Developing Threats; Electro-Magnetic Pulses

The Defence Select Committee has agreed to follow up its Reports about six months after the publication of the Government reply.

As part of our series of inquiries into emerging threats, we inquired, in our Tenth Report of last session, into the threat posed to the UK electronic infrastructure by electro-magnetic pulses, whether resulting from space weather or from the deliberate detonation of a nuclear or other device. The Government response was received, and published by us, in April this year, and I am writing to enquire what further progress has been made in respect of the issues we identified.

I should add that the Committee had a useful meeting on the principles of the issue with the Prime Minister last month, and this letter is to follow up on the detail.

The Government response contained a number of references that work was proceeding in certain areas. It would be helpful to have an update on each of these in respect of work done since the Government response was written. For convenience, with the exception of the first question I have grouped the issues in the order used in the Government Response.

I realise that a number of the questions do not relate to the work of the MoD, but, as the Department was kind enough to co-ordinate the original response to the Report I am hoping that you will be prepared to do so again.

A number of the responses to individual recommendations referred to the National Space Security Policy, which was expected to be published ‘later this year’? The Committee will be very interested to see it. When is publication now expected?

Nature of the threat

What progress has been made in the further analysis that is in hand to enable infrastructure owners and operators to plan their response to future [Carrington-type] events and capability improvements?
What recent work has been done by the Energy Emergencies Executive Committee to clarify the potential impacts of severe space weather on electricity assets and networks?

Has there been any change in the assessment of the risk of an EMP event caused by a hostile actor, whether state or non-state?

What progress has been made in respect of National Grid, in association with BGS and working with E3C, in developing more detailed modelling of severe space weather events including impacts on generator transformers. When is action likely to follow this work?

Have there been any developments in respect of non-nuclear EMP weapons?

**Resilience**

Have there been any developments in forecasting space weather?

Have there been any developments in respect of hardening elements of the National Grid?

Have there been any developments in international co-operation, especially in respect of the United States and Europe?

**The MoD and EMP**

Whether it remains Government policy that no one Minister is given immediate overall responsibility for EMP events?

Has any further thought been given to an exercise in reacting to an EMP event?

**Satellites**

The Government response includes the statement that ‘the MoD’s Skynet communications services are also available to other Government Organisations and Departments, and future requirements across Government Departments are currently being discussed with a view to developing successor services for all potential Government users.’ Has there yet been any outcome to these discussions?

These specific questions arise from the Government response, but we would be very grateful to learn of any other relevant developments.

The Committee have agreed that if they do not seek further evidence on these matters, this correspondence may be placed on the Committee’s website.

CHAIR