million in more than 100 countries.



Dr. Boys has held political office in the UK, worked on Capitol Hill and Wall Street and brings these experiences to his interpretation of political events. Dr. Boys' work straddles history, politics and international relations. He is a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at King's College London, Associate Professor of International Political Studies at Richmond University in London and a Senior Research Fellow at the Global Policy Institute in London.

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"The National Security Council is an extremely successful innovation and change in Government. It provides for an inclusive and important process in bringing Government and Whitehall together on delivering our foreign policy and security objectives."

Sir Kim Darroch, UK National Security Adviser

"What the [UK] National Security Council does is clearly an adaptation from American thinking, but I hope that it is fitted for the requirements of Cabinet Government and not for the separation of powers. It gives an opportunity for Ministers from the relevant departments, these days very much including the home departments, to be part of national security policy-making."

Rt. Hon. The Baroness Neville-Jones

"I wouldn't underestimate the structures already in place in Westminster, there are already levels of coordination, to formalize it and also bring it into the public arena is, I think, a welcome move. It will be interesting to see what comes of it."

Claire Yorke, International Security Programme Coordinator, Chatham House

"[The National Security Council] is the place in Government where military, diplomatic, and resources could be studied and continually appraised."

President Harry S. Truman

"Putting before the President the fullest range of choices and their likely consequences was indeed the main job of the National Security Adviser."

Dr. Henry Kissinger

"There is no closer ally for the U.S. in the world than the U.K. We are in absolute alignment with the British on a range of core international security interests and, of course, our deeply shared set of values that have tied us together for many decades."

Ben Rhodes, U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser

"The [Joint Strategy] Board will help enable a more guided, coordinated approach to 'over the horizon' challenges we may face in the future and also how today's challenges are likely to shape our future choices."

Joint White House-Downing Street Statement

"The cooperation that I see every day in intelligence matters is without parallel in the world."

Rt. Hon. William Hague, M.P. Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

"When the United States and Britain stand together, our people and people around the world can become more secure and more prosperous. It is a perfect alignment of what we both need and what we both believe."

Barack Obama and David Cameron, Joint Statement

"The U.S. and UK already work closely together on many national security issues. The new board will allow us to look ahead and develop a shared view of emerging challenges, how we should deal with them, and how our current policy can adapt to longer-term developments."

Downing Street Statement

"I think it's fair to say that most of us involved in the initial design don't think that the (UK) National Security Council is what it should be."

Mark Phillips, Research Fellow, Royal United Services Institute

Introduction – The Future Direction of UK National Security Infrastructure

As the twenty-first century continues to evolve in ways few could have forecast, many Western powers appear to be struggling to adequately project their military power as they face a host of global challenges, not least of which is a restrictive economic environment that has curtailed defence expenditure and costly overseas initiatives.

In an effort to address contemporary challenges the United Kingdom configured a National Security Council in May 2010, designed to mirror its American namesake, established by President Truman in 1947.

Additionally, in May 2011, President Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron announced the establishment of a Joint Strategy Board to formalise the longstanding security and intelligence links between the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Government has also published a National Security Strategy (NSS) in an effort to ensure that policies and procedures are adequate for today's security, military and intelligence-led requirements.

These decisions, both national and supra-national, have the potential to recalibrate the foreign policy decision-making process within the United Kingdom and have implications for the future direction and focus of the transatlantic relationship.

This paper, in part, considers these developments to ascertain their significance and potential impact upon the formulation of policy. It draws upon interviews and testimony to reveal the thinking that led to the establishment of these entities and the drafting of the NSS, the timings involved and their likely implication.

As the United Kingdom seeks to reconfigure and redefine its alliances in the second decade of the highly unpredictable twenty-first century, what are the implications of this institutional evolution? Will they lead to new meaningful security arrangements between nations, or are they merely a series of cosmetic exercises?

This Bow Group Target Paper is designed to draw together a series of findings related to these three areas of national security architecture, concluding that further action is required to ensure that the reforms that have been continued and in some cases initiated under this government are only the first in a series of steps towards meaningful reform.

This paper draws upon open source material, interviews with policy makers and policy advisers, committee hearings and on material prepared by advisers to the Conservative Party prior to taking office in 2010. Accordingly, the report considers political aspirations and contrasts these with decisions taken once in government to address where these expectations have failed to be delivered upon and how this can be rectified.

These sources are drawn upon to present a series of recommendations designed to prompt the Government into action and to continue its efforts to reform the United Kingdom's national security architecture for the benefit of all citizens and for the continued well being of our international partnerships.

National Security Considerations

Of all the responsibilities of Her Majesty's Government, none are more pressing or more challenging than those surrounding national security. With the accompanying challenges of political violence, debates surrounding the role of the state and the rights of citizens, budgetary decisions and the difficulties of long-term planning in a short-term political environment, the decisions that are made in this sphere go to the very core of a government's responsibility to protect the nation and its citizens. It is, alas, a regular casualty of budgetary cuts and short-term political manipulation. Matters of such national importance require long-term, cross party collaboration to ensure that national security is not compromised as a result of party political machinations.

The Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister acknowledged the singular importance of this area of responsibility in the introduction to the 2010 National Security Strategy report, which established the focus and ambition of the Government's foreign policy for the duration of this Parliament: "In a world of startling change, the first duty of the Government remains: the security of our country."¹

The 2010 National Security Strategy recognised the changed security environment of the modern era and the new dangers posed by non-state actors and made a definitive link between national security and economic security.

The Government has clearly recognised the need to update the national security architecture following the ad hoc approach taken by too many administrations over too many years. Through a Cold War and a War on Terror the decision-making process in Downing Street was far too lax and gave rise to justifiable criticism relating to issues of accountability and transparency.

With the implications for potential miscalculation already high enough in this area, it should be logical that any steps that can be taken to aid policymakers would be welcomed. As President John F. Kennedy observed, "Domestic policy can only defeat us, foreign policy can kill us."² Whilst the threats that confront the United Kingdom, her citizens and allies are very different in magnitude and scope than from the days of the Cold War, the implications of failure in the field's of foreign, military and security policy are nonetheless just as serious.

The British Government recognises that as a result of geo-political developments "Britain today is both more secure and more vulnerable than in most of her long history."³ To this end the Government wisely chose to implement a series of changes that had been considered in Opposition that relate directly to the national security infrastructure of the United Kingdom.

This Bow Group Target Paper commends the Government for taking the all too often avoided decision to challenge the status quo and to implement change. It notes, however, that the changes that have been made were not necessarily in keeping with aspirations that were expressed by the Conservatives in Opposition and that these should therefore be seen as the first in a series of steps towards an improved national security infrastructure, rather than being a destination in itself.

¹ *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 2010, 3

² John F. Kennedy, quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Press, 1965, 426

³ *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 2010, 3

The Concept of National Security Councils

In recent years, the actions of a succession of world leaders have lent credence to the idea that the national executive should monopolise key decisions in the area of foreign policy. Around the world, national leaders have sought to emulate a presidential approach to policy implementation and execution in spite of the constitutional limitations placed on them by their national laws and regulations.

Despite such efforts, national governments rarely become completely detached from foreign affairs and few leaders can function without resorting to what is conventionally called a 'cabinet' even if it sometimes bears little resemblance to the British model.

This has given rise to the development of an alternative form of Cabinet with a specific focus, what may in some circles be referred to as a War Cabinet. Such entities have served a variety of purposes. At best they serve to focus attention by omitting unnecessary attendees and by drawing out solutions to problems from the best experts available, thereby providing national leaders with the greatest possible opportunity to devise and execute an optimal outcome.

At worst they risk being an un-elected coterie of shadowy figures, susceptible to groupthink, unanswerable to anyone, for anything and a threat to the very democratic principles that they were intended, in theory, to protect.

Such bodies, therefore, are not without their detractors who usually consist of those whose voices have been overlooked, either because they were not invited to attend in the first place or else have been subsequently over-ruled at such gatherings.

Placed within the executive branch of government, National Security Councils (NSC) have become the central body for policy coordination on matters pertaining to security, foreign policy, defence and intelligence issues; on all matters therefore relating to national security.

Globally, membership of such entities varies but an appointed National Security Advisor traditionally heads them, with attendees drawn from the appropriate departments of government, military, intelligence and other agencies. They are often chaired by the national executive, be that a Prime Minister or President, whom the body is ultimately designed to advise.

Nations as diverse as Brazil, the United States, India, Turkey and Sri Lanka have all seen fit to incorporate a national security council into their decision-making processes and it is appropriate that the United Kingdom has joined these ranks of nations.

Despite the best of intentions, National Security Councils have, however, been known to foster inter-agency tension, as competing Governmental Departments vie for priority, funding and influence. The establishment of a National Security Council with an accompanying National Security Adviser creates an obvious source of potential conflict with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the statutory role of the Foreign Secretary. Such tensions are not uncommon in national security architecture and the experience of the United States in this area is instructive.

The United States' National Security Council

For all of its current stature and renown, the United States' National Security Council was created without great fanfare in 1947. As but one element of the wider National Security Act of that year, its formulation was relegated to page 2 of *The New York Times*. Clearly, its creation was seen to be of secondary importance to the unification of the Army and Navy into a single Department of Defence.⁴

This may well have been the case, but by the time of the Korean War, the NSC had arguably become a far more significant body in its area than the full Cabinet, a body that has had little, if any, collective influence in American political life, in stark contrast to the British Cabinet.⁵

In the evolution of what became the NSC, then Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, proved to be its foremost advocate as he sought to regularise presidential decision making and hence constrain the chief executive by establishing a formal, top-level group with which he would be obliged to meet regularly.

Clearly, history reveals that this is not what emerged in practice. Whilst President Truman was content enough to unify the military, he agreed to the concept of a National Security Council only when it had been watered down to become an advisory board. James Forrestal's ambitions of a foreign policy decision-making body, capable of binding the American president, would go unfulfilled.

The National Security Council, therefore, had a somewhat inauspicious birth, as little more than a body to foster interagency cooperation. Neither did it appear to have the full confidence of the president. Harry Truman reduced the title of its head from 'Director' to 'Executive Secretary' and failed to meet with the group for ten months after its inaugural sitting. He was not blind to its potential, however, since he notably refused to place the NSC at the Pentagon and instead welcomed it 'as an enlargement of the presidential staff.'⁶

Indeed, it is vital to note that the NSC has ebbed and flowed ever since, with developments and priorities reflecting individual presidents' styles and policies. Vivaly, George Marshall had warned that the NSC could "markedly diminish the responsibility of the Secretary of State."⁷ This occurred not necessarily because of the existence of the NSC, but due to President Eisenhower's establishment of a presidential assistant for national security affairs.

President Kennedy's decision to grant broad day-to-day responsibility for the coordination of foreign policy to his aide, McGeorge Bundy, exacerbated this situation. This also marked the first time that such an adviser had an office in the West Wing in a pattern that continues to this day and which serves to reinforce General Marshall's concerns in a world where proximity to power often *is* power. This is not universally accepted but the placing of the National Security Adviser in the rarefied real estate of the West Wing places the office holder at a distinct advantage over the Secretary of State, secluded on the seventh floor of an office block in the Foggy Bottom district of Washington, D.C.

⁴ Ivo H. Daadler and I.M. Detler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009, 3

⁵ Christopher Hill, *The Changing Politics of Foreign Policy*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 63

⁶ Marshall to Truman, February 7, 1947, quoted in Anna Kasten Nelson, "National Security I: Inventing a Process," in Hugh Heclo and Lester M. Salamon, eds., *The Illusion of Presidential Government*, San Francisco: Westview Press, for the National Academy of Public Administration, 1981, 233/245.

⁷ Ibid, 233

Kennedy and Bundy were vital in the establishment of the existing role of the National Security Advisor, of the Situation Room and the transformation of the NSC from a theoretical, on-site think tank, to the centre of foreign policy decision-making for the presidency, with members recruited specifically to serve the incumbent, rather than as an extension of the omnipresent bureaucracy that continued in office irrespective of the make up of the Government.

Whilst later presidents such as Richard Nixon and George H. W. Bush would do much to restructure the National Security Council, all subsequent presidents would build on the Kennedy/Bundy foundation.⁸ Indeed it is hard to think of a better example of crisis management than the model established by President Kennedy at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis when the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOMM) was briefly established to address the situation.



Fig. 1 - EXCOMM meets at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis

It is telling that the National Security Council emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War and at the start of what became The Cold War. The timing had as much to do with serendipity, as it had to do with geo-politics. Despite his many successes during an unprecedented 12 years in power, President Roosevelt was known to foster inter-agency and inter-personal rivalry within his administration. This, combined with what has been referred to as his 'intimate, personalised and disorderly' conduct of WWII decision making had 'caused great pains at the Pentagon and State.'⁹ Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal had felt that pain most acutely. In the aftermath of World War Two and the death of President Roosevelt, came an opportunity to alter the structures of U.S. national security. When this occurred it was to the British example that American leaders such as Forrestal turned. Contrasting the operation of FDR's White House with the British War Cabinet, Forrestal saw much to recommend in the latter. This pattern would be replicated in the decision to establish the Central Intelligence Agency, a body modelled heavily on MI-6 and later the National Security Agency, utilising the British model of GCHQ.

⁸ Ivo H. Daadler and I.M. Detler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009, 56

⁹ Richard E. Neustadt, "Approaches to Staffing the Presidency: Notes on FDR and JFK," *American Political Science Review*, vol.57, no.4 (December 1963), 860

The Special Relationship

This common history is instructive to this paper for a variety of reasons, but it is indicative of the true nature of what is referred to, in Britain at least, as the Special Relationship. This is itself a concept that many are quick to dismiss as irrelevant, lacking in balance or any continued relevance. They do so in error by focusing on the fluctuating inter-personal relationship between the national leaders. Whilst the relationship between the American President and the British Prime Minister is of importance in setting the tone for their time in office together, the Special Relationship is based on far more than this. It is a relationship forged in common language, history, culture, economics and ideology.

Vitally, and often overlooked by headline writers and critics of the relationship, are the links that exist between the nation's intelligence, military and political actors at a sub-executive level. Senior officers in the armed services and members of the diplomatic services have a tradition of operating together with an affinity unmatched in other foreign countries. It is a relationship that is not only misunderstood but also one that is constantly being written off, re-examined and overly analysed to the embarrassment of all concerned. Like all relationships it thrives when it is being enjoyed, not analysed. One of the key elements in foreign policy decision-making is the use of intelligence material, gained from both foreign operations and domestic counter-intelligence. The relationship between politics and intelligence is of crucial importance to the success of foreign policy. It remains at the heart of the transatlantic relationship.

The *Resilient Nation* report, prepared by the Conservatives in Opposition, reveals the Government's "strong commitment to the transatlantic alliance. The United States remains our indispensable partner in diplomacy, intelligence and security. Our relationship should be one of permanent friendship coupled with honest criticism."¹⁰ President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron defined the relationship for their time in office in May 2011: "Our relationship...is founded on a deep emotional connection, by sentiment and ties of people and culture. But the reason it thrives, the reason why this is such a natural partnership, is because it advances our common interests and shared values. Ours is not just a special relationship, it is an essential relationship."¹¹

The Increasing Politicisation of COBRA

Whilst it is flattering that American policy makers should have looked to Great Britain for a model upon which to base their emerging national security structures, it is perhaps, not surprising that all was not quite as streamlined as they may have imagined.

In 1972 the Government established study groups to prepare contingency plans in case of terrorist incidents on issues of operational control and communication and the use of state of the art technology. This was located in the windowless Cabinet Office Briefing Room A.¹² This subterranean, poorly lit, poorly ventilated environment inadvertently became the heart of the UK's national security decision-making process. In the following years COBR, chaired by the Home Secretary, played a central role in the Iranian Hostage crisis of 1980, which saw the first use of the SAS in Britain to resolve a crisis. Despite her reputation for a hands on approach, Prime Minister Thatcher only chaired a COBR session once, in February 1982 in response to a hijacking of an Air Tanzanian jet, forced to land at London's Stansted airport.

The events of 9/11 are indicative of the centrality of intelligence to the Special Relationship. Though the majority of lives lost on 9/11 were American, more British

¹⁰ *A Resilient Nation*, Policy Green Paper No.13, 17

¹¹ President Barack Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron, "An Essential Relationship," *The Times*, 23 May 2011.

¹² Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5*, London: Allen Lane, 2010, 614

civilians, 67, were also killed than in any other terrorist attack. COBR, now referred to more openly as COBRA, convened on September 11, 2001, chaired by the PM¹³ but met only three times in the following month. Prime Minister Tony Blair felt his inner circle was more useful to him than an official body.¹⁴ This was, however, twice more than the full Cabinet met during this period.

Despite the obvious utilisation of COBRA during international incidents, it can and has been used for domestic crises, though this is unusual. Tony Blair used it to manage fuel protests,¹⁵ the first time this was done to bring about an immediate change in domestic policy, rather than resolving a crisis.¹⁶ Blair's style, however, precluded excessive use of debating forums and ensured that time and again, decisions were made in small, select groups rather than in formal settings such as the Cabinet Office Briefing Room.

Gordon Brown, however, took a very different approach and developed what his Security Minister, Alan West, called "a passion for COBRA. It's not some magic place. It's just a room really."¹⁷ The very name, however, carried a connotation of action and danger, especially in a Whitehall setting that is usually anything but. The unusually robust acronym, accompanying press releases and Prime Ministerial speeches guaranteed media coverage that was invariably positive.

It was recognised that "COBRA does weave a certain spell on the media. It conveys the impression that the PM is gripping a crisis."¹⁸ However, it became apparent very quickly that COBRA was being utilised for political gain. What became seen as Brown's COBRA compulsion 'started for genuine reasons', noted one civil servant. 'They then very quickly learnt that they could get an easy headline on the Sky News banner from 'PM chairs COBRA.'¹⁹

When Number 10 announced that Gordon Brown had convened five meetings of COBRA in four days, civil servants recognised that this was less for practical reasons than presentational purposes. 'It was not a war room, it was a newsroom.'²⁰ Brown's former Security Minister, Admiral Rt Hon. Lord West of Spithead, noted in hearings of the National Security Committee that "COBRA has a kind of mystique, and I am afraid that some Prime Ministers have been guilty of adding to that, saying, "I'm calling COBRA!" It is the Cabinet Office Briefing Room A, that is all it is."²¹ It appears evident that under the Brown Administration the potential media benefits of initiating a COBRA meeting were, on occasion, granted priority over the operational considerations of the day.

¹³ Ibid, 809

¹⁴ John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, London: Free Press, 2003, 121

¹⁵ Tony Blair, *A Journey*, London: Hutchinson, 2010, 295

¹⁶ Anthony Seldon, *Blair Unbound*, London & New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007, 73

¹⁷ Alan West, quoted in Andrew Rawnsley, *The End of the Party*, London: Viking, 2010, 467

¹⁸ Rawnsley, *The End of the Party*, 467

¹⁹ Anonymous Civil Servant, quoted in Rawnsley, 470

²⁰ Ibid, 474

²¹ Admiral Rt Hon Lord West of Spithead, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 12 September 2011, 31

The UK National Security Council

Origins

The idea of introducing a UK National Security Council had been raised before the 2010 election. In March 2008 it was reported that Gordon Brown was to establish such a body to complement, rather than replace, the existing *ad hoc* COBRA emergency committee, which the Prime Minister had regularly convened to deal with a variety of crises from winter storms to terrorist activity.²² It was anticipated that such a body would be launched alongside the release of the National Security Strategy.

Reports suggested that Gordon Brown's NSC would comprise of senior politicians from all parties, representatives from Foreign Office, Department for International Development, the Home Office and the Ministry of Defence, experts from the private sector as well leading members of the military and intelligence organisations. However, rather than an NSC, the Government implemented two bodies: the Committee on National Security, International Relations and Development (NSID) and the National Security Forum.

An interim National Security Forum was formed at that time with support staff drawn from the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.²³ It was anticipated that a permanent Forum would be recruited by open competition in 2010. The Forum "started off with the great and the good, retired people, academics, who were experts in their field, who could look at certain issues for government and feed into the policy making process. There was an idea that that could then be extended to include cross party representatives."²⁴ It was immediately dismissed as being "another talking shop" by David Cameron who insisted that a full National Security Council was required.²⁵

Initial Plans in Opposition

As part of David Cameron's policy review prior to the 2010 election, the Conservative Party drew up a policy paper addressing national security. The report, *A Resilient Nation*, was prepared in line with the Conservative manifesto and asserted "individuals need to be better prepared, need to take more involvement in a whole range of issues, whether that be community intelligence, counter terrorism or preparing themselves to cope with a national disaster."²⁶ The *Resilient Nation* committed the Conservatives to recalibrate the national security architecture and to the establishment of a National Security Council to replace the Ministerial Committee on National Security, International Relations and Development (NSID) and the Ministerial Civil Contingencies Committee. As planned by the Conservatives in opposition, the NSC would "ensure that departments across Whitehall are able to bring their expertise together at the centre not just to coordinate or to comment on the efforts of others but to think strategically about policy, relate its different aspects to each other in a coherent whole, and innovate in departmental delivery."²⁷

The *Resilient Nation* was not the only national security related document to emerge from the Conservatives in Opposition. *The National Security Machinery: Options* paper went

²² See Rosa Prince, "Britain to get a US-Style Security Council," *The Daily Telegraph*, March 17, 2008 and Colin Brown, "Brown to Create US-Style National Security Council," *The Independent*, March 18, 2008

²³ See Margaret Gilmore, "Determining the Wider Dimensions of the UK's National Security," *RUSI.org*, <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C49B4F2FD1EB40/>

²⁴ Mark Phillips, Interview with Dr. James D. Boys, March 20, 2012

²⁵ David Cameron, Response to Prime Minister's Statement to the House on National Security Strategy, March 19, 2008. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7304999.stm

²⁶ Mark Phillips, Interview with Dr. James D. Boys, March 20, 2012

²⁷ *A Resilient Nation*, 8

into greater detail in relation to the redesign of the national security infrastructure and the creation of a National Security Council, which would replace the Ministerial Committee on National Security, International Relations and Development. The potential to bring Permanent Secretaries into the operations of the NSC at 'deputies' level was described as being "a desirable innovation".²⁸ This concept of a Deputies Committee would have been a direct replication of the American model.

Anticipating The National Security Adviser and Membership

The *National Security Machinery: Options* paper gave attention to the role of a National Security Adviser, which it described as being "sufficiently different from the American model," and "an innovation."²⁹ The position was advocated since the NSC would require a full time chief to act as a conduit between Permanent Under Secretaries and Ministers as well as to "mind the shop and ensure that the National Security Strategy and the collective agenda are driven forward."³⁰ Such a role would take over, combine and upgrade the work done by four Prime Ministerial Advisers (Foreign Policy and Defence; Security; G20; head of the National Security Secretariat).³¹ Such an individual would need to command the confidence of the Prime Minister, colleagues and senior officials within the military and intelligence communities and be able to withstand public scrutiny at Parliamentary committees.³² As a result, the *National Security Machinery: Options* paper argued that in a debate between a political and an official appointment, "an official at Grade 1 or hors class would probably fit more easily."³³

As outlined in the *National Security Machinery: Options* paper, the NSC "would draw together...under the Prime Minister, the strategic direction of many aspects of national security which are at present scattered through Government."³⁴ The NSC would be at the centre of Government thinking on foreign policy and necessarily chaired by the Prime Minister. As the NSC was designed in part to replace Gordon Brown's 16-member NSID, the paper recommended that core membership include Cabinet members with portfolios reflecting security responsibility (HO, FCO, Cabinet Office, DFID and the Treasury). Beyond this initial core, "those with responsibilities which either have considerable impact on security or are greatly affected by security issues and are required themselves to take account of / plan for security issues" should be regular attendees. Finally, the paper recommended inclusion for "those on whose portfolio a crisis would have major impact for which they must plan (e.g. health)."³⁵

The *Resilient Nation* document subsequently recommended that the Prime Minister chair the NSC, with core membership consisting of the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Defence Secretary, the International Development Secretary, the Security Minister and other Ministers nominated by the Prime Minister. Other colleagues would attend as necessary. As in the United States, membership of the NSC would be fluid and dependent upon circumstances and the requirements of the Prime Minister. The report likened the role of the National Security Adviser at such meetings as being akin to that of the Cabinet Secretary at Cabinet meetings.³⁶

²⁸ *National Security Machinery: Options*, 4

²⁹ *Ibid*, 5

³⁰ *Ibid*, 5

³¹ *Ibid*, 5

³² *Ibid*, 23

³³ *Ibid*, 23

³⁴ *Ibid*, 6

³⁵ *Ibid*, 18

³⁶ *Ibid*, 19

Aspiration and Application: The Post 2010 Structure

The establishment of the UK National Security Council was one of the first concrete steps taken by the new Government following the General Election in May 2010 and met for its inaugural session on May 12. Despite the presence of the Liberal Democrats in the Coalition Government, this was clearly a Conservative-led initiative. The Liberal Democrats had made no mention of national security in their 2010 manifesto and their commitment to an immediate Strategic Security and Defence Review appeared dedicated as much to an examination of climate change as it was to the UK's defence posture.

The Government announced that the panel would convene weekly under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Membership was set to including the Deputy PM, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Home Secretary, the International Development Secretary, the Energy and Climate Change Secretary and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. As set out in Opposition, the Council would also invite members of the armed forces and the intelligence service to attend as necessary. The Government also established three ministerial sub-committees of the NSC designed to address Britain's relationship with emerging international powers; Nuclear Deterrence and Security Threats; and finally to consider Hazards, Resilience and Contingencies. This final sub-committee included a restricted group to consider intelligence matters.

The establishment of the NSC coincided with the termination of the National Security Forum, as the Prime Minister believed that a panel of outside experts was unwarranted and that if necessary the government could approach such individuals as the need arose. Similarly, the idea of incorporating politicians drawn from outside the Government were scrapped, although the convention of briefing the Leader of the Opposition on issues under Privy Council terms and being invited to meetings of COBR was retained.

As per its plans in Opposition, the Government established the post of National Security Adviser and initially appointed the former Permanent Secretary of the FCO, Peter Ricketts, who served until his appointment as Ambassador to France and was succeeded by Sir Kim Darroch in January 2012. In June 2010 it was announced that the National Security Adviser would be aided by two deputies; Oliver Robbins, (former Principal Private Secretary to Prime Minister Tony Blair) and Julian Miller (former deputy head of foreign and defence policy at the Cabinet Office).

It is important to note that the aim of the new UK National Security Council was to bring a new sense of order and process to the way Britain approaches global security issues. It was a distinct effort to move away from the perceived informality of the Blair years. In this sense, it appears to have succeeded. However, despite this new architecture the risk is that the NSC merely follows the COBR meetings and becomes a vehicle for window dressing. Additionally, it could potentially be too driven by events rather than by strategy.

For all of the intellectual and academic discussions surrounding the intricate structural elements in place to aid leaders in their decision-making processes and the degree to which these are underpinned by a proper process, political realities suggest that such decisions have invariably been made in conversations with close and trusted aides in less than ideal circumstances, as opposed to in formal committee settings. Former Foreign Secretary David Miliband has referred to the National Security Council as being "akin to an expensive and shiny Rolls Royce, whose owner spends all their time polishing it and very little time behind the wheel."³⁷ It is important, however, to consider the initiatives that were devised in Opposition and contrast these plans with what has been put in place to ascertain the degree of success that this exercise has achieved.

³⁷ David Miliband, quoted in *The National Security Council and the Prime Minister*, George Bangham and Sarang Shah, The Wilberforce Society, March 2012, 2

A Consideration of the Restructuring

The NSC was partly David Cameron's response to what he saw as the foreign policy failures of his predecessors in Iraq and, to a lesser degree, Afghanistan: ill-planned and ill-defined military adventures with no clear exit strategy. Questions have been raised as to the degree of organisational, structural and operational change that the NSC has heralded. Critics have noted that the efforts in Libya indicate that Blair's much derided "sofa government" has been replaced with a new, back-of-the-envelope approach.³⁸ Such criticism is valid. The changes were made with too little thought having been paid to their implementation following the 2010 election and were made with excessive sensitivity to prevailing structures. Despite this, it does appear to have brought a more business-like approach to foreign policy decision-making in Whitehall.

The Government has made an important move in overcoming the natural bureaucratic inclination to continue with existing structures and instead opting to create the National Security Council and recalibrate the national security architecture, which improves on the poor attempts at collective strategy formulation under previous administrations. It has been described as "an extremely successful innovation and change in government," which "provides for an inclusive and important process in bringing Government and Whitehall together on delivering our foreign policy and security objectives."³⁹

However, Government insiders have expressed their concerns that the entity could become too powerful. Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones has acknowledged that she believes the NSC, "while challenging other departments, should itself be challenged."⁴⁰ The inherent risk is of Government becoming an echo chamber that pays no heed to external sources and instead relies upon its own appointees for advice. "If we have learnt anything about modern government, it is that we need the resources of the whole of society to make it work properly, so it is important that the system remains open. I hope that the National Security Council...does not become a form of closed shop."⁴¹

Despite the work that had been conducted by the review team in Opposition, Sir Peter Ricketts was granted a great deal of latitude in structuring the NSC. He appears to have given little thought to the initial research and instead has taken the existing cabinet secretariat and formed a national security secretariat out of it. This has ensured that the NSC was established along lines that were favourable to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but also that its mandate was not as sweeping as it could have been.

However, serious questions have been asked about its viability and suitability. Worryingly, it appears to differ little from the previous National Security Committee, with similar if not identical membership. Of concern is the stated concern of at least one individual who devised the Government's initial plan: "I think its fair to say that most of us involved in the initial design don't think that the NSC is what it should be."⁴² The decision to institute a National Security Council was a bold move, but it must be more than a re-branding exercise if it is to be a success. It cannot merely be an abridged form of the Cabinet, nor should it be a re-branded National Security Committee. A consideration of Gordon Brown's National Security Forum is instructive as to potential improvements to the institution as currently constituted.

³⁸ Con Coughlin, 'In Libya and London, We're Getting Into A Frightful Mess,' *Daily Telegraph*, April 20, 2011

³⁹ Sir Kim Darroch, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy*, 26 March 2012, 2

⁴⁰ Rt Hon. Baroness Neville-Jones, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 4 July, 2011, 10

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 10

⁴² Mark Phillips, Interview with Dr. James D. Boys, March 20, 2012

The Demise of the National Security Forum & the Rise of the NSC

In his appearance before the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Gordon Brown's former Security Adviser, Admiral Rt Hon. Lord West of Spithead, lamented the demise of the National Security Forum. "I think that it was sad that it was disbanded...I think it added huge value. I was not convinced when it first started, but some of the papers that we produced were really valuable and some of the debates and discussions were very good. I think that Prime Minister Brown was surprised when he saw a couple of them, and he actually came along and listened to some of these debates. I think that they have lost something in losing that. It enabled those people, whether it was academics, or those who had great linkage into the Muslim community, or great industrialists, to go and talk to the people they knew to get feedback and even papers produced...I think that is a great loss."⁴³

The concept of placing intellectuals and subject specific experts in direct communication with the Prime Minister and key decision-makers was a strong signal of intent to seek advice and guidance from a wider range of individuals than had been the case previously. Abandoning the link with outside experts is a mistake that should be rectified. Even those who do not lament the loss of the Forum recognise the need for external input: "I would like to see all departments have some think-tank element within them. We do not have the National Security Forum and I do not particularly regret that. However, it is important that departments should maintain an open dialogue and allow themselves to talk to experts in their area so that the Government do not cut themselves off from expertise."⁴⁴

In Opposition David Cameron had dismissed the National Security Forum as being "another talking shop."⁴⁵ It would appear, however, that as Prime Minister, he has attempted to combine elements of the National Security Forum into the National Security Council. In his appearance before the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Oliver Letwin observed that the Prime Minister's "modus operandi at these meetings is to do something that is perhaps annoying to politicians at first—he starts by asking the experts and comes to the politicians only after we have all heard what the experts have to say. We have found that enormously educative."⁴⁶

A question arises, however, as to the true 'external' nature of the experts in question. The Parliamentary Committee on National Security Strategy was forced to enquire as to the extent and range of external input and was advised in a written response that the NSC had been briefed by external experts on Afghanistan and Pakistan "in June 2010 and in December 2011," and that "senior departmental officials and Ambassadors in-country, frequently brief the NSC." In addition the committee were advised that "Ministers on the NSC may of course consult experts in preparation for the NSC and the normal conduct of their business."⁴⁷ It should be clear from this response that the input of external, non-governmental expertise, therefore, is severely limited and is a major flaw in the process.

⁴³ Admiral Rt Hon. Lord West of Spithead, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 12 September 2011, 30

⁴⁴ Rt Hon. Baroness Neville-Jones, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 4 July, 2011, 10

⁴⁵ David Cameron, *Response to Prime Minister's Statement to the House on National Security Strategy*, March 19, 2008. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7304999.stm (accessed May 3, 2012)

⁴⁶ Oliver Letwin, *Evidence to Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 24 October 2011, 50-1

⁴⁷ Cabinet Office, Written Evidence, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 107

A previous response from the Cabinet Office informed the committee that Government consultation in the preparation of policy involved “external bodies,” but refused to elaborate. It further stated that the National Security Secretariat “frequently commissions assessments from the JIC, JTAC and lead Departments (including FCO, MOD, HMT, HO, DECC DFID etc) to inform NSC discussions.”⁴⁸

These are still governmental agencies, however. The letter concluded this point by stating, “It is supported by strategic advice and expertise across Whitehall, including work conducted in partnership with organisations outside Government such as the private sector, think tanks, academia and wider international organisations,”⁴⁹ again failing to elaborate upon specific individuals or organisations and talking in vague generalities. Sir Kim Darroch recently testified that “The way that the National Security Council works is that you tend to get presentations by officials and then a political discussion among Ministers, to which, if there are questions of detail or fact, officials may be brought in again.”⁵⁰ It is important to note that the presentations are therefore coming from ‘officials’ not from outside experts.

Whilst having an entire committee dedicated to external advice may have been excessive, it would appear that it enabled external experts to bring their insight to the seat of power in a way that is often overlooked in the United Kingdom. In other nations, such as the United States or Israel, the linkage between government, the military and academics is far more robust and allows for far greater interaction. It would appear that the decision to scrap the National Security Forum might have been a retrograde step in any effort to improve this situation and to ensure that decision-makers have access to a wide range of views as they weigh up policy options. Revoking this decision, or finding a way to continue this dialogue with external sources would be a welcome move.

Gordon Brown’s model un-necessarily occupied the Prime Minister’s time and that of leading ministers in direct discussion with external sources. A solution would be to embrace an overall concept more akin to the American model. This would allow external sources access to mid-ranking government officials who could then feed this data up to ministers and the Prime Minister at the National Security Council as appropriate and bring in select experts when the situation demanded it.

In her appearance before the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, Rt Hon. Baroness Neville-Jones noted “what the [UK] National Security Council does is clearly an adaptation from American thinking, but I hope that it is fitted for the requirements of Cabinet government and not for the separation of powers.”⁵¹ The distinction from the American model is important, however, the decision to use the same name as in the United States invites inevitable comparisons that may be inappropriate. If the UK model is to vary from the American system it was unwise to adopt the expression. However, if the UK system is intended to replicate the U.S. model then the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office must be addressed. The National Security Secretariat must also be enhanced to make it a more viable entity.

⁴⁸ Cabinet Office, Written Evidence, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 91

⁴⁹ Cabinet Office, Written Evidence, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 91

⁵⁰ Sir Kim Darroch, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy*, 26 March 2012, 18

⁵¹ Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 4 July, 2011, 3

The Role of the National Security Adviser

The role of National Security Adviser as currently constituted has three key elements: (i) act as Secretary of the National Security Council; (ii) act as a senior foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister and (iii) head the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.⁵² These distinctions ensure that the adviser's priorities are unclear, as is the seniority of the role itself, as the Downing Street website does not even list the National Security Advisor as being a member of the National Security Council.

In the United States, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (National Security Adviser) is a powerful figure often drawn from academia (Kissinger, Lake, Rice) or from a military background (Jones, Powell, Scowcroft, Poindexter).⁵³ The role commands an office in the West Wing of the White House and is recognised as being the most influential adviser to the president on foreign affairs.

This role has developed greatly from its original conception. As the National Security Council was originally configured, there was no such position. The role was not officially sanctioned until after the 1952 election of President Eisenhower and came to prominence with the appointments of McGeorge Bundy in 1961 and particularly of Henry Kissinger in 1969. Appointments serve at the pleasure of the president and tenure in office is therefore variable. Some appointments will serve for the entire 4-year duration of an administration, whilst others will remain for a far shorter time period. President George W. Bush had one adviser for each term, whilst President Reagan had six during his eight years in office.

The constitutional position is different in the United Kingdom. At present the National Security Adviser is a high ranking member of the Cabinet Office, not drawn from the House of Commons or the House of Lords and appointed to a Cabinet position. Whilst such a development is not impossible in the future it would raise immediate challenges as to the role of the Foreign Secretary and lead to unnecessary confusion.

Sir Kim Darroch has acknowledged the challenges inherent in the role: "There is another part of my role, which is to be the senior foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister. The Foreign Secretary obviously has the primary role in that, but he cannot do the day-to-day answering of Prime Ministerial questions or requests for advice or whatever, and I can provide a certain amount through that. I go to all the Prime Minister's meetings with foreign leaders and I travel with him, so there is an important role there effectively as a foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister."⁵⁴

The role carries with it the potential for duplication and confrontation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Intelligence services. This has been the experience in other nations that have adopted a National Security Council (including the United States) and the United Kingdom would be well advised to avoid this development. The American model is dependent upon a personal connection with the President, with whom they have often developed a rapport on the campaign that has brought them to office. Clearly no such situation has developed yet in the United Kingdom, although that is not to say that it could not in the future. Essentially, however, the National Security Adviser must have a personal rapport with the Prime Minister, with whom he will spend so much time.

⁵² Sir Peter Ricketts, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 5 December 2011, 59

⁵³ Respectively, National Security Advisers to Presidents Nixon, Clinton, W. Bush and Obama, Reagan, Bush and Reagan)

⁵⁴ Sir Kim Darroch, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy*, 26 March 2012, 24

There are, therefore, challenges in the role as presently defined. As Sir Peter Ricketts has noted, “because I am close to the Prime Minister, I know what the Prime Minister is looking for in policy—the issues he is focusing on that he expects me to go and carry forward in Whitehall.”⁵⁵ However, as Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones has observed, “He cannot just be the Prime Minister’s ear. The individual has to command the confidence of the committee as a whole.”⁵⁶ This relates to the second element to the role of the National Security Adviser.

As Oliver Letwin has observed, “The role of the National Security Adviser...is to ensure that the NSC does its work properly. He is its secretary and he sets its agendas by consultation with the Prime Minister.”⁵⁷ The clerical element of the role is clearly important. In his appearance before the National Security Strategy Committee in December 2011, Sir Peter Ricketts addressed this element of the role: “I can convene; I can call meetings and bring people together to tackle problems...I am in a position to put on the agenda...issues that I think need tackling, but I do not have the executive responsibility; that rests with the departments, but I can and do certainly initiate.”⁵⁸

As embodied by Sir Peter Ricketts and currently by Sir Kim Darroch, the UK National Security Adviser is essentially the National Security Council’s principal secretary. At this point, therefore, the National Security Adviser is akin to an executive secretary, at the side of the Prime Minister, arranging meetings and collating data. As Sir Kim noted, “when I am sitting on the NSC, my job is to make it run as effectively and productively as possible, delivering both operational judgments and strategic outcomes.”⁵⁹

The position does not entail specific policy advice, as would be the case in the United States. The position as presently defined does not call for foreign policy expertise, but for experience of the foreign policy bureaucracy and structures of the civil service. With this emphasis on bureaucratic expertise ahead of subject specific knowledge it is, perhaps, not surprising that the first two appointees have been drawn from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Such a background is not essential and indeed Baroness Neville-Jones has acknowledged, “he or she does not have to be an official. You could perfectly well, if you so chose-I would not object to this-take someone from outside, if you found the right person. He or she does not have to be from the Foreign Office.”⁶⁰

Vitality, the NSC has been established on lines conducive to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, ensuring that any future developments are based upon existing foundations that maintain the constitutional role of the Foreign Secretary. Speed, however, appears to have trumped opportunity, as this move was not necessarily in keeping with Conservative plans in Opposition but may have been the easiest to implement in the short time period following the 2010 General Election.

⁵⁵ Sir Peter Ricketts, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 5 December 2011, 60

⁵⁶ Rt Hon. Baroness Neville-Jones, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 4 July, 2011, 14

⁵⁷ Oliver Letwin, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 24 October 2011, 50

⁵⁸ Sir Peter Ricketts, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 5 December 2011, 60

⁵⁹ Sir Kim Darroch, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy*, 26 March 2012, 24

⁶⁰ Rt Hon. Baroness Neville-Jones, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 4 July 2011, 11-12

Replacing COBR: The National Security Operations Centre

In the midst of an overhaul of the national security architecture, a logical question to address concerns the continued role of COBR. The administration of Gordon Brown was seen to have initiated this option too readily and the establishment of a National Security Council raises questions as to the continued necessity of the *ad hoc* arrangement. The use of the national security architecture for short-term political gain was a shameful act that was noted by civil servants and political appointees for the travesty that it was. The decision to reverse this by the current Government is welcomed, as are efforts to revert back to the use of the acronym COBR.

One of the challenges is drawing the line between political and military control in this arrangement. Clearly the UK and the U.S. pride themselves on the civilian control of the military. However it is important that civilian control know where to draw a line and not get involved in the military details of operational consequence. There is "the inevitable tendency for politicians to interfere at the lower levels and you can see this particularly over Libya where they took targeting decisions through the NSC."⁶¹ The idea of politicians making targeting decisions is one that justifies alterations to the existing national security architecture to place such decisions firmly in the hands of the military.

Such a situation must be avoided at all costs. Suggestions that this occurred during the Libyan Operation are concerning. "That reflected a lack of confidence in the targeting process that the MOD was adopting...The second point just to make in regard to the NSC's involvement in targeting is that that's not sustainable because officials will become very used to ministers making those decision and won't be able to make them themselves in the future, that's a politically risky situation to be in, it dis-empowers the system...If you have a very fast moving operation...can ministers actually make decisions in the time scales required?"⁶² The historic example of note to be wary of is the American experience in Vietnam where civilians in the Pentagon and the White House were devising bombing lists and vetoing options presented to them by the military on political grounds.

Using the American model as an example is also instructive in regard to the distinctions between the UK-NSC and COBR. As Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones advised the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, "If the full council starts getting into tactical stuff, I think that it is not doing its job, because that should be done in a COBR-style committee. The NSC should take strategic aspects of policy that cannot be done, say, in the case of Afghanistan without having a good grasp of the tactical situation. But the council is not there to discuss the tactical situation as a major item on the agenda."⁶³

The parallel with the US-NSC is instructive, since it was precisely because the US-NSC became involved in operational matters that the Iran-Contra affair⁶⁴ was permitted to reach into the very heart of the White House. Distinguishing between policy planning (NSC) and Operational Control (COBR) is an important component of the new national security architecture that could benefit from clarification across Whitehall.

⁶¹ Mark Phillips, Interview with Dr. James D. Boys, March 20, 2012

⁶² Mark Phillips, Interview with Dr. James D. Boys, March 20, 2012

⁶³ Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 4 July, 2011, 8

⁶⁴ An operation designed to address issues in the Middle East and Central America: Barred from supplying funds to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua the Reagan Administration sold arms to Iran with hope that this would lead to the release of U.S. hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon. The funds were then diverted to the Contras. The scandal led to Congressional hearings in 1987.

Intriguingly there is also a hybrid; a sub-committee of the NSC. An example of this is NSC-L, established solely to address the Libyan engagement. Such a body has echoes of EXCOMM, the *ad-hoc* body devised by President Kennedy to address the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, drawn from select members of his NSC as well as outside experts. The decision to initiate this sub-committee to examine Libya had a political and strategic rationale, as Peter Ricketts, the former National Security Adviser, explained: “Ministers want to be very closely involved in the decision-making. That is why we set up a separate NSC (Libya), which ran parallel with the regular weekly NSC meetings, so that we did not lose sight of the strategic issues that Ministers were looking at week by week.”⁶⁵ The fact that this body met more than 55 times raises questions as to the involvement of Ministers in operational affairs and the potential for an overlap with COBR.

There are, therefore, three potential entities in the process: “The NSC, which settles the broad lines of policy; sub-committees of it where necessary—very restricted numbers—to deal with prolonged engagements; and COBR to deal with immediate operational issues.”⁶⁶ Added to this list, of course is the Cabinet, which remains, in theory, at the heart of Government decision-making.

The introduction of the National Security Council at the heart of the national security architecture is a welcome move. However it is essential that it receive adequate support staff with the secretariat to enable it to not only function but to thrive and provide strategic horizon scanning and long-term analysis. The risk is that the architecture becomes fragmented with the civil contingency secretariat becoming a problematic combination of implementation and operational responsibilities, with one section engaged in crisis management (COBR) and thereby focused on day-to-day, shorter term tasks. The danger is that the NSC by extension becomes focused on these issues and thereby exacerbates the short-term focus of the national security architecture over longer term planning.

An examination of the continuing remit for COBR is essential and long overdue. It should be the next logical step in the Coalition Government’s newly inaugurated national security architecture. This report recommends that the *ad-hoc* nature of COBR should be replaced with a recognised National Security Operations Centre designed as a hub for operational command and control of missions and crisis management. As the National Security Council is responsible for policymaking, this new body would be responsible for its operational implementation, a distinction that would rightly separate policy planning from operational command and control. The current architecture still presents the potential for political involvement in operational decisions, a situation that a systematic overhaul of the national security architecture could and should have prevented. Implementing a National Security Operations Centre, based in Whitehall, would be a step that acknowledged how time and technology have progressed. Such a move would not be without precedent. The much-vaunted ‘Situation Room’ in the basement of the West Wing recently underwent a massive overhaul to equip it for the twenty-first century. It had previously been little more than a small meeting room, akin in many ways to COBR.

A National Security Operations Centre in Whitehall would be a permanently manned entity that was above political manipulation, capable of serving the nation in time of crisis and of being a natural intersection between political decision-makers and those with a more operational focus. The incorporation of a National Security Operations Centre in Whitehall would, therefore, complement the initiatives put in place by the Government, cement the new architecture and establish a recognised command and control facility from which the nation’s military and intelligence operations could be securely run. The decision to initiate a National Security Operations Centre in Whitehall would be the final architectural alteration necessary to bring the national security structure into the twenty-first century.

⁶⁵ Sir Peter Ricketts, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 5 December 2011, 69-70

⁶⁶ Oliver Letwin, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 24 October 2011, 49

The Joint Strategy Board: A Transatlantic NSC?

On the occasion of President Obama's state visit to Britain in May 2011, the White House and Downing Street jointly announced the establishment of a Joint Strategy Board to consider matters of long-term security, the threats posed by terrorism and rogue states.

At the time the White House said the new body presented the opportunity for the United Kingdom and the United States to work more closely together, to share intelligence and analysis, and address long-term security challenges rather than just immediate concerns. It also presented an opportunity to redress imbalances that had arisen in the past.⁶⁷

This announcement was interesting considering the long and particularly close relationship that has existed between the intelligence communities of both nations and also because of the unusual step of formalising a body that could potentially share what is usually jealously guarded, hard earned intelligence.

The development was clearly intended as a commitment to the on-going relations between the United Kingdom and the United States that continues to defy expectations of an imminent demise. The relationship is one that is redefined by each new leader on both sides of the Atlantic; however, its fundamental foundations ensure that it continues to endure despite the fondest wishes of headline writers and left-leaning intellectuals.

This structural confirmation of the long standing intelligence relationship was intended to provide a psychological boost to the British and serve as further evidence to the rest of the world as to the ties that continue to bind the two nations. The Joint Strategy Board promised to provide tangible evidence of the benefit derived from a relationship with the United States, which *The Resilient Nation* document had addressed: "The United States remains our indispensable partner in diplomacy, intelligence and security. Our relationship should be one of permanent friendship coupled with honest criticism."⁶⁸

At the time of the trip the Government implied that the development marked a significant step: "The US and UK already work closely together on many national security issues. The new board will allow us to look ahead and develop a shared view of emerging challenges, how we should deal with them, and how our current policy can adapt to longer-term developments."⁶⁹

President Obama's Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes noted: "There is no closer ally for the U.S. in the world than the U.K. We are in absolute alignment with the British on a range of core international security interests and, of course, our deeply shared set of values that have tied us together for many decades." The creation of the Joint Strategy Board appeared to be a manifestation of this.

The expectation was that the Joint Strategy Board would be co-chaired by the U.S. National Security Staff and the U.K. National Security Secretariat and would include representatives from the Departments of State and Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Joint Intelligence Organisation. The board was expected to report to the U.S. and U.K. National Security Advisors, (Tom Donilon and Sir Peter Ricketts) who were expected to meet individually every few months.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See James D. Boys, "What's So Extraordinary About Rendition," *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 15, No. 4, May 2011, 589–604

⁶⁸ *A Resilient Nation*, 17

⁶⁹ Downing Street source quoted in Nicholas Watt, "Barack Obama agrees to form joint national security body with UK," *The Guardian*, May 23, 2011.

⁷⁰ Downing Street Statement on The US-UK Joint Strategy Board, Wednesday 25 May 2011. Available at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/the-us-uk-joint-strategy-board/> (accessed April 22, 2012)

One Government source said that the two men would have to tread with care. "The US national security adviser is a political appointment, whereas Sir Peter Ricketts is a civil servant. But this does make sense. We have a highly developed relationship with the USA where our military and intelligence officials work closely together."⁷¹

The Board was expected to help enable a more guided, coordinated approach to analyse the "over the horizon" challenges we may face in the future and also how today's challenges are likely to shape our future choices. It is designed to better integrate long-term thinking and planning into the day-to-day work of our governments and our bilateral relationship, as we contemplate how significant evolutions in the global economic and security environment will require shifts in our shared strategic approach.⁷²

Current Structure of the UK National Security Council (2012)		
Role on NSC	Office	Office Holder
Chair	Prime Minister	David Cameron
Deputy Chair	Deputy Prime Minister	Nick Clegg
Statutory Attendee	Foreign Secretary	William Hague
Statutory Attendee	Home Secretary	Teresa May
Statutory Attendee	Minister of State of Policy	Oliver Letwin
Statutory Attendee	Defence Secretary	Phillip Hammond
Statutory Attendee	Chancellor of the Exchequer	George Osborne
Statutory Attendee	International Development Secretary	Andrew Mitchell
Statutory Attendee	Energy & Climate Change Secretary	Ed Davey
Statutory Attendee	Parliamentary Under Secretary for Crime & Security	James Brokenshire

Fig. 2 - 2012 Structure of UK National Security Council

It was anticipated that the Joint Strategy Board would meet quarterly at locations that would alternate between the United States and United Kingdom. The long-term fate of the Board was to be decided by the US and UK National Security Advisors who would review its status after one year and decide whether to renew its mandate.⁷³ That time has now elapsed.

The Parliamentary National Security Strategy Committee has raised questions as to the status of the Board and received rudimentary responses. The extent to which the Joint Strategy Board has provided any tangible benefits is yet to be seen. The Board only met once in 2011 and there has been an agreement not to disclose the precise topics discussed at meetings.⁷⁴

The status of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States is indeed in a unique position. For all of the attempts to define the relationship in recent years, as Special, Unique or Essential, the relationship is quintessentially unexamined in an official capacity within the Foreign and Commonwealth office. Unlike other nations that have dedicated analysts to consider the rudimentary aspect of the UK's ongoing relationship across a range of issues, there is no full time dedicated experts considering the future direction of US global policy working in Whitehall.

⁷¹ Nicholas Watt, Barack Obama agrees to form joint national security body with UK, *The Guardian*, May 23, 2011.

⁷² *Downing Street Statement on The US-UK Joint Strategy Board*, May 25, 2011. Available at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/the-us-uk-joint-strategy-board/> (accessed April 22, 2012)

⁷³ *Downing Street Statement on The US-UK Joint Strategy Board*, May 25, 2011. Available at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/the-us-uk-joint-strategy-board/> (accessed April 22, 2012)

⁷⁴ Cabinet Office, Written Evidence February 7, 2012, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 111

This point has been lamented by the former Ambassador to Washington, Sir Christopher Meyer; "I sought regularly and in vain to get the Foreign Office to...draw the conclusion that if it was right to train cadres of specialists in the EU, the Middle East, Russia and China, as we do, then it was also right to create an American cadre, which we do not."⁷⁵

With over 400 employees currently working in the UK embassy in Washington, it could be rightly asked why more analysts are required in Whitehall. However, those posted to Washington are not necessarily experts on U.S. policy and what is needed in Whitehall is nothing above and beyond the attention that is focused upon other nations, with whom the UK has far less interest.

Current Structure of the US National Security Council (2012)		
Role on NSC	Office	Office Holder
Chair	President of the United States	Barack Obama
Statutory Attendee	Vice President of the United States	Joe Biden
Statutory Attendee	Secretary of State	Hillary Clinton
Statutory Attendee	Secretary of Defence	Leon Panetta
Regular Attendee	National Security Adviser	Tom Donilon
Regular Attendee	Deputy National Security Adviser	Dennis McDonough
Regular Attendee	White House Chief of Staff	Jacob Lew
Intelligence Adviser	Director of National Intelligence	Lt. Gen. J. Clapper
Military Adviser	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs	Gen. Martin Dempsey
Drug Policy Adviser	Dir. National Drug Control Policy	Gil Kerlikowske
Additional Attendees	Homeland Security Adviser	John O. Breeean
Additional Attendees	Director of Central Intelligence	David Patreaus
Additional Attendees	Dir of Office Management & Budget	
Additional Attendees	Secretary of the Treasury	Timothy Geithner
Additional Attendees	Attorney General	Eric Holder
Additional Attendees	Asst to the Pres. for Economic Policy	Gene Sperling
Additional Attendees	Ambassador to the United Nations	Susan Rice
Additional Attendees	Secretary of Homeland Security	Janet Napolitano
Additional Attendees	Counsellor to the President	Pete Rouse

Fig. 3 - 2012 Structure of US National Security Council

There is a troubling tradition of assumption making in regard to the actions of the United States. Our shared language and related heritage makes for rushed assumptions in relation to intent and motivation. This is not a new phenomena; it was noted in an article by Boys and Keating in 2009 and by Professor Rob Singh in 2001.⁷⁶ There is a fundamental problem that needs to be addressed regarding a misguided sense of familiarity with regard to American politics and its culture. This inadvertently causes a sense of dependency and reliance that is partially true but which is exaggerated to the detriment of both parties. As Meyer noted, "Think of American as Britain writ large and you risk coming to grief."⁷⁷

It blinds the UK to policy flaws that could be potentially detrimental to the national interest and has on occasion bound us to policy initiatives that have been harmful. There is simply not enough strategic, horizon-scanning analysis being conducted on the future direction of US foreign policy and the its potential implications for the United Kingdom.

⁷⁵ Christopher Meyer, *D.C. Confidential*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005, 59

⁷⁶ See James D. Boys and Michael F. Keating, "The Policy Brief: Building Practical and Academic Skills in International Realtions and Poilitical Science," *Politics*, 2009, Vol 29(3), 204 and Robert Singh, "Teaching American Politics," *Politics*, 2009, Vol 21(2) 133-34.

⁷⁷ Christopher Meyer, *D.C. Confidential*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005, 58

The Joint Strategy Board could have been a solution to this but it does not appear to be addressing the challenges it was established to solve. As with the National Security Council, the JSB appears to be spending too much of its precious time addressing short-term issues rather than considering the far-reaching potential of a UK-U.S. alliance.

The Joint Strategy Board as originally envisaged and advocated by the United Kingdom, would have been a transatlantic security council that enabled a dynamic flow of ideas and data in both directions across the Atlantic between London and Washington. The watered-down JSB is still a benefit to the United Kingdom but it is not the great asset that it could and indeed should have been. Judging its success is made all the more difficult by the decision not to reveal the topics under discussion or the minutes of meetings. The unnecessarily secretive nature of the Joint Strategy Board hinders any assessment of its relative standing or its impact on policy or processes.

Whilst the aspirations inherent in the Joint Strategy Board are to be applauded, it appears in retrospect that it was a case of appearance over substance. The sentiment behind the Joint Strategy Board was viable and distinct and would have provided a tangible foundation for a relationship that is often in need of definition and direction.

The successful implementation of a Joint Strategy Board could be a bold assertion of intent and a commitment to a relationship at a time of increased speculation regarding the direction of U.S. foreign policy interests in the coming years and amidst talk of a Pacific Rim focus in the future. It is in both nation's interests to see the Joint Strategy Board thrive and succeed and to be continued beyond its initial twelve month mandate.

This report recommends an emphatic rededication to the concept behind the Joint Strategy Board, of continued and close working ties at the highest levels of government between the United Kingdom and the United States. The Joint Strategy Board is a logical and tangible development, whose mandate should be continued, whose status should be enhanced and whose remit should be clarified. It has the potential to be a source of great significance both structurally and symbolically and its demise into lethargy would be a sad loss and a missed opportunity.



Fig 4. President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron meet in the Oval Office

The National Security Strategy

In March 2008 the Labour Government of Gordon Brown published *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World*. The 62-page document was largely descriptive and lacking in overall direction. It was the product of extensive interdepartmental wrangling in Whitehall.

This, however, is not unusual for such a document. Like so much that has been introduced to the United Kingdom's national security system of late this is also based upon a model imported from the United States. In 1986 Congress passed the *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defence Reorganization Act*, which recalibrated the United States military and its relationship with the civilian leadership. It was the most profound change to the national security apparatus of the United States since the 1947 National Security Act.

One of the changes to emerge from this legislation was the requirement for each administration to produce a National Security Strategy Report that outlined its foreign policy priorities and means by which they would be implemented.

Such a broad document is by its very nature always going to be beholden to bureaucratic sensibilities and a hostage to changing international environments. They serve best as a barometer of intent as opposed to a blueprint for future actions. As former U.S. National Security Adviser Anthony Lake noted, "Nobody in any government I am aware of except perhaps in the Soviet Union, or in Mao's China, says at a meeting, "OK, *what did we say in the strategy document, therefore, here's what our policy is.*" That would be insane...it provides a context."⁷⁸

The Labour Government is to be praised for its initiative in implementing this report. As it noted in its introduction, "This is the first time the Government has published a single, overarching strategy bringing together the objectives and plans of all departments, agencies and forces involved in protecting our national security."⁷⁹

Compiling such a report is a Herculean task and doing so for the first time is especially taxing. It was not surprising that the report was as much about listing the threats that the nation faced, as it was about ways to address them. However, the initiation of such a process was correctly identified as being "an important step, and the latest in a series of reforms bringing greater focus and integration to our approach."⁸⁰

The production of this report was a constructive step in the modernisation of the U.K.'s national security architecture. Even Lord West, however, was forced to concede "the first National Security Strategy was, to put it in blunt terms, rather cobbled together initially. The good thing about it was that it tried to embrace all the various risks and threats—all the sorts of problems that one had to consider—and it started various departments thinking about these things. It was far from a wonderful document but, my goodness me, it was the first time that we had done it and that was a very good thing."⁸¹

Unsurprisingly the Conservative Opposition argued that such a document should "not only look good on paper but must lead to concrete achievements."⁸² *The Resilient Nation*

⁷⁸ Anthony Lake, Interview with Dr. James D. Boys, 14 September 2004

⁷⁹ *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World*. London: The Stationary Office, 2008, 4

⁸⁰ *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World*. London: The Stationary Office, 2008, 4

⁸¹ Admiral Rt Hon Lord West of Spithead, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 12 September 2011, 19

⁸² *National Security Machinery: Options*, 7

document presented the Conservative opinion on the future production of the National Security Strategy:

The purpose of the National Security Strategy is to set the framework across government for all security-related work over the longer-term (up to approximately 2025) including for the Strategic Defence and Security Review by:

- Defining and prioritising the UK's national security goals and interests and the key risks to them;
- Clarifying the strategic connections between different risks;
- Focusing Departmental attention on these strategic connections and clearly identifying where cross-Departmental working is required;
- Developing a cross-Government planning process that can be applied to each interest/risk and which brings together different national instruments;
- Informing the development of sub-strategies within it; and
- Providing indicative metrics to assess outcomes and impacts.⁸³

The Resilient Nation document recognised the need to “undertake systematic long-term risk assessment...and to develop risk mitigation strategies and planning assumptions flowing from this assessment.”⁸⁴

In October 2010 the Coalition Government released its own National Security Strategy, subtitled, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*. This report, shorter than the 2008 paper at 37 pages was even more akin to its American counterpart, coming as it did with an introduction signed by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Unlike the American model, however, the report was thematic, rather than geographic in focus.

Assembling a coherent national strategy from the various governmental departments proved no easier for the Coalition Government than it had for its Labour predecessor and again the document that emerged was largely descriptive. It was not a great leap forward that had been anticipated in some quarters. Lord West observed that the new National Security Strategy “was very similar to what we had worked out for the national risk register; there was nothing very different. It had not gone that step further that I had hoped for [in terms of being] a proper strategic document.”⁸⁵

Writing in the *RUSI Journal* in March 2012, Mark Phillips called for “the early publication of an NSS which clearly defines and prioritises the UK's non-discretionary national interests for security and prosperity, and the risks to them, clarifies non-discretionary tasks that are a political priority, and sets a doctrine or concept that breaks down barriers and integrates the defence and security departments, focusing on what the government wants to achieve and designing solutions for this rather than concentrating on discrete platforms.”⁸⁶

Such a call echoes recommendations made in Opposition in regard to the formulation of policy: “The strategic direction of policy should be expressed in a National Security Strategy, valid for a Parliament and updated through a quadrennial/quinquennial review process. NSS should reflect security policy priorities at home and abroad accurately and holistically and be readily defensible in Parliament, easily comprehensible to the public

⁸³ *A Resilient Nation*, 11

⁸⁴ *A Resilient Nation*, 11

⁸⁵ Admiral Rt Hon Lord West of Spithead, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 12 September 2011, 19-20

⁸⁶ Mark Phillips, “Policy Making in Defence and Security: Lessons From the Strategic Defence and Security Review,” *The RUSI Journal*, February/March 2011 Vol.157 No. 1 32

and command their support. The policies developed by departments to implement the NSS should be responsive to changed circumstances and capable of adaptation.”⁸⁷

The decision to implement a National Security Strategy has ensured that Government policy from across a range of departments is brought together in one place and prioritised. “What this document did...is nail the Government’s colours to the mast on priorities and which of the particular risks were the most important.”⁸⁸ However, a major challenge with a report of this kind is in its flexibility and longevity. The reports necessitate an extended lead in time and can be rendered irrelevant by unexpected events in the international arena. Oliver Letwin noted, “nothing that human beings do, in my view, is ever future proof.”⁸⁹ The NSS therefore needs to be viable for the long-term, whilst recognising that events will impact its implementation and even in extreme cases, its continued relevance.

It should be the goal of any future Government to ensure that a National Security Strategy be prepared for the lifetime of each Parliament. This will require an investment of time and energy into ensuring that the National Security Secretariat is sufficiently staffed to enable the horizon scanning and long-term strategic thinking that is required to enable such a report to be assembled in a viable time frame. It is lamentable that the team that was drawn together within the National Security Secretariat to develop the National Security Strategy has disbanded and that Structural changes, currently underway, will see a reduction by 25% of its currently total of 195 staff.⁹⁰

At present the NSSR is still susceptible to short-term prioritising and last minute political tinkering. The Parliamentary Committee on the National Security Strategy have noted this and have made pointed efforts to gain an insight into this situation. Their efforts have received vague platitudes by way of response from the Cabinet Office.⁹¹

The present Government may not be devotees of a Grand Strategy approach to foreign policy, as this would require “a very clear view of what the world that you are going to have a strategy about will look like for at least quite a number of years ahead...In my view we need adaptability, not grand strategy.”⁹² However, adaptability is no excuse for lack of a long-term strategic vision for policy and implementation. As Sir Peter Ricketts rightly observed, “if a strategy is to mean anything, it has to have a little bit of shelf life, but I absolutely agree that it needs to be prepared in detail and in depth”⁹³

⁸⁷ *National Security Machinery: Options*, 14

⁸⁸ Rt Hon Baroness Neville-Jones, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 4 July, 2011, 10

⁸⁹ Oliver Letwin, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 24 October 2011, 43

⁹⁰ Cabinet Office, Written Evidence, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 77

⁹¹ Cabinet Office, Written Evidence, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 106

⁹² Oliver Letwin, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 24 October 2011, 41

⁹³ Sir Peter Ricketts, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy: First Review of the National Security Strategy 2010*, 5 December 2011, 68

Conclusions

The Government is to be commended for implementing changes to the National Security Architecture of the United Kingdom. All too often the status quo is allowed to prevail and successive governments, both Labour and a Conservative-led Coalition, have sought to find ways to challenge orthodoxy. Despite teething trouble, a variety of high-level staff in Whitehall maintain that 'the NSC system works rather better than had been suggested in the media and better than its predecessor.'⁹⁴ It is clear that this has been a major development in the national security architecture of the country.

The distinction from the American model is important, however, the decision to use the same name as in the United States invites inevitable comparisons that may be inappropriate. The status of the UK National Security Council in 2012 should be compared not perhaps to the U.S. model of today, but to its initial establishment in 1947. It is an entity that is in its initial stages and will doubtless develop and evolve with each incoming administration. However, naming the body the National Security Council implies an American-style committee that may be inappropriate for a Cabinet-led Parliamentary democracy.

One of the key elements in foreign policy decision-making is the use of intelligence material, gained from both foreign operations and domestic counter-intelligence. The relationship between intelligence and politics is of crucial importance to the success of foreign policy. It has been and remains central to the continued Special, Essential, Relationship between the UK and the United States of America. Investing in the future of the Joint Strategy Board would, therefore, appear to be a logical decision.

The appointment of successive establishment figures to the role of National Security Adviser, rather than a strategist is unsurprising but disappointing. Clearly, neither Peter Ricketts nor Kim Darroch is UK's answer to Dr. Henry Kissinger. The role will struggle to develop if it remains a mere secretary to the National Security Council. The challenge will be to incorporate original thinking into a role that also necessitates a bureaucratic mindset and an appreciation of how politics operates across the Cabinet Office, Whitehall and the national security secretariat.

Finally, the attitude of the National Security Council and its officials in regard to the Joint Parliamentary Committee that oversees it should be required to improve dramatically. Evidence to the panel has been late in arriving, testimony has been verging on the obtuse, whilst written responses have been vague and unforthcoming.

The new National Security Adviser, Sir Kim Darroch, has noted, "In the longer term, we need to look at the way in which it [the National Security Council] operates, the mix of tactical and strategic discussions that it hosts."⁹⁵ This report welcomes this stance and acknowledges Sir Kim's wise and prudent approach to the evolving process.

This is clearly a time of evolution and change within the U.K.'s national security architecture. Having initiated bold moves, it is in the long-term interest of the country for the Government to address where changes have worked, where they have fallen short of expectation and where continued improvements could be implemented. This report notes the valid changes that have been initiated but it is essential that further reforms are enacted to ensure the continued viability of the nation's national security architecture.

⁹⁴ James Kirkup, 'More Thoughts on David Cameron's National Security Council,' *Daily Telegraph*, May 16, 2011

⁹⁵ Sir Kim Darroch, *Evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy*, 26 March 2012, 2

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government reconsider the national security infrastructure of the United Kingdom as a matter of urgency to take into account the following key points:

1. The Government was correct to implement changes to the United Kingdom's national security architecture but changes are required to ensure that security is not compromised due to unnecessary and avoidable bureaucratic intransigence.
2. The ad-hoc nature of COBR needs to be replaced with a new **National Security Operations Centre** designed as a hub for operational command and control of missions and crisis management.
3. The National Security Secretariat should be recalibrated to bring in recognised experts from the private sector. Consulting only with civil servants bypasses outside elements that could bring fresh insight and reduce the politicisation of foreign policy decision-making.
4. The Joint Strategy Board should be retained, strengthened and institutionalised. It should be extended beyond its initial mandate and be incorporated more fully into strategic decision-making on both sides of the Atlantic.
5. The approach taken by the National Security Secretariat towards the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy must improve dramatically. Materials should be produced on time and the committee shown more respect. It is currently a woefully under-utilised resource.
6. Joint Strategy Board meetings should be scheduled on a regular basis. Failure to meet will result in atrophy; regular meetings will promote unity and increase the flow of intelligence and communication.
7. The preparation of the National Security Strategy needs to be institutionalised and be seen as a priority for every future incoming government. This requires a dedicated national security secretariat that is tasked with horizon scanning and the requisite long-term analysis.

The initial efforts by Her Majesty's Government to implement changes to the national security architecture demonstrate a willingness to challenge the status quo and to initiate reform. The reforms implemented to date have been necessary but not sufficient. Having commenced the process, the Government should continue these reforms to ensure the safety and well being of the nation and the stability of its foreign relations.

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Principle author: Dr. James D. Boys

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