

SDA EVENING DEBATE REPORT

The 2010 United Kingdom Strategic Defence and Security Review



June 30, 2010
Bibliothèque Solvay, Brussels

A *Security & Defence Agenda* Report

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Date of publication: **August 2010**

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CONTENTS

Programme	p. 4
Speakers & Moderator	p. 5
Introduction	p. 6
The financial screws are on	p. 7
Hard choices to be made	p. 8
How to get it right	p.11
Pressure for more cooperation	p.13
Conclusion	p.14
List of participants	p.16
About the SDA	p.26

The 2010 United Kingdom Strategic Defence and Security Review

Evening Debate – Wednesday, June 30th, 2010

Bibliothèque Solvay, 17:30-19:00

The UK Government has announced it intends to undertake a Strategic Defence and Security Review. The UK Defence Secretary has said that he is determined the Review bring into balance defence policy, plans, commitments and resources, and produce over time a transformative change to UK Defence. What kinds of challenges should the UK be preparing to confront? What kinds of capabilities will that require? What assumptions should the UK make about allies' and partners' contributions to collective security? What expectations do partners and allies have of the UK?

Programme

17:00 Registration

17:30-19:00 Evening debate

Speakers

Julian Miller, Head of Foreign and Defence Policy, Cabinet Office, UK

Tom McKane, Director General of Strategy, UK Ministry of Defence

Nick Pickard, Head, Security Policy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK

Lt. Gen. Ton van Osch, Director General, European Union Military Staff

Jamie Shea, Director for Policy Planning, Private Office of the Secretary General, NATO

Moderator

Giles Merritt, Director, Security & Defence Agenda

SPEAKERS



Julian Miller
Head of Foreign and Defence Policy
UK Cabinet Office



Tom McKane
Director General of Strategy
UK Ministry of Defence



Lt. Gen. Ton van Osch
Director General
European Union Military Staff



Nick Pickard
Head, Security Policy
UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office

MODERATOR



Jamie Shea
Director for Policy Planning
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Giles Merritt
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INTRODUCTION

The current financial situation provided the backdrop to the SDA evening debate on the 2010 United Kingdom Strategic Defence and Security Review. "The government has made it clear that the financial screws are on" explained Julian Miller, Head of Foreign and Defence Policy in the UK Cabinet Office in his opening remarks. Participants questioned the ability of the United Kingdom to continue to cover current commitments while dramatically slashing budgets.

A great deal has occurred since the 1998 Defence Review. 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a financial crisis have reshaped the strategic context yet no equivalent reform of the security and defence establishments in the UK has followed. "We have seen the changing nature of conflict to irregular warfare, to wars among the people", explained Nick Pickard, Head of Security Policy in the Foreign and Commonwealth office in the UK. The SDSR will need to incorporate the lessons and experiences of the past decade including the nature of modern threats and the growing emphasis on the links between security and development and between governance and politics.

On the future of operations in Afghanistan, Tom McKane, Director General of Strategy in the UK Ministry of Defence, made it clear that, "The fact that we are undertaking this review does not, in any way, deflect us from our view that Afghanistan remains the main effort of the MoD".

In his opening remarks moderator Giles Merritt, Director of the Security & Defence Agenda, suggested the debate would possess both a British dimension and a larger European dimension, "Given the size and weight of the British defence effort in all European security formations", began Merritt, "it seems to me that what the British decide are their priorities, what they decide are things to be cut or transformed in one way or another, will have an impact on the way policy is considered and decided over the next couple of years here in Brussels".

Jamie Shea, Director of Policy Planning in the private office of the NATO Secretary General, agreed with this assessment suggesting the SDSR would be an opportunity for the UK to demonstrate "how to get it right" to other European countries, which will inevitably need to conduct similar reviews for similar reasons.



Cooperation with the EU was a recurring theme in the debate, with Lt. General Ton van Osch, Director General of the EU Military Staff, highlighting the opportunity which the current review presented for the deeper involvement of the United Kingdom with partners in the EU, saying to the British speakers, "Like in other nations, you will be forced to look for other options for acquiring capabilities, so there will be pressure for more cooperation".

There was also criticism of the small number of references to the EU and the Lisbon Treaty in the early stages of the review process.

THE FINANCIAL SCREWS ARE ON

The UK Government expects the upcoming SDSR to be much more ambitious than the review carried out in 1998, going beyond defence and including the entire range of national security interests, including national resilience, floods and pandemics on the one hand, and more traditional strategic interests, such as nuclear deterrence, on the other. A National Security Council has also been established in order to provide a more coherent approach to national security. "That is an ambitious undertaking", commented Miller, "it is especially ambitious in the financial circumstances in which we, and I think everyone here, finds themselves".

"The Foreign Secretary has said that the review will be lead by the requirements of a distinctive British foreign policy", began Pickard, describing it as both comprehensive and realistic, based on the experiences and the changes to the strategic context in the last decade. New types of conflict and new threats exist, which are further complicated by the continuing spread of globalisation and growing interdependence between nations. "If we are to make the most of opportunities in the 21st century, and if we are to secure our economic prosperity, which is at the heart of our security, then it cannot be in our national interest for our role in the world to reduce drastically" he said.

Shea pointed out that nobody in NATO or the EU has an interest in the review being a modern equivalent to the reviews of 1956 and 1971. "In other words", he said, "a review that is dictated by a radically different view within the UK of its role in the world based on a sense of decline". "Nobody", he emphasised, "has an interest in the UK becoming a country which, because of this review, is going to give up important tasks either in the Alliance or the EU or in other forms of coalition", he said referring to the NATO operations and the various EU operations in which the UK is involved. "That would be a bad example to other European countries", he concluded.



Picking up this theme, Pickard explained that, “while the SDSR will clearly look at the long term, we shouldn’t forget that Afghanistan, our top foreign policy priority, will inevitably be at the heart of what we are trying to achieve”.

“We are clear that the extra costs of current conflicts will continue to be met in addition to our planned core budgets for our security departments”, added Miller.

“It is very important for the UK to stay involved in security developments within the EU as well”, added van Osch, “you have Lady Ashton in a position of great responsibility, you have an operational commander in charge of Operation Althea in Bosnia and you have, in Northwood, the operational command for the counter piracy operation”, he said referring to Operation Atalanta in the Gulf of Aden.

The SDSR will be a reflection of both the National Security Strategy and the Comprehensive Spending Review. It will be a marriage of ambitions with the realities of severe financial limitations. Bringing budgets back in tune with reality, “will come after a period when our ambitions, particularly for defence, have tended to get ahead of the available funding”, said Miller.

The National Security Strategy will provide the political framework for the review, explained Miller. It will identify the UK’s place in the world, from a point of view of the national interests which need to be protected and pursued. It will identify national strengths that can be leveraged, such as trading links, the English language and historical and cultural connections.

The Comprehensive Spending Review being carried out across all departments of government will heavily influence the review. With spending cuts expected to reach up to 25%, there is significant financial pressure on all departments contributing to national security.

Andrew Duff, the Liberal Democrat MEP, expressed his initial impressions of the review, “I would like a slightly more refreshing self-reappraisal in Whitehall and Westminster”, he said referring to what he sees as a lack of radical and proactive thinking on certain issues.

HARD CHOICES TO BE MADE

“Even if we succeed in having the most flexible and adaptable military capabilities imaginable, there



will be some hard choices to be made here”, said McKane.

“We must start by identifying a small domain of truly non-discretionary tasks, ranging from our strategic nuclear deterrent through to the ability to provide at least the absolutely core necessary protection for the UK homeland and our Overseas Territories, through to some national resilience tasks that we simply cannot forgo”, said Miller explaining the initial steps of the review. McKane further explained how these would lead to revised defence planning assumptions, and form the core of the SDSR.

Duff disagreed with the government’s position on Afghanistan saying he thought the government has it, “badly wrong”.

Fellow MEP Takis Hadjigeorgiou of Cyprus also voiced his concerns about Afghanistan particularly on the lack of clarity regarding the coalition goals in that country. He concluded his assessment of the situation suggesting there is, “no end in sight”.

Merritt asked if waning public support for the ongoing operations in Afghanistan would translate

into waning public support for the military in general, and growing support for defence cuts.

Shea answered that in his opinion, the opposite is true. “One issue that has come up in the UK defence review is what has become known as front-line first”. This, he explained, is the growing public sympathy for frontline soldiers that have to fly around in 40 year old aircraft, or lack adequate body armour or continue using vehicles that are not protected against Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Shea commented that this highlighted another important issue, “The SDSR can serve to re-cement the covenant between the armed forces, the government and the population which we cannot allow to be fractured”.

Shea did concede, however, that many countries wish to deal with current internal economic problems before getting back to dealing with Afghanistan. He pointed out that a strategic “pause button” did not exist and therefore governments would need to work on both issues simultaneously.

Igor Garcia-Tapia of the Security & Defence Agenda questioned the ability of the UK, already overextended with its current resources, to realistically cover current commitments while slashing budgets.



“Operations such as the one in Afghanistan are manpower intensive and the personnel portion of the defence budget tends to be one of the largest”, he pointed out, “any serious attempt at cutting costs will require attacking that portion of the budget”. This, he suggested, will severely limit the UK’s ability to sustain current deployments.

Responding to this and a similar question by Hadjigeorgiou on the possible withdrawal of UK military personnel from overseas bases, Miller agreed that the personnel issue will be a difficult one, but commented that the political will exists to make difficult and unpopular decisions. He cited the recently imposed pay freeze across government, including military personnel, as an example of this.

On the Trident issue, Duff gave his assessment of the government’s decision to maintain the strategic nuclear deterrent, “I think the decision to preclude a thorough reassessment of the nuclear deterrent is a profound mistake which, if it is not corrected in the course of the SDSR and the life of this Parliament, will prevent Britain from being truly radical in its reappraisal of its security and defence policies”.

Miller countered that the cost of Trident represents only 5% of the defence budget and when the re-

placement programme begins it will actually represent a modest proportion of overall investment for a limited period of time. He also pointed out that the political decision had already been made and was based on an appraisal of trends in certain parts of the world.

Responding to a question from Pascal Mallet, the NATO and EU defence correspondent for Agence France Presse, Pickard explained that the government did not view as inconsistent the long term vision of a nuclear-free world with the current security need for a nuclear deterrent.

Merritt questioned the nature of these hard choices pointing out that, “you are refusing to cut Trident, which seems to be a relic of past and not future politics, you also say we are going to win in Afghanistan and at the same time you are going to implement major cuts”. “None of this seems to add up very well”, he said.

Duff went further still, “I think one has got to face up rather more squarely”, he told the UK government speakers, “a 20% cut in real terms, which is what we are speaking about here, means that Britain cannot continue to pretend to be the major, classic, military player it has been in the past”.



HOW TO GET IT RIGHT

Referring to the requirements for British foreign policy, Pickard pointed out that coherence across government will be a primary concern, “The broad approach will require a greater degree of coordination between foreign policy and development, defence and security policies in order for it to form part of a coherent strategy that wins the support of the British public”.

Shea made the suggestion that the overseas development budget, which is being protected from the cuts by the government, could be geared towards supporting security policy in places like Afghanistan and not just on more global objectives such as global poverty reduction.

“Our foreign policy”, continued Pickard, “must become more ingenious and energetic, requiring many different tools, not just our diplomats and our armed forces, but also our businesses and our cultural, educational and sporting assets as well”.

Agreeing with this, Shea commented on the need to maintain cultural diplomacy instruments such as the BBC World Service which he feels should not be

lost for the sake of cutting budgets equally across the board.

Shea also proposed shifting to the use of soft power, as a means of compensating any decrease in hard power capabilities. “One of the obvious conclusions that many people draw is that if hard power instruments are temporarily constrained then the UK should maximise more of its soft power instruments”, he commented. “One of these is prevention”, he said, emphasising the logic of this considering the considerable costs of intervention.

“The UK”, continued Shea, “has not, in recent years, been closely associated with promoting, at government level, the normative aspects of security, such as the Responsibility to Protect”. He commented that this seems to be traditionally left to British celebrities, such as Princess Diana on the topic of landmines. By regulating the security environment, Shea suggested, the UK could make it more difficult for troublemakers to cause problems, negating the need for difficult interventions.

Shea identified the need to maintain the balance between homeland security and more traditional, beyond borders defence as a key focal point of the SDSR, saying, “In this defence review I would ex-



pect a big focus on what is required to keep the UK population safe but hopefully not at the expense of Britain's ability to also project power".

Regarding the issue of personnel costs, Shea suggested a solution might be the maintenance of an active core in the armed forces with an in-built surge capacity based on the use of reserves. He also suggested the current financial difficulties could prove an opportunity to reform defence procurement.

In response to a question by Brooks Tigner, the EU and NATO affairs correspondent for *Jane's International Defence Review*, on public preference for cuts in homeland security or defence, Shea suggested the issue will probably be dealt with as a continuum with no real distinction between security abroad and security at home. "But", he said, "if that is the case and we get the military more involved in domestic security, dealing with floods or terrorist attacks as a backup to the police, then the *quid pro quo* would have the police and some of these other services as part of the comprehensive approach in Afghanistan".

Tigner, continuing on this same line of thinking, suggested the government consider exporting suc-

cessful homeland security programmes abroad, citing as an example the domestic outreach programme for counter-radicalisation that is currently being run in the UK.

McKane responded to a follow up question by Tigner, on whether budget cuts would focus more on investments or operations, saying that it is still too early to predict where the axe will fall hardest.

Bill Giles, Director General for Europe at BAE systems, pointed out the UK's position as the largest market for Europe's four largest defence companies, and the impact large defence cuts would have on industry.

McKane agreed that the government will need to take into consideration the impact on industry when conducting the review.

Focussing on research and development budgets, Giles then asked how the government would meet the challenge of maintaining funding in technology, given the potential cuts in research and development budgets.



Van Osch responded that key to maintaining investments will be the European Defence Agency and industry cooperation projects such as the A400M. The EDA, said van Osch, provides very good value for money requiring relatively small investments from governments with a much larger output.

McKane added that to his knowledge no decision on the EDA had been made and therefore, for the time being at least, things will remain as they are. He also emphasised that the issue of the UK's continued participation in the EDA is not a priority issue in the SDSR.

PRESSURE FOR MORE COOPERATION

"The circle of international decision making is becoming wider and more diffuse", commented Pickard giving as an example the growing influence of the G20 over that of the G8. "Deepening our alliances is a strategic necessity", he continued. "Of these, NATO clearly remains the pre-eminent security alliance, providing us with collective defence and providing the key link between the United States and Europeans".

"We want to look very hard at the way we work in alliances with partners, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to understand what we need to be able to do, as a minimum, purely ourselves and where we can work with partners to deliver greater effect and where perhaps we can rely on partners to do some things which we choose not to do ourselves", added Miller.

Pickard highlighted the UK's membership of the Commonwealth of Nations as a unique opportunity to be exploited.

Shea pointed out that a growing reliance on partners will necessitate greater interoperability, both with the US and with other partners.

Responding to a question on who the UK would ask for assistance in the hypothetical case of another Falklands scenario, posed by Arnauld Hibon, Eurocopter Vice-President and Director for EU Relations, Miller commented that while there is currently no perception of a threat to the Falklands, whether the protection of British Overseas Territories falls into discretionary or non-discretionary tasks will have to be closely studied and may affect the future shape of the armed forces.



Duff asked the British Government speakers for more proactive thinking on the European dimension of the SDSR, noting that none of the speakers had mentioned the Lisbon treaty in their opening remarks. He specifically mentioned the possibilities the treaty presents for permanent structured cooperation in defence and pointed out that “If Britain excludes itself from the group of politically willing and militarily capable states then we will not have permanently structured cooperation in defence”, he said.

Duff emphasised the importance of coordination between European states when conducting defence reviews in order to encourage those countries that have yet to conduct similar exercises. He also asked for coordination at the EU level, as, he announced, the parliament has asked Lady Ashton, in her capacity as Vice-President of the Commission to initiate the first ever European Union white paper on defence.

This emphasis on the European security dimension was picked up by van Osch who, while reiterating the essential role of NATO in collective defence, also pointed out the advantages of building EU capabilities, “When we strengthen the military capabilities of the European Union it is also beneficial to NATO”, he said. “We cannot always expect the US to come to our rescue whenever we have a prob-

lem in our neighbourhood”, he continued, arguing that EU member states should be able to independently conduct operations and deploy formations up to and including a Corps.

“We must be both active and activist in Europe”, Pickard agreed, “we will be vigorous and positive in promoting our national interests within the EU and also strive to make the EU itself a success”. “It is in our interest”, he continued, “for the EU to make greater use of its collective weight in the world”. Pickard, however, pointed out that the EU was only one of the many networks, both formal and informal, that the UK will need to use in pursuing its national interests.

CONCLUSION

The underlying theme of the debate was the desire for the SDSR to be viewed as an opportunity; to shift emphasis towards the use of soft power instruments, to encourage greater cooperation with the EU and other alliances, and to redress persistent institutional problems and inefficiencies.

As Merritt had predicted in his opening remarks, the debate had two distinct streams, a primarily



British stream, focussing more on Afghanistan, nuclear deterrence and more technical issues, and a European stream which centred on cooperation and coordination.

The doubts expressed by participants about the ability to slash budgets while covering current commitments, particularly in Afghanistan and maintain capabilities such as the strategic nuclear deterrent, only highlight the difficult choices that lay ahead.

Both Miller and Shea agreed that ambitions should not be lowered, this is a key point other countries would do well to emulate as international stability in a deeply interconnected and interdependent world, requires the continued participation of states, all of which will continue to be stakeholders.

The desire for the SDSR to “spill over”, as Duff described it, and encourage similar exercises in other European countries and at the EU level was expressed repeatedly throughout the debate. As Shea pointed out, the SDSR could be a model for similar reviews, demonstrating how to successfully transform security departments in order to continue covering current commitments internationally.

When he asked whether the UK would continue to “go it alone”, Merritt expressed the frustration felt in Brussels at the apparent persistence of the UK in acting outside the framework of the EU, particularly on foreign and security policy issues.

While this may be true at the highest political level, the UK, as pointed out by Miller, Pickard and van Osch, is very active at the operational level of CSDP. The mere fact that the debate took place in Brussels also supports Pickard’s claim that the UK coalition government will in future be more engaged and productive in the EU.

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Dick Zandee
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NATO

OTAN

People are ABOUT NATO'S

“How is climate change relevant to the Strategic Concept debate?”



“Is NATO in danger of becoming a ‘one issue organization’ because of its involvement in Afghanistan?”



“How important are Partnerships in energy security?”

talking

NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT



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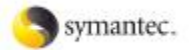
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