DEMOS

Report

The case for a national security strategy

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Introduction

This report draws on background research[1] and discussions at a Demos seminar on the case for a national security strategy. Speakers at the seminar included Sir Lawrence Freedman (Professor of War Studies, King's College London), Leon Fuerth (Research Professor, George Washington University and former National Security Adviser to Al Gore) and Sir David Omand (Visiting Professor, King's College London and former Security and Intelligence Coordinator, Cabinet Office). The seminar was chaired by Charlie Edwards, Head of the Security Programme at Demos.

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www.demos.co.uk/projects/networkedsecurity

Executive summary and recommendations

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, governments across the globe have struggled to keep up with the growth and complexity of the challenges facing them. This government is no exception and finds itself exposed to changes across a global system that often reverberate unpredictably throughout British society. This global interconnectedness makes it harder for governments to predict and intervene in social and economic problems. Today cartoons shown in Danish newspapers create civil unrest on the streets of London, drugs from the poppy fields of Afghanistan lead to violence on Glasgow estates, and regional instability in the Middle East raises the price of petrol in the UK.

While departments have begun to develop a more joined-up approach to this interconnected world, there has been no obvious impact to Britain's archaic security architecture and systems. Without a strategic framework for departments and agencies to operate within, Whitehall continues to suffer from a duplication of resources, mixed messages from politicians and infighting between departments – all of which makes the system more opaque, both for those people who work in it and for citizens.

To cut through this complexity and help the government respond to the plethora of challenges facing the UK, at home and abroad, the government should develop a national security strategy. A strategy would aim to:

- articulate a vision of the current and future security environment
- communicate Britain's values in the twenty-first century
- develop a framework for collaboration across government on national security policy and identify policy areas where departments and agencies can be more efficient and effective in working together
- prioritise national security policies and initiatives and the allocation of resources
- bring together the plethora of departmental white papers on national and international security.

Recommendations

In developing a national security strategy, government should:

- take a networked approach to national security in response to the security environment, where the boundaries between domestic and international politics, policy areas and public and private spaces has become blurred and interconnected
- place strategic long-term thinking at the centre of government planning; at present this occurs in small pockets around Whitehall such as the Foresight programme

- take into consideration that the process of developing a national security strategy will take time and effort; a white paper drawn up in a matter of months will not suffice; the development of a national security strategy will not fit easily into a political timetable
- develop a strategy directed by the permanent secretary, Intelligence Security and Resilience at the Cabinet Office together with a ministerial committee on national security under the instruction of the prime minister
- draw together representatives from relevant government departments to help create a national security strategy
- ensure a rigorous and comprehensive consultation period is held with key stakeholders during the early phases of development.

Democratic accountability

- Place the strategy before Parliament for debate. It is important to note that the present government has a poor record of debating issues of security and defence in the House of Commons.
- Provide an annual report on the implementation of the strategy to Parliament.
- Create a forum for representatives of society to discuss and debate national security.
- Create a new House of Commons select committee on national security.

Resources

- Take into account the idea for a single budget for counter-terrorism as an important step in developing a holistic approach to the threat faced by the UK. However, this needs to be put into a broader framework of challenges facing the UK as well as the current configuration of government. A separate fund should also be set aside, under the direction of representatives from across the national security architecture, to use for policy development and initiatives on national security.
- Discuss the necessity of reforming the Treasury. Without accounting for the current process of allocating funds, the government will squander the opportunities that new policies and initiatives present.

1 Complex, uncertain and shapeless: the world in the twenty-first century

It has become something of a cliché that the beginning of the twenty-first century is marked by increasing complexity and uncertainty, on a national, regional and international scale. Yet it is an intriguing paradox of the post Cold War world that national security has become, if anything, more frantic while the world around has become relatively more peaceful and benign than in previous decades.[2]

This sense of vulnerability is further perpetuated by an information revolution that has powerfully influenced expectations around the globe. Twenty-four hour news, seven days a week, has shortened time horizons, and governments have found it increasingly more difficult to request time to deliberate when television and online media report the latest unfolding tragedy minute by minute. It is an environment in which the British government finds itself ever more interconnected, where changes anywhere in the system reverberate unpredictably – and often chaotically throughout society.

This global interconnectedness makes it harder for governments to predict and intervene in social and economic problems. Today cartoons shown in Danish newspapers create civil unrest on the streets of London, drugs from the poppy fields of Afghanistan lead to violence on Glasgow estates, and regional instability in the Middle East raises the price of petrol in the UK. Cause and effect are no longer close in time and space.[3]

Towards a networked approach to security

The strategist John Bryson suggests that this increasing interconnectedness is perhaps most apparent in the blurring of three traditionally important distinctions – between domestic and international spheres; between policy areas; and between the public and private spaces.[4] This blurring can be seen most obviously when you consider the mass of trends and events affecting the UK, from terrorism, immigration, pandemics, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the impact of fragile states on the international community and the growth of serious and organised crime.

The challenge the British government faces is that these diverse trends are marked by complex interactions that link, rather than divide, streams of events in the present and the future. Government may by default remain linear, but life can no longer be understood or dealt with in such terms.[5] The threats and hazards[6] outlined above cannot be adequately dealt with solely by one department or even by a national government. As threats become increasingly interlinked, such as terrorism and organised crime for example,

joining forces across government(s) and the public and private spaces has become an everyday necessity.

Increasingly the government will have to take a 'networked approach' to national security, shaped and directed by an overarching strategy. This will lead to greater interdependence among departments and agencies, demanding a more holistic approach to security policy. The ramifications will become increasingly apparent as the responsibilities of departments blur, along with traditional lines of accountability; creating further opportunities for collaboration between public servants, and enhancing the prospects for innovation across government.

Thus the case for a national security strategy is growing. In the absence of a clear framework it is difficult to prioritise security policy at the national level given the lead times needed for the procurement of equipment, to allow initiatives to mature and be evaluated and for an overarching strategy to be accepted by the British public. Yet the government's current approach creates the potential for conflicts of interest between departments and agencies, reducing collaboration and cooperation between them, which raises a further issue of whether national security is adequately safeguarded.

Shown in this light the current questions over the future of the Home Office highlights a fundamental misunderstanding of the current security environment. The interconnectedness of issues and threats requires the government to take a joined-up approach in managing its response. In short, it is ironic that at a time when the government needs to take a more collaborative approach to security, the Home Secretary is advocating the division of labour between a number of departments.

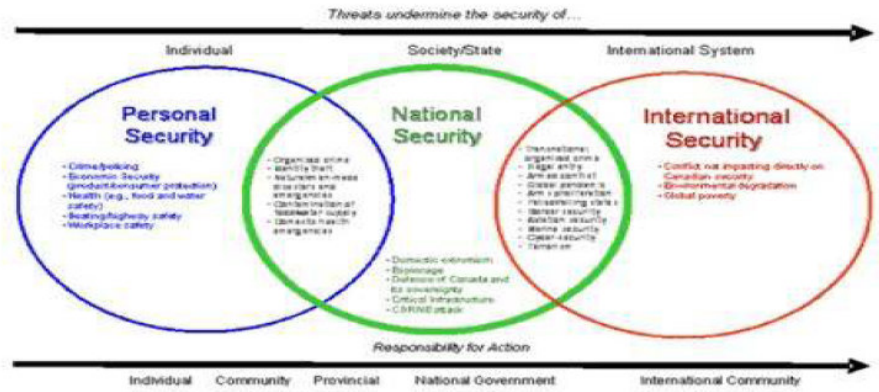
This approach to organisational reform is not counter-intuitive, but may well turn out to be counter-productive. In 2007 the British government continues to come under increasing pressure to adapt its security architecture to the new realities of the post Cold War world. As Leon Fuerth suggests: 'Redesigning the national security architecture to cope with the new challenges of the twenty-first century has to start with recognising how the world has changed.'[7]

Defining 'national security'

With the expansion of the concept of national security comes a major challenge to the organisations on which we rely for the management of security policy.[8] Thus we need to expand the operational definition of national security from its core interest in physical protection towards a comprehensive definition that embraces the sources and realities of power in the twenty-first century.[9]

The debate about what is and is not a concern of 'national security' is long overdue. Defining what is national security is an urgent requirement, as threats and hazards mutate over time, becoming more interconnected and thus more difficult to respond to by a single government department. As shown in figure 1 the concept of national security must be broadened to include a range of new challenges.

Figure 1. National security in the twenty-first century



Source: PCO, *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* (Privy Council Office, Canada, 2004).

For example, organised crime such as drug trafficking has been at the edge of the traditional security agenda. It has been there because the drug problem is serious and because military instruments can be used to locate crops or traffickers, interdict supplies, and destroy drug laboratories or crops.[10] One of the main tasks of the British military in Afghanistan, government ministers said, was to help end heroin production, which supplies 90 per cent of the narcotics sold illegally on British streets.[11] Despite the fact that the greatest possible efforts are currently being made to prevent and, wherever necessary, combat factors that undermine the UK's security, those involved invariably address only sub-aspects of national security.[12]

As recent events have shown the UK faces a broad spectrum of threats and hazards to its national security.[13] For example:

- *Terrorism.* This includes state-sponsored terrorism, domestic extremism, religious extremism and violent secessionist movements.
- *Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.* The threat does not come only from countries of concern, but also from non-state actors (eg terrorists, criminal networks).[14]

- *Serious and organised crime.* Organised crime is increasingly becoming part of a globalised network. The most damaging sectors to the UK are judged to be trafficking of Class A drugs, organised immigration crime and fraud. In addition, there is a wide range of other threats, including high-tech crime and counterfeiting.[15]
- *Espionage.* In today's high-tech world, the intelligence requirements of a number of countries now include new communications technologies, IT, genetics, aviation, lasers, optics, electronics and many other fields. Intelligence services, therefore, are targeting commercial enterprises far more than in the past. As well as this the Security Service estimates that at least 20 foreign intelligence services are operating to some degree against UK interests. Of greatest concern are Russia and China. The number of Russian intelligence officers in London has not fallen since Soviet times.[16]
- *Fragile states.* The growing number of failed or failing states is one of the most disturbing of recent security developments. These states contribute to instability and can be a haven for terrorists and organised crime groups that exploit weak or corrupt governing structures to pursue their nefarious activities.[17]
- *Natural disasters.* The UK has been subject to natural hazards such as flooding and foot and mouth disease, and major accidents.
- *Pandemics.* Examples such as the SARS epidemic or Avian Flu (H5N1) demonstrate how accelerated international travel patterns have amplified the risk of pandemics and related health threats to the security of British people.
- *Energy security.* The UK will move from a position of 80–90 per cent self-sufficiency in oil and gas to 80–90 per cent imports over a period of 10 or 15 years. As the prime minister said at the launch of the Langeled gas pipeline in 2006, 'the future of energy security will be almost as important as defence to the overall security of [this] country's interest'.[18]
- *Vulnerability of the critical national infrastructure.* A rush-hour power cut in 2003 caused major disruption on rail and tube services in London and the South East and affected approximately 250,000 people. Cyber-attacks are also a concern and have the potential to impact on a wide range of critical infrastructure that is connected through computer networks.

2 Adapting to the new security environment

It's been clear for some time that the capacity of the UK system for long-range strategic thinking needed strengthening.
Dame Pauline Neville-Jones, formerly Head of the Defence and Overseas Secretariat, Cabinet Office[19]

David Omand has suggested elsewhere[20] that the development of strategy would provide government with an anticipatory view of national security. As Lawrence Freedman notes: 'Strategy is about choice. It depends on the ability to understand situations and to appreciate the dangers and opportunities they contain.'[21] And as the quote by Pauline Neville-Jones suggests, this approach would be sensible given the lack of capacity for 'long-range strategic thinking'. Dwight Eisenhower captured this attitude eloquently in drawing a distinction between the needs of a country at war and one at peace: 'In war nothing is more important to a commander than the facts concerning the strength, dispositions, and intentions of his opponent, and the proper interpretation of those facts. In peacetime, however, the necessary facts are of a different nature. They deal with conditions, resources, requirements, and attitudes prevailing in the world. They are essential to the development of policy to further our long-term national security and best interests.'[22]

Strategic planning for the long term

Long-range strategic thinking is imperative if government is to prepare for future uncertainties and is a crucial process in allowing individuals in government to question organisational assumptions about the direction of policy. For example, so much of what goes down in history as 'intelligence failures' results from assumptions, ones that are often derived from mirror imaging – asking what we would do if we were in some one else's shoes. If getting the questions right is the first task, being clear about what is an assumption and what is a critical variable is the second. There are a number of methods that allow organisations to attempt to understand the future; they include forecasting and scenario planning.

Techniques such as scenario planning, for example, are useful because they allow organisations to develop strategies that will work in all conceivable futures – the key question they answer is not 'what will the future look like?' but 'how can we prepare for all likely futures?' Once completed, scenarios serve two main purposes. The first is protective: anticipating and understanding risk. The second is entrepreneurial: discovering strategic options of which you were previously unaware.[23]

Good scenario planning also allows a diverse range of perspectives to be aired in public and private, a crucial factor given the more diffuse range of security challenges of the twenty-first century when 'it will not be possible to accumulate the breadth and depth of understanding which intelligence collectors, analysts and users built up over the years about the single subject of the Soviet Union'.[24] The failure to entertain different perspectives can lead to 'group think'.

As Lord Butler noted in his review of intelligence on WMD, 'well developed imagination at all stages of the intelligence process is required to overcome preconceptions. There is a case for encouraging it by providing for structured challenge, with established methods and procedures, often described as a 'Devil's advocate' or a 'red teaming' approach. This may also assist in countering another danger: when problems are many and diverse, on any one of them the number of experts can be dangerously small, and individual, possibly idiosyncratic, views may pass unchallenged.'[25]

The importance of not becoming trapped by our own assumptions and thinking is further highlighted by Geoffrey Vickers, as he suggests: 'A trap is a trap only for creatures who cannot solve the problem it sets. Man traps are dangerous only in relation to the limitations of what men can see and value and do. . . . We the trapped tend to take our own state of mind for granted – which is partly why we are trapped.'[26]

Individuals and organisations are also very bad at learning the right lessons from random or unpredictable events. There is a clear place for learning operational lessons from events, such as the July bombings in London, in order to prepare ourselves for a similar event next time. However, this should not be at the cost of ignoring other potential scenarios; the strategic aim should be to better prepare for unpredictable events in general. As Nassim Taleb suggests: 'Our track record in predicting [random events, such as 9/11] is dismal; yet by some mechanism called the hindsight bias we think that we understand them. We have a bad habit of finding "laws" in history (by fitting stories to events and detecting false patterns); we are drivers looking through the rear view mirror while convinced we are looking ahead.'[27]

Finally some of the biggest threats to organisational survival are often not shock events but slowly building pressures and trends. The government's ability to foresee and respond to these increasing threats is handicapped by an archaic and compartmentalised system that dates from the Cold War. While the current system is already hard put to keep up with ongoing and near matters, it is especially deficient in planning for major, long-range contingencies.[28] The ability to plan for the long term will become an ever-

greater priority as domestic and international politics, and policy areas blur, creating 'wicked' problems.

The emergence of 'wicked problems'

There is a growing literature on Whitehall's lack of strategic approach to 'wicked' problems, or what the systems expert Jake Chapman refers to as 'messes'. Messes, like national security, are 'problems which are unbounded in scope, time and resources, and enjoy no clear agreement about what a solution would even look like, let alone how it could be achieved'.[29] National security relies on a multitude of departments, agencies and, increasingly, private sector and voluntary organisations in a growing network of collaboration and coordination.

For example, the recently formed Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) was established as a tri-departmental unit, to provide the government and its partners with integrated assessment and planning support, underpinned by an operational capability, to deliver more effective stabilisation operations. The PCRU currently has 28 personnel drawn from the Department for International Development (DFID), Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Ministry of Defence (MoD) and HM Treasury.[30]

Postconflict reconstruction is just one element of the national security spectrum that demands a strategic framework in which to work. The PCRU may play a valuable role in the system but it can seem disjointed from the rest of government and the energy of its personnel wasted without an overarching framework that connects the organisation's work to an overarching strategy.

Furthermore, the only way in which large-scale coherent results can be obtained from such a multitude of different players is to have active – indeed visionary – leadership from the government in order to form and maintain consensus around a strategic purpose that all can share, a conceptual framework to simplify what needs to be done down to the level of outline strategic campaigns and a set of specific high-level things that all accept as fair challenges.[31]

Bryson suggests that this requires organisations to adopt four approaches:

- Organisations must think, act and learn strategically as never before.
- They must translate their insights into effective strategies to cope with their changed circumstances.
- They must develop the rationales necessary to lay the ground work for the adoption and implementation of their strategies.

- And they must build coalitions that are large enough and strong enough to adopt desirable strategies and protect them during implementation.[32]

3 The case for a national security strategy

Until the early 1980s, strategic planning in the public sector was primarily concerned with military strategy and the practice of statecraft on a grand scale.[33] And while there is not the space to discuss the transformation of the term strategy across the military–civil divide we should bear in mind the suggestion of Michael Howard, the military historian, that the term *strategy* needs continual definition.[34] In the case of national security the role of strategy is important in a number of respects.

First, it is crucial to articulate a vision of the environment in which the UK operates, both for individuals and organisations working in government and the public at large. At present, there are a plethora of documents on 'national security', be it the MoD's *Strategic Defence Review*[35] (and the subsequent *New Chapter*[36]), the FCO's international priorities or numerous Home Office publications.

Frequently, government departments claim to have a comprehensive mission – stating that they are: 'responsible for keeping the UK safe from any threat to our national security' (Home Office);[37] 'defending the United Kingdom and its interests' (MoD);[38] while the FCO's 'purpose is to work for UK interests in a safe, just and prosperous world'.[39] However, all too often, policies and missions are pursued by departments that are in conflict with each other, resulting in poor coordination, failure to meet policy goals and objectives, and a sense of confusion in government. This can be seen, for example, with the lack of consistency in applying the UK's counter-terrorism strategy around the four strands – prevent, pursue, protect and prepare. Perhaps the 'fifth P' (process), which was dropped from the final publication of Contest,[40] would have helped to better shape the government's approach.

Second, a national security strategy should offer scope to arrive at a political assessment of the risks on which to prioritise and allocate funding and direct resources. Developing a government-wide framework therefore would promote greater synergy between the relevant departments and agencies, thus enabling a more strategic approach to national security, while ensuring the British government was able to anticipate future threats and challenges. In order to do this such a strategy would also have to:

- define the remit of national security and British security interests
- assess the national and international security environment
- identify the risk factors within the national and international environment

- outline the goals and objectives that would contribute to safeguarding and asserting national security and Britain's wider interests
- identify courses of action and means for ensuring national security.

A third reason for such a strategy would be to provide some form of integration and consistency with the strategies of international organisations such as the European Union (European Security Strategy), the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Fourth, a strategy would instil confidence in the government's approach to national security from an often sceptical public. The debate about whether a national security strategy should be in the public realm or kept secret is a moot point. To keep such a document secret would seem to buck the current trend by the Labour government to publish material related to national security, such as the counter-terrorism strategy, which was made public in 2006. In a statement to the House of Commons in July of that year, John Reid indicated that the publication of Contest was agreed to, on the basis that it would 'inform the general public about the process so that it can be better understood and more transparent. We also hope that it instils confidence and trust.'[41] However, as Michael Herman has argued, 'secrecy fits awkwardly into the accountability of open democracies'.[42]

Publishing an agreed document would also follow a global trend of governments publishing their national security strategies. The Canadian government, for example, published its strategy in 2004. In doing so it stated: 'The fact that this is Canada's first-ever comprehensive statement of our National Security Policy makes it particularly important that we engage Canadians on its content. We are tabling the policy with Parliament so that it can facilitate that added dialogue.'[43] The Singapore government has gone a step further with the publication entitled *1826 Days: A diary of resolve*, a reference to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York.[44]

The issue of whether or not such a strategy should be made public continues to divide opinion. Commentators have suggested that publication of a document would mean the government agreeing to only the most banal set of principles while complex issues would be over-simplified. However, the case remains: 'If the government cannot explain its security strategy, and the way in which its current actions support it, its opponents will provide their own context and interpretation in a way that seeks to undermine this consent.'[45]

Finally, a strategy would influence the way the government manages the resources associated with national security. While departments currently

'join-up' to bid for resources, a strategic approach to resource allocation will become an increasingly important issue as challenges morph over time, requiring the current system to adapt even further. And this is where the absence of a clear security strategy is most painfully felt: 'Denied a wider context, ministers struggle to make [a] case.'[46]

4 A coherent approach

Producing a strategy would be a relatively straightforward process. After all, Whitehall prides itself on its 'joined-up' approach to national security. Initiatives such as Contest, the government's counter-terrorism strategy, for example, continue to play an important role in developing a strategic coherence to policy development and planning. And while the conclusion of the prime minister's delivery unit was that the strategy 'was immature, forward planning is disjointed or has yet to occur. Accountability for delivery is weak [and] real world impact is seldom measured,'[47] there are clear signs that, irrespective of its initial weaknesses, the holistic approach to counter-terrorism policy has been a positive and welcome departure from the traditionally siloed approach by individual departments on matters of national policy.

As a report by the House of Commons defence committee stated: 'In many areas the government has confused activity with achievement. A strong central authority is needed to lay down the clear criteria for the work of individual government departments and to coordinate the efforts of other agencies.'[48]

The risks associated with the lack of a holistic approach by government to national security was recently identified by the Netherlands national security strategy steering group, many of which can be applied directly to the British system of government, including:

- *the lack of a suitable framework.* Current national security policy is also fragmented and compartmentalised, which stands in the way of adequate proactive policy development.
- *failure to recognise the initial signs or early warnings.* Threats or hazards may come from unexpected sources – this is not to say the latter may be prevented entirely but the capacity to distinguish and recognise such signs could be increased.
- *deficient risk analysis and identification.* (Though this is becoming a central plank of the British government's protective security and resilience planning.)
- *insufficient opportunity to prioritise.*
- *leadership.* Structures are fairly well organised for an adequate approach to large and small-scale incidents in the response phase. The current British approach is to convene meetings of senior officials and ministers, in the Civil Contingencies Committee colloquially referred to as COBR (Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms). Members vary according to the issue being dealt with and a diverse set of issues is discussed. It is seen as a model of how effective government coordination in a crisis can be, especially in the

definition of strategic goals, options and risk appraisal, and the allocation of work to secure those goals.

A networked approach to national security also impacts on the allocation of resources and the accountability of the system. A strategy would have to define the government's approach to both. Although central government bears responsibility for national security, this does not imply the need to execute all operations by itself. Local government bodies, private business and citizens all make their own contributions towards national security.[49]

Finally, a networked approach also questions the traditional command and control approaches to national security. The empowerment of local, private and informal actors in the provision of security and latterly resilience is becoming a societal norm. Elaine Scarry provides an innovative analysis of the passengers of Flight 93 which crashed in Pennsylvania en route to the White House on 9/11. As she explains: 'When the plane that hit the Pentagon and the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania are looked at side by side, they reveal two different conceptions of national defense: one model is authoritarian, centralized, top down; the other, operating in a civil frame, is distributed and egalitarian. Should anything be inferred from the fact that the first form of defense failed and the second succeeded? This outcome obligates us to review our military structures, and to consider the possibility that we need a democratic, not a top-down, form of defense. At the very least, the events of 9/11 cast doubt on a key argument that, for the past 50 years, has been used to legitimize an increasingly centralized, authoritarian model of defence – namely the argument from speed.'[50]

5 Creating a national security strategy

I believe we need a national security strategy, updated each year for changing circumstances.

Gordon Brown[51]

Given the necessary materials and access a bright graduate could write a national security strategy in a relatively short time. That, however, misses the point of creating a national security strategy. Commentators would understandably pour scorn on a 'precious Whitehall document'. The process of developing a strategy would need to influence all relevant departments on national security and this takes patience, not least because of the importance of drawing together Whitehall, and agreeing a course of action. It should be realised that the very process of creating a strategy is as important as the final product.

The Contest strategy, for example, took just under a year to develop. During that time there were countless meetings, consultations and papers developed on a diverse range of issues. The process brought together the relevant parties, allowed ministers to keep a watching brief on progress, and allowed all parties to raise their own ideas and shortcomings, all under the watchful (if not often distracted) eye of the prime minister.

A half-hearted, rushed strategy published on a political timetable will not suffice. At best it will create friction among departments, at worst it will end up a victim of the shredder, an embarrassing failure for a new prime minister. As the academic John Gray notes, 'poor strategy is expensive, bad strategy can be lethal, while when the stakes include survival, very bad strategy is almost always fatal'.[52]

To accomplish a strategy that influences the way the government is organised on national security a new bureaucratic culture will be required. As we have learned from the experience of military reform, networked command and control are essential, but can also lead to paralysis. To make a strategy a success a joined-up approach based on a culture of collaboration of being able to plan and operate seamlessly across jurisdictional lines is fundamental.[53]

The present government must begin by creating a national security committee in which all departments are represented at senior level. In the Demos annual security lecture David Omand suggested this task of driving a more coherent national security strategy should be given to a strengthened Cabinet Office at the heart of government.[54] Given the uncertain nature of British politics at present it would be mindful of ministers and senior officials to prepare a plan B.

6 Pushing at an open door?

The development of a national security strategy has already been leapt on by politicians from across the political spectrum, and there is a growing realisation that the current system of government offers insufficient scope to arrive at a sound political assessment of the risks on which to base prioritisation and the allocation of financial resources. Lessons can be learned from Hurricane Katrina, where the US Bureau of Federal Audits emphasised just how essential it was to devise a system that enabled 'politicians to develop sound risk assessments and make decisions concerning investments'.[55]

Likewise, Chancellor Gordon Brown's recent foray into the security debate highlighted the need for a single security budget, though this would be focused solely on counter-terrorism. Indeed, a more interesting debate is whether a national security budget should take into account the budgets of the MoD, FCO, DFID, Home Office and finances of other relevant departments. This may seem absurd today, but the importance of resource allocation is central to a future national security strategy and should not be underestimated as a potential barrier in the long term.

The Conservative Party Group on National and International Security has also stated its aim for a national security strategy or doctrine. In the interim paper *Security Issues* Pauline Neville-Jones states: 'At the strategic level of national security however the system works far less well. It finds it difficult to bring together consideration of long-range policy issues affecting the responsibilities of several departments in a way that ensures the consistency and compatibility of policy responses whether at home or abroad. In a world where the two cannot be isolated from each other . . . a common and shared definition of the objectives of national security policy – a national security doctrine – is necessary.'[56]

Last, the present government and political parties should also take note of the lack of trust in politicians on matters of national security: 'Back in August [2006] – in the immediate aftermath of the alleged plot to blow up airlines – a YouGov poll found that 35 per cent of people still believed British politicians "generally exaggerate the terrorist threat". Many will have responded with similar cynicism when Tony Blair unveiled a Queen's speech [November 2006] that put security top of government priorities. As one BBC correspondent suggested yesterday, Britons are suffering from "terror fatigue".'[57]

Conclusion

There can be no greater role for government than the protection and safety of its citizens. But managing national security without a strategy is like running an orchestra without a musical score: a recipe for an ill-coordinated and out of tune response. A national security strategy is not a panacea for joined-up government, and there are limitations to strategy: a strategy by no means renders national security invulnerable to threats. Nor does a strategy eradicate all risks. It would, however, enable the government to communicate clearly concerning its ability and inability to safeguard national security.[58]

Politically, Prime Minister Tony Blair, Chancellor Gordon Brown and leader of the Conservative Party David Cameron have all called for such a strategy in the past few months.

In Whitehall, there is growing interest in the idea of a strategy that binds together some of the disparate parts of the system and ensures all relevant departments and agencies can bring their expertise and resources to the table.

Publicly, a document that sets out this new strategy – the priorities of government, the role of departments and the allocation of the resources – is important in both promoting the government's role in international security and explaining how it intends to keep the UK a safe and secure society.

While there is no doubt that this government understands the size and nature of these threats and hazards, the lack of an overarching strategy that places all these challenges into context with one another is lacking. Furthermore in the absence of a clear framework it has become increasingly difficult to prioritise policy at national level for the future, as the focus remains on managing the short term, often causing further problems down the road.

The Cabinet Office's departmental report for 2006 begins: 'Imagine a time when delivery of public services is truly seamless.'[59] For national security, that time has come. Too often, the British government has relied on individual departments and agencies – as well as occasional good luck – to win the fight, but such a piecemeal approach to security can only end in tragedy. Creating a national security strategy will be not be an easy process, but it is the first step in understanding how the government should respond to the dynamic and changing threats and hazards to the UK today and in the future.

Notes

[1] My thanks to Simon Parker, Peter Bradwell and Hannah Green at Demos and Derek Leatherdale for their important and useful insights.
[2] G Treverton, *Reshaping National Intelligence for an Age of Information* (Cambridge University Press and Rand, 2003).
[3] Charlie Edwards and Simon Parker, *Futures Thinking (and how to do it)* (Demos, 2006).
[4] JM Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A guide to strengthening and sustaining organizational achievement*, 3rd edn (Jossey-Bass, 2004).
[5] L Fuerth, 'Strategic myopia: the case for forward engagement', *The National Interest* 83, Spring 2006.
[6] The terms 'threats' and 'hazards' are separated to distinguish between natural disasters – for example Hurricane Katrina – and human-inspired risks such as terrorism.
[7] Fuerth, 'Strategic myopia'.
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