Evidence submitted to *The National Security Capability Review*  
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**Summary**

The Review should be undertaken with emphasis on the actual security experience of recent years, the management of the current security posture and the recognition of global security trends. There is little evidence that the UK security community recognises this requirement and the Review will be of limited value unless it does.

1 **Introduction**

The National Security Capability Review (NSCR) will be most efficient if it is undertaken in the context of three elements.

- The actual UK security experience of recent years. A timespan of 2001 to 2017 is the most appropriate in view of the radically changing global security environment in that period.
- Issues relating to the organisation, funding and management of the current UK security posture.
- The major global trends most likely to affect international security in the coming decade.

2 **Security Experience**

2.1 It is not appropriate to assess UK security requirements without analysing and learning from the three serious international security failures of the past sixteen years. This is not easy to face, especially as all three failures followed what appeared to be early successes. Thus the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was terminated and al-Qaida dispersed within three months of the 9/11 atrocities, the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq collapsed just three weeks after the start of the 2003 war and the Gaddafi regime in Libya was ended within six months.

2.2 The *Afghan* war is now in its seventeenth year with growing concerns over the extent of Taliban control, the influence of ISIS and the deep insecurity which extends even to the centre of Kabul. In the case of the UK, the major campaign in Helmand Province from 2006 appeared to work well but since the withdrawal and Prime Minister David Cameron’s declaration of “mission accomplished” the gains made have all but disappeared. Taliban and other armed opposition groups (AOGs) dominate most of the province which is providing substantial financial rewards from the production and refining of opium paste.
2.3 More generally, the huge deployment of US and other Western troops by 2011 (peaking at 140,000) did not even bring the Taliban and AOGs to the negotiating table, and the subsequent shrinking of the forces to 14,000 is now being reversed. President Trump has ordered the deployment of some more 5,000 troops, additional strike aircraft and Special Forces are being deployed yet the security outlook is bleak, the main casualties being ordinary Afghans. As of now, the war in Afghanistan has been disastrous.

2.4 In Iraq, after the Saddam Hussein regime’s collapse an insurgency developed rapidly, was complicated by bitter inter-confessional violence and the six year war from 2003 to 2009 led to several hundred thousand casualties, displacement of millions of people and serious damage to the infrastructure and economy of the entire country. A counter-insurgency campaign appeared to bring that to an end by 2010 and US and UK troops then withdrew but the core of the earlier insurgency regrouped successfully in the form of ISIS, taking control of much of northern Iraq and Syria. That has been largely controlled by an intense three-year air war and the use of Special Forces, with at least 60,000 insurgents killed, yet ISIS is now reverting to its previous guerrilla tactics in Iraq while spreading its message and methods in northern Africa and South and South-East Asia and inspiring attacks further afield.

2.5 The end of the Gaddafi regime in Libya resulted in the creation of a failed state with scores of militias vying for power, the cascading of weapons out of the country, continuing violence and the transit of many tens of thousands of often desperate migrants towards Southern Europe.

2.6 More generally, the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have all contributed to the survival of extreme paramilitary movements and this has been in parallel with developments in irregular war focusing on the low-cost exploitation of the structural and organisational vulnerabilities of advanced industrial societies. World-changing events such as 9/11 can be mounted for less than the cost of a tank and dedicated economic targeting can have substantial political impacts. It is a trend that is amplified if the proponents have a revolutionary vision extending beyond earthly existence, an eschatological dimension to actions that may be rooted in timescales measured in many decades if not a century or more. UK national security policy highlights the risk of paramilitary domestic attacks and provides for a well-funded counter-terrorism security organisation but what seems remarkable is that this seems scarcely related to the UK’s role across the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia from where much of the motivation for paramilitary action originates.

3 The UK Security Posture

3.1 The most significant issues relating to the current security posture relate primarily to defence procurement and organisation. In relative terms, national security organisation against political violence, as mentioned above, is far better coordinated and more generously funded than thirteen years ago, initially because of the impact of the 7/7 London
attacks and more recently because of clear evidence and experience of continuing threats. The national counter-terror system including JTAC and the CTUs have achieved high levels of coordination and co-working to the extent that the UK is ahead of most comparable states. There may still be room for improvement but that it not where the problems lie.

3.2 The more traditional defence posture, on the other hand, shows evidence of not being fit for purpose, not least through a chronic inability to control new project costs and the more general consequences of major procurement decisions that must now be open to question given the changing global security environment. A detailed analysis is not necessary but the problems can easily be illustrated by four examples.

- When the new P8 long range maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) planes finally start to enter service at RAF Lossiemouth by the end of this decade they will at last fill a 10-year capability gap since the Nimrod MR2 was scrapped. For the UK as one of the world’s major maritime states to have lost this capacity for so long and to be dependent on Canadian, French and other NATO capabilities is an indication of sustained incompetence.

- The Type-45 Daring class destroyer is the Royal Navy’s primary air defence system yet has been plagued by multiple problems since completion. These have included the risk of complete loss of power as well as limitations in warm water deployment and have meant that very few of the six ships are ever available for deployment, a situation which will remain until expensive repairs and modification are successfully completed.

- There are many problems with submarine nuclear propulsion for both of the current classes being deployed or built and more specific cost overruns and delays with the Astute-class SSN programme. This, in turn is part of a much more general issue that the combination of the Royal Navy’s SSBN and carrier programmes means that there are very limited resources for any other naval function and even serious equipment procurement constraints across all three branches of the armed forces.


3.3 If the management of defence procurement leaves much to be desired what should be of greater concern is that so much of the overall defence posture is now predicated on having a limited but very expensive carrier-based global expeditionary capability and a strategic nuclear force. Given the nature of the irregular warfare experience of the past 16 years it would appear that much of this emphasis is irrelevant in relation to the problems likely to be faced, problems which involve global trends that will increase the risk of “revolts from the margins” employing a range of methods of irregular war.

4 Global Trends
4.1 Extreme Islamist paramilitary movements have constituted major security problems since the turn of the century and, as we have seen above, have not been successfully controlled. They should, furthermore, be seen as markers for the kinds of radical and even extreme movements that should be expected to evolve over the next decade and beyond in the context of global drivers of insecurity. These are deepening socio-economic divisions and the relative marginalisation of most peoples across the world while the entire system faces the prospect of deep and lasting environmental constraints, especially climate disruption, as anthropogenic impacts exceed the homeostatic capabilities of the global ecosystem.

4.2 These fundamental drivers of conflict – economic marginalisation and climate change - are exacerbated by two more elements. One is that a whole raft of welcome improvements in education and literacy are having the effect of making far more people aware of their own marginalisation and unwilling to accept it; the other is that there is a presumption that security can best be controlled, when other methods fail, by resort to military responses. This is greatly aided by the power and influence of what Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex but is better described as the military-industrial-academic-bureaucratic complex.

4.3 In this context, ISIS, al-Qaida and similar movements should correctly be seen as examples of revolts from the margins, initially specific to the Middle East but with much wider implications. Others that are also indicative include the little-recognised but highly significant neo-Maoist Naxalite rebellion in India as well as, in the recent past, the neo-Maoists in Nepal and the Shining Path movement in Peru. All in their different ways are indicators of the problems likely to be faced if what has been described as a “crowded glowering planet” is allowed to evolve.

5 Conclusion

5.1 For the UK the problem is fourfold - security analysis consistently fails to address these wider issues, there is little appetite for recognising the failings of existing approaches, especially the disasters of the “war on terror”, the current and intended defence posture is far too dominated by a highly expensive nuclear force and the re-establishment of a limited expeditionary capability, with all of these in the context of a sector of government that is proving to be inefficient in the implementation even of current programmes.

5.2 At the very least there is an urgent need for a fundamental re-assessment of the UK’s approach to international security which may lead in very different directions. Unless the National Security Capability Review recognises this it is far from clear that it will have lasting value, or even relevance.