Written evidence submitted to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy

The National Security Capability Review

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About The Henry Jackson Society
The Henry Jackson Society is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.

About the Global Britain Programme
The Global Britain Programme is a research programme within The Henry Jackson Society that aims to educate the public on the need for an open, confident and expansive British geostrategic policy in the twenty-first century, drawing off the United Kingdom’s unique strengths not only as an advocate for liberalism and national democracy, but also a custodian of both the European and international orders.

About the author
James Rogers is the Director of the Global Britain Programme at The Henry Jackson Society. Previously, he held a number of roles over a five-year period at the Baltic Defence College in Estonia, including Acting Dean, Director of the Department of Political and Strategic Studies, and Lecturer in Strategic Studies. He has worked on research projects for the European Union Institute for Security Studies and RAND Europe, among other institutions. He holds a first class B.Sc. Econ. (Hons.) in International Politics and Strategic Studies from Aberystwyth University and an M.Phil. in Contemporary European Studies from the University of Cambridge.

Outline of this submission
The first part of this submission focuses on the linkages between the resurgence of state-based threats in relation to the international rules-based order, and the intensification of the challenge to the United Kingdom (UK) from revisionist states. The second part focuses on the need for additional resources for the British Armed Forces so that the UK will be able to maintain its position as a leading custodian of the international order.
1. THE RESURGENCE OF STATE-BASED THREATS AND INTENSIFYING WIDER STATE COMPETITION AND THE EROSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RULES-BASED ORDER

1.1 The resurgence of state-based threats and the erosion of the international rules-based order were rightly identified as major challenges to the United Kingdom (UK) in the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015. These two challenges are so important because they could merge together and become an existential challenge to the UK and its allies.

1.2 The ‘international rules-based order’, the ‘liberal international order’, or the ‘free and open international order’, is predicated on three different but interlocking components. Politically, it is comprised of nation states, each incorporating liberal principles and constitutional government, preferably representative, multiparty democracy. Economically, it is predicated on a progressively more open maritime economic order, which has – through use of railways, roads, ports and telecommunications systems – penetrated many terrestrial areas once enclosed or inaccessible. And diplomatically, it is founded on expectations of peaceful change, where countries structure their relations through a plethora of international institutions, associations and alliances.

1.3 But the rules-based order is not yet fully global in scope – and may never be. However, since its emergence, development and expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, countries have tended to position themselves in relation to this order in four different ways:

1.3.1 A small handful of countries have acted as ‘custodians’: they created and/or now actively support – ideologically, legally, diplomatically and/or militarily – the rules-based system, particularly on a global plane. The custodians benefit most from the system in terms of influence and status, but they have also provided the system with the most support. Without them it would almost certainly fracture or collapse. As the first constitutional state, with a progressively more liberal and democratic political system, as well as the first modern economy, the UK was the founder of the modern rules-based order. In time – realising that its geopolitical interests would be largely coterminous with those of the UK – the United States (US) took over from the UK as the lynchpin of the order during the mid-twentieth century, although the UK remained vitally important. Both countries worked together to expand and embed a more institutionalised version of the liberal order in the second half of the twentieth century, with the UK playing a special role in the creation of the existing European architecture (e.g., the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). Consequently, the rules-based order has always been a geopolitical order, rooted in the North Atlantic, further extending into Europe and across the Pacific into Asia. As such, it has ultimately been undergirded by the UK and US, using the armed forces, alongside an array of military bases from which to project force, both to dissuade and deter opponents, as well as to reassure partners and allies.

1.3.2 ‘Revisers’ are those authoritarian countries that are opposed, in whole or part, either functionally or geographically, to the rules-based order itself, and particularly to its custodians, i.e., the US and/or the UK. Sitting beyond the system, they seek to reverse or alter the established order in accordance with their national interests, which are often defined by

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autocratic regimes. These revisionists have adopted one of two strategies. Most have directly and systematically challenged the liberal order, and have sought to replace it with a different order. During much of the twentieth century, Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union tried to challenge the prevailing order, often violently and radically, in an attempt to replace it with their own fascist or communist orders. Since 1989, a plethora of local powers – such as Serbia, Iraq, and Iran – have also sought to challenge or revise the liberal order, either in a geographic or functional context, although they were simply too small or weak to mount a truly existential challenge. More recently, Vladimir Putin’s Russia has emerged as a major revisionist, although lacking the power of its Soviet predecessor – it has sought more to dismantle the existing order in a regional context than to impose its own vision. China has also sought to revise the prevailing order, particularly in the South China Sea.

1.3.3 The rules-based system also contains a number of ‘coasters’: these states may not directly challenge the system, but they do very little to support it either. They may hold their defence spending and/or aid spending at sufficient levels, relative to their immediate strategic needs and geopolitical environments, but do little more to help the custodians to resist the revisers.

1.3.4 Finally, the rules-based system has been confronted increasingly in recent years by the ‘shirkers’: these nations not only ‘coast’, but have even begun to ‘freeride’, in whole or part, on the rules-based order – meaning ultimately, the UK and US. They are often located in volatile areas and benefit from the peace and prosperity the system provides, but in return they often do little to support it.

1.4 Unfortunately, since 2015, the rules-based order has come under far more pressure, particularly from state-based revisionists. Moreover, many countries in Europe have continued to descend from ‘coasters’ into ‘shirkers’ as their defence and aid spending have been compressed:

1.4.1 Russia has emerged as an increasingly dissatisfied country, which has sought to revise not only the regional order in Eastern Europe in a geopolitical context, but has also waged an aggressive political war to degrade the legitimacy of Western democratic institutions. Russia has utilised the digital communication revolution to influence its opponents through propaganda and social media.

1.4.2 China’s rapid and sizeable military modernisation programmes – allied to the expansion of its geopolitical footprint with the construction of ports, railways, roads and even artificial military islands, both in and around Eurasia – have undermined the security system in East and South-East Asia, as well as the broader Indo-Pacific.

1.4.3 Many of the leading and closest allies and partners of the UK and US have failed to assume their fair share of the responsibility in upholding and defending the rules-based order, even in Europe. Many large and/or wealthy European countries – not least Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands – are not meeting their NATO commitments to move closer towards spending, for example, 2% of their national output on their military forces. Equally, many are failing to allocate 0.7% of GDP to Overseas Development Assistance. While some have agreed to increase their military spending, the increases are coming far too slowly to make much difference.

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4 For more on ‘anti-hegemonic’ and ‘counter-hegemonic’ struggle, see: See: Rogers, J. and Tyushka, A., “‘Hacking’ into the West: Russia’s ‘anti-hegemonic’ drive and the strategic narrative offensive’, Defence Strategic Communications 2:1 (2017).

5 Ibid.

Finally, in the aftermath of the ‘War on Terror’ and the 2007-2008 Financial Crisis, the UK and US – the leading custodians of the rules-based order – have experienced significant economic and political dislocation, which has sapped, to some extent, their willingness to act in their traditional capacity as stewards of the liberal order.

2. ARE THE RESOURCES SUFFICIENT?

2.1 Given the importance of the rules-based order to the UK, as well as the UK’s significance to the rules-based order, Britain must maintain the capability and political will to underwrite that order. In other words, it must continue to see itself as a custodian, as well as act as one. The country does not lack the ability to do so: as The Henry Jackson Society’s recent ‘Audit of Geopolitical Capability’ shows, the UK remains one of the most-capable, resourceful and influential countries in the world, and will likely remain so well into the current century.7 It has one of the world’s most developed national homelands, with good communications and an integrated and effective central government. It has one of the world’s largest and most technologically-powerful economies, as well as London, the world’s beating financial heart. It has a large and distributed diplomatic service, enjoys a number of close relationships, partnerships and alliances with other countries and is a member of most of the world’s most important intergovernmental organisations. Meanwhile, it has a large and technologically advanced military-industrial base and the reach to play a key role in the support of international peace, while British culture continues to attract people from around the world. Indeed, very few countries have such broad and integrated national capabilities.

2.2 The UK must be better provisioned to harness these resources to dissuade potential opponents from believing that the possible gains of a revisionist policy will outweigh the costs. Britain must also be able to assure nervous allies that it has the means and willingness to protect them, particularly as the revisionists grow in strength and confidence. Unless additional financial resources are found, this is where the ‘National Security Capabilities Review’ and the new ‘Modernising Defence Programme’ are likely to fall short. As a recent report by The Henry Jackson Society – ‘Global Britain and the future of the Armed Forces’ – argues, until the UK is prepared to increase its military spending to a level more appropriate in confronting the revisionist challenge, the country’s ability to act as a custodian of the rules-based order, and its capacity to dissuade revisionist behaviour on the part of foreign powers, is likely to decline.8

2.3 The commitment of the British government to spend only 2% of GDP on defence is wholly inadequate. When this guideline was agreed in principle in 2006, just before NATO’s Riga Summit, it was considered to be just enough to maintain existing forces during a period when the rules-based system was not under any form of revisionist challenge. If Britain remains committed to spending only 2% of GDP on defence, it will end up either with a military capable only for regional (effectively European) defence or a disjointed military, lacking either the mass or superiority to dissuade, deter and ultimately defeat a growing number of opponents.

2.4 Therefore, the UK must place additional emphasis on rebuilding its armed forces to ensure they are ready for future challenges, both in Eastern Europe and further afield, not least the Indo-Pacific region – a region the UK is likely to become more involved in as it leaves the European Union, both from an economic and strategic perspective. As a starting point, then, the UK needs to increase military spending to approximately 3% of GDP, a level of spending comparable to other periods of


strategic uncertainty in the past. This could be achieved by allocating an additional 0.2% of GDP per year to the defence budget for the remainder of the current parliament.