

30 October 2018

Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
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Office

King Charles Street
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Secretary of State

Dear Tom,

During a Parliamentary debate on Global Britain and the International Rules-Based Order on 6 September 2018, you called on the Government “to publish by 31 October 2018 its assessment of the threats posed by Russia and other hostile states to the international rules-based order, and the Government’s strategy and resources for countering those threats”. This letter provides the Government’s response.

The Government takes very seriously the threats posed to the UK by hostile states, including Russia. The 2015 National Security Strategy recognises that the UK is a target for hostile foreign intelligence activity because we are an advanced economy, have a sophisticated military and wield international influence. **The National Security Capability Review (NSCR), published in March 2018, commits to hardening our defences against all forms of hostile state activity and sets out the actions being taken.** These include making full use of existing tools and powers to track the intentions of those travelling to the UK; introducing a new power to stop, question, search and detain a person at UK ports and the border area in Northern Ireland; and reviewing what powers we have to counter all forms of hostile state activity directed against the UK.

The Government addressed the **specific threat from Russia** in its response of 20 July 2018 to the Committee’s report: “Moscow Gold: Russian Corruption in the UK”. The response states that the threat is underscored by Russia’s modernisation of its conventional and nuclear forces and its willingness to deploy other capabilities, such as malicious cyber attacks. The attack in Salisbury was an especially egregious example of reckless Russian behaviour. We are committed to countering the Russian state’s malign activity and to protecting the UK and our allies from Russia-based threats. The Government’s strategy brings together cross-government resources to develop, deliver and deploy our considerable national security capabilities to maximum collective effect.

Your request relates to threats from hostile states to the rules-based international system (RBIS). **The National Security Strategy includes a strong commitment to strengthening the RBIS and its institutions.** The Government is boosting UK representation to international institutions, setting global norms and standards through regulatory diplomacy and championing sensible multilateral reform. The RBIS also relies on enforcement of standards and laws. There have been successes, in particular the work of the E3/EU+3 to conclude the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) with Iran, and the ongoing work of the remaining JCPoA participants to maintain the deal. Some powerful states and non-state actors, however, are increasingly ignoring international norms that they believe run contrary to their interests, or favour the West. Russia’s illegal annexation of

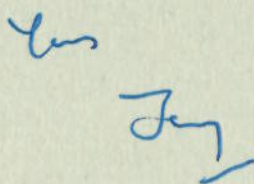
Crimea and Assad's use of chemical weapons are examples of this. In light of these developments, the NSCR identifies the resurgence of state-based threats and the erosion of the RBIS as challenges that are likely to drive UK security priorities for the coming decade. Further information on our work to address these threats and strengthen the RBIS can be found in the FCO's Annual Report for 2017-2018.

The UK is at the forefront of international efforts to defend the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and support the vital work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The UK, alongside our international partners, called a meeting of States Parties on 26-27 June 2018 to discuss upholding the global ban and address the use of chemical weapons in Malaysia, Syria, Iraq and the UK. We secured a Decision that empowers the OPCW to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. The Decision also empowers the OPCW Director General to take forward work to put in place independent, impartial and expert arrangements to identify those responsible for using chemical weapons more broadly, if requested by any State Party investigating possible chemical weapons use on its territory. And the Decision authorises the OPCW to share information with relevant Syria-focused investigations established under UN auspices, and to enhance assistance to States to implement the CWC. The Government is proud to have led diplomatic efforts to secure this outcome and looks forward to working with all States Parties to implement the Decision.

The UK is pursuing similar efforts to uphold the RBIS in cyberspace, ensuring we remain united with allies in demonstrating that the international community will stand up against irresponsible cyber attacks. We have publicly attributed a range of malicious cyber activity alongside allies, including the WannaCry ransomware attack to North Korean actors in December 2017, the NotPetya cyber attack in February 2018 and a multi-year computer network exploitation campaign to the Mabna Institute based in Iran in March 2018. Most recently, the UK and Netherlands exposed a campaign by the GRU, the Russian military intelligence service, of indiscriminate and reckless cyber attacks targeting political institutions, businesses, media and sport, supported by 19 other European countries, the EU and NATO. More broadly, the UK is investing in building the capacity of international partners, including across the Commonwealth, in cyber defence, law enforcement and policy. We are also working with European Union partners on further measures, including sanctions, to respond to and deter cyber attacks.

There are limits to what we can disclose publicly about our work to counter threats from hostile states. Nonetheless, I hope this letter and the public documents to which it refers are useful and make clear the Government's commitment to deploying the full range of national security capabilities to counter hostile state activity.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the House of Commons Library.



THE RT HON JEREMY HUNT MP