



House of Commons  
Defence Committee

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# Deterrence in the twenty–first century

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**Eleventh Report of Session 2013–14**

## *Volume I*

*Volume I: Report, together with formal minutes*

*Written evidence is contained in Volume II, available on the Committee website at [www.parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/defcom)*

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## The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

### Current membership

Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP (*Conservative, North East Hampshire*) (Chair)  
Mr Julian Brazier MP (*Conservative, Canterbury*)  
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Mr James Gray MP (*Conservative, North Wiltshire*)  
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Derek Twigg MP (*Labour, Halton*)  
John Woodcock MP (*Labour/Co-op, Barrow and Furness*)

The following Members were also members of the Committee during this inquiry.

Thomas Docherty MP (*Labour, Dunfermline and West Fife*)  
Penny Mordaunt MP (*Conservative, Portsmouth North*)  
Sandra Osborne MP (*Labour, Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock*)

### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the internet at [www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/parliament.uk/defcom).

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume. Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are James Rhys (Clerk), Dougie Wands (Second Clerk), Karen Jackson (Audit Adviser), Ian Thomson (Committee Specialist), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), Rowena Macdonald and Carolyn Bowes (Committee Assistants).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5745; the Committee's email address is [defcom@parliament.uk](mailto:defcom@parliament.uk). Media inquiries should be addressed to Alex Paterson on 020 7219 1589.

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# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Introduction

1. The concept of deterrence remains fundamental to the way in which the UK seeks to manage the threats to its security. Deterrence must be credible to be effective. This means that it must be possible to both scale the threatened response to be proportionate to deter the attack in question and it must be possible to carry out the threatened response. Any proposed reductions in conventional capabilities must be considered in this light. Communication of will and intent is also an essential component of deterrence. (Paragraph 10)
2. We recommend that the MoD set out in the 2015 Defence and Security Review the contribution provided by the NATO Alliance to the deterrence of threats identified in the National Security Strategy and focus on how the UK can best contribute to the Alliance's continued effectiveness and overall deterrent capability. Recent events in the Ukraine illustrate that this remains of profound importance (Paragraph 11)

## International terrorism

3. The Contest counter-terrorism strategy draws on the concept of deterrence in seeking to deny terrorists the benefits and outcomes that they expect from their actions, in punishing those responsible, including their sponsors and financiers, and in addressing the ideological convictions of potential terrorists. There are evidently limits in the effectiveness of deterrence by punishment when dealing with ideologically driven or genuinely irrational actors, or when faced with an adversary whose precise identity may be difficult to establish. The increasing difficulty of deterrence of such asymmetric threats, whose connection to hostile states may be uncertain, heightens the importance of the role of intelligence and diplomacy in seeking to understand the motivations of such groups. (Paragraph 18)
4. Communication is fundamental to the concept of deterrence in all its forms, and the difficulty of communications with terrorists and non-state actors makes the challenge of looking to deter these actors even greater. The 2015 Defence and Security Review provides an opportunity to build on the UK's messaging about its resilience in the face of attack and the determined measures that it is prepared to take to punish terrorists and those that assist and finance them. We also look to the Government to set out in the 2015 Defence and Security Review its thoughts on the role of strategic messaging in deterring terrorist threats. (Paragraph 19)

## Cyber attack

5. At one level, once a destructive cyber attack has been launched, deterrence has de facto already failed. However, if Government is unable to respond to an attack because it does not know for sure who was responsible, the ability to deter future attacks will be undermined. The costs of retaliation against the wrong target might be high. (Paragraph 24)

6. The potentially increased difficulty of identifying the source of a cyber-attack on the United Kingdom or its interests, given the proliferation of non-state actors or the potential for rogue states using proxy actors, raises the question of whether the burden of proof needs to be revisited to ensure that the UK's deterrent capability in this field remains credible. This might require the UK Government to state that it would consider a response where evidence existed of the strong possibility of the source of an attack. (Paragraph 25)
7. We welcome the emphasis that the Government places on the importance of cyber defence and we note the commitment of resources to a new cyber strike capability. We are concerned that the difficulty in identifying actors in a cyber attack makes the ability to deter that much harder as hostile parties may feel more confident that they can mount an attack with impunity. Another challenge for deterrence is that question marks over the proportionality and legality of a response to a cyber attack may have a bearing on a hostile actor's calculations about the UK's readiness to deploy its own offensive capability, adding to this sense of impunity on the part of a potential aggressor. (Paragraph 26)
8. We call on the MoD to set out in more detail in the 2015 Defence and Security Review the Government's thinking on how it can deter cyber attack from both state and non-state actors and what messaging it can employ to make it clear that an attack on vital national assets will elicit an appropriate and determined response. Where it is not possible to deter a cyber attack by threatening a response against the interests of a hostile actor, emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that critical systems are resilient to attack and contingency plans for recovery are in place. (Paragraph 27)

### **Attack by another state using CBN weapons**

9. To remain credible, an effective nuclear deterrent relies on conventional forces that are able to deter threats to the UK and its Overseas Territories short of those that threaten the very continued existence of the state. This is a more fundamental test of the adequacy of our Armed Forces than whether they are sufficient to meet the demands of the Defence Planning Assumptions. We call on the MoD to show how this essential test will be factored in to the outcome of the 2015 Defence and Security Review. (Paragraph 36)
10. There may come a point where further reduction in the size of the UK's conventional capabilities brings into question the effectiveness of the nuclear deterrent. The next Defence and Security Review must be conscious of this risk. (Paragraph 37)
11. The blurring of lines between state and non-state actors poses a particular challenge in seeking to deter attacks using CBRN weapons. It may not be possible to deter a hostile state intent on launching attacks by threatening punishment where that state is confident that it can successfully cover its tracks. Circumstances in which the hostile actor is not clear or where it is not clear that a hostile state can be held to be responsible to an acceptable standard of proof pose a particular challenge to the concept of deterrence. Such a threat is akin to an act of international terrorism and

the similar difficulties in attribution and in determining a proportionate response raise the same challenges for the concept of deterrence. (Paragraph 38)

### Tier three risks

12. The deterrent strength of the UK armed forces against conventional military threats is reliant on the credibility of the Armed Forces to project military power. Fighting power is the key calculation in measuring this deterrent strength; this includes not only the physical capabilities of the Armed Forces, but also the conceptual and moral components reflecting a readiness to undertake operations. We call on the MoD to describe the fighting power of the UK's conventional forces in contributing to deterrence. (Paragraph 43)

### Conclusions on deterrence of National Security Strategy risks

13. Deterrence of asymmetric threats is more complex than deterrence of another state either by conventional or nuclear means as it is more difficult to communicate with potential adversaries; may be difficult to identify them; and is likely to be difficult to identify interests against which a response can be legitimately threatened or targeted. However, the concept of deterrence is still key to countering these threats. Questions around the attribution of hostile acts (or the degree of responsibility of a hostile state) raise questions about the proportionality and legality of any response and risk bringing the credibility of the use of force into question, undermining the ability to deter such acts. We call on the MoD to set out more of its thinking on how it can act to deter such asymmetric threats, overcoming these challenges, in the 2015 Defence and Security Review. (Paragraph 44)
14. There will be risks to the nation's security and vital interests, and to the collective security and interests of our allies and friends, that are not covered satisfactorily by the existing definition of risks in the National Security Strategy. These risks may not necessarily amount to a direct attack against the UK, but may involve a hostile state seeking to deter, contain or otherwise constrain the country's actions either through their conventional military forces or through economic or diplomatic pressure. Strong conventional forces provide the UK with a contingency against the unexpected and, as yet, not quantified threats that may emerge. In a rapidly changing global environment, there is unlikely to be much warning of events that might require the reconstitution of conventional forces, once cut back, to adequately deter new and emerging threats. Recent events in Ukraine illustrate the speed with which new threats, and indeed the reappearance of old threats, can manifest themselves (Paragraph 45)
15. We call on the MoD to ensure that the 2015 Defence and Security Review articulates a more coherent and convincing policy of conventional deterrence, based on a balance of capabilities of UK Armed Forces, and placed in the context of the military capability of our allies. Deterrence, after all, is based on achieving the credibility, in the eyes of those that we seek to deter, that we have the capability and will to employ armed force (Paragraph 46)

## Nuclear deterrence

16. We note, however, that while the potential range of emergent threats is significant, they do not preclude either the re-emergence of tensions with an existing nuclear power, nor the emergence of a new power whose interests are inimical to those of the United Kingdom with the capacity to deliver a CBRN attack on the UK or its interests. (Paragraph 57)
17. The fourth of the deterrent roles identified in the White Paper is to provide potential retaliation against threats that may emerge over the next 50 years. Nuclear proliferation is not under control and many of the sources of future insecurity could in themselves contribute to state-on-state conflict, creating an ever more unstable, and increasingly nuclear-armed, future strategic context. The assessment of future threats is as important as the assessment of current threats in considering the case for the nuclear deterrent (Paragraph 58)

## The opportunity cost of the nuclear deterrent

18. The operation of a nuclear deterrent clearly does not obviate the need for substantial investment in other approaches to security, including the diplomatic, and measures to tackle risks at source. As we have noted, the nuclear deterrent cannot be used to deter all threats to national security. Given the importance of communication to the concept of deterrence, investment in diplomatic and intelligence assets must be integral to the UK's security apparatus. However, it would be naive of us to assume that a decision not to invest in the nuclear deterrent would release substantial funds for investment in other forms of security. We believe that the decision on the retention of the nuclear deterrent, and whether its retention is still merited as a means of deterring existential threats to the UK, should be made on its own merits, rather than on the basis of what else could be bought with the money saved. (Paragraph 63)

## Implications of advanced conventional weapons for nuclear deterrence

19. It is possible to foresee an environment in which the core role of nuclear deterrence – to protect a state from attack – is achieved by the deployment of advanced conventional weapons, providing both offensive and defensive capability. However, we are not yet in a position to evaluate any viable technical options. This will be a matter which our successor Committee may wish to examine further. (Paragraph 71)
20. It is not the purpose of this report to re-open the question of the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent. We did not re-examine the evidence in the detail that our predecessor Committee did. The 2015 National Security Strategy will identify a new order of threats and we will look to the 2015 Defence and Security Review to identify which of these threats the nuclear deterrent will be expected to deter. (Paragraph 72)

## Conclusion

21. Although the concept of deterrence is most commonly thought of in respect of the nuclear deterrent, the ability of the Armed Forces to deter threats worldwide to the

UK's interests is integral to the National Security Tasks and applies to all branches of the UK's security apparatus. (Paragraph 73)

22. The deterrence of threats to national interests is made more complex by the greater significance of asymmetric threats compared to the Cold War strategic context, but is still a concept fundamental to national security. We call on the Government to use the opportunity of the 2015 Defence and Security Review (DSR) to set out more of its thinking on the role all parts of Government play in deterring asymmetric threats, including those from the ideologically driven and radicalised. (Paragraph 74)
  23. It also needs to be emphasised that, even in this new strategic context, NATO remains the cornerstone of UK deterrence and we call on the Government to ensure that the 2015 Defence and Security Review focuses also on how the UK can best contribute to the Alliance. Recent events in Ukraine not only illustrate the importance of NATO to UK security, but bring into question the continued relevance of the categorisation of threats in the current National Security Strategy. The 2015 National Security Strategy must reflect that threats to UK security include the re-emergence of state threats that we may have been tempted to think had diminished with the end of the Cold War. These state threats may become manifest in a range of ways, including through attack with CBRN weapons, conventional forces, terrorist proxies or cyber capabilities. We will return to this point in our overarching report on Towards the next Defence and Security Review, later in the year. (Paragraph 75)
  24. The UK Armed Forces have a deterrent capacity dependent on calculations of their capability and on perceptions of the UK's readiness to use force when the need arises. We are concerned that recent comments by Robert Gates, former US Defence Secretary, about the UK's value as a military partner for the US in the wake of defence cuts, illustrate a deterioration in perceptions abroad of the UK's military capabilities. The 2015 Defence and Security Review must be drafted with reference to the Armed Forces' continuing deterrent capability and decisions around the MoD's financial settlement in the next Comprehensive Spending Review must be made in the light of the need to retain a credible deterrent capacity in the country's Armed Forces. A failure to do so could have significant implications for the country's security. Credible conventional forces are also essential to maintain the credibility of the nuclear deterrent. (Paragraph 76)
  25. We conclude that deterrence, both nuclear and conventional, has an important place in the defence philosophy of the UK but will increasingly form part of a more complex security strategy alongside greater need for resilience and recovery as the world becomes more multi-polar and less stable and where the certainties of identifying an aggressor may be reduced. (Paragraph 77)
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# 1 Introduction

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1. We announced our inquiry into Deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century on 23 July 2013, as one of four strands that we are pursuing as part of our overarching inquiry *Towards the next Defence and Security Review*. We published our preliminary report, *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part I*, in January,<sup>1</sup> and expect to publish our final report in this series in the summer. Our intention, in this series of reports, is to help to shape and inform the next Defence and Security Review which is expected to be conducted in 2015.

2. The strands have been entirely paper-based inquiries in that no formal oral evidence was taken on each. In another change from our usual practice, the Committee has appointed Committee Members to act as rapporteurs on each of the strands, who have presented their findings to the Committee. The rapporteurs on this strand were James Arbuthnot and John Woodcock.

3. We requested written evidence on

The concept of deterrence: definitions and where deterrence sits in the continuum stretching from influence to intervention;

The climate in which deterrence must operate and how it has changed;

The targets of deterrence: is every threat potentially deterrable?

The different levels of deterrence, when each might be appropriate, and the likely efficacy of each: nuclear deterrence, deterrence through conventional forces, the link between the two, the significance of Ballistic Missile Deterrence, deterrence by protection of potential targets and the cyber dimension;

The importance of credibility: the sufficiency of the means, the sufficiency of the will and of the ways in which it is expressed, and communication of the message, including to the target;

How the UK Armed Forces currently contribute to deterrence and how this contribution can be improved; and

How deterrence can be expected to change in future.

We are grateful to all those who submitted written evidence to this inquiry. We would also like to put on record our gratitude to our Specialist Advisers for their contribution to this inquiry and to the staff of the Committee.<sup>2</sup>

4. We are also grateful for the invitation that was extended by the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during the course of the inquiry to James Arbuthnot, John Woodcock and the Clerk of the Committee to attend a conference at Wilton Park on the future of non-nuclear deterrence. This conference gave the individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Seventh Report of the Committee, Session 2013-14, HC197.

<sup>2</sup> The declarations of relevant interests by our Specialist Advisers are recorded in the Committee's Formal Minutes which are available on the Committee's website.

concerned a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas with a wide range of experts in the field.

5. In strategic terms, the MoD explained that deterrence is one of the “ways” by which a state seeks to achieve its security policy “ends”.<sup>3</sup> The MoD sought to define deterrence as follows:

deterrence employs the proportionate threat of force to discourage someone from doing something, by convincing them that the costs of their actions will outweigh any possible benefits.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of deterrence comprises both deterrence by punishment (achieved through a threat to inflict costs on a potential aggressor through retaliation after any attack) and deterrence by denial (achieved by convincing a potential attacker that they will be denied the expected benefits of aggression).<sup>5</sup>

6. The concept of deterrence is popularly associated primarily with nuclear capability. The 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) includes a section entitled “The Deterrent” that refers exclusively to the nuclear deterrent. However, nuclear deterrence is merely a subset of a broader concept. The MoD emphasised that the concept of deterrence continues to be integral to many conventional operations in which the Armed Forces engage, for example commitments in the South Atlantic; deterrence of threats to UK airspace; deployment of Rapier air defence measures in London during the Olympics; and measures to intercept pirates off the Horn of Africa.<sup>6</sup> The mere presence of a capability – be it warships or air defence measures – can provide a deterrent to potential aggressors, reminding them of the consequences that would follow in the event of an attack being launched.

7. The MoD told us that deterrence was still integral to the National Security Tasks of exerting influence to exploit opportunities and manage risks; and protecting the UK and our interests against threats from state and non-state sources.<sup>7</sup> The 2010 SDSR also demanded “a renewed emphasis on using our conventional forces to deter potential adversaries” as part of a broader focus by the Armed Forces on tackling risks before they crystallised.<sup>8</sup> Deterrence must therefore be set within the broader context of measures of conflict prevention. However, deterrence can also be a feature of measures to control the escalation of conflict, and is therefore also a tool for management of ongoing conflict.

8. Dr Jeremy Stocker, Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), defines deterrence as a relationship between deterrer and deterree, and notes that communication, including signalling and perception, is fundamental to this relationship.<sup>9</sup> He also noted that effective deterrence relies on credibility — the threatened response to

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<sup>3</sup> Ev w1

<sup>4</sup> Ev w1

<sup>5</sup> Ev w1

<sup>6</sup> Ev w2

<sup>7</sup> Ev w1

<sup>8</sup> Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: the Strategic Defence and Security Review, Cm 7948, paragraph 2.10.

<sup>9</sup> Ev w11

deter any attack must be proportionate, to be both legal and credible.<sup>10</sup> Effective deterrence also relied on an ability to deliver the necessary threat.<sup>11</sup>

9. The MoD told us that “NATO, and the UK’s commitment to it, is the cornerstone of UK defence policy”.<sup>12</sup> NATO is the most important element in a global network of defence partnerships and alliances to which the UK contributes and from which it benefits, and the collective defence guarantee enshrined in Article V of the 1949 Washington Treaty is a key element in deterring attack on the UK. Article V provides

That an armed attack against one or more [NATO allies] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.

The combined nuclear and conventional capabilities of all 28 NATO allies continue to have a powerful deterrent effect to the benefit of all members of the alliance. Although NATO grew out of the Cold War, it remains key to defending Alliance and UK territory at a time of substantial geopolitical change and where the potential for instability on both NATO’s southern and eastern flanks remains high, as evidenced most recently by events in Ukraine. During the course of this inquiry, we have been keen to investigate the links between deterrence and security both in an Alliance context, and, within a broader changing strategic context, to understand better whom we are trying to deter and how we can deter them.

**10. The concept of deterrence remains fundamental to the way in which the UK seeks to manage the threats to its security. Deterrence must be credible to be effective. This means that it must be possible to both scale the threatened response to be proportionate to deter the attack in question and it must be possible to carry out the threatened response. Any proposed reductions in conventional capabilities must be considered in this light. Communication of will and intent is also an essential component of deterrence.**

**11. We recommend that the MoD set out in the 2015 Defence and Security Review the contribution provided by the NATO Alliance to the deterrence of threats identified in the National Security Strategy and focus on how the UK can best contribute to the Alliance’s continued effectiveness and overall deterrent capability. Recent events in the Ukraine illustrate that this remains of profound importance.**

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<sup>10</sup> Ev w12

<sup>11</sup> Ev w12

<sup>12</sup> Ev w2

## 2 Deterrence in a changing strategic context

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12. The National Security Strategy (NSS) noted the increasing diversity and complexity of the “risk picture” since the end of the Cold War.

During the Cold War we faced an existential threat from a state adversary through largely predictable military or nuclear means. We no longer face such predictable threats. The adversaries we face will change and diversify as enemies seek means of threat or attack which are cheaper, more easily accessible and less attributable than conventional warfare.<sup>13</sup>

In this chapter, we examine how the concept of deterrence remains relevant in managing both the more diverse range of new threats and risks identified in the National Security Strategy and the older risks to our national security and vital interests that remain.

### National Security Strategy Tier One Risks

#### *International terrorism*

13. The NSS identifies the threat of international terrorism as one of the highest priority risks, a tier one threat, and includes the threat of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack by terrorists. The MoD acknowledges the additional complexity of seeking to deter acts of terrorism.<sup>14</sup> Terrorist attacks are unpredictable and there may be difficulties in accurately and definitively attributing responsibility for them. It is also likely to be more difficult to communicate “red lines” to such groups and individuals, as lines of communication may be limited or unreliable, making it hard to make clear what response would be elicited by an attack. It is also likely to be more difficult to determine what constitutes a proportionate response to a terrorist attack, as it is likely to be more difficult to identify or locate the interests of a terrorist organisation that can legitimately be the object of retaliation.<sup>15</sup>

14. The MoD explained that the Government's counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST, was built around four core strands – Protect, Prepare, Pursue and Prevent – each of which incorporated the principle of deterrence.<sup>16</sup> The Protect and Prepare strands, involving the physical protection of infrastructure and enhancing resilience where attacks do occur, constitute a form of deterrence by denial, hoping to deny the terrorists the benefits that they anticipate from their attack (in terms of disruption and damage caused). A potential adversary might think twice about attacking a part of our Critical National Infrastructure if it knew that an attack might well be ineffective, or that even a successful

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<sup>13</sup> A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty, The National Security Strategy, Cm 7953, paragraph 1.32.

<sup>14</sup> Ev w3

<sup>15</sup> Ev w3

<sup>16</sup> Ev w3

attack would damage the infrastructure for only the short time it took to recover, and the costs of an attack therefore outweighed the likely benefits.

15. The Pursue strand involves a combination of deterrence by denial (detecting, investigating and disrupting terrorist activity) and deterrence by punishment (seeking to bring perpetrators to justice). The MoD acknowledges that

The latter may not be an effective form of deterrence against an ideologically-motivated terrorist, but it has relevance in the context of state sponsorship of terrorism, or of enablers such as those who offer financial backing.

Some terrorists may have associations with state adversaries and may be used as proxies by those states. This relationship may be difficult to establish with certainty, making it difficult to threaten a deterrent response against the appropriate party that is both proportionate and legal and therefore credible. Communications with a potentially hostile state may be made more difficult by uncertainty over that state's level of control over its proxies. However, in addressing the threats from non-state actors, Dr Jeremy Stocker, Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute argued that

few threats are genuinely non-state and non-territorial. State-sponsorship or at the very least state acquiescence in non-state action makes accountability more difficult to establish, but not impossible. The relationships between Al Qaeda and the Taliban in 2001 or between Hezbollah and Iran today are cases in point.<sup>17</sup>

16. The Prevent strand

involves elements of what has sometimes been called 'deterrence by counter-narrative', seeking to undermine the ideological convictions of those who may be inclined to participate in terrorism.<sup>18</sup>

This “deterrence by counter-narrative” includes, for example, measures to address radicalisation of UK citizens and deter them from terrorist activity. Deterrence by threatening punishment against individuals who are set on their own martyrdom is of clearly limited value. However, there is a role for looking to dissuade these individuals from such action using intelligence and strategic communications.

17. Paul Bell, a director of Albany Associates and specialist in the use of communications to counter terrorism and extremism with experience developing and running a US military communications unit in Iraq from 2004-11, emphasised the value of strategic communications and psychological operations in looking to deter the threat from terrorists. He explained the need to examine “how to deal with their cause, ideology and levels of support in their communities, since that is at the heart of their ability to recruit and continue their war”. Asymmetric threats could also arise from conflict with another state which could see that adversary employing a “sophisticated mix of regular and irregular forces including proxies, conventional and guerrilla tactics, information operations and high-end technologies such as the cyber domain”. Consequently, he argued

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<sup>17</sup> Ev w13

<sup>18</sup> Ev w4

that the military should invest in capabilities in this sphere and develop its expertise. He added that

As asymmetric warfare becomes the global mode of violent engagement, increasingly the psychological and sociological domain is becoming the real “battle space”. These conflicts are promoted, amplified, judged and, as a result, effectively fought through the media.

Mr Bell concluded that

Asymmetric adversaries will become the norm. However, even when facing sovereign state threats, the mobile phone, tablet, PC or TV screen have become the new ‘front line’ in a battle of competing ‘narratives’ and the quest for legitimacy. Prevention as a strategy has shifted beyond the traditional deterrent of mutually assured destruction between state actors, to a more complex scenario involving a multitude of actors with a range of actions, in which the principal task is to be able ‘to interrupt the narratives of those who threaten our values and interests and to support those who champion them’.

**18. The Contest counter-terrorism strategy draws on the concept of deterrence in seeking to deny terrorists the benefits and outcomes that they expect from their actions, in punishing those responsible, including their sponsors and financiers, and in addressing the ideological convictions of potential terrorists. There are evidently limits in the effectiveness of deterrence by punishment when dealing with ideologically driven or genuinely irrational actors, or when faced with an adversary whose precise identity may be difficult to establish. The increasing difficulty of deterrence of such asymmetric threats, whose connection to hostile states may be uncertain, heightens the importance of the role of intelligence and diplomacy in seeking to understand the motivations of such groups.**

**19. Communication is fundamental to the concept of deterrence in all its forms, and the difficulty of communications with terrorists and non-state actors makes the challenge of looking to deter these actors even greater. The 2015 Defence and Security Review provides an opportunity to build on the UK’s messaging about its resilience in the face of attack and the determined measures that it is prepared to take to punish terrorists and those that assist and finance them. We also look to the Government to set out in the 2015 Defence and Security Review its thoughts on the role of strategic messaging in deterring terrorist threats.**

### **Cyber attack**

20. The risk of cyber attack is categorised as a tier one threat to the UK. The MoD notes that:

The deterrence of cyber attack arguably provides the most acute challenge due to its pervasiveness, ease of access, global reach and the difficulty of identifying actors in order to communicate a credible threat.

21. Our report on *Defence and Cyber-security* noted the emerging threat to cyber security and called on the MoD and the National Security Council to keep the military’s role in

national cyber security under review.<sup>19</sup> Of the £650 million allocated for 2011-15 to the National Cyber Security Programme, £90 million was allocated to the MoD. The MoD has made a significant investment in cyber security since the 2010 SDSR. Cyber defence and measures to enhance resilience constitute a form of deterrence by denial as they seek to deprive hostile actors of the perceived benefits to them of disruption of and damage to the country's critically important systems, or at least to minimise and mitigate these effects.

22. In September 2013, the Government announced that it was recruiting several hundred "cyber reserves" to bolster its capability to defend against cyber attacks on the UK, but also to develop its own cyber attack capability. This cyber reserve would therefore also act to provide a deterrent against or to pre-empt attack. Up to £500 million has been allocated to the recruitment of the cyber reserve. The development of an offensive capability constitutes a form of deterrence by punishment, as it seeks to deter adversaries from attack with the threat of the response or the pre-emptive action that might be provoked.<sup>20</sup> The Secretary of State's announcement of an offensive capability will, in itself, have some degree of deterrent effect.

23. Our report on *Defence and Cyber-Security* emphasised the need to develop doctrine on the deployment of a cyber capability and develop rules of engagement.<sup>21</sup> In its response, the MoD noted that, for security reasons it was unable to share with us its doctrine on Cyber, but noted that a response to an imminent cyber attack would be governed, under the Law of Armed Conflict, by the legal principles of necessity, proportionality and imminence in respect of "anticipatory self defence".<sup>22</sup> The MoD also noted that the application of the Law of Armed Conflict in this respect was made potentially more complex by difficulties in attributing responsibility for a likely attack; the speed with which an attack could be conducted, making it more difficult to respond to the threat of attack; and difficulties in determining intent even where actions and actors were provable. The Government noted that the test of the legal principles in terms of what would constitute a legitimate act of anticipatory self defence was set high. This complexity has implications for the ability to operate a deterrent in this area.

24. A cyber attack could be launched by state actors, but concerted attacks have also been launched by "hacktivists", including groups such as Anonymous, not obviously linked to any state. Attributing responsibility for a serious attack may be extremely difficult, other than where it is possible to bring prosecutions against individuals. **At one level, once a destructive cyber attack has been launched, deterrence has de facto already failed. However, if Government is unable to respond to an attack because it does not know for sure who was responsible, the ability to deter future attacks will be undermined. The costs of retaliation against the wrong target might be high.**

25. **The potentially increased difficulty of identifying the source of a cyber-attack on the United Kingdom or its interests, given the proliferation of non-state actors or the potential for rogue states using proxy actors, raises the question of whether the burden**

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<sup>19</sup> Sixth Report of the Committee, Session 2012-13, HC 106, paragraphs 122-123.

<sup>20</sup> Ev w4

<sup>21</sup> Sixth Report of the Committee, Session 2012-13, HC 106, paragraph 67,

<sup>22</sup> Sixth Special Report of the Committee, Session 2012-13, HC719, pages 7-8.

of proof needs to be revisited to ensure that the UK's deterrent capability in this field remains credible. This might require the UK Government to state that it would consider a response where evidence existed of the strong possibility of the source of an attack.

26. We welcome the emphasis that the Government places on the importance of cyber defence and we note the commitment of resources to a new cyber strike capability. We are concerned that the difficulty in identifying actors in a cyber attack makes the ability to deter that much harder as hostile parties may feel more confident that they can mount an attack with impunity. Another challenge for deterrence is that question marks over the proportionality and legality of a response to a cyber attack may have a bearing on a hostile actor's calculations about the UK's readiness to deploy its own offensive capability, adding to this sense of impunity on the part of a potential aggressor.

27. We call on the MoD to set out in more detail in the 2015 Defence and Security Review the Government's thinking on how it can deter cyber attack from both state and non-state actors and what messaging it can employ to make it clear that an attack on vital national assets will elicit an appropriate and determined response. Where it is not possible to deter a cyber attack by threatening a response against the interests of a hostile actor, emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that critical systems are resilient to attack and contingency plans for recovery are in place.

## Tier two risks

### *Attack by another state using CBRN weapons*

28. An attack by another state or proxy using Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear (CBRN) weapons is identified as a tier two threat in the NSS. While the potential impact of such an attack could be equally catastrophic, the likelihood is assessed as being lower than the terrorist threat. The NSS states that "we face no major state threat at present and no existential threat to our security, freedom or prosperity".<sup>23</sup> While this may be true, any assessment of threats to national security must assess future threats as well as current threats. The NSS goes on to warn "we cannot be complacent. The world will change."<sup>24</sup>

29. The nuclear deterrent sits at the top of the UK's deterrent capabilities and remains the ultimate deterrent against a nuclear-armed state. The nuclear deterrent itself requires substantial conventional forces to defend it, but this is not the only way in which the nuclear deterrent relies on conventional capabilities. To remain credible, a nuclear deterrent must be supported by the ability to escalate conventional capabilities up to the point whereby a further escalation to deployment of nuclear weapons represents a proportionate and appropriate response. The MoD explained to us that the UK's nuclear deterrent

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<sup>23</sup> A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty, The National Security Strategy, Cm 7953, paragraph 1.11

<sup>24</sup> A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty, The National Security Strategy, Cm 7953, paragraph 1.12.



is there to prevent, at the extreme, any threat to national existence, or nuclear blackmail from a nuclear-armed state against the UK homeland or our vital interests. However, [...] the use of nuclear weapons is only appropriate to deter the most extreme threats. [...] Nuclear weapons are therefore just one element of the total capability to maintain/achieve the deterrent effect the UK seeks. To be most effective, deterrence requires the knitting together of both conventional (including, increasingly, asymmetric capabilities such as cyber) and nuclear capabilities in a carefully graduated tapestry, supported by clear strategic messaging.<sup>25</sup>

30. Vice-Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham, former Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, has raised concerns about the impact of conventional defence cuts on the effectiveness of the nuclear deterrent.<sup>26</sup> He argued that the credibility of the nuclear deterrent relied on the ability to defer any decision on their use until the point that the continued existence of the country was at stake; conventional forces had to be sufficient to deter any lesser threat. A nuclear response would not be credible in dealing with any lesser threat, and therefore the credibility of the nuclear deterrent relies itself on strong conventional deterrence. He explains

If the conventional means at our disposal are weak, the point of transition to nuclear use may be lowered to levels at which the risk of nuclear obliteration is self-evidently disproportionate to the issue at stake. At that point, it is likely that deterrence through the threat of nuclear use becomes incredible and can be so perceived by an opponent – a bluff waiting to be called. Thus, through conventional weakness, the nuclear deterrent is compromised, whether it is a rogue state or a major power that is involved.<sup>27</sup>

Blackham explains that deterrence is a “broad continuum” comprising conventional and nuclear capabilities, and that the threat of conventional force is credible because it is usable. However, the conventional deterrent was only credible if potential adversaries believed that it could deliver the threat in question. He expressed concern that

In Britain today ‘defence policy’ appears to be merely to have a nuclear deterrent and then buy whatever else can be afforded, with no informed consideration of how the whole strategy fits together. This is certainly not to argue that the UK should not possess a nuclear deterrent but rather that, if such deterrence is to be effective and credible to friend and foe alike, it must be part of a coherent overall defence strategy.<sup>28</sup>

31. The MoD informed us that the UK’s nuclear deterrent was important to NATO’s deterrent posture as a whole, contributing to the collective defence of the whole alliance, adding that use of nuclear weapons could only be envisaged in the most extreme circumstances:

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<sup>25</sup> Ev w1.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.uknda.org/uknda-commentaries.html>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.uknda.org/uknda-commentaries.html>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.uknda.org/uknda-commentaries.html>

The UK's nuclear declaratory policy makes clear the restrained nature of our deterrence posture. The UK has long been clear that they would only be used in extreme circumstances of self defence, including the defence of our NATO Allies, and would not use any weapons contrary to international law. Our focus is on preventing nuclear attack or coercion that cannot be countered by other means. While the UK does not rule in or out the first use of nuclear weapons, in order not to simplify the calculations of a potential aggressor by defining more precisely the circumstances in which the UK might consider the use of nuclear capabilities, UK nuclear doctrine is exclusively one of deterrence. Maintaining ambiguity over when, how and at what scale nuclear weapons might be used enhances the deterrent effect.<sup>29</sup>

32. The risk also exists of attack by a state where responsibility for the attack is not clear. We have previously drawn attention to the risk of high altitude nuclear electro-magnetic pulse weapons;<sup>30</sup> a nuclear device could be detonated between 25-500 miles above the Earth to create an electro-magnetic pulse that would cause severe damage to technology over a wide area. In such circumstances, proving the identity of the originator and their connection to a given state, and doing so quickly, may be particularly difficult. Lord Hennessy outlined the work of a group commissioned by the Chiefs of Staff in 1950 that contemplated the possibility of an atomic bomb being detonated in a UK port from a Soviet ship or by a "suicide" civilian aircraft. The then Cabinet Secretary noted to the Prime Minister that "this is a risk against which we cannot at present take, in normal times, any effective precautions".<sup>31</sup> Hennessy notes that, in a Cold War setting, the party responsible would have been pretty clear, but that in a multi-polar strategic context, this would not be the case.

Should, heaven forbid, such a "suicide" mission have been mounted or an atomic bomb in an eastern bloc freighter destroyed Liverpool or Southampton in a clandestine, pre-emptive strike during a transition from Cold War to World War III, the British Government would have known it was Soviet mounted.[...] no such clarity or certainty would be the case today.<sup>32</sup>

33. Deterrence relies on having certainty in the identity of an opponent but also on it being possible to resolve any questions around responsibility for an attack to an acceptable standard of proof quickly. Where there is potential for weapons of mass destruction to be delivered with anonymity, hostile states may be encouraged to believe that they can act with impunity. Challenges in attribution may be further confused where states act through proxies, such as terrorist organisations, and it may be extremely difficult to prove to an acceptable standard of proof the guiding hand of a hostile state behind an attack.

34. An attack by a state using CBRN weapons either seeking to conceal its traces or acting through a deniable proxy poses many of the same challenges as seeking to deter an act of international terrorism. A hostile state acting in such a way indicates, *de facto*, a failure of

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<sup>29</sup> Ev w3

<sup>30</sup> Tenth Report of the Committee, Session 2010-12, paragraph 42.

<sup>31</sup> Ev w4

<sup>32</sup> Ev w5

deterrence by punishment as that state would have accepted the risk that its actions, however well disguised, could provoke a nuclear response against its cities and strategic interests. The best means of minimising the extent to which a hostile state could act in this way would be through an emphasis on intelligence.

35. Given the implicit failure of deterrence by punishment in this scenario, efforts to convince any potential hostile actor that the benefits that they would gain from such an attack would be outweighed by the risk of nuclear response could constitute a form of deterrence by denial. Measures to enhance resilience and recovery represent a means of exercising deterrence by denial, attempting to deny the attacker the success of their attack, as measured by the destruction and disruption that it causes.

**36. To remain credible, an effective nuclear deterrent relies on conventional forces that are able to deter threats to the UK and its Overseas Territories short of those that threaten the very continued existence of the state. This is a more fundamental test of the adequacy of our Armed Forces than whether they are sufficient to meet the demands of the Defence Planning Assumptions. We call on the MoD to show how this essential test will be factored in to the outcome of the 2015 Defence and Security Review.**

37. There may come a point where further reduction in the size of the UK's conventional capabilities brings into question the effectiveness of the nuclear deterrent. The next Defence and Security Review must be conscious of this risk.

38. **The blurring of lines between state and non-state actors poses a particular challenge in seeking to deter attacks using CBRN weapons. It may not be possible to deter a hostile state intent on launching attacks by threatening punishment where that state is confident that it can successfully cover its tracks. Circumstances in which the hostile actor is not clear or where it is not clear that a hostile state can be held to be responsible to an acceptable standard of proof pose a particular challenge to the concept of deterrence. Such a threat is akin to an act of international terrorism and the similar difficulties in attribution and in determining a proportionate response raise the same challenges for the concept of deterrence.**

### Tier three risks

39. The tier three risks identified under the NSS include a large scale conventional military attack on the UK by another state; a conventional attack on another NATO or EU member to which the UK would have to respond; and an attack on a UK overseas territory. Conventional capabilities, underpinning the ultimate nuclear deterrent, are the key deterrent factor in management of these risks. The NATO alliance provides for the forces of all 28 allies to act to deter attack on the UK or any NATO state. However, the alliance would not be expected to be involved in defence of UK Overseas Territories.

40. One measure of the Armed Forces' ability to deter or contribute to deterring a large scale conventional attack is the measure of its fighting power. As we noted in our report on *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part One*, this is defined as "the Armed Forces' ability to fight. It consists of a conceptual component (the thought process), a

moral component (the ability to get people to fight) and a physical component (the means to fight)”<sup>33</sup>.

41. The former United States Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, expressed his concerns in January about the impact of defence cuts on UK military capabilities. He told the BBC’s Today Programme that

With the fairly substantial reductions in defence spending in Great Britain, what we’re finding is that it won’t have full spectrum capabilities and the ability to be a full partner as they have been in the past.<sup>34</sup>

If such concerns are being expressed about the degradation of the capabilities of the UK Armed Forces by our closest allies, these messages will not be lost on potential foes, and have the potential to undermine the UK’s ability to deter conventional attacks.

42. The MoD told us that the “emphasis in Future Force 2020 on projection of power and influence reflects conscious effort to maximise deterrent effect of capability [...] The retention of high readiness forces that can deploy rapidly to respond to contingencies anywhere in the world is designed to deter adversaries from acting against our interests”<sup>35</sup>. However, as the doctrine of fighting power indicates, capability must be underpinned by evidence of both the will and the intent to use that capability if it is to be effective as a deterrent. The evidence for the will and intent must be provided. Dr Jeremy Stocker, Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute, noted that

Deterrence is critically about credibility. The threats and promises on which deterrence is based must be believable and believed. This is a function of capability, will and communication, *as understood by the deteree*, for it is the other party who decides whether or not to be deterred.<sup>36</sup>

**43. The deterrent strength of the UK armed forces against conventional military threats is reliant on the credibility of the Armed Forces to project military power. Fighting power is the key calculation in measuring this deterrent strength; this includes not only the physical capabilities of the Armed Forces, but also the conceptual and moral components reflecting a readiness to undertake operations. We call on the MoD to describe the fighting power of the UK’s conventional forces in contributing to deterrence.**

## Conclusions on deterrence of National Security Strategy risks

**44. Deterrence of asymmetric threats is more complex than deterrence of another state either by conventional or nuclear means as it is more difficult to communicate with potential adversaries; may be difficult to identify them; and is likely to be difficult to identify interests against which a response can be legitimately threatened or targeted. However, the concept of deterrence is still key to countering these threats. Questions**

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<sup>33</sup> Seventh Report of the Committee, Session 2013-14, HC197, paragraph 31.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25754870>, 16 January 2014

<sup>35</sup> Ev w2

<sup>36</sup> Ev w12

around the attribution of hostile acts (or the degree of responsibility of a hostile state) raise questions about the proportionality and legality of any response and risk bringing the credibility of the use of force into question, undermining the ability to deter such acts. We call on the MoD to set out more of its thinking on how it can act to deter such asymmetric threats, overcoming these challenges, in the 2015 Defence and Security Review.

45. There will be risks to the nation's security and vital interests, and to the collective security and interests of our allies and friends, that are not covered satisfactorily by the existing definition of risks in the National Security Strategy . These risks may not necessarily amount to a direct attack against the UK, but may involve a hostile state seeking to deter, contain or otherwise constrain the country's actions either through their conventional military forces or through economic or diplomatic pressure. Strong conventional forces provide the UK with a contingency against the unexpected and, as yet, not quantified threats that may emerge. In a rapidly changing global environment, there is unlikely to be much warning of events that might require the reconstitution of conventional forces, once cut back, to adequately deter new and emerging threats. Recent events in Ukraine illustrate the speed with which new threats, and indeed the reappearance of old threats, can manifest themselves.

46. We call on the MoD to ensure that the 2015 Defence and Security Review articulates a more coherent and convincing policy of conventional deterrence, based on a balance of capabilities of UK Armed Forces, and placed in the context of the military capability of our allies. Deterrence, after all, is based on achieving the credibility, in the eyes of those that we seek to deter, that we have the capability and will to employ armed force.

## 3 Nuclear deterrence

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### What threats does the nuclear deterrent deter?

47. The 2006 White Paper on the Future of the UK's nuclear deterrent set out four deterrent roles for UK nuclear weapons:

To deter against the re-emergence of a major direct nuclear threat to the UK or our NATO allies, and to prevent major war which threatens the British state;

To deter against the use of weapons of mass destruction by a rogue state during a regional intervention in which UK forces were involved, allowing the UK to continue to be able to intervene militarily around the world without fear of “nuclear blackmail” or coercion;

To deter against state-sponsored acts of nuclear terrorism; and

To act as an insurance against emerging threats to the UK's vital interests and the uncertainties and risks of the future.<sup>37</sup>

48. In respect of the first deterrent role, the Nuclear Information Service told us that Russia or China were the only nations that could pose such a threat to the UK in the foreseeable future, but concluded that “the possibility that Russia or China would at some time over the next fifty years pose a direct military threat to the UK represents an unlikely and exceptionally worst case scenario [...] It is time for the government to accept that Russia and China do not pose a military threat to the UK and that they are now becoming our economic and strategic partners”.<sup>38</sup> Dr Nick Ritchie, University of York, acknowledged continuing tensions between both countries and the West, and acknowledged that some political crises might have military dimensions, but concluded that it was “barely conceivable that UK nuclear deterrent threats and consideration of using nuclear weapons against Russia or China will ever be part of the solution to future confrontations”.<sup>39</sup>

49. However, Franklin C Miller, a former Special Assistant at the White House and Senior Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control at the National Security Council, has argued, in contrast, that calls from the UK and the US for the worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons “has not drawn obvious support from France, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea or Iran” and that the current Russian leadership placed a “very high reliance on nuclear weapons”, and had threatened nuclear use against its neighbours, including running an exercise which simulated nuclear weapons attacks on Poland.<sup>40</sup> He added that Russian nuclear forces were put on a state of alert during the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 to guard against “NATO adventurism”. Mr Miller concluded that “Russia's nuclear weapons are coercive weapons and the Russian

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<sup>37</sup> The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent, Cm6994, December 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Ev w28

<sup>39</sup> Ev w34

<sup>40</sup> Franklin C Miller speech to Chatham House on the Future of the UK's nuclear deterrent: a view from the US, 27 May 2010.

Government has been using them for such effect”. He accordingly argued strongly for the retention of the UK nuclear deterrent. We note that the recent Russian intervention in Crimea was accompanied by a test of a Russian inter-continental ballistic missile, again suggesting that Russia was prepared to use its nuclear capabilities as a form of leverage in global relations.

50. The second deterrent role envisages deterring a rogue state from using weapons of mass destruction to allow for a regional intervention. The Nuclear Information Service argued that,

If the survival of a rogue regime armed with weapons of mass destruction was genuinely under threat, military intervention would be an unpredictable high-risk option, with a disproportionate risk that the regime might use its weapons in a last-ditch attempt to survive.<sup>41</sup>

Ritchie noted that the dangerous “asymmetry” of the stakes where the survival of a nuclear-armed rogue state was threatened would make it unlikely that UK nuclear deterrent threats would prevent the use of nuclear weapons by that state.<sup>42</sup>

51. The third of the threats that the White Paper said the nuclear capability was designed to deter was state sponsored acts of terrorism. We noted in Chapter 2 the challenges to deterrence of attack by a state that was confident in concealing its traces, either acting through a proxy or by other means. UNA-UK told us that the nuclear deterrent provided no benefit in managing the asymmetric threats posed by terrorist groups or by unstable states within which or near to which the UK had resource interests.

These frail states cannot be solidified by the UK’s nuclear deterrent, and the deterrent cannot be used as leverage or as “a big stick” towards irregular forces within such states [...]. Al-Shabab does not feel threatened by any state’s nuclear weapons, and the only time Al-Qaeda cogitates over any state’s nuclear deterrent, is possibly to consider how it might compromise the security of it.<sup>43</sup>

52. Our predecessor Committee noted in its report on *The Future of the UK’s Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context* that

The most pressing threat currently facing the UK is that of international terrorism. Witnesses to our inquiry overwhelmingly argued that the strategic nuclear deterrent could serve no useful or practical purpose in countering this kind of threat.<sup>44</sup>

Professor Hennessy argued that the nuclear deterrent was never designed to be a deterrent against terrorism.<sup>45</sup>

53. A number of submissions to this inquiry argued that nuclear deterrence was only of relevance when dealing with rational actors. Ward Wilson, Senior Fellow at the British

<sup>41</sup> Ev w29

<sup>42</sup> Ev w34.

<sup>43</sup> Ev w17

<sup>44</sup> Eighth Report of the Committee, Session 2005-06, paragraph 88.

<sup>45</sup> Ev w5

American Security Information Council, argued that “deterrence fails against madmen” and that “it only works with those who stop and consider rationally the costs of what they’re about to do”.<sup>46</sup> However, in responding to the charge that nuclear weapons are of no use against “non-deterrable” terrorist threats, Dr Stocker told us that there are few genuinely irrational actors.<sup>47</sup> He believed instead that “It is rather that not all rationalities are the same. It all depends on an individual’s, a group’s or a state’s underlying assumptions, perceptions, beliefs and values”. As noted in paragraph 16 above, Dr Stocker also argues that few threats are genuinely non-state or non-territorial in origin.

54. General (ret'd) Sir Hugh Beach argued that nuclear weapons had provided no discernible benefit to the UK and certainly provided no protection against terrorism.<sup>48</sup> Professor Malcolm Chalmers noted that none of the scenarios that might necessitate independent use of nuclear capabilities were currently plausible and that the UK was “safer than it has ever been from the threat of conventional military attack on its homeland by another state”.<sup>49</sup> However, he cautioned that it was “not possible to predict the shape of the international strategic environment in the 2030s or 2040s. And the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons and related technologies increases the risk that, at some point, a direct threat to the UK might emerge”.

55. The fourth purpose of the nuclear deterrent, to act as potential retaliation against emerging threats, has been characterised as the “nuclear hedge”. Professor Chalmers described the argument of the nuclear “hedge” as “while there may be no credible threat today that justifies a national nuclear deterrent, the country should hedge against the possibility that such a threat may re-emerge in future”.<sup>50</sup>

56. Dr Ritchie argued that nuclear weapons provided no answer to the types of threats to UK interests that were likely to arise from future uncertainty. He said that

Such threats are likely to be messy and arise from an interdependent mix of environmental, economic, military and political sources of insecurity. These include the effects of climate change, mass poverty and global economic injustice, global pandemic diseases, mass migration, and refugee flows, weak and failing states, international terrorism and asymmetric warfare, the spread of WMD and advanced conventional military technologies, ethnic and sectarian nationalism and competition over access to key resources such as oil and water.<sup>51</sup>

He added that the “apparent certainties” of nuclear deterrence provided a “false comfort” in looking at the diversity of future threats.

**57. We note, however, that while the potential range of emergent threats is significant, they do not preclude either the re-emergence of tensions with an existing nuclear**

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<sup>46</sup> Ev w41

<sup>47</sup> Ev w13

<sup>48</sup> Ev w6

<sup>49</sup> Small Nuclear Forces, Five Perspectives, RUSI Whitehall Report 3-11, page 19.

<sup>50</sup> Small Nuclear Forces, Five Perspectives, RUSI Whitehall Report 3-11, page 20.

<sup>51</sup> Ev w36



power, nor the emergence of a new power whose interests are inimical to those of the United Kingdom with the capacity to deliver a CBRN attack on the UK or its interests.

58. The fourth of the deterrent roles identified in the White Paper is to provide potential retaliation against threats that may emerge over the next 50 years. Nuclear proliferation is not under control and many of the sources of future insecurity could in themselves contribute to state-on-state conflict, creating an ever more unstable, and increasingly nuclear-armed, future strategic context. The assessment of future threats is as important as the assessment of current threats in considering the case for the nuclear deterrent.

### The opportunity cost of the nuclear deterrent

59. Dr Ritchie drew attention to the “opportunity costs” of proceeding with Trident replacement, questioning “whether procuring another generation of strategic nuclear weaponry is an appropriate investment given the types of security threats the UK is likely to face over the coming decade”.<sup>52</sup> CND concluded that money spent on nuclear deterrence was not spent on combating other threats and a decision not to renew the weapons system could therefore be spent improving other means of deterring threats more effectively.<sup>53</sup>

60. One point to note in evaluating the opportunity cost argument is that the current SSN fleet of nuclear powered submarines, a key element in the Navy’s conventional deterrence capability, relies heavily on the research and development investment in the nuclear-armed SSBN fleet and on the benefits of technological exchange.<sup>54</sup> A decision to dispense with the continuous at sea nuclear deterrent (CASD) would be likely to sharply increase costs in the conventional SSN fleet and may call into question the UK’s ability to support and run a viable SNN programme.

61. Dr Rebecca Johnson, Director of the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy argued that reliance on nuclear weapons for deterrence had “skewed thinking” about deterrence and “will inevitably direct military, political, economic etc. resources towards doctrines, strategies and weapons that may not be appropriate or effective for the desired purposes, or even be counterproductive for security”.<sup>55</sup> The Nuclear Information Service called on the UK to focus more on tackling risks at source and taking steps to improve resilience and self-sufficiency.<sup>56</sup>

62. The MoD stated that

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<sup>52</sup> Ev w38

<sup>53</sup> Ev w15

<sup>54</sup> The acronym SSN stands for Ship Submersible Nuclear, and denotes a nuclear-powered, general purpose, conventionally armed attack submarine. The acronym SSBN stands for Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear and denotes a nuclear-powered, nuclear-armed submarine.

<sup>55</sup> Ev w20

<sup>56</sup> Ev w30

Effective deterrence is predicated upon being able to put oneself in the shoes of those whom one is seeking to deter. This is likely to require significant up-front investment in intelligence, engagement (where possible) and in cultural awareness.<sup>57</sup>

**63. The operation of a nuclear deterrent clearly does not obviate the need for substantial investment in other approaches to security, including the diplomatic, and measures to tackle risks at source. As we have noted, the nuclear deterrent cannot be used to deter all threats to national security. Given the importance of communication to the concept of deterrence, investment in diplomatic and intelligence assets must be integral to the UK's security apparatus. However, it would be naive of us to assume that a decision not to invest in the nuclear deterrent would release substantial funds for investment in other forms of security. We believe that the decision on the retention of the nuclear deterrent, and whether its retention is still merited as a means of deterring existential threats to the UK, should be made on its own merits, rather than on the basis of what else could be bought with the money saved.**

### **Is there a need for the UK to retain an independent capability within NATO?**

64. General Beach also argued that Trident was not a genuinely independent capability as it was still reliant on the US for operation and maintenance and it would be inconceivable that it might be used in the face of US opposition.<sup>58</sup> In response to the previous Committee's report on the Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context, the MoD stated that

The UK Trident system is fully operationally independent of the US or any other state. Decision-making and use of the system remains entirely sovereign to the UK. Only the Prime Minister can authorise the use of the UK's nuclear deterrent, even if the missiles are to be fired as part of a NATO response.[...] All the command and control procedures are totally independent.<sup>59</sup>

65. Professor Hennessy told us that, once a decision had been taken to get rid of the UK's nuclear capability, it would be practically impossible to reacquire it (in terms of the effort to reacquire the technology and skills lost and the money required).<sup>60</sup> Robert Gates, former US Defense Secretary, recently warned the UK against nuclear disarmament.<sup>61</sup>

66. Franklin D Miller said that, during the Cold War, the UK and US Governments "believed that "two centres of [nuclear] decision" complicated Soviet decision making thus enhancing deterrence". He added that

Russian nuclear policy and acts of nuclear saber-rattling and intimidation make fairly self-evident that the need for "the second centre of decision" is still with us and will be for a long time. Although the US government remains bound to the defense

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<sup>57</sup> Ev w2

<sup>58</sup> Ev w8

<sup>59</sup> Ninth Special Report of the Committee, Session 2005-06, Appendix, paragraph 12.

<sup>60</sup> Ev w5

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25754870>

of the United Kingdom by treaties and by history, we cannot be 100% confident that an aggressive Russian leadership will recognise that the US would provide a nuclear umbrella over the UK in a future crisis if the UK did not possess nuclear weapons. [...] Faced with a credible independent British deterrent, however, we can be confident that that same Russian government would understand that there could be no possible scenario in which an attack on the United Kingdom would not draw a retaliatory blow – and thus it would be deterred from such an attack in the first place.<sup>62</sup>

67. General Beach also questioned why the UK needed its own nuclear capability if the US nuclear guarantee was watertight.<sup>63</sup> Professor Chalmers notes that the Government argues that

The existence of an “independent centre” of decision-making can enhance the credibility of NATO nuclear deterrence in circumstances where an opponent may doubt the willingness of the US to use its own nuclear weapons.<sup>64</sup>

## Implications of advanced conventional weapons for nuclear deterrence

68. Dr Andrew Futter and Dr Benjamin Zala, University of Leicester, noted that the US was shifting to more advanced conventional weapons, including both an advanced offensive capability (Prompt Global Strike (PGS)) and defensive capability (Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)); and argued that the US administration’s intention was to create the conditions in which its nuclear arsenal could be reduced, signalling an intention to eventually disarm its nuclear capability.<sup>65</sup>

69. These developments have substantial implications for the concept of deterrence and the ability of a state to exert some control over the escalation of a conflict. In the event of conflict between two or more nuclear-armed states, the ability to control the escalation of conflict relies on the ability to deploy a range of capabilities to escalate threats up to the point where the continued existence of the state is in question and a nuclear exchange becomes credible enough for nuclear deterrence to work. The proposed US PGS capability would provide a threat that was both extremely prompt, which would usefully increase the risk in an adversary’s calculations, and a conventional capability that could be credibly used at a lower threshold of provocation. It could also be argued that it would be easier to mobilise public support for such a response, as it would not require commitment of forces on the ground and would not have the same indiscriminate destructive impact as a nuclear weapon, further enhancing its credibility.

70. However, it could also be argued that such a threat could lower the nuclear threshold, as some proposed means of delivery may be indistinguishable from the delivery of a nuclear capability. In December 2013, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister warned the US

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<sup>62</sup> The Future of the UK’s nuclear deterrent – a view from the US, speech to Chatham House, 27 May 2010, <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/177693>

<sup>63</sup> Ev w7

<sup>64</sup> Small Nuclear Forces, Five Perspectives, RUSI Whitehall Report 3-11, page 18.

<sup>65</sup> Ev w24

that it would be prepared to respond to a conventional attack by PGS using nuclear weapons.<sup>66</sup>

**71. It is possible to foresee an environment in which the core role of nuclear deterrence – to protect a state from attack – is achieved by the deployment of advanced conventional weapons, providing both offensive and defensive capability. However, we are not yet in a position to evaluate any viable technical options. This will be a matter which our successor Committee may wish to examine further.**

**72. It is not the purpose of this report to re-open the question of the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent. We did not re-examine the evidence in the detail that our predecessor Committee did. The 2015 National Security Strategy will identify a new order of threats and we will look to the 2015 Defence and Security Review to identify which of these threats the nuclear deterrent will be expected to deter.**

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<sup>66</sup>“Russia warns of nuclear response to US Global Strike Programme”, Moscow Times, 11 December 2013, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-warns-of-nuclear-response-to-us-global-strike-program/491389.html>

## 4 Conclusion

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73. Although the concept of deterrence is most commonly thought of in respect of the nuclear deterrent, the ability of the Armed Forces to deter threats worldwide to the UK's interests is integral to the National Security Tasks and applies to all branches of the UK's security apparatus.

74. The deterrence of threats to national interests is made more complex by the greater significance of asymmetric threats compared to the Cold War strategic context, but is still a concept fundamental to national security. We call on the Government to use the opportunity of the 2015 Defence and Security Review (DSR) to set out more of its thinking on the role all parts of Government play in deterring asymmetric threats, including those from the ideologically driven and radicalised.

75. It also needs to be emphasised that, even in this new strategic context, NATO remains the cornerstone of UK deterrence and we call on the Government to ensure that the 2015 Defence and Security Review focuses also on how the UK can best contribute to the Alliance. Recent events in Ukraine not only illustrate the importance of NATO to UK security, but bring into question the continued relevance of the categorisation of threats in the current National Security Strategy. The 2015 National Security Strategy must reflect that threats to UK security include the re-emergence of state threats that we may have been tempted to think had diminished with the end of the Cold War. These state threats may become manifest in a range of ways, including through attack with CBRN weapons, conventional forces, terrorist proxies or cyber capabilities. We will return to this point in our overarching report on *Towards the next Defence and Security Review*, later in the year.

76. The UK Armed Forces have a deterrent capacity dependent on calculations of their capability and on perceptions of the UK's readiness to use force when the need arises. We are concerned that recent comments by Robert Gates, former US Defence Secretary, about the UK's value as a military partner for the US in the wake of defence cuts, illustrate a deterioration in perceptions abroad of the UK's military capabilities. The 2015 Defence and Security Review must be drafted with reference to the Armed Forces' continuing deterrent capability and decisions around the MoD's financial settlement in the next Comprehensive Spending Review must be made in the light of the need to retain a credible deterrent capacity in the country's Armed Forces. A failure to do so could have significant implications for the country's security. Credible conventional forces are also essential to maintain the credibility of the nuclear deterrent.

77. We conclude that deterrence, both nuclear and conventional, has an important place in the defence philosophy of the UK but will increasingly form part of a more complex security strategy alongside greater need for resilience and recovery as the world becomes more multi-polar and less stable and where the certainties of identifying an aggressor may be reduced.

# Formal Minutes

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**Tuesday 11 March 2014**

Members present:

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair

Mr Julian Brazier  
Mr James Gray  
Mr Dai Havard  
Adam Holloway

Madeleine Moon  
Gisela Stuart  
Derek Twigg  
John Woodcock

Draft Report (*Deterrence in the 21st century*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 77 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Eleventh Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 12 March 2014 at 2.00p.m.]

## List of written evidence

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(published in Volume II on the Committee's website [www.parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/defcom))

1	Ministry of Defence	Ev w1
2	Professor Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield, FBA	Ev w4
3	General (rtd) Sir Hugh Beach	Ev w6
4	Dr Jeremy Stocker, Associate Fellow, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)	Ev w11
5	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament	Ev w14
6	United Nations Association–UK	Ev w16
7	Dr Rebecca Johnson, Director, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy	Ev w18
8	Dr Andrew Futter & Dr Benjamin Zala, University of Leicester	Ev w23
9	Nuclear Information Service	Ev w26
10	Dr Nick Ritchie, Department of Politics, University of York	Ev w30
11	Ward Wilson, Senior Fellow, British American Security Information Council	Ev w40
12	Paul Bell, Director, Albany Associates	Ev w43

## List of Reports from the Committee in Session 2013–14

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The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2013–14

First Report	MoD Supplementary Estimate 2012–13	HC 291 (HC 644)
Second Report	Ministry of Defence Main Estimates 2013–14	HC 517 (HC 670)
Third Report and First Joint Report	Scrutiny of Arms Exports and Arms Control (2013): Scrutiny of the Government's UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2011 published in July 2012, the Government's Quarterly Reports from October 2011 to September 2012, and the Government's policies on arms exports and international arms control issues	HC 205 (Cm 8707)
Fourth Report	The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 3: Educating the Children of Service Personnel	HC 586 (HC 771)
Fifth Report	The Armed Forces Covenant in Action? Part 4: Education of Service Personnel	HC 185 (HC 759)
Sixth Report	The Defence Implications of Possible Scottish Independence	HC 198 (HC 839)
Seventh Report	Toward the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One	HC 197 (HC 1175)
Eighth Report	Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2012–13	HC 653
Ninth Report	Future Army 2020	HC 576
Tenth Report	Remote Control: Remotely Piloted Air Systems – current and future UK Use	HC 772

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