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The 2015 SDSR: The Strategic Issues

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Summary

The UK government is expected to publish its 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) on 23 November. This will set out the planning assumptions on which defence and security policy will be based over the course of the current parliament. This briefing is based on Oxford Research Group's engagement with the SDSR process since 2013 and aims to summarise the key issues which the Review must address if it is to present a strategic and sustainable approach to improving UK, regional and international security.

Introduction

The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) presents an opportunity for the UK to set out how it will act responsibly to address the myriad security challenges that the country will confront over the next decades. Yet it will be published at a particularly turbulent time in national, regional and global affairs. At home, the long cross-party consensus on the UK's role in the world has fractured. The election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of Labour and the rise of the Scottish National Party mean that alternatives to foreign military interventions and the possession of nuclear weapons are very much back on the political agenda.

British membership of the European Union (EU) is also in question whilst the crisis in Ukraine has led to a renewed discussion on the future direction of NATO, with analysts [debating](#) the emergence of a new Cold War with Russia. How these interconnected dynamics play out will also largely determine the future of the UK itself given the continuing high level of support in Scotland for independence and seemingly divergent views within the Union on Britain's place and role in the world.

Compared to 2010, when the last SDSR was conducted, the global situation also seems far less secure. Ongoing tensions between the US and Russia, between Iran and Gulf Arab states, and Washington's 'pivot to Asia' has led the 2015 US National Military Strategy to [conclude](#) that 'the probability of U.S. involvement in interstate war with a major power is assessed to be low but growing'. In 2014, senior military, political and diplomatic figures also [warned](#) that the risk of nuclear conflict was rising because of global tensions as well as insecure nuclear arsenals and fissile materials. Add to this the emergence of Islamic State in a volatile greater Middle East and the [dangers](#) of unchecked climate change and it is clear that British decision-makers are faced with a

highly complex and quickly evolving strategic environment requiring bold and innovative leadership.

Responding to these challenges requires policies that are strategic in their long term commitment to resolve major security threats and to prevent new ones from aggravating. It also requires a policy response that is far more than the application of military tools to maintain the status quo. While it applies particularly to the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the SDSR is a document owned by the Cabinet Office and which must coordinate a strategic and sustainable approach from across government, adding diplomacy, development and intelligence to defence.

This briefing aims to highlight the key strategic questions that the government needs to address in the SDSR if it is to present a credible response to current and future threats. Many of these are intrinsically political and ask deeper questions about the nature of Britain's role and interests in the world, the impact of its past and current postures and policies, and key assumptions about the primacy of resourcing offensive military capabilities over other tools and levers. These are more difficult questions than previous reviews have been willing to address, but ultimately these are the issues on which the UK's next defence and security strategy must be judged.

Decision-Making and Strategy

The SDSR is supposed to respond to the security threats identified by the Cabinet Office through its concurrent National Security Strategy (NSS) review, with resourcing defined by the Comprehensive Spending Review. That the government will publish the SDSR before these documents raises significant questions about strategic planning processes and decision-making over security policy.

The NSC and Strategy-Making

The National Security Council (NSC) was [established](#) in 2010 by David Cameron to co-ordinate and 'consider matters relating to national security, foreign policy, defence, international relations and development, resilience, energy and resource security'. Five years on, it would be timely for the government to provide its assessment of how effective the NSC has been. For example, Joe Devanny and Josh Harris have [asked](#) whether the UK is 'more secure – or at least, were its leaders making better-informed and more timely decisions on security – than in the NSC's absence?'

If this question is to be properly answered then the government will need to give an account of key and highly controversial decisions made by the NSC. These include the decision in 2011 to deploy UK military forces in [Libya](#) and the use of drone strikes to kill two British citizens in [Syria](#) in 2015.

More widely, questions should be asked about how effective the NSC is in terms of strategic planning, given that it has been [accused](#) of focusing on short-term, tactical goals rather than producing coherent and sustainable proposals for British and international security. Such strategic thinking is necessary, for example, if the UK is to move away from relying on using military force when responding to crises and towards a focus on conflict prevention.

Parliament and the Use of Force

In 2011 Foreign Secretary William Hague [stated](#) to the House of Commons that ‘we will also enshrine in law for the future the necessity of consulting Parliament on military action’. The significance of this announcement was that if such constitutional change was implemented it would bring to an end the Prime Minister and Cabinet’s war-making powers, known as the Royal Prerogative. Conservative MP [James Gray](#) argues that leaving aside the 2003 Iraq War vote, the 2013 vote on whether or not to launch an air strike against Syria was a ‘terminal abandonment of the use of the Royal Prerogative’.

Yet Gray goes on to point out that the coalition government when in power ‘were faced with a number of military involvements and deployments for which they signally failed to change their reliance on the Royal Prerogative’. As the recently [abolished](#) Political and Constitutional Reform Committee [requested](#) in 2014, the government should therefore set out how it intends to follow through on its commitment to democratise war-making decisions.

Spending Constraints

The question of how much the UK is willing to spend on defence over the next five years was by and large answered by the Chancellor in his [July 2015 budget](#) statement, in which he committed to spending 2.0% of UK GDP (the minimum spend pledged by NATO members) on defence until at least 2020. [Uncertainties remain](#) over exactly how the government will meet this commitment to a real terms increase in the defence budget as almost £1 billion per year of new money will need to be found if assumptions about strong British GDP growth are realised. With the planned procurement and maintenance of major weapons systems taking up 40% of the budget, any over-run in such costs could have enormous repercussions, not least with the [vaguely costed](#) new nuclear weapons system expected to absorb one-third of the capital budget by the early 2020s.

Despite this stabilisation of the MOD’s allocation, even over the term of the 2010 SDSR [MOD spending](#) averaged 2.35% of GDP, almost the same as under the previous Labour government (1997-2010). The SDSR needs to reflect on whether it is sensible to try to preserve the same ‘full spectrum’ capabilities and hugely ambitious international reach on what is in historical terms a reduced budget. While the UK will likely remain in the top seven military spenders globally over this parliament, its share of global military expenditure and assets is likely to continue to fall.

With the defence budget now ring-fenced at 2.0% of GDP and the international development budget guaranteed by statute and manifesto pledge to be 0.7% of GDP, there remains a [squeeze](#) on the now tiny share of government spending allocated to diplomacy through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which gets just one thirtieth of the amount allocated to defence and is facing heavy pressure from the Treasury to cut deeper. A truly strategic approach to UK security might well redress the balance between the foreign policy pillars of defence, diplomacy and development. Without this, the UK’s ability to formulate political settlements to resolve or prevent international security challenges will be very weak.

Representing the 'National' Interest

The 2015 SDSR will be published at a time of unprecedented uncertainty concerning the future of the United Kingdom given the high level of support in Scotland for independence and the potential for a rerun of the 2014 independence referendum. Calls for Scottish [independence](#) are likely to rise if the UK as a whole votes in 2017 to leave the European Union but the majority of Scottish voters opt to stay in.

The issue of sovereignty is also connected to the 2016 Main Gate parliamentary vote on Trident replacement. At present decisions regarding foreign affairs, intelligence and security affecting Scotland are made in Westminster. The fact that Trident submarines are based at the Faslane naval base in Scotland is perhaps the most visible symbol of Westminster rule with [polls](#) showing that a majority of Scots want Trident to be scrapped. In addition, former Scottish First Minister [Alex Salmond](#) has vigorously opposed recent military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya whilst Nicola Sturgeon has committed the SNP to oppose military action in Syria. As [Andrew Dorman](#) notes, the UK as a state thus 'knows what it was, but there is no clear agreed idea of what it wants to become'. Dorman concludes that a 'forward-looking national security strategy' can only be constructed after such fundamental questions have been resolved. An SDSR based in political reality would therefore need to face these limitations upfront if it is to claim any legitimacy.

Defence and Deterrence

Defence and deterrence are at the heart of conventional strategic thinking and determine the balance of resources directed to the armed forces. Changes in the global and European strategic environments, as well as the legacy of post-2001 interventions, mean that the UK will need to reassess its commitments, partnerships and posture relative to 2010. The pending Trident 'main gate' decision in 2016 also presents an opportunity to pause and consider the implications of nuclear deterrence within the UK's defence policy.

Territorial Defence

Since the 1990s and the demise of the Warsaw Pact, UK military posture has [shifted](#) increasingly away from defending or deterring attack on the territory of the United Kingdom and its sovereign dependencies and [towards expeditionary warfare](#) that aims to tackle assumed threats to UK security 'at source' anywhere in the world. The perception of a benign security environment in Europe and its immediate neighbourhood coupled with heavy commitment of UK forces to operations in Afghanistan at the time of the cuts-driven 2010 SDSR led the Coalition government to prioritise resources to current and future force projection operations, including the ongoing project to build two full-size aircraft carriers, at the expense of traditional territorial defence capabilities.

The glaring hole in UK defences since then has been the lack of any dedicated maritime patrol aircraft able to detect enemy submarines in UK waters, including in the approaches to the UK's own submarine base, at Faslane. The Royal Navy does retain many ship-based anti-submarine warfare helicopters but these are short range and the number of warships available to patrol UK and northern European waters is now very small. While the conventional threat to the UK mainland remains low, the resurgence in Russian naval and submarine activities in the North Atlantic since 2014 increases the

attraction of such defensive capabilities. However, they are not in the current very full [Defence Equipment Plan](#), on which spending assumptions out to 2025 are based.

In the course of this parliament, the question of what territory the UK is required to defend may also change markedly. Scotland leaving the Union is one eventuality to be planned for but a referendum on EU membership also would have implications for the UK's regional mutual defence commitments, at least as far as the EU's non-NATO members are concerned. How, for example, would the UK's relationship with neutral Ireland be redefined by a British exit from the EU?

Nuclear Weapons

The Main Gate decision on replacing the UK's nuclear-armed submarines will likely take place in early 2016 or late 2015, with the government [expected](#) to seek parliamentary approval for this decision. The Conservative Party's election [manifesto](#) promised that a Conservative government would 'build the new fleet of four Successor Ballistic Missile Submarines', thus maintaining continuous-at-sea-deterrence. Given the strong likelihood that the Conservative's position on replacement will be carried through parliament, several questions need to be addressed by the new SDSR.

Firstly, the government needs to explain why it believes Trident is relevant to the current threats the UK faces or is likely to face in the coming decades given that, as the 2010 National Security Strategy [stated](#), 'we currently face no major state military threat'. If, as is likely, recent Russian aggression and assertiveness is used as a justification for maintaining a nuclear arsenal, then the government should explain how and why Moscow, with its relatively [weak](#) military - especially when [compared](#) to NATO - and limited regional ambitions, poses an existential threat to the UK.

In addition, the SDSR should be transparent about current projected [costs](#) for replacing Trident, what [capabilities](#) the new system will have and what plans exist to build a replacement [warhead](#). Given the UK's dual [responsibilities](#) under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty - to eliminate its nuclear weapons and support the creation of a nuclear weapons free world - the government should also explain how the UK will help realise these goals.

Alliances and Partnerships

The 2010 SDSR described the UK's defence and security relationship with the US as 'pre-eminent' and NATO as 'the bedrock of our defence'. Yet an examination of the nature and consequences of the UK's role as a subordinate and key supporter of the US is necessary, not least because of the anticipated publication in summer 2016 of the Chilcot inquiry into the Iraq war. While it is unlikely that the UK will seek to redefine its relationship with NATO under the current government, the 2015 SDSR should be more explicit about the UK's ability to operate independently of the US or a US-led coalition and how its niche capacities fit are designed to work with the US and NATO partners.

Moreover, given the ongoing crisis in the Ukraine and NATO-Russia relations being at a dangerous low, aside from sending [troops](#) to the Baltic States, the government should explain how it intends to help resolve the conflict and build cooperative relations between Moscow and the Euro-Atlantic alliance. The UK should do this as part of a wider review of how it will work with multilateral bodies such as the Organisation for Security

and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations on conflict prevention and resolution.

There is also a great deal of strategic ambiguity around the UK's alliances and partnerships in Asia, where the current government has been keen to forge wide-ranging partnerships with China, sometimes to the annoyance of the US. The UK also retains defence commitments to South East Asian allies that it no longer has any capacity to uphold.

Overseas Territories and Bases

As the successor state to the most global of modern empires, the United Kingdom has responsibilities to defend (or deter attacks on) territory and people far more widely dispersed than the British Isles. This includes territories in the Mediterranean, Caribbean, Central and South Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. In a number of cases, these residual territories host UK or allied military and intelligence services and play important roles in UK and US ability to project force: notably Gibraltar, Ascension Island, Diego Garcia and Cyprus. More remotely, the large air, land and sea forces garrisoning the Falkland Islands are an important consideration (or distraction) for UK defence policy-makers given the live Argentine claim to them.

Garrisoning these outposts costs the MOD an estimated £350 million annually, which is approaching 2% of the ministry's non-capital budget. The permanent Falklands garrison of four Typhoon fighter aircraft, transport, refuelling and search and rescue aircraft plus 1,200 troops, one frigate or destroyer, one ocean patrol vessel, a tanker and the assumed presence of a nuclear submarine is comparable in scale to [Operation Shader](#) against IS in Iraq and Syria since 2014. Were the Argentine military to procure significant new combat aircraft, as has been mooted repeatedly since 2014, the British deterrent presence might be expected to increase.

Given the current level of operational over-stretch, the financial costs involved and the negative diplomatic implications of current policy, the SDSR should address what the UK government can do strategically and sustainably to reduce the threat to the Falkland Islands in the longer term.

UK forces operating in an expeditionary capacity around the world also depend on a network of bases in allied foreign states. This currently [includes](#) active bases or garrisons in Bahrain, Brunei, Qatar, the UAE and possibly also Chad, Djibouti, Jordan and Kuwait. While some associated costs may be borne by host governments, the strategic implications for the UK of association with, and defence of, such regimes should be openly assessed in the SDSR.

Expeditionary Force

The British Armed Forces are currently structured to be able to mount multiple overseas operations, often of an offensive character. However, from Afghanistan via Iraq to Libya the political imperative to 'project power' and use force to solve international disputes has frequently and increasingly resulted in tactical stalemate and strategic retreat regardless of the qualitative superiority of British troops and weapons. The current SDSR should have provided an opportunity to rethink the role and structure of the armed forces

in relation to the threats they face and the likely impact of military interventions and aggressive power projection.

The Future of Future Force 2020

The core of the armed forces restructuring underway since 2010 is the [Future Force 2020](#) concept. This force structure is focused on maximising the deployability and sustainability of armed forces units and their ability to engage in the full spectrum of military roles even as the overall size of the armed forces diminishes. This has put the emphasis very much on mounting expeditionary operations rather than territorial defence.

The SDSR should pose two important questions of the Future Force 2020 structure. The first is whether it is credible or realistic within the much reduced size of the armed forces and equipment plan, which focusses on quality rather than quantity of ships, aircraft and fighting vehicles, to structure the armed forces for full spectrum capabilities or to have global reach. The alternative would be for the armed forces to focus more on territorial defence, whether of the UK, EU or NATO, or to focus on the development of niche, specialised capabilities. If the latter, the SDSR would need to be clear on how British forces would fit with other armed forces in defence or expeditionary operations, and what consequences this would have for UK security and independence.

The second question is broader and requires an evaluation of the consequences of a defence posture presaged on tackling security threats far from the UK through military interventions. While certain smaller operations such as in Sierra Leone or tackling piracy off Somalia have yielded greater security, the consequences of the higher tempo enduring operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the short intervention in Libya, have, at best, yielded only temporary gains at enormous cost in lives, injuries, morale and money. Continuation of the focus on major expeditionary operational capability outside of Europe might be counter-productive unless the SDSR has produced evidence that such operations have contributed to, rather than undermined, British security since 2001.

The War in Iraq and Syria

The UK has been involved in aerial combat operations over Iraq, and occasionally Syria, since September 2014. Whether the bombing campaign is extended from Iraq to Syria, as the government has indicated it would like to do, must be settled by Parliament rather than the SDSR. However, the SDSR should define the strategic and operational context and resources for UK forces operating against the Islamic State in the Middle East.

The SDSR is an opportunity for the government to set out in practical terms its responses to the questions posed by the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in its recent [inquiry](#) into the extension of offensive military operations to Syria. In particular, the SDSR should answer what extra 'war-winning' capacity the UK could contribute to the coalition and how the current and any future military action fit into efforts to achieve robust political settlements in Syria, Iraq and the wider Middle East.

Remote Warfare, Special Forces and Targeted Killings

David Cameron has already [indicated](#) that the SDSR will devote more resources to the procurement of unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs), tripling the number of armed

drones that the UK operates, as well as prioritising other intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft. The government has also pledged that the SDSR will channel greater resources to equipping expanded special operations forces.

This may well increase the potency of British military force in the kind of foreign interventions, or counter-terrorism operations, in which the UK has been heavily involved over the last two decades. However, there are crucial issues of accountability and legality that the SDSR will need to address if such '[remote warfare](#)' capabilities are to be deployed operationally. Since the MOD does not comment on the location of its Special Forces or its UCAVs (which are not licensed to fly in UK airspace), an expansion in such capabilities amounts to a diminishment of scrutiny over the military and its activities. With the [Special Forces](#) and drones already known to have operated in Syria, the SDSR should set out what the operational codes governing such deployments are, how their legality is determined and what oversight they must be subject to.

The issue of targeted killing is particularly relevant given the [acknowledged](#) use of an RAF UCAV to execute two British citizens in Syria in August 2015. The SDSR is an opportunity for the government to set out how this policy is determined and legally justified.

The Royal Navy's Thin Red Line

The issue of building and commissioning two full-sized aircraft carriers overshadowed the 2010 SDSR, given the huge fixed costs involved and the questionable need for such conventional war-fighting technology in modern, hybrid or asymmetric wars. Questions still remain over the costs and timescale of equipping the carriers to operational status, particularly given delays in the acquisition of F-35 Joint Strike Fighters.

Bringing the carriers into service towards the end of this parliament will have major consequences for the Royal Navy, whose number of frigates and destroyers has steadily shrunk to 19 (and possibly less, if there is no like-for-like replacement of current frigates with the new [Global Combat Ship](#)). While the UK will still deploy one of the world's largest and most capable navies, the renewed focus on carrier operations and Future Force 2020's focus on the ability to mount global amphibious operations mean that the Royal Navy will face extreme stretch to fulfil its large number of standing commitments as well as patrol UK waters and approaches. Given the September 2014 [decision](#) to bring both new carriers into full service, the 2015 SDSR will need to answer how this can be resourced in manpower terms and what the implications of sustaining a carrier battle group would be for the rest of Navy's surface and submarine fleet and its commitments.

The UK in the World

The SDSR must also respond to some of the longer term or less obvious threats to international security, which will impact on British security and strategic decision-making. These include the impacts of climate disruption, competition over energy and other scarce resources, humanitarian crises, the impact of the global arms trade, human rights abuses and poor governance.

Climate Change

As the 2010 National Security Strategy [observed](#), the UK's security is 'vulnerable to the effects of climate change and its impact on food and water supply'. It went on to add that the global effects of climate change are 'likely to become increasingly significant as a risk multiplier, exacerbating existing tensions around the world'.

These insights should lead the government to review carefully both its energy policies, in order to move away from reliance on fossil fuels and transition to a low carbon economy, and how it will act to enable the UK and vulnerable nations to adapt to climate change.

Such considerations are urgent given the World Energy Council's recent [downgrading](#) of the UK's energy rating after the government cut some renewable energy subsidies. The government should therefore explain how it will ensure that it meets its [legally-binding](#) carbon budgets and [support](#) the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which includes universal access to 'affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy'. While climate change will certainly have destabilising security consequences, as already seen in the Middle East, it is important that the National Security Strategy and SDSR focus on long-term solutions and mitigation rather than military-led crisis management operations.

Energy Security and Resource Scarcity

According to the 2010 SDSR, the 'range of risks' relating to the UK's ability to 'access secure, diverse and affordable supplies of energy' are 'likely to intensify over the coming years, due to our growing dependence on imports of fossil fuels'. In addition, 'global demand and competition for energy is increasing' as part of a wider competition between states for resources, which is likely to contribute to international 'instability'.

The potential for conflict over supply of resources is used to justify high levels of military spending, including on the navy's surface fleet, in order to protect trade and energy supplies. As long as the UK and its major trading partners in Europe and Asia are dependent on oil and gas supplies from the Middle East, the UK will be drawn into conflicts there and efforts to secure maritime choke points on the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. Europe's increased dependence on Russian energy has decreased European negotiating power with an increasingly assertive Moscow.

The government now needs to do more to maximise energy efficiency and utilise renewables if it is serious about long-term energy security. Focusing on renewable sources of energy, much of which can be located in the UK, is vital for a [just transition](#) away from fossil fuels. It would also allow the UK to reduce military expenditures and focus on development and conflict prevention, which are at the centre of a [sustainable](#) approach to security.

Peace Support Operations

The UK is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and contributes 6.68% of the UN's peacekeeping budget. Yet only 0.3% of UN peacekeepers are currently British and, other than Cyprus, the UK has not committed any significant forces to UN-run peacekeeping operations since the mid-1990s. Instead, the UK has favoured involvement in NATO-led 'stabilisation' operations such as in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

The wisdom of using NATO for such multidimensional missions far outside its home area should be re-evaluated.

Post-Afghanistan, the Prime Minister has [pledged](#) more British forces for UN-led missions in South Sudan and Somalia from 2016. The SDSR provides an opportunity for the government to set out what level of forces and with what specialist capabilities it is prepared to commit to UN or, referendum permitting, EU peace support operations in the future. For example, allies France, Italy, Netherlands and Spain all currently commit at least battalion-level formations to UN operations. Committing to the primacy of UN-led mediation is also crucial and the UK should explore ways of expanding and improving UN conflict prevention diplomacy.

Defence Engagement and the Arms Trade

The UK is one of the world's leading arms exporters. Its military industries annually produce over \$45 billion (about £30 billion) worth of arms. This constitutes a major component of UK manufacturing industry, producing everything from ammunition to nuclear-powered submarines, as well as national exports. However, such industries are also a potential liability when their production lines and capacities need to be maintained throughout procurement cycles and when they are dependent on export orders to reduce unit costs and compete with foreign producers.

The UK's close ties with repressive Middle Eastern states such as [Saudi Arabia](#), other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and [Israel](#), to whom the UK exports significant amounts of arms and technology, should also be carefully scrutinised. As [Richard Norton-Taylor](#) points out, the UK must not put 'short-sighted, short-term considerations', including commercial interests, ahead of the UK and the region's long-term security. The SDSR should take a strategic consideration of whether such arms sales, particularly to the Middle East, are in the interests of regional and international security.

Similar concerns have also been raised concerning the UK's recent nuclear energy deals with China and India, given the [threats](#) to British cyber security in the case of the former and the potential for [diversion](#) of technology and expertise to the latter's nuclear weapons programme.

What has been broadly branded [International Defence Engagement](#) should also be assessed for its contribution to long-term security. The 2013 International Defence Engagement Strategy supports arms sales as a form of constructive engagement. Other forms of engagement include use of basing facilities, for example in Bahrain, Brunei, Qatar and the UAE, the embedding of [200 Loan Service personnel](#) within these armed forces plus Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, plus RAF pilots flying combat missions with the US and Canadian air forces. Often outside of formal treaties, these linkages have implications both for the UK's reputation and its involvement in foreign wars.

Conclusion

The 2015 Conservative Party election [manifesto](#) spoke of the need to 'maintain Britain's strong global role and our capacity to project British power and values around the world'. This liberal internationalist approach is driven both by economics - to promote open markets, access to energy supplies and strategic resources - and politics - to maintain Britain's status in world affairs. Yet rather than short-term competition focused on

winning the so-called ‘[global race](#)’ between nations, a sustainable approach to security requires international cooperation if the long-term challenges of climate change, poverty, conflict, nuclear proliferation and terrorism are to be responsibly addressed.

This briefing has posed many questions about the assumptions underlying British defence and security planning which we believe policy-makers need to ask in order to direct policy towards a genuinely strategic and sustainable response to the myriad of challenges that face the UK and the world. If the SDSR has avoided these questions, it seems unlikely that it will reach credible solutions. The UK remains a major global actor at the hub of an almost unparalleled network of diplomatic, commercial and military influence and expertise; whether it is a force for good (not least its own people’s security and well-being) will be determined by its ability to foresee and plan for the long-term impact of its actions on the rest of the world. Upon such strategic foresight and self-awareness, the 2015 SDSR will ultimately succeed or fail.

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