

**Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons**  
**Written Submission on**  
**Update to the UK's Integrated Review of Security, Defence,  
Development & Foreign Policy**

**Submitted by Rethinking Security**

**November 2022**

**About Rethinking Security**

Rethinking Security is a network of UK-based organisations, academics and campaigners with expertise in peacebuilding, conflict and security research, disarmament and demilitarisation.<sup>1</sup> 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. For further information, please see [www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk](http://www.rethinkingsecurity.org.uk).

**1. The 'Refresh': Terms, Outreach and Challenge**

**1.1** We very much welcome the Foreign Affairs Committee seizing the initiative on the updating of the Integrated Review and initiating this inquiry even while government departments were making divergent statements on the status of the process begun by PM Truss and in the absence of any official statement on the 'Refresh' from PM Sunak or the Cabinet Office. To our knowledge, this inquiry is the only current open process by which people or organisations can make formal submissions about the 'refresh'.

**1.2** In the absence of any official statement or terms of reference in the public domain, which would explain what the government intends to achieve by this 'refresh', or what questions it is attempting to answer, it is difficult either to contribute to the review or offer essential challenge to its assumptions. Transparency and accountability matter; their absence has real consequences both for our democracy, the success of national strategy, and the allocation of finite resources towards increasing our security.

**1.3** Rethinking Security, with United Nations Association – UK, has conducted an assessment of the external consultation undertaken as part of the Integrated Review in 2020-21, as well as in previous SDSRs, and found it deeply flawed, not least in effectively excluding those least likely to agree with the assumptions of political and security elites conducting the review.<sup>2</sup> We would particularly draw your attention to the refusal of the FCDO (other than Wilton Park) to engage

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<sup>1</sup> Rethinking Security's organisational members include Campaign Against Arms Trade, Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament, Conciliation Resources, Forces Watch, International Alert, Medact, Movement for the Abolition of War, Peace Direct, Quaker Peace And Social Witness, Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, Saferworld, Scientists for Global Responsibility, United Nations Association – UK, and War on Want.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, B. & Reeve, R. [Open Societies, Closed Conversations: External Consultation and the Integrated Review](#), Rethinking Security/UNA-UK, December 2021.

with freedom of information requests concerning its (including DFID's) external consultation activities.<sup>3</sup>

**1.4** Indications so far are that consultation around this review will be even worse. There are no publicised terms of reference, no government call for evidence from wider society, and what limited external engagement we are aware of thus far appears to skew heavily towards elements advocating an increasingly militarised 'tilt' to the 'Indo-Pacific'.<sup>4</sup> It is not even clear that concerned government departments beyond the Cabinet Office and MOD are briefed and on-board with the 'refresh'. We have written to the PM in association with 10 other organisations in an attempt to secure a more open and transparent review process.<sup>5</sup> Mindful of how averse to parliamentary scrutiny the government was on the original Integrated Review, we hope that the Committee will be making similar asks of Number 10.

## **2. The Integrated Review as Strategy**

**2.1** Before answering the Committee's specific question it is important to offer some brief comments on the nature of the original Integrated Review. If the overall document and approach to security are flawed, a light-touch approach to updating its assumptions and actions according to shifting perceptions of strategic threat will not be adequate.

**2.2** First, the Integrated Review is not a strategy in the sense that previous National Security Strategies (2008, 2010, 2015) were. Whatever one makes of its scope or its narrative assessment of threats, opportunities or national ambition, it sets out no clear prioritisation of what the UK intends to do over the next decade to achieve its strategic endpoint. At least 77 different things are described as 'priorities' within the core document but there is no sense of how these priorities are to be prioritised or resourced.<sup>6</sup> What we have is a framework document for pursuing 'strategic advantage' of the UK, but no national strategy for promoting either national or human security.

**2.3** Second, while we welcome that the Integrated Review (p.13) gave a definition of security (alongside sovereignty and prosperity) as a core interest of the British people, there is next to nothing in the document about how progress against objectives, priorities and defined interests will be monitored, evaluated and learned from. Under SDSR 2015, there were three annual reports on progress, featuring a useful (if post-facto) annex of 'principal commitments'.<sup>7</sup> Despite the Integrated Review's mention (p.99) of a cross-government 'Performance and Planning Framework' and Evaluation Taskforce, we have seen no evidence of this in operation or any

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<sup>3</sup> See correspondence between Rethinking Security and the FCDO at: <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/policy-makers/>

<sup>4</sup> We note a number of articles and Twitter threads from MOD-oriented think tank analysts and academics in early October mentioning one or more outreach meetings on the 'tilt' in early October.

<sup>5</sup> [Letter to PM Rishi Sunak on the 'refresh' of the Integrated Review](#), 16 Nov 2022, co-signed by Rethinking Security, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, Airwars, Campaign Against Arms Trade, Gender Action for Peace and Security, Peace Direct, Saferworld, Scientists for Global Responsibility, Shadow World Investigations, Tearfund and United Nations Association-UK.

<sup>6</sup> See Reeve, R. [The Integrated Review: Global Britain and its competitive priorities](#), Rethinking Security, 19 March 2021.

<sup>7</sup> See for example: [The National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review Third Annual Report updates on progress made from SDSR 2015 and NSCR 2018 commitments](#), Cabinet Office, July 2021.

published annual reviews. How, then, does the government expect to know whether its existing strategic framework is effective or realistic?

**2.4** Third, what the Integrated Review lacks fundamentally is a vision and theory of change of how the UK can help to transform the world into a more stable, peaceful and secure place through increasing opportunities and incentives for cooperation. Its framework is focused on obtaining ‘strategic advantage’ for the UK in an increasingly competitive global context. While we accept that the global context since at least 2014 has indeed been marked by increasingly aggressive confrontation between established, rising and waning global powers, the logic of competition and confrontation is of increased conflict, potential for violence and ultimately of war. Indeed, the Integrated Review’s companion Integrated Operating Concept from the MOD suggests that the UK already is at war, albeit so far not an all-out war.<sup>8</sup> This is an existentially dangerous, self-fulfilling approach whose mirror we can see in Russia’s destructive engagement with the world. To cite a recently departed director-general at the FCDO: the “answer to a more contested world isn’t endless contestation but endless collaboration.”<sup>9</sup> As in the early/mid-1940s, when it helped to create the UN Charter, the UK ought to be leading the big thinking now on how we can transcend competition and endless contestation to something better and safer.

### **3. Changes to the UK’s strategic environment**

**3.1** The two main **state challengers** to the UK’s strategic advantage that the Integrated Review sets out are Russia (“the most acute direct threat to the UK”) and China (“a systemic competitor”).<sup>10</sup> Events since March 2021, including the Russian invasion of Ukraine and rising tensions between China, Taiwan and various other states, do not contradict this assessment. However, they do highlight some of the shortcomings of the UK’s system of military alliances and the difficulties they pose to moving beyond the current impasse.

**3.2** **Russia’s** invasion of additional areas of Ukraine has marked a major shift in European security following decades of relative peace there between states.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the outcome of this major war, it seems likely that the government in Moscow, whether led by Vladimir Putin or not, will be hostile to the UK and many of its NATO allies and in possession of considerable military resources, not least the world’s largest nuclear stockpile, for the foreseeable future. However, the war has shown Russian conventional military forces to be far less capable than assessed by most Western military analysts, even before suffering massive losses to Ukrainian forces. While Moscow will look to spend to rebuild its armed force it faces substantial economic and technological barriers to doing so effectively. Moreover, its vast Soviet-era stockpile of heavy equipment from tanks to submarines is now over 30 years old and increasingly outmoded. NATO already outspent Russia by a factor of 17:1 before this war and has massive qualitative and quantitative advantages over Russia. Therefore, while Russia will continue to be a major irritant as well as an existential threat, given its possession of and attitude to weapons

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<sup>8</sup> MOD Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre, [Integrated Operating Concept](#), August 2021. See also Reeve, R. [Reclaiming the Right to Fight: Global Britain and International Law](#), Rethinking Security, 12 August 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Moazzam Malik, [Twitter thread](#), 07 June 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Integrated Review, p.26.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to Russia’s 2014 interventions in Ukraine, the wars between Armenia and Azerbaijan (1992-94, 2020 & 2022), Russia’s invasion of Georgia (2008), NATO’s wars with Yugoslavia (1999) and Bosnian Serbs (1994-95), Yugoslavia’s wars with Croatia (1991-92) and Slovenia (1991), and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (1974) are all notable exceptions to the idea of persistent inter-state peace in Europe since WW2.

of mass destruction, its direct threat to the UK has not increased and its likelihood of attacking a NATO state is low. While the UK may want to replace arms stocks donated to Ukraine, even these amount to a few percent of its enlarged Defence budget and so far much less what the MOD has squandered on the Ajax armoured vehicle procurement programme.<sup>12</sup> The case for expanding UK government spending on Defence is therefore not proven by the current war in Ukraine. For the longer term, there needs to be far greater thinking, starting now, as to how Europe moves beyond an armed division between NATO and Russian-dominated blocs.

- 3.3** It bears repeating that the actual military threat that this much weakened Russia poses to the UK and NATO is through its potential to use **nuclear weapons**. Given the cataclysmic humanitarian impact of any such action, it is imperative that the UK and other Nuclear Weapons States reverse course on nuclear rearmament and expansion programmes – including the expanded threshold of UK nuclear warheads set out in the Integrated Review – and recommit to strategic arms reduction and control initiatives towards multilateral nuclear disarmament.
- 3.4** **China's** sheer size, growing wealth and military capabilities, as well as its alternative, authoritarian political system tend to support the assumption that it is a systemic challenger to some aspects of current international rules and norms. Yet such challenges have also come from various other major powers, including the United States, supported by the UK, Russia, India and Turkey, as well as some smaller ones, including Iran, Israel and North Korea. While the UK should be robust and critical in its engagement with China, including on human rights in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong, its territorial claims in the South China Sea, and aggressive posture towards Taiwan, it does not follow that it should do more militarily in the 'Indo-Pacific' to deter or constrain China. This is both unrealistic within the UK's resources and as likely to stimulate an unwelcome militarised response as if China boosted its military presence in northern Europe.
- 3.5** The Integrated Review makes plain the intended continuity of **the United States** remaining "the UK's most important strategic ally and partner" over the next decade.<sup>13</sup> However, this is not a symmetrical relationship (the UK is one of many countries closely but subordinately allied with the US) and it is not necessarily an immutable one. While President Biden's weathering of this month's mid-term elections suggests that the strategic context since March 2021 has not changed significantly in regard to the UK-US relationship, this may not be true of the post-2024 period. US society and polity are heavily polarised, with far-right populism still ascendant in the Republican Party, and serious preparations being made for war with China. The consequences for trans-Atlantic relations, including support for NATO and Ukraine, remain in the balance, with potentially very destabilising consequences given the UK and EU's extreme dependence on the US militarily. Meanwhile, there is nothing inherent in the current UK-US or NATO alliance that binds the UK to host US nuclear weapons, nor anything in the Integrated Review to this effect.

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<sup>12</sup> According to the House of Commons Library, the UK had committed to £2.3 billion in military support for Ukraine in 2022 by 09 November, equivalent to 4.8% of the MOD annual budget. Some of this includes stocks of weapons or ammunition that would otherwise have been retired. At least £3.2 billion of a £5.5 billion 'fixed price contract' has so far been spent by the MOD on Ajax, which may never enter service. This is not a unique problem. For example, the MOD had spent £3.8 billion on the Nimrod MRA.4 maritime patrol aircraft, which never entered service.

<sup>13</sup> Integrated Review 2021, p.60.

The refreshed Review must make a clear statement on any intention to resume hosting US nuclear weapons within the UK (e.g. at RAF Lakenheath) and any decision must be subject to full parliamentary scrutiny and vote.

**3.6** Essentially missing from the Integrated Review is any assessment of what the UK's strategy is towards the **Middle East and the Gulf region** in particular. The drift of the Review, as in SDSR 2015, is that the UK should be doing more in this unstable region and be ever more closely aligned, including militarily, with its governments. In a rare mention, it singles out Israel and Saudi Arabia as countries in which we will "build upon our close security partnerships ... to better protect our interests in the region."<sup>14</sup> While the dynamics in the region have not shifted significantly since 2021, this is the region in which the UK has its largest concentrations of deployed military forces (notably in Bahrain, Iraq, Oman and Qatar) outside of Europe, where it has fought most of its recent military campaigns, and where it has supported the brutal Saudi/Emirati war in Yemen. Yet there is next to nothing in the Integrated Review or Defence Command Paper on UK objectives in the region. Given that the authoritarian nature of almost all of the region's states is at odds with the Review's ostensible emphasis on promoting 'open societies', this silence is both jarring and likely deliberate. It is also at odds with the direction of travel of the United States<sup>15</sup> and should lead to questions on whether the UK is 'gap-filling' for its closest ally.

#### **4. The UK's larger security context**

**4.1** Even with the best laid strategy, competitive geopolitics is only going to get the UK so far in promoting the security of its people within a larger context in which the **ecological viability of its planet and humanity** is collapsing. This is a far larger crisis than the competition for strategic advantage. Successive expert studies<sup>16</sup> over the last year have reinforced the lived experience of billions that the global climate is breaking down and bringing, inter alia: sustained drought and extreme heat across Europe; spring temperatures of 50°C+ in Pakistan followed by unprecedented flooding; the second deadliest storm ever to hit the continental USA; and a drought-induced famine threatening 22 million people in the Horn of Africa. The humanitarian impact of such change will be increasingly catastrophic over coming decades, yet there is little urgency to address it in the Integrated Review. It describes tackling climate change and biodiversity loss as the UK's foremost international priority but then barely resources it compared to major new funding for the military, even while promoting the UK as a science and tech superpower. Unless the UK strategy places combating climate change at its centre, rather than its end, everything else that it aims to do, from economic prosperity to ensuring energy security to preventing conflict or atrocities will be more difficult, if not impossible to achieve. Moreover, in a context of international conflict, competition and contestation – as seen glaringly in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine – the global cooperation necessary to combat climate change withers.

**4.2** During and after the publication of the Integrated Review, the UK has made substantial cuts to its **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** budget; these are due to continue into 2023 and

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<sup>14</sup> Integrated Review 2021, p.63.

<sup>15</sup> See [National Security Strategy, October 2022](#), The White House, pp.42-43.

<sup>16</sup> See for example: IPCC, [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#), IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, 27 Feb 2022.

beyond, according to recent analysis.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the major boost to the MOD's capital budget (+£24bn) announced in November 2020 during the Integrated Review process was directly at the expense of the development budget (-£18bn).<sup>18</sup> While the Integrated Review states a continued commitment to using ODA in support of the UK's strategic objectives, it provides no analysis on the impact of ODA cuts on the ambitions laid out in the rest of the document. ODA is not the only relevant foreign policy tool, but a refreshed Integrated Review should include an honest and open assessment of: how a reduced budget might impact on other objectives in the Integrated Review, including on climate action, women and girls' rights, the creation of 'open societies', and on global peacebuilding and conflict prevention; how the remaining budget will be used in the most effective way to achieve these goals; and how its use will be coherent with other FCDO activities. It should also consider how the uncertainty and confusion around ODA impacts regional and country objectives stated in the IR.

- 4.3** In its attention to promoting 'open societies' and stability overseas, the Integrated Review often seems blind to the pressures placed on the UK's own fundamental Union through the government's actions that erode the basic rights and liberties of its own citizens and its failure to address the accelerating poverty, inequalities and polarisations that characterise the UK in the 2020s.

*"The Union is also bound by shared values that are fundamental to our national identity, democracy and way of life. These include a commitment to universal human rights, the rule of law, free speech and fairness and equality. The same essential values will continue to guide all aspects of our national security and international policy in the decade ahead, especially in the face of rising authoritarianism and the persistence of extremist ideologies."*  
(Integrated Review 2021, p.13)

It is not only that international policy expressed elsewhere in the Review towards, for example, Israel and Saudi Arabia, or in its selective analysis of which states most challenge international rules and norms, does not cohere with the UK's expressed values. It is fundamentally that the UK does not – and increasingly and consciously does not – embody these values in its domestic policy and approach to its own citizens, those who reside here, and those who legitimately wish to seek refuge here. No international strategy is credible unless it is coherent with policy at the domestic level<sup>19</sup> and currently that is not the case for the UK. However, the challenge here may be less to rewrite the values of the Integrated Review than to revisit domestic policy across government to ensure that we conform to the standards that we set other countries. In so doing, the government would also greatly strengthen the human security of the people of the UK as well as the Union of its constituent nations.

*This submission was written for Rethinking Security by Richard Reeve, its Coordinator, with input from members of its Political Engagement Working Group.*

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<sup>17</sup> Worley, W. & Ainsworth, D. [UK aid faces third major cut in 3 years, with £1.7B to be cut](#), Devex, 23 Nov 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Parkinson, P. [Briefing Points on the UK Autumn 2021 Budget and Spending Review](#), GCOMS UK, October 2021.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, School of International Futures, [A National Strategy for the Next Generations](#), SOIF, Sept 2020.