Written evidence submitted by Mr Richard Reeve (Coordinator at Rethinking Society) (ISD0014)

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.[1] 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.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This evidence submission seeks to address the nature and process of security reviews conducted by the UK and peer states. It draws upon the collective knowledge and experience of Rethinking Security's membership as well as insights from a comparative study made by Rethinking Security of 20 European and North American national security strategies.[2] It focuses on seven of the questions posed by the Committee in its Call for Evidence:

- What is the purpose of a security, defence and foreign policy review?

- How often should a review be scheduled and how should different aspects be sequenced?

- What is the purpose, and appropriate scope, for cross-Government collaboration in the review process? What is the best way to ensure it is effective?

- What methodology and analytical capability is required to ensure that assessments of threats and risks to the UK are future-proofed?

- Which external stakeholders should be engaged in the review process? How?

- What role should international allies and multinational alliances play?

- What level of detail should be provided to Parliament and the public once the review is completed?

1.2 The key conclusion of this submission is that the Integrated Review as currently conceived is flawed in recognising neither the primacy of human security over state security, nor that the most pressing and far-reaching security threats that the UK faces are transnational and require global solidarity and cooperation to mitigate them. Climatic and environmental breakdown and pandemic disease are but the most currently obvious of these. To put such challenges at the

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[1] Rethinking Security's organisational affiliates include Campaign Against Arms Trade, Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Conciliation Resources, Forces Watch, International Alert, Medact, Movement for the Abolition of War, Oxford Research Group, 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.

[2] McKeon, Celia (2018) Contrasting Narratives: A Comparative Study of European and North American National Security Strategies, *Rethinking Security*.
https://rethinkingsecurityorguk.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/contrasting-narratives-march-2018.pdf

heart of a societal security strategy requires the government to rethink and restart its review process, with governmental review following on from a period of public and parliamentary consultation. The current crises of health and economic security provide added, acute impetus for this restart.

2. The purpose of a security, defence and foreign policy review

2.1 National security strategies are public documents that define their government's ambition for its place in the world. They are best understood as an articulation of a state's public position, rather than necessarily as an accurate reflection of how it behaves in practice. They are primarily rhetorical public statements with a political purpose, intended to make a persuasive argument for, and convey a positive impression of, the government's chosen approach. They are instrumental in defining the tone and focus of public and political narratives about security but they do not necessarily convey how that country's people define or feel about their own security.

2.2 The question of 'security for whom' is paramount in national security strategies. While the idea that the security of its people is the first responsibility of the state is oft repeated, most national security strategies are preoccupied with the security of the state itself. In the case of the UK, there is an additional element of exceptionalism in that the 2015 Strategy talks freely of the security of UK "interests", which, though undefined, are clearly meant more broadly than territory and people. The focus on "prosperity" clearly indicates a preference for economic security with an emphasis on promoting UK businesses and protecting access to markets and global commons.

2.3 For whom security strategies are designed has important ramifications for how security is, or is not, defined. The UK, along with half of other countries surveyed by Rethinking Security, gives no definition or vision of security in its current strategy.[3] This matters because a definition can provide the fundamental conceptual clarity essential to any document that purports to be 'strategic'. In turn, it increases state accountability for the vision of security it is trying to achieve, and its effectiveness in working towards that outcome.

2.4 The proper purpose of a national security strategy should be to maximise the wellbeing and potential of the nation, its citizens and residents. This should include not just the role and responsibility of the state but also of society as a whole since security is a shared responsibility. This is much more usefully seen as a shared responsibility to build 'positive peace' - attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful and resilient societies - rather than collective mobilisation against articulated threats. [4]

2.5 In a world of increasingly transnational security challenges – of which pandemic disease and climate breakdown are only the two most currently obvious – states should also consider setting out their vision of both 'national' and 'global' security. This means understanding and measuring the impact of UK actions on global security, not just the impact of the world on the UK. Thus, the purpose of the review should be to maximise human security within a global framework of shared security. Trying to prioritise UK security over and at the expense of global security should not be an option.

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[3] McKeon (2018), pp.8-9.
[4] See Visions of Humanity (2017), *An introduction to Positive Peace*, International Institute for Economics and Peace. http://visionofhumanity.org/introduction-positive-peace/

2.6 Thus far, it is unclear whether the Integrated Review is intended as a new National Security Strategy at all. Its remit as set out by the Prime Minister is unusual in that it appears to be concerned with setting an international profile for the UK and asking the military and other organs of government to deliver against this with security – national and global – as a secondary concern. The privileging of the FCO and MoD in setting the strategy suggests that the government sees defence diplomacy as a primary means to expand its profile and influence. This risks increasing entanglement in foreign conflicts as well as underplaying other branches of government. Given the primacy of other parts of the public services in responding to the current Covid-19 crisis, it is essential that the government rethinks and revises the Integrated Review's remit before resuming full-scale work on it.

3. The timing and sequencing of a security review

3.1 While it is probably desirable that security reviews are conducted at regular intervals that cohere with 'normal' five-year parliamentary cycles as per current practice, this periodicity is far less important than the timeframe of analysis and action that underlies the review or than the sequencing of broad security reviews with sectoral or departmental action plans that implement strategic responses.

3.2 Five years is an inadequate timeframe to assess risks, threats or responses when most of the security challenges to the UK and the world have deep structural causes that require commitment and action on a far longer term than one electoral cycle. Prime examples are climatic and environmental breakdown or the threat of pandemic disease, all of which have been identified as Tier 1 threats to UK security in recent National Security Strategies. Recognising that incoming governments will want to set their own strategies, and should be able to demonstrate progress against them within an electoral cycle, it is vital that mitigation and response strategies set-out and prioritise sustained action over much longer periods.

3.3 Sequencing is crucial if a National Security Strategy is to inform a cross-government approach to promoting the security and wellbeing of the nation. The 2015 Strategy was conjoined to the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and thus effectively a preamble to Defence policy. The 2010 Strategy, while separate to that year's SDSR, was published only one day before the latter. In neither case was there time for wider reflection on the national strategy nor did it obviously inform any departmental white paper other than Defence. While the NSS and SDSR are necessarily symbiotic, it is important that military responses are neither the sole nor the privileged option for delivering security. Logically, a national strategy held by the National Security Council (NSC) should inform the departmental policies of, *inter alia*, the FCO, DFID, Home Office, BEIS and other departments represented on the NSC.

4. The purpose and scope of cross-Government collaboration

4.1 According to the Secretary of State for Defence, the only four stakeholders in government for the Integrated Review are the FCO, Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet Office and the MoD.[5] This is surprising and concerning given that other departments have clear stakes in delivering security and development. Despite the review's extended title referencing International Development, there was no mention of DFID. Despite Mr Wallace stating that Homeland Security was one of

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[5] Answers by Ben Wallace, Sec of State for Defence during Defence Questions in Parliament, 16 March 2020, Hansard, Vol 673, Col. 647. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-03-16/debates/CFA44CE2-22D9-45E1-A9C1-33FAA9DB49C7/IntegratedReview

the four "main workstreams" of the Review, there was no mention of the Home Office or Department of Justice. If, as it must be, tackling climate breakdown is one of the "Global Issues" referenced as another workstream, why is BEIS not included as a primary stakeholder? Similarly, how can health security be promoted without the Department of Health as a stakeholder?

4.2 This is not simply a question of asking a range of departments to devise strategies to respond to or mitigate a range of threat scenarios devised by the Cabinet Office/Number 10. It is also imperative that a wide range of departmental perspectives and expertise is utilised in the assessment of what actually or realistically threatens people's security. The wording of the Prime Minister's announcement of the Review, stating that it will consider "the totality of global opportunities and challenges the UK faces and [determine] how the whole of government can be structured, equipped and mobilised to meet them"[6], as well as Mr Wallace's statement on stakeholders, suggests that the role of non-stakeholders is simply to plan and implement responses.

4.3 The apparent exclusion of DFID from the Integrated Review is of particular concern in the context of questions over the future independence of the Department. Given that the Integrated Review appears to be concerned primarily with UK international policy and influence, it will be unbalanced as long as Development lacks a seat at the table equal to the other 2 of 3 'D's, Diplomacy and Defence. We are concerned about this due to the special, world-leading expertise that DFID has in understanding and measuring the impact of conflict, fragility and UK activities across the world as well as in responding to the longer term drivers of conflict through (upstream) conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

5. Methodology and analytical capability

5.1 No assessment of threats and risks can be 'future-proof' but the Committee is right to question how methodologies used in the Review can be more effective at foreseeing and responding to future risks. To do this, it is important to take a much broader view of threat assessment and response.

5.2 First, any assessment methodology that focuses exclusively on threats and risks rather than opportunities is predetermined to focus on a) responsive measures and b) the preservation of the status quo. Rather than assuming that the challenge is to prevent any deterioration in security, a Review ought to be asking what the opportunities are to improve security and wellbeing.

5.3 Second, the unit of analysis in all recent UK and many other national security strategies has been the State and informed by the dominant view of inter-state relations as one of competition and conflict. Assessments should, rather, be focused on threats to people, both within the UK and globally. It is not realistic to assume that actions that threaten people outside the UK will have no impact on security within the UK in the longer term, as coronavirus and climate change starkly demonstrate.

5.4 Third, the key questions when conducting a threat assessment are not so much *who or what* threatens the UK (and how to counter them) but *why* other actors pose a threat to the UK and

[6] Prime Minister's Office, *PM outlines new review to define Britain's place in the world*, Press Release, 26 Feb 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world

how this might be influenced or reinforced by UK actions future, current and historic. This involves deeper questions of perception: why do we perceive others as threats? Why might they perceive the UK as threatening? Obvious examples include how Iran might assess UK policies towards Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel or Saudi Arabia, or the global impact of the UK possessing nuclear weapons and pursuing an explicit policy to project military 'strike' power globally.

5.5 Fourth, in terms of responses to threats, it is important that resourcing is adaptive and adequately mapped against the threats that are identified in a review. The 2015 National Security Strategy rightly identified Public Health and Major Natural Hazards as Tier 1 (high impact and likelihood) threats to the UK but it failed to resource responses to them at similar scale to military threats.[7] Some threats are more equal than others because they are a closer fit with legacy planning assumptions. Similarly, defining Climate Change as a global Risk rather than a national Threat in the 2015 document allowed the government to bypass resourcing prevention or response strategies. Unless resourcing and actions are coherent and proportionate to threats as assessed, there is nothing strategic about such a 'strategy'.

6. External stakeholders and consultation

6.1 We are mindful both that the government has conceded that the Integrated Review will incorporate consultation with external stakeholders and that the 2015 review was justly criticised by parliamentary and other commentators for its dismal failure to consult widely or transparently[8].As a civil society network with expertise in peace and security analysis and practice, we would propose several principles for consultation within the Review. This will take time, including feedback to the public, and this should be reasonably factored into the timescale of this and future reviews. The Covid-19 induced delay of the review provides both a necessity and an opportunity to rethink the timeline.

6.2 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. Citizens' assemblies, random sample polling with open questions and other representative feed-in mechanisms should be considered to gauge national opinions about what people believe would maximise their security and wellbeing. Given the current and expected circumstances of restricted movement during this review period, creative use of online consultation and deliberation mechanisms could be harnessed, but these must not detract from the value of the consultation. If it cannot be done effectively online, it should not be rushed through. The consultation should be transparent and accountable with clarity over how submissions from the public are used.

6.3 Different groups experience security differently and consultation mechanisms need to be devised to engage with the perspectives of all communities including those most marginalised

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[7] National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015:A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, HM Government, Nov 2015, pp.85-87.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf
[8]. JCNSS (July 2016), National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015, First Report of Session 2016–17, HL Paper 18/HC 153, pp.6-7. See also, Correspondence between Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP and Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, September 2015, published online by Defence Committee.

from the political mainstream. It is particularly important to understand and acknowledge the domestic repercussion of UK international policy. Key groups will include, but not be limited to, women, young people, migrant, diaspora and traveller groups, religious minorities, and communities in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the overseas territories.

6.4 The role of parliamentary committees is critical to a well-formulated and accountable security strategy. This was another major weakness in 2015 and we note that the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) is unlikely to be reconstituted before mid-way through the Review's envisaged term. We welcome the activism of the Defence, Foreign Affairs and International Development committees in engaging with the Review but would stress that there needs to be due time within the process for the government to engage with inquiry findings.

6.5 External stakeholders in UK security policy also include people outside the UK, not least in countries where the UK is militarily active or defines its own critical interests. Communities affected by conflict often have the most sustainable solutions for addressing conflict and their views are vital to informing the UK's understanding of what works, including in places where the UK has minimal diplomatic presence.

7. International allies and multinational alliances

7.1 As with other areas of policy, the UK needs to recognise the impact that its alliances have not just on the UK but on people and states within and outside those alliances. This is particularly important as NATO continues to engage well beyond its mandated collective security zone and allies including the United States and Turkey seek to enmesh NATO and the UK in their own disputes and interventions. It also applies to non-treaty allies, and major arms customers, such as Saudi Arabia, whose domestic and international actions the UK legitimises and encourages.

7.2 As the government seeks ways "in which the UK will be a problem-solving and burden-sharing nation"[9], it is important to recall that the multilateral framework around the United Nations is the primary alignment by which the UK should understand its security relationship with other states. A commitment to global multilateralism through the UN, and the progressive reform of the Security Council, should be at the heart of the UK's global vision and a genuine rules-based international order.

8. Parliamentary and public oversight

8.1 Recent UK national security strategies and defence reviews have been notably lacking in transparency and accountability in relation to Parliament. We note the Defence Committee's recent and historic difficulty in obtaining basic information from the government and NSC on review process and timelines. It is particularly concerning that the parliamentary committee mandated to scrutinise the National Security Strategy (the JCNSS) is unlikely to be reconstituted until mid-way through the Integrated Review's proposed timescale and thus will have no opportunity to comment on process, scope or mandate. The avoidance of consultation or communication with opposition parties that characterised the 2010 and 2015 reviews should also not be repeated. Any national strategy ought at least to aim for national consensus.

8.2 A review of and strategy for national security should not be considered as a one-off activity but part of an ongoing conversation between people and government on what can maximise their

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[9] PM's Office, 26 Feb 2020, Op cit.

own security, resilience and happiness, as well as that of the wider world. 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.[10] 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.[11] Ireland has also recently put public dialogue at the heart of the development of its first national security strategy.[12]

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This submission was written for Rethinking Security by Richard Reeve with input from Fred Carver of the United Nations Association-UK, Lewis Brooks of Saferworld, Prof Mary Kaldor of the London School of Economics, Ann Feltham of Campaign Against Arms Trade, Dr Daniel Jakopovich of Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Gemma Kelly of International Alert, and Liam Walpole and Megan Karlshoej-Pedersen of Oxford Research Group.

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[10] McKeon (2018), pp.27-28.
[11] See Public Safety Canada (undated), *Connecting with Canadian Communities*. https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrt/crss-cltrl-rndtbl/index-en.aspx
[12] O'Keeffe, Cormac (2019), Public asked for views on Ireland's first national security strategy, Irish Examiner, 06 December 2019. https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/public-asked-for-views-on-irelands-first-national-security-strategy-968892.html