



Briefing

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Open Society, Closed Conversations: External Consultation and the Integrated Review

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Summary

“Open society” was a core refrain of the UK’s 2020-21 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, billed as the most important, comprehensive and joined-up review in three decades. But the Government’s process for developing the review was far from open or comprehensive, leaving the public, civil society and other stakeholders out in the cold, save for a chosen few. In important respects the Integrated Review’s external consultation marks a new low. There is ample evidence that key strategic decisions within the Integrated Review were taken outside of the official process and in the absence of any external consultation.

This is of more than procedural concern. Far from “challenging traditional Whitehall assumptions and thinking”, as was its stated objective, the Review privileged the views of those who are already at the table and reinforces a patriarchal ‘leave it to us’ policy-making mentality.

In failing to put people at the centre of security policy-making, and in ignoring the perspectives of those most acutely experiencing injustice and insecurity, it not only misses the opportunity for an important and necessary national conversation, it also guarantees ineffective strategy.

When there is a disconnect between policy-makers and the public, when people do not feel included and do not trust those in power, it is much harder to get the whole-of-society responses we need to tackle security challenges - from pandemics to climate change. It can also pose a security threat in itself; rich countries are not immune to social unrest and violence.

Given the disastrous outcomes of recent national security policy, including multiple foreign wars-of-choice alongside growing levels of inequality and mistrust in politicians, this closed, exclusive approach to the UK’s security should concern us all.



This briefing compares the practice of the Integrated Review with previous reviews, drawing on published methodologies and information gained from a series of Freedom of Information requests. It aims to inform better practice and contribute to Rethinking Security's Alternative Security Review project.

Key Findings

- External engagement appears to have been included in the Integrated Review as an afterthought and rushed through in contravention of established government guidelines. Public outreach was extremely limited and resulted in less than one-quarter the number of inputs as the previous (2015) review.
- While proactive engagement with external expertise increased on 2015 by at least 50%, the rationale for consultees' inclusion appears ad hoc and skewed towards like-minded institutions experts. This is highly likely to have entrenched and validated pre-existing assumptions.
- Notable by their exclusion were those with greatest experience of global insecurity, including NGOs with international development, humanitarian and peacebuilding expertise; those representing vulnerable communities, and organisations based in the Global South.
- Despite the stated ambition to challenge Whitehall assumptions, the narrow framing of the public consultation denied any opportunity to challenge the underlying approach to security.
- Key strategic decisions were repeatedly taken outside of the Integrated Review process and without external consultation, including the abolition of DFID and major spending decisions on defence and international development.
- Despite pledges to develop its 'public engagement capacity' to support implementation of the Review, it is not clear if, and if so, how, the government intends to develop a meaningful conversation with the public on security policy.

Introduction

We are used to hearing the British Government's maxim "The first duty of the government is to keep citizens safe and the country secure".¹ But how exactly does the government define this security and how does it know what makes its citizens feel safe? How does this imperative to secure the country sit with other asserted values of a rules-based democratic society like inclusivity, transparency and accountability?

¹ This is currently the opening sentence on the Home Office's 'About Us' webpage. <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office/about>



This briefing explores how the most recent UK security review, known as the Integrated Review, engaged with people and organisations outside of UK government, while comparing it to the processes employed in previous national security reviews. It asks how well the Integrated Review stands up to the principle of openness that the document itself identifies as a positive characteristic of UK society and a fundamental principle of the UK's 'Global Britain' persona on the international stage.

The UK and national security strategy-making

Since 1957, when the first post-World War II defence white paper was published, there has been at least one review of the UK's national security policy every decade.² Over time, the reviews have become more regular, with the expressed commitment from 2010 of holding one every five years, at the beginning of each new parliament. In practice, early elections and delays have dented this regularity. The reviews have also claimed to be ever more comprehensive. The 1998 review added 'strategic' to its title and its 2010 and 2015 successors added 'security', becoming Strategic Defence and Security Reviews (SDSRs). Nominally, the 2020-21 review outdid its predecessors by becoming the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.

From 2008 to 2015, these security reviews were preceded by or conjoined with a National Security Strategy, a single, overarching strategy bringing together the objectives and plans of all departments, agencies and forces involved in upholding national security. Unusually, the Integrated Review describes itself as a "strategic framework" rather than a standalone national security strategy. It appears that the UK no longer has a National Security Strategy as such. Published separately from the Integrated Review, for example, was a 'Defence Command Paper', setting out the military's "contribution to the Integrated Review" and other sectoral strategies are set to follow.³

Since 2010 there has also been a National Security Council, comprised of government ministers chaired by the Prime Minister, and a variety of sub-committees of overlapping membership. Within the Cabinet Office there is also a National Security Secretariat of civil servants to help advise on, develop and implement national strategy, including the Integrated Review. Thus, a political and bureaucratic ecosystem has evolved in Whitehall around the idea of a comprehensive⁴, fusion⁵, or integrated approach to national security. And in Parliament there is a cross-party Joint Committee of MPs and peers to scrutinise national security decision-making and strategy implementation.

2 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7313/> On average, defence reviews have been held every 7 years since 1957, with the frequency increasing from every 8-9 years before 1998 to every 5-6 years subsequently.

3 Ministry of Defence (March 2021), *Defence in a competitive age* (CP 411). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-in-a-competitive-age>

4 See: House of Commons Defence Committee (18 March 2010), *The Comprehensive Approach: the point of war is not just to win but to make a better peace* (HC224). <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmdfence/224/224.pdf>

5 The term Fusion Doctrine was developed in 2018 by the National Security Capability Review, a sort of interim national security review following the 2016 Brexit vote and the 2017 early general election.



The Integrated Review and Open Societies

Amid the upheaval of Brexit and after two early elections, Prime Minister Boris Johnson billed the 2020-21 Integrated Review as “the largest review of the UK’s foreign, defence, security and development policy since the end of the Cold War”⁶. Published in March 2021, its report *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* aims to set out Britain’s proposed role in the world in response to the totality of opportunities and threats facing the country.⁷

Running throughout the 114-page document is the theme of “openness”. This is presented as a British value underpinned by democratic principles to be cherished and applied across all channels: trade, domestic, global governance and sharing of information and ideas. The Integrated Review invokes “open societies” as a means of “driving prosperity and improving the wellbeing of people across the Union”⁸; promoting this perhaps more than any other concept as the ideology around which the future international order should be shaped. Building openness overseas is asserted as a leading objective for the UK’s programme of international development.⁹ By contrast, in asserting a form of classical liberalism as the basis for the Global Britain project, the review rejects political authoritarianism and closed economies and identifies the promotion of openness as a means of resisting such threats to the UK’s assumed interests.

Learning from the SDSRs

In launching the Integrated Review in February 2020 Prime Minister Johnson made a commitment to “utilise expertise from both inside and outside government” to strengthen the Review and to offer “constructive challenge to traditional Whitehall assumptions and thinking.”¹⁰

In June 2020, Deputy National Security Adviser Alex Ellis, the lead civil servant overseeing the Review wrote to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS):¹¹

“We will be engaging with experts beyond Whitehall and wider stakeholders with an interest in our nation’s security and prosperity. This includes our allies and partners, building on our discussions with them on C-19 response and recovery. In this way we will ensure that some of the best minds in the UK and beyond are feeding into the review’s conclusions and challenging traditional Whitehall assumptions and thinking.”¹²

6 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world>

7 HM Government (March 2021), *Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (CP 403).

8 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-integrated-review-2021>

9 The phrase “open societies” features 25 times throughout the 114-page document, many of which relate to building capacities overseas and strengthening the global governance system.

10 PM’s Office, 10 Downing Street press release (26 Feb 2020), PM outlines new review to define Britain’s place in the world. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world>

11 The JCNSS is comprised of representatives from both the Houses of Commons and Lords, including the chairs of parliamentary committees that shadow government departments represented on the National Security Council. Unlike Commons select committees, it does not have a majority of Conservative members.

12 Update from 10 Downing Street on the Integrated Review (24 June 2020) <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/1734/documents/16824/default/>



Both will have been mindful of criticisms made of the SDSR processes conducted in 2010 and 2015 for their lack of meaningful opportunities for civil society organisations and citizens to engage with them.¹³ The JCNSS recommended in its July 2016 report on the 2015 SDSR that the next review should “allow more time for review and for engagement with external experts,” and that, “Such engagement must, however, be more than a tick-box exercise and must include a robust examination of the substance of the security strategy.”¹⁴

Ahead of the Integrated Review, UNA-UK wrote to the Cabinet Office with a model for what a meaningful consultation on national security could look like. It urged:

- the consideration of representative feed-in mechanisms to ensure marginalised communities were included;
- sufficient time for submissions and their consideration by those drafting; transparency over how submissions would be used;
- openness to ideas around human security which challenge traditional presumptions around military power; and
- public outreach by UK ministers to spearhead a national conversation on the issue.

Rethinking Security also wrote to the Prime Minister in March 2020 to seek clarity on how the review would engage with external expertise and the wider public and to urge him to ensure that “consultation should be open to the public without exception to have its say. This should include an open call and accessible forum for submissions to the government by individuals and civil society groups”.

The Integrated Review and public consultation

It is highly concerning that the public consultation element of the Integrated Review compares unfavourably across multiple indicators to the 2015 SDSR, a review which itself was widely derided as a tick-box exercise.¹⁵ In 2015 the public consultation was open for at least 45 days¹⁶ whereas the 2021 process – promoted as a more in-depth process – was open for just 30 days.¹⁷ This window of opportunity for public engagement is within the context of a process that ultimately lasted for almost 400 days, and represents barely a third of the 84-day window that the Government’s own

13 The 2015 SDSR is the first Review that states that a public consultation was carried out. The 2010 National Security Strategy makes reference only to “a wide range of contributions and ideas from parliamentarians, from many experts outside government and from consultation with the private sector and with allies.” P.10

14 JCNSS, National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 First Report of Session 2016–17, 4 July 2016 (HL Paper 18, HC 153) p.7. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201617/jtselect/jtnatsec/153/153.pdf>

15 Abigail Watson, Liam Walpole (March 2020), ORG Explains #13: UK Defence Reviews, Oxford Research Group. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1329-org-explains-13-uk-defence-reviews>

16 The authors have sources evidencing that the public submission portal for the 2015 SDSR was open for at least 45 days

17 Between 13 August and 11 September 2020: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-call-for-evidence>



Code of Practice for Consultations advises as a minimum.¹⁸

On quantity, in 2015 there were “around 2000” public submissions,¹⁹ whereas the 2021 exercise received “more than 450 submissions”²⁰ – less than a quarter. This could be in part due to the shorter time window as well as the coincidence of the window for submissions with the summer parliamentary recess and school holiday period, which is also inconsistent with the Government’s own consultation guidelines.²¹

Another reason for the low uptake could be the absence, as far as we are aware, of any form of outreach campaign. The only place the public consultation appears to have been communicated is via a post on the Cabinet Office website.²² The apparent lack of high-profile outreach by senior politicians, proactive efforts to ensure the inclusion of marginalised communities or use of representative feed-in mechanisms will have skewed the consultation inputs towards ‘the usual suspects’ – the perspectives of establishment think-tanks, academia and those working in a small part of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector. It is likely to have furthered the exclusion of those vulnerable communities most likely to suffer insecurity in the UK.

On quality, while the 2021 review allowed for a longer, more substantive submission than the 2015 exercise’s widely derided ‘engagement poll’²³, it remained highly restrictive both in terms of word limits and of the highly directed questions, allowing little opportunity for respondents to make general points or raise alternative relevant topics.²⁴ The primary route for submission was adapting a MS Word template and submitting it by email. The only means to request an accessible version of the document was also by email, raising questions about the validity of the consultation with respect to the UK’s obligations not to discriminate based on access to IT and software and ability.²⁵

18 Public consultations should be open for a minimum of 84 days: HM Government (July 2008), Code of Practice on Consultation https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100807/file47158.pdf and more recently, here: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/UK-Consultation-Principles-3-4-June-stockholm-2013.pdf>

19 HM Government (October 2015), National Security Strategy and SDSR, 2015, p.81. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/555607/2015_Strategic_Defence_and_Security_Review.pdf

20 HM Government (March 2021), Global Britain in a Competitive Age, p.107. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-the_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf pg 107.

21 “When the consultation spans all or part of a holiday period, consider how this may affect consultation and take appropriate mitigating action” https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691383/Consultation_Principles_1_.pdf

22 Cabinet Office (13 Aug 2020, updated 16 Dec 2020) *Integrated Review: Call for evidence*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-call-for-evidence>

23 This permitted the public to send ideas restricted to 1,500 characters (about 250 words) via an online portal.

24 A limit of 500 words was set per response to a restrictive set of questions.

25 “Consider how to tailor consultation to the needs and preferences of particular groups, such as older people, younger people or people with disabilities that may not respond to traditional consultation methods” https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691383/Consultation_Principles_1_.pdf



Since the publication of the Integrated Review and Defence Command Paper in March 2021, there is little sign that the Government's appetite for public consultation on security issues has increased. As of mid-September, the MOD had not conducted any public consultation for its AI Strategy²⁶, for instance, which was due to be published in autumn 2021 and remains outstanding at the time of writing.

Who submitted evidence to the Integrated Review?

The publication of a simple breakdown of submission numbers and content themes of the public consultation is welcome.²⁷ From this we learn that from 441 validated submissions in total, just 140 (32%) were received from individuals, with 301 coming from organisations, including: industry; NGOs; international organisations, academia; think tanks; local government; local resilience forums; the media; religious organisations; and fire and police organisations.

The low proportion of individual participants as well as the low overall number of submissions constitutes further evidence of a lack of public outreach. We don't have any further data on how representative a sample of UK society these participants were, including by location, age, race, faith, income or other characteristics. We do know that no bespoke opinion polling or surveys were conducted as part of the Review, thereby missing the opportunity to obtain a nationally representative sample of opinion and inform a proactive effort to address gaps in its outreach.²⁸

Moreover, while the review team wrote to all respondents in January 2021 to seek permission to publish their evidence submissions, this has not yet been done and the Cabinet Office has not explained why this is the case.²⁹ Through a Freedom of Information (FoI) request we have obtained a list of 228 organisations that submitted evidence to the Integrated Review³⁰ However, questions remain about the completeness of this data and the handling of responses given the exclusion of multiple submissions which the authors of this briefing are aware of.

Whose views did the government proactively seek?

While the Government conducted little or no public outreach as part of the Integrated Review, the Cabinet Office did proactively seek the views of a distinct (though often overlapping) group of individuals and organisations. In response to FoI requests, the Cabinet Office and others have provided the names of 108 organisations whose representatives "attended workshop, interview, roundtable or other specific engagement event(s)" linked to the Integrated Review. Subsequent

26 FoI Request, FOI2021/0893, Ministry of Defence, 10 September 2021. See: <https://una.org.uk/file/13819/download?token=5YnFlChn>

27 Cabinet Office (16 Dec 2020), Update on the Integrated Review call for evidence: December 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-call-for-evidence/update-on-the-integrated-review-call-for-evidence-december-2020>

28 FoI Request FOI2021/11517, Cabinet Office, 18 June 2021. See https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/foi2021_11517-reply.pdf

29 Cabinet Office email correspondence with Rethinking Security, 2021.

30 FoI Request FOI2021/11517, Cabinet Office, 18 June 2021. See <https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/co-ir-engagement-summary-2021.pdf>



information obtained from Wilton Park (the Foreign Office’s conference centre in West Sussex) appears to show that these were all participants in a series of between 7 and 11 roundtables organised there or online over three weeks in August-September 2020 – i.e. around the same time as the public call for evidence submissions.³¹

This is about twice as many as the “over 50” organisations mentioned as proactively consulted by the 2015 SDSR, although a “non-exhaustive list” of those consulted in 2015 provided to Rethinking Security by the Cabinet Office lists 68, not all of which are fully outside of government.³²

The Integrated Review’s invited respondents break down largely as being from three main sectors:

Think Tanks Representatives from at least 32 think tanks or research institutions in 10 countries participated. 14 were located in the UK, 6 in the United States, 3 in France, 2 each in India and Belgium, and 1 each in Denmark, Israel, Japan, South Africa and Switzerland. Most were concerned primarily with foreign policy and security/military issues.

Universities Representatives from 33 universities in 9 countries participated. 22 were located in the UK, 4 in the United States, and 1 each in Australia, Brazil, France, Japan, Norway, Philippines and Sweden. Of course, the academics concerned will not necessarily have been nationals of these countries.

Private sector – At least 20 businesses were represented among participants, with a notable concentration on new tech, space, artificial intelligence and ‘superforecasting’ in line with the Review’s focus on making the UK a “Science and Tech Superpower”.³³ Those present were mainly UK-based but others consulted were located in the United States, Canada, China and Cyprus. While some of those present are certainly involved in security and defence industries (e.g. cyber; surveillance), unlike in 2015 there seem to have been few of the large ‘prime’ military industrial companies involved. However, this absence may be explained by the MOD conducting its own external engagement around its input to the Integrated Review. While we do not have access to this data, the MOD has said that its “industry engagement was in part co-ordinated by the ADS Group”.³⁴

Another category of participants was **inter-governmental**. The Review states that senior officials “held more than 100 engagements with over 20 countries across six continents, with a particular focus on key allies and partners”.³⁵ But this engagement may not have been systematic;

31 FOI Request FOI 2021-23407, FCDO-Wilton Park, 27 September 2021. <https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/foi-23407-response-wilton-park-letter.pdf> The subjects of known roundtables were: Development, Youth, Open Societies, Science, Resilience and the Indo-Pacific Tilt.

32 FOI Request FOI329681, Cabinet Office, 20 March 2020. See <https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/foi329681-reply.pdf>

33 HMG (2021), Global Britain in a competitive age, pp.6, 8 & 10.

34 FOI Request FOI2021/10036, Ministry of Defence, October 2021. https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/20211006-foi2021_10036-1.pdf. ADS is also mentioned on the Cabinet Office’s list of consultees. According to its website, “ADS represents and supports more than 1100 UK businesses operating in the aerospace, defence, security and space sectors.” For a list, see: <https://www.adsgroup.org.uk/members/>

35 HMG (2021), Global Britain in a competitive age, p 106



Germany's foreign minister Heiko Maas, for example, publicly criticised, and appeared surprised by, the Review's increase in the cap for the number of UK nuclear warheads.³⁶ Given the Integrated Review's apparent emphasis on development, it is surprising that the Cabinet Office has not highlighted any direct interstate-level engagement with officials in those governments that have been the beneficiaries of the UK's international development programmes.

Further participants included a few NGOs, several Quangos or 'non-departmental public bodies', one newspaper, and several professional bodies and associations.

Perhaps the most glaring absence in the proactively sought views was international NGOs working on **development, humanitarian and peacebuilding** issues. Oxfam GB alone seems to have been invited to participate from this large sector, alongside a couple of development-focused think tanks, consultancies and philanthropic organisations. This is striking given that international development was explicitly within the mandate and title of the review for the first time and was the subject of one of the roundtables at Wilton Park. It is also in contrast to 2015, when a dozen such NGOs were listed among the Cabinet Office's invited participants.³⁷ This exclusion in 2020 – just as the Department for International Development (DFID) was being merged into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), thereby removing the dedicated Cabinet-level voice on development issues - seems unlikely to have been accidental. The omission of these perspectives is all the more surprising given they are in many cases key local partners for achieving UK objectives.

Other groups that a cohesive and integrated approach to the UK's security might reasonably have reached out to include those representing **vulnerable communities in the UK** on such issues as poverty, immigration, racial justice, health inequality, children's issues, human rights and climate justice. Many of these demonstrated their interest in the Integrated Review through submissions of evidence, but none appear to have been proactively engaged by the government, therefore missing the opportunity to incorporate their views in a more substantial manner.

Separate consultations related to the Integrated Review were conducted by the Ministry of Defence (MOD), DFID and FCO in 2020 but specifics of these have not been disclosed. So far, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has refused to confirm who the FCO and DFID consulted with other than through the Wilton Park roundtables.³⁸ This is particularly disappointing as DFID was generally well-regarded for taking consultation seriously, at least within the development sector, before being merged into the FCDO.

36 Jon Shelton (19 March 2021), Germany's Heiko Maas criticizes UK plans to expand nuclear arsenal, Deutsche Welle. <https://www.dw.com/en/exclusive-germanys-heiko-maas-criticizes-uk-plans-to-expand-nuclear-arsenal/a-56918456>

37 Data on 2015 includes reference to Action Against Hunger UK, British Agencies Afghanistan Group, British Red Cross, Conciliation Resources, International Crisis Group, International Alert, International Rescue Committee, MSF, Saferworld, Save the Children, Transparency International, and World Vision.

38 Rethinking Security and BOND's Conflict Policy Group, for example, were invited at very short notice to review certain input documents prepared by DFID in August 2020.



The Integrated Review and parliamentary engagement

The government also underperformed in the final sector of external engagement: parliament, and specifically with select committees holding inquiries into it. This fits a historical pattern of frustration between committee chairs and the Cabinet Office and National Security Secretariat, but is notable given each Commons committee has a majority of the ruling Conservative Party MPs among its members and both the Defence and Foreign Affairs committees are chaired by Conservative MPs.

While the JCNSS did not organise any dedicated inquiry into the Integrated Review during the review process³⁹, the Commons Defence⁴⁰, Foreign Affairs⁴¹ committees both began inquiries into it soon after it was launched. The International Development Committee made the Integrated Review, and the possibility of DFID being merged with the FCO, a focus of its inquiry into Effectiveness of UK Aid.⁴² These inquiries, which operate under different criteria to government consultations, were valuable in, for example, questioning at an early stage the process by which the Review should be conducted⁴³ and commissioning an opinion survey on international perceptions of the UK.⁴⁴

Evidence submissions to parliamentary inquiries demonstrated a high degree of appetite for engagement with the Integrated Review from a broad cross-section of UK civil society. The FAC garnered at least 80 submissions, while the IDC attracted at least 73. While most of these will have been written by professional policy analysts rather than the general public, this is several times the normal volume received by these committees' inquiries.

However, parliamentary outreach is no substitute for government outreach. While the government is obliged to respond in writing to committee reports, it does not have to agree with them or incorporate their recommendations. It was also clear through the inquiries that the committees were receiving very little information from the Cabinet Office on the process and progress of the Review, including whether and when work was suspended due to COVID-related lockdowns.⁴⁵

Overall, we had hoped to see the Government's engagement with parliament on the Integrated Review to be a sustained, substantial collaboration. The indicators suggest the opposite – minimal interactivity and a dearth of information about key decisions regarding the review or how inputs would be used.

39 This may have been influenced by the unclear timelines of the Review, given the JCNSS's relatively slower processes. The Review was originally expected to be concluded within about six months.

40 House of Commons Defence Committee (13 Aug 2020), In Search of Strategy – The 2020 Integrated Review (HC 165). <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2265/documents/21808/default/>

41 House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (22 Oct 2020), A Brave New Britain? The future of the UK's international policy (HC 380). <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3133/documents/40215/default/>

42 House of Commons International Development Committee (14 July 2020), Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger Fourth Report of Session 2019–21 (HC 596). <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/1928/documents/18761/default/>

43 See: <https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/68>

44 FAC, HC 380, pp.26-32.

45 See letter from Chairs of Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development committees and of the JCNSS to the Prime Minister re. Integrated Review, 30 June 2020. Published via Twitter (13 July 2020) <https://twitter.com/CommonsDefence/status/1282600658181345285>



Monitoring and evaluation

Details on how external consultation may be intended, if at all, to inform the ongoing task of monitoring, evaluating and adapting the Integrated Review are not forthcoming. Just two paragraphs (of the 114 page document) are dedicated to “Implementation”, which outline a process for government departments to report on delivery plans as well as referring readers to the Defence Command Paper for details of MOD spending plans.

In support of strategy implementation, the Review does commit to developing its “strategic communications and public engagement capability”.⁴⁶ This may represent an admission that its external consultation process was unsatisfactory, although it is unclear whether the intention is to develop government listening or government communications capacity. Suggesting the latter while speaking publicly in September 2021, National Security Adviser Stephen Lovegrove stated:

“public consent for foreign policy, military interventions and our wider approach to national security is a critical factor. [...] That’s why IR sets out a need to further develop public engagement capability. We must make the case for how international engagement affects people’s real lives and helps make the UK safer and more prosperous.”⁴⁷

Confirming this approach while speaking to the Commons Defence Committee on 30 November, he said:

“I would be very, very happy to broaden the debate about these subjects much more widely than has commonly been the case. We have begun to take some steps in that direction. [...] I think that there is a role for engaging civic groups, think-tanks, newspapers and whatever it may be in order to spell out where we think the major problems are and why we are doing the things that we are doing.”⁴⁸

As far as we can tell, therefore, there is no plan at the outset for measuring the effectiveness of the Integrated Review, let alone using public engagement as a mechanism to monitor and evaluate implementation or suggest refinements as necessary. This is another missed opportunity to trigger an ongoing conversation between people and government on what can maximise their own security, resilience and well-being.

There are many precedents of how this can take place. Mass civic education on societal security has been pursued in, among others, Finland and Austria as part of their strategic approach.⁴⁹ Canada also has an encouraging model in its Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security, which is mandated to engage all its diverse communities in a long-term dialogue on security policy.⁵⁰

46 HMG (2021), *Global Britain in a competitive age*, p 97.

47 Sir Stephen Lovegrove speech at the Council on Geostrategy (15 Sept 2021) <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/sir-stephen-lovegrove-speech-at-the-council-on-geostrategy>

48 Sir Stephen Lovegrove, Oral evidence: Defending Global Britain, HC 166, 30 November 2021, Q282. <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/3101/pdf/>

49 McKeon, Celia (2018) *Contrasting Narratives: A Comparative Study of European and North American National Security Strategies*, *Rethinking Security*, pp.27-28. <https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/contrasting-narratives-march-2018.pdf>

50 See Public Safety Canada (undated), *Connecting with Canadian Communities*. <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrt/crss-cltrl-rndtbl/index-en.aspx>



Conclusion

The Integrated Review is not the first UK security review to suffer from a lack of willingness on the Government's part to engage with the public or expertise beyond an inner circle of trusted confidants. But what is striking this time around is the glaringness of the contradiction between the heavy emphasis on Britain's "open society" as a driver of security and the closed, exclusive process to put the UK's security strategy together. This raises two fundamental related questions. First, whose definition of security is the government responding to? And secondly, how can an open, secure society be fostered while excluding the perspectives of those most likely to suffer insecurity?

Within the limits of what did take place, there are also major questions about the sincerity of the external consultation. These concerns are reinforced by the fact that key strategic decisions were taken pre-emptively, divorced from the consultations on the Integrated Review. For example, the merger of DFID into the FCO was announced in June 2020 without any prior external consultation and well ahead of the Integrated Review. Likewise, the November 2020 decisions to significantly reduce overseas development assistance and make the largest investment in military funding in 30 years.⁵¹

There is scant information as to how the public consultation submissions were used in the Integrated Review. In other settings, when the government has responded more substantially to a public consultation exercise, as with this year's New Plan for Immigration, it has sought to dismiss dissenting views as unrepresentative and skewing "towards those who have strong views on the proposals".⁵² If the Government is concerned that consultation exercises give skewed responses – as we believe was the case with its own closed consultations on the Integrated Review – then it should invest in robust processes to ensure that a representative sample of the population is engaged, polled or involved in citizens assembly-type conversations on policy.

Given the major deficiencies detailed in this report it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the external consultations for the Integrated Review were not only inadequate and inconsistent with the government's own guidelines, but were also conducted in bad faith.

This is of more than procedural and ethical concern. Far from the stated ambition to "[challenge] traditional Whitehall assumptions and thinking", the consultation for the Integrated Review is likely to have entrenched and validated pre-existing views. If one considers that the public rather than the state should be the central concern of security policy, then it follows that as many people as possible should be engaged in security policy-making. Their views are what make policy relevant and resilient. Consultation is not an end in itself but a means to achieve better policy outcomes.

51 10 Downing Street Press Release (26 Feb 2020), PM to announce largest military investment in 30 years. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-to-announce-largest-military-investment-in-30-years>

52 Home Office (July 2021), Consultation on the New Plan for Immigration: Government Response (CP 493), p.3. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005042/CCS207_CCS0621755000-001_Consultation_Response_New_Plan_Immigration_Web_Accessible.pdf



A consultation that overlooks the views of its stakeholders reinforces a patriarchal ‘leave it to us’ policy-making mentality and in doing so privileges the views of those who are already at the table: military actors, established security institutes and professionals working in the sector. In turn, this is likely to feed militarised definitions of and approaches to security. It also inhibits a healthy national conversation about national security and the day-to-day threats experienced by the UK population. Ironically, such an approach is also more in keeping with the authoritarian regimes cast as inferior throughout the Integrated Review.

While the Integrated Review venerates open societies as part of the DNA of Global Britain and its preferred international order, security policy-making in the UK remains essentially closed. After the devastating decision-making around Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and Yemen, with our climate and biodiversity collapsing and with inequality surging, the established approach to security is manifestly deficient. It’s past time to ask the people if they have better ideas.



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About the Alternative Security Review

The Alternative Security Review is a civil society-led review of the UK's approach to security. It proceeds from principles of human and shared security that prioritise inclusion, equality, accountability and wellbeing at home, as well as a vision of shared global security and a commitment to the ecological security of our planet. Learning from past practice in the UK and other countries, it will incorporate an extensive exercise in surveying public opinion and wide consultation, in order to understand and respond to the UK public's security needs and priorities.

About Rethinking Security

Rethinking Security is a network of UK-based organisations, academics and activists. We work for a just and peaceful world, based on approaches that address the underlying causes of conflict and insecurity. We have a shared concern that the current approach to national security in the UK and beyond often hampers efforts for peace, justice and ecological sustainability. We are committed to building a much richer understanding of what security really means, and of what is required to build sustainable security.

About UNA-UK

The United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK) is the country's foremost advocate for UK action at the UN; the UK's leading source of analysis on the UN; and a vibrant grassroots movement of 20,000 people from all walks of life. We are the only charity in the UK devoted to building support for the UN amongst policymakers, opinion-formers and the public. We believe that a strong, credible and effective UN is essential if we are to build a safer, fairer and more sustainable world. We advocate strong government support for multilateralism - political and financial - and seek to demonstrate why the UN matters to people everywhere.

Neither Rethinking Security nor UNA-UK is affiliated with any political party and both aim to work with all parties in pursuit of their objectives.