

HOUSE OF LORDS
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TAKEN BEFORE
THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

**NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY
EVIDENCE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER**

THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2014

Rt Hon David Cameron MP

Sir Kim Darroch KCMG

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 1 - 45

Members present

Margaret Beckett (Chair)
Mr James Arbuthnot
Sir Malcolm Bruce
Lord Clark of Windermere
Lord Fellowes
Lord Harris of Haringey
Lord Levene of Portsoken
Paul Murphy
Mark Pritchard
Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale
Lord Sterling of Plaistow
Baroness Taylor of Bolton
Lord Waldegrave of North Hill

Witnesses

Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Prime Minister

Sir Kim Darroch KCMG, National Security Adviser

QI The Chair: Can I welcome people to this afternoon's session, and say at once that although we do not anticipate that there will be a Division in the Commons before 4 o'clock, if there is I will adjourn the Committee for 15 minutes? Hopefully there will not be. Welcome, Prime Minister. We had been looking forward to interviewing you on a quiet Thursday. It turns out not to be quite so quiet, but you are most welcome nevertheless. As I hope you will know, this Committee is very supportive of the principle of a national security strategy and a National Security Council and wants to see if we can contribute constructively to its work. We have taken evidence from a lot of Members and the adviser and are now very anxious to hear from you. Would you tell us first what you hope to gain by having a national security strategy and council?

Mr David Cameron: What I hope to gain is to make sure that we analyse better the threats to Britain and the opportunities for our country, that we plan better across government and that we make better decisions. I would say that, three and a half years in, it has been a real

success, because you are bringing together the relevant departments, you are considering national security from a domestic perspective as well as an overseas perspective, and you are making sure that the great fiefdoms of Whitehall—Defence, the Foreign Office, DfID—play together rather than separately. I think it has proved itself across a number of subjects. I am hugely enthusiastic about this reform. I think it works very well. I think it joins up Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor, Home Secretary and others in a way in which perhaps they have not been joined up in the past, and I hope it is a reform that will endure.

Q2 The Chair: You said that it enables you to look at domestic and other matters. Our impression is that it has been very foreign-policy oriented so far.

Mr David Cameron: I would argue that it has been a reasonable mixture. I have the figures with me. In 2011, we had 36 NSCs, we covered 50 foreign policy topics and nine domestic policy issues but 14 security-related issues, such as counterterrorism and defence. I think there is an argument that it could do more domestic subjects, and the Home Secretary is always keen that we discuss more, but the point I would make is that when you are discussing a foreign policy subject you have the Minister responsible for counterterrorism and security around the table as well as the head of MI5 and other relevant officials. I think that is hugely helpful in two different ways. If you are talking about Syria as a foreign policy issue, you obviously want to have the Home Secretary there and our counterterrorism experts to worry about the blowback from Syria of the radicalisation and terrorism that is being fostered there. That is important. If you are thinking about our relations with China and how we improve them, it is very good that you have the Trade Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary and all its expertise, but you also have the Home Secretary there to think about things like visas and border access—all those things, which are an important part of our relationship.

We could shift to do more domestic subjects, but the balance is pretty good, and when we are doing the foreign policy subjects we take the domestic aspect very seriously.

Q3 The Chair: At the outset, understandably as a new Government you did the national security strategy, the spending review and the defence review alongside each other. Was the intention that the national security strategy set the context for the other reviews?

Mr David Cameron: Yes. As you say, as a new Government we had to do all three things together: the security strategy, the strategic defence review and, of course, the comprehensive spending review. But the national security strategy helped to set the context for what we wanted to do in defence. We have seen some of the work of your Committee, and I know that people are very keen that the strategy is set out, then the defence review is set out, and then and only then do you consider the resources issues. In the difficult and straitened times in which we live, that would be difficult. You have to consider what is affordable alongside what is desirable. That is just realistic. But as you say, strategy should inform the defence decisions that we make.

Q4 The Chair: I take the point that you are making, but you must know that it has been suggested that the defence review in particular was driven wholly by budgetary and not by strategic considerations.

Mr David Cameron: I would reject that completely. The defence review was about how we should configure our defence forces, given Britain's place in the world and our foreign policy and security policy objectives. The most important decisions that we took in that defence review were to radically reduce the number of battle tanks in Europe and to look at increasing the manoeuvrability and flexibility of our forces. We made some big decisions about investment in cybersecurity, spending more money. We made important decisions about bringing on stream two new aircraft carriers. This was not driven by spending. Of

course it was informed by what we believed was affordable, but it was a proper strategic defence review that took proper strategic decisions.

Q5 The Chair: There is one other issue that I particularly wanted to raise with you at the outset, because we referred to it in our first report. In the national security strategy itself, against the background of describing the rise of new global powers and shifts in the centres of economic activity, the strategy still said that there should be no reduction in influence for the UK. In your most recent report, which has just come out, on the national security strategy, you talk about expanding the influence of the UK. We were concerned at the outset that “no reduction in influence” was unrealistic. When you say “expanding” now, do you mean spreading ever thinner across the world?

Mr David Cameron: No, I do not. I would answer the question in two ways. First of all, if you look across our projection of power and influence—the Foreign Office, international development, defence, trade—you can definitely see that Britain is doing more. We have been opening embassies. We have been expanding our presence in India and China. I think we are one of the only European countries with a full embassy in every ASEAN nation. So there is no doubt in my mind that part of our strategy is that we want to link up with the fastest growing parts of the world and to be an open and engaged power, so we are using all of what we have to do that.

I would argue that even in the area of defence—of course the defence budget has come down in real terms, not by a huge amount but by a small amount because we have made choices, such as fewer battle tanks in Europe, and investment in things like drones, cyber and flexibility—there has been no long-term reduction in Britain’s defence capabilities and our ability to stand up for ourselves in important ways around the world. So I do not really accept your point.

I also reject the idea that you can only measure how engaged you are and how successful you are in projecting influence by how much money you spend. No business goes about its life like that. We have to make sure that we get as much into the teeth and as little into the tail of our defence as possible, and I would argue that the MoD under Philip Hammond's leadership has been pretty successful at that. So again, I do not really accept the idea that because we are spending a little less on defence we cannot be as significant a defence player.

The Chair: In a moment I am going to hand over to Lord Waldegrave, but Mr Arbuthnot wants to come in briefly.

Q6 Mr James Arbuthnot: Is it not embarrassing that we are spending more on the winter fuel allowance than we are on the Foreign Office?

Mr David Cameron: We are spending the right amount on the Foreign Office to see an expanding global network. I am a great user of our Foreign Office. I travel all over the world flying the flag for British business and trying to encourage investment and exports, and I see in our Foreign Office an amazing asset. I think we have some brilliant diplomats and some fantastic teams around the world. The Foreign Office was relatively well treated by the comprehensive spending review, and I do not see a Foreign Office in retreat at all; I see a Foreign Office in advance and opening new posts. As I say, I think we now have a bigger presence in India than any other European power, we are expanding in China and we are opening embassies in a whole series of new nations. What we spend on the winter fuel allowance is necessary to help keep people warm.

Q7 Lord Waldegrave of North Hill: Prime Minister, forgive me for talking a lot about security and strategy today. It might be just worth seeing that we are using words in the same way roughly. When you talk about "strategy", what do you mean?

Mr David Cameron: To me, strategy is about setting out a very clear series of goals that you want to meet and then making sure that you have sensible means for achieving those

goals. I do not have to look at a bit of paper to tell us what our strategy is: it is to restore Britain's economic strength, it is to tie us to the fast growing parts of the world, it is to refresh and enhance the great alliances that we have, it is to tackle the threats that could threaten our country—and it is to make sure that we do this right across government and it is not just the Foreign Office fighting for us abroad but every single bit of government working together. That is the strategy. Maybe I am too much of a practical chap, but I think that having set the strategy you really want to try to use government to make sure that you are implementing the strategy. Of course in the NSC we discuss strategy, but I want us to determine policy, I want us to agree action, and I want us to check that we have done what we said we were going to do. To me, that is not misusing the NSC and making it too much about implementation rather than strategy; it is the right use. I do not know what you found when you were in government, but I find that the problem all too often is that people love sitting around talking about strategy. Getting people to do things and act and complete on the strategy is often the challenge.

Q8 Lord Waldegrave of North Hill: Thank you. The next word is “security”. In your answer you took security very widely. There is no final answer to this, but you could include practically everything in security, from having a healthy democracy to having good social cohesion, energy policy, agricultural policy—everything can be security if you are not careful. If the strategy is going to work, it has to be some things and not other things, so how would you use the word “security” here?

Mr David Cameron: You have to take a wide definition because our nation's security relies on having strong defences so that we can protect ourselves, but it also means considering every risk to our security: from floods, pandemic diseases, new threats such as volcanic eruptions or space weather—all these things. What we tried to do with the national security secretariat is bring together in one place in the Cabinet Office under Kim's leadership the

teams that do all these things. Security, in the end, is the ability to protect your country, your people and your interests so that they can grow and prosper, and in delivering security you have to deal with every threat, from the biggest to the most unlikely. The point of having this big army in Whitehall is to make sure that we cover all those threats, some of which I am sure we will talk about today.

Q9 Lord Waldegrave of North Hill: So security has a pretty wide definition. Let me give an example. Is tax avoidance by multinational companies part of the national security? Some people might say that it was, and other people might say that it was not.

Mr David Cameron: At the heart of our national security strategy is restoring Britain's economic strength. As I think we are seeing at the moment, if you gain in economic strength, many of the other things that you are trying to do fall into place. If you lose economic strength, you are in a much more difficult situation. If we say that at the heart of our national security is strengthening our economy, if we cannot properly raise taxes from businesses because the technology has changed and they are not playing by the rules, that would, I suppose, be a threat to your security.

Lord Waldegrave of North Hill: I am trying to probe what is not security.

Mr David Cameron: I can see that. You have to have a hierarchy. I am afraid that we have a terrible list of acronyms in the national risk assessment and the national resilience planning assumptions, but the attempt is to try to delineate risks to security, have them all dealt with in one part of Whitehall and make sure that we have a strategy for dealing with all of them.

Q10 Lord Waldegrave of North Hill: I know about "Events, dear boy, events" and all that, but could you give me an example of where people were thinking, "We ought to do X, but that clashes with the strategy"? Is there something that seemed a good idea, but it was decided that it should not be done because it would clash with the strategy?

Mr David Cameron: A good example—although this is more about balancing interests—is the issue of visa discussions. When we decide about visa rules and visa waivers for countries, you have to weigh up the prosperity agenda with the security agenda and make sure that you are making the right decision. In the past, visa decisions were made by the Home Office, prosperity decisions were made by the Treasury, and “never the twain shall meet”. We now discuss and debate them around the table: “Well, we have important economic relations with this country and, frankly, the visa restrictions are getting in the way. Is the national security really being threatened?” We have a good barney about it and we reach a decision. Regarding things that have been proposed that fall absolutely counter to the strategy, I am struggling to think of one. However, the visa issue is not a bad example of where you have a policy issue, which is about which countries get visa preference, and you have a way of properly discussing that in terms of your security strategy.

Q11 Paul Murphy: Prime Minister, we would like to know a little bit more about how the NSC actually works or operates. At the moment, the Committee has some idea of its agendas based on the names of countries—one week you will be dealing with Syria and on another Afghanistan and on another Northern Ireland—but that does not indicate to us, without giving any secrets away, how operational or long-term or strategic those discussions might be. My experience of Cabinet committees is that the Secretary of State comes in, gives his report to the committee, which has a talk about it and that is the end of the committee. Is it more than that?

Mr David Cameron: It is a lot more than that. The National Security Council brings together not only the Ministers—it is normally the Secretary of State and we do not really allow, if we can avoid it, junior Ministers to come in their place, as I think that it is very important that my Cabinet Ministers see this as one of the most important meetings of the whole week—including the Foreign Secretary, Chancellor, Prime Minister and DfID

Secretary with the heads of the intelligence agencies, the head of the JIC and the Chief of the Defence Staff as well as, if necessary, the head of the Metropolitan Police or someone to do with counterterrorism. So you have got the experts in the room as well as the politicians.

The format of the meetings is often a presentation, rather than just a mass of paperwork, and the presentation will often be given by Sir Kim or a leading Foreign Office official, who will set out in front of the committee the choices that we have to make. Sometimes it is very operational. On Afghanistan, for instance, we will want to have a proper look at the draw-down plans that the Ministry of Defence has, and as a committee we will want to work out whether that is the right operational plan for Britain. I think that is very operational, but I think that it is right that the Government collectively decide these things. Sometimes it can be very strategic. We might have a discussion about our relations with the emerging powers, and it will be about how we best go about things, who we should be seeking relations with and how we improve them. Sometimes it can be a meeting where it really helps to have a collective discussion and a decision. For instance, we have this thing called the conflict pool, which brings together money from Defence, the Foreign Office and DfID, and I think that it is good that we sit round the table and say, "Right, we have got this money. How are we going to spend it? Which conflict areas and unstable states should our investment be going into?" We are about to have a conversation about the DfID budget, because obviously it is important that the DfID budget is determined according to aid principles, but I think that it is important to discuss this collectively so that we can see the links between what we are doing on fragile states that we are trying to help fix with the decisions that we are making. That is a long answer, but what I am trying to say is that it is sometimes very operational and sometimes very strategic, but sometimes we genuinely make operational decisions that have an impact across Whitehall.

Q12 Paul Murphy: That is very useful. Regarding the perhaps longer-term or more strategic meetings that you could have, one thing that we have noticed is that the meetings seem to dry up—inevitably, I suppose—in July and then start again some time in October. Is there a case for having one or two meetings in that period to look more widely at things or more discursively, if you like? At the same time, the Committee has been concerned about whether in fact the NSC has sufficient outside expertise to come in and give advice and knowledge. Finally, do you think that having just two staff belonging to the NSC is really enough?

Mr David Cameron: Sorry, how many staff?

Paul Murphy: Two.

Mr David Cameron: No, the NSC is serviced by the national security secretariat, whose staff perhaps Sir Kim can confirm the number of.

Sir Kim Darroch: Two hundred people.

Mr David Cameron: Yes, 200 people. You really feel that the NSC is not just a committee that brings together Whitehall but has a proper team behind it that can operationalise decisions and make them happen.

On outside advice, we have on occasion brought outsiders in, but we have also occasionally had seminars that NSC members attend in order to hear from outside experts. We had a particularly good session on Pakistan and Afghanistan for which some experts came. We had a special NSC in August last year on Syria. For our G8 agenda on tax and transparency and all of that, we had a whole series of experts in to address those issues—people such as Paul Collier.

Regarding meetings over the summer, we have had such meetings. If the criticism is that urgent operational meetings to discuss Syria, Afghanistan and Libya tend to crowd out more thematic discussions, I think that I would probably plead guilty. I think that it is inevitable

that, when Governments have to prioritise and choose, they will talk about the most urgent things. I would say that we have spent more time on the operational emergencies than on blue-sky thinking.

The Chair: We are tight for time, although we are doing reasonably well, so I ask Mr Pritchard to be brief.

Q13 Mark Pritchard: Prime Minister, I support the innovation of the National Security Council. I think that anything that allows sharing of institutional and corporate knowledge within government is a good thing. Prior to the NSC, if there was a strategic decision relating to, say, defence or foreign affairs, it was usually the practice that the Foreign Secretary or the Defence Secretary would make the final decision. Now that we have the NSC, if you are chairing that meeting, can you think of an occasion where there has been a foreign policy or defence decision where the ultimate decision has been taken by you rather than the Secretary of State?

Mr David Cameron: I am not sure that Mrs Thatcher or Tony Blair would necessarily say that they just left defence and foreign policy decisions to their Secretaries of State and only occasionally intervened. I think that the history—I am not a constitutional historian—is more that it often ended up as a bilateral thing between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary or between the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary. The good thing about this innovation is that it is a more collective way of making decisions.

Of course, there are still important decisions made by individual Ministers that come through Number 10 in the normal way. If you look at the SDSR decisions or the decisions over, for instance, how we went about our engagement in Libya or the decisions that we made about Syria, those issues were genuinely discussed around the table with those Ministers, with the expert advice and—this is another point—a better institutionalisation of the legal advice, because the Attorney-General also sits at the table and is there to give his

opinion on these things. If you are asking whether there are times when the NSC has come to a different decision to what the Foreign Secretary or Defence Secretary or even Prime Minister thought when they first walked into the room, yes, it has. That is what collective decision-making is about.

Q14 Mr James Arbuthnot: That is very helpful. We would like to ask a series of questions on how the system actually works in practice. You have mentioned Syria—in a sense, this is a repeat of the question that Lord Waldegrave asked—but how did the national security strategy affect the way that you made decisions and the decisions that you took on Syria?

Mr David Cameron: Obviously, when we drew up the strategy and the SDSR in 2010, we did not have perfect foresight about what was going to happen in the events of the Arab spring and in Syria. I would like to think that, in all those things, the decisions that we have made have been relatively consistent with what is set out in the national security strategy. But the strategy always has to be adaptable and has to be changeable according to circumstances—as I think Mike Tyson said, everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth—so you have to make sure that you can adapt what you have. I would say that the strategy is about Britain engaging in the world in order to protect its interests but also to promote British values such as democracy, freedom of speech and human rights. I would argue that what we did in Libya and the approach that we have been taking in Syria is consistent with that.

Q15 Mr James Arbuthnot: What would you say your strategic goal was in Syria?

Mr David Cameron: I think it is twofold. First of all, we have taken a general view as a National Security Council that, while there are risks in the instability that the Arab spring has thrown up, the advance of what I would call the building blocks of democracy—more open societies and more participatory systems—is a good thing in the long term for security.

There will always be bumps along the road, but that is a good thing and so we should basically be encouraging those sorts of developments.

Q16 Mr James Arbuthnot: What if Parliament had authorised the use of force in August?

Mr David Cameron: Of course, the use of force that was being asked for was linked, purely and simply, to the issue of chemical weapons. In a way, quite a lot of the debate that we had in Parliament ended up being about what happened in Iraq and what some people feared might happen in Syria; it was not really so much a debate about the use of chemical weapons and our response to that. Fortuitously—because, I think, there was a tough global response—Syria has decided to give up its chemical weapons and progress on that is not too bad.

When it comes to approaching Syria, our argument has been that Britain should continue with its very strong position on humanitarian aid, which is set out in the national security strategy, that we continue our support for developments that are positive under the heading of the Arab spring—which I think is consistent with the values in here—and that we take a strong and careful look at how we protect ourselves from the risks of terrorism and extremism, which I think is a growing threat in Syria. I think that we now need to spend a huge amount of time on working out how we best mitigate that.

Q17 Mr James Arbuthnot: On the issue of chemical weapons, presumably you had a strategic goal in mind. What was it? Was it to make Assad give up the chemical weapons, or was it regime change or a message of punishment or what?

Mr David Cameron: The strategic goal that I discussed with President Obama before the vote in the House of Commons was that, having set a red line on chemical weapons use, we could not allow Assad to cross it with impunity. The sort of military action that was envisaged was purely and simply about chemical weapons. We judged—I judged—that it was important not only in the context of Syria but, as I argued in the House of Commons, that

the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons has been of immense value to Britain and countries like Britain for decades. So it was worth while taking a strong stance on this issue not just because of Syria but because of the message that it would send to other dictators around the world if we did not take that stand. As I say, happily, without military action being taken, the desired effect has been achieved, which is that they look as if they are making real progress with giving up their chemical weapons. That was what it was about. It was not about regime change or broadening the conflict; it was purely and simply about that issue.

Mr James Arbuthnot: Lord Harris has further questions.

Q18 Lord Harris of Haringey: My specific question is this. We are all concerned about the implications of people who have fought in Syria returning to this country having honed their skills in combat, acquired new techniques and so on. Is that the sort of issue that is discussed by the National Security Council?

Mr David Cameron: Yes, in quite a lot of detail all the way through our discussions about Syria. Syria has been a really difficult challenge for policymakers all over the western world, because no one wants to get involved in conflicts but, on the other hand, everyone could see right from the start that this was a conflict that was going to drive extremism and instability and cause huge problems in the region. It has been a massive challenge. In every discussion that we have had about Syria, we have also discussed the dangers of British people travelling to Syria, the dangers of extremism and the dangers of terrorists returning home. I think that the signs in Syria are extremely worrying on that front. Not unrelated to that is why, downstairs in the House of Commons, we are debating how we should be able to take away people's citizenship. So we have a cross-government response, which has got to be about securing our own borders, discouraging people from travelling to Syria, working with allies

to deal with the terrorist threat and stopping people coming back et cetera. It is a very big focus for us right now.

Lord Harris of Haringey: Was the Home Secretary's announcement yesterday a decision of the National Security Council?

Mr David Cameron: That was something that we have looked at in the National Security Council. I do not recall whether the decision was actually taken on that specific measure, but she has been empowered by the National Security Council to look at these issues.

Q19 Lord Harris of Haringey: That is very helpful. You said earlier that this is not just about foreign policy and that there is a domestic element to it, but obviously there are other issues. People might wonder why we put £600 million-odd a year into policing counterterrorism and £2 billion or so into the single intelligence account, but at the moment they are having problems with flooding and our expenditure on flood defences last year was £560 million, although it is rising next year. Does the National Security Council get involved in deciding how to allocate resources between the different risks on the national risk register, and if so, how does it reach a conclusion?

Mr David Cameron: That is a very good question. We have a national risk assessment as well as the national risk register, which is a document that we use to try to assess these risks. We discuss and agree it, and try to make sure that we are dealing with risks in an appropriate way. It is very difficult to measure up the amount you spend on one subject with the amount you spend on another against the respective threats. I cannot pretend that there is an exact science to it, but I would say that, because all these risks and the register are brought together in the national security secretariat, at least we have one part of Government that tries to measure all this up in a committee that then looks at it.

Q20 Lord Harris of Haringey: Do you look at those resource choices?

Mr David Cameron: Yes, we do look at the resource choices. The intelligence budget is quite a good example of the National Security Council in action. The budget comes in front of the NSC and it is a moment when politicians can act as inquisitors to the experts about whether we have the balance right between counterterrorism and counterespionage, and whether the balance is right between counterterrorism, policing and our broader intelligence spending. On the question of whether we measure up directly floods on the one hand against the chance of terrorism on the other, while they are all on the national risk register, it is quite difficult to argue that there is a science to working out whether you have put the exact amount of money in the exact place.

Lord Harris of Haringey: Is it a question of a finger in the air and saying £600 million for counterterrorism?

Mr David Cameron: You are bringing it all together. You look at your potential weaknesses and you try to make sure that you are correctly identifying the gaps.

Q21 Lord Harris of Haringey: Has the National Security Council discussed flooding?

Mr David Cameron: We have a sub-committee. We have discussed flooding in the context of the national risk register and the national risk assessment, and we have a specific sub-committee that looks at resilience, threats and hazards. However, flooding has more generally been dealt with through COBRA. It is a mistake to think that the NSC is entirely strategic and COBRA is entirely operational. I use COBRA to address issues where you need a cast that is slightly wider than that of the National Security Council. Flooding is a good example of that.

Q22 Lord Harris of Haringey: Do you have, either as part of that process or as part of the National Security Council, a long-term plan for the impact of climate change on the UK? For example, have you considered which pieces of the critical national infrastructure are most threatened by rising sea levels?

Mr David Cameron: Yes, we have. We have had discussions in the National Security Council about climate change, and we probably need to have another one before the next conference of parties meeting. We also have a piece of work that has been done on our critical infrastructure and the potential threats to it, including from floods and rising sea levels, and that work has been considered. I want to make sure that I am not misleading the Committee in any way, but the critical infrastructure work is co-ordinated by the NSS and is then put up to Ministers.

Q23 Mr James Arbuthnot: Prime Minister, coming back to something you mentioned before about the reorganisation of the Ministry of Defence, this Committee's report last year mentioned the fact that Army 2020 and Future Reserves 2020, which redraws entirely the structure of the Reserves, had not been something that had come before the National Security Council. Why was that, and do you think we were right to be concerned about it?

Mr David Cameron: I never want to criticise the person sitting on my left because he does a fantastic job, but I looked over his evidence because I wanted to check it. I think it is actually true to say that the National Security Council did discuss the Army structure before the announcement was made. I do not want to give the impression that this was a process entirely outside the remit of the National Security Council.

The Chair: To be fair to Sir Kim, I think it was the Secretary of State for Defence who told us that.

Mr David Cameron: Okay, I will blame him instead. You have made a fair point. We announced the SDSR, which was very much done by the NSC. A piece of that which was sorted out later was the overall structure of the Army, but I think I am right in saying that the Reserves work was commissioned by the NSC and the result of that and the future structure of Reserves versus Regulars was discussed by the NSC before the announcement. Have I got that right?

Mr James Arbuthnot: That is good to know.

Mr David Cameron: If you are saying, “Look, you should have done the whole thing in one go at the SDSR”, obviously that would have been neater, but sometimes these things take a few iterations to get absolutely right.

Mr James Arbuthnot: It would be neater, but it is probably impossible.

Q24 Baroness Taylor of Bolton: Prime Minister, we are still on security but with something of a change in emphasis. I refer to risk and public perception. Mention has just been made of flooding. If one asks lots of people what they think is the biggest risk we face today, they would say that it is flooding. When we have had terrorist incidents, the response was about those. In your strategy you outline the heading of economic benefit, something that we would all agree with, but who is responsible for engaging the public so that their perception of risk is not just a knee-jerk reaction to the latest problem? When someone challenges what the Government are doing, are you able to explain your position? You have talked about Syria and you pointed out that even the debate in the House focused mainly on Iraq. How do you deal with that? Who in Government is responsible for putting across the message about the proper perception of risk?

Mr David Cameron: I hope that, by having a National Security Council, people can see that these risks are being looked at as a whole and in the round, and in the end it falls to the Prime Minister to try and explain how we look at risks and the steps we take in trying to keep the country safe. Our scientists can probably help by informing the debate about risks and probabilities. Your Committee is helping because you are looking at our strategy and asking, “Have you given this enough consideration?” and “Have you looked at those risks?”. That is not a great answer, but in the end we must have a strategy and explain what it is. The Prime Minister has to front it up and the scientists can help by explaining some of the probabilities and risks. That is probably the best you can do.

Coming back to the question of flooding versus terrorism, people want to know that we are doing everything possible to protect dwellings from flooding, that we have a forward investment programme and so on, but I think they understand that there are severe weather events that can affect the country. You do everything you can to mitigate against them, but in the end you cannot mitigate against every single thing. However, when it comes to appalling terrorist events which can be so indiscriminate and pose such huge risks, people just want to know that you are doing everything possible to prevent them happening in the first place.

Q25 Baroness Taylor of Bolton: Do you think that the recent problems we have seen around the Snowden revelations and the way they have been publicised and even lauded by some people are actually undermining public confidence in our security agencies? If so, who is responsible for defending the agencies and explaining the position, thus bringing some perspective to these difficult discussions?

Mr David Cameron: First of all, in response to Snowden, what we have to do is make sure that we are confident that the governance procedures for the intelligence services are robust through the Intelligence and Security Committee, through the Intelligence Service Commissioners ensuring that things happen under the law, and through the role of Ministers. I keep asking myself whether we have a good system in place and I think we have, although I do not rule out trying to improve it. On whether Snowden has dented public confidence in the work of the security services, I do not know the answer to that question because I have not seen the opinion polling. My sense, however, is that the public reaction as opposed to some of the media reaction is this: "We have intelligence and security services because it is a dangerous world and there are bad people who want to do terrible things to us. We should support the intelligence services in the work they do". What I have felt in terms of people's reactions is that they are in fact pretty robust.

Who is responsible for defending the security services and explaining what they do? I think that I have a responsibility. I am the Minister for the security services and I feel I have a responsibility to stand up for them and thank them publicly because they cannot be thanked as the other emergency services are. I need to try to explain what they do and I have done some of that. They are often the best spokespeople for themselves. Their appearance in front of the parliamentary Committee recently was excellent. The speech made by the head of the security services was a very good summary of the threats we face. While they have to focus on the day job—I do not want them to make speeches every week—they can help to set the agenda and explain what they do perhaps better than anyone.

Q26 Baroness Taylor of Bolton: I come to my final question. Is there a danger of a lack of support for what a Government might feel it is essential to do in certain circumstances? Could public support be undermined unless there is a more robust defence and explanation of what could be needed? Should that not be part of your planning when you talk about your strategy? The strategy should not just be about economic benefits, but about explaining the position in a broader way.

Mr David Cameron: That is a very fair point. If you are asking whether the three of us—the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary who is responsible for two of the intelligence agencies, and the Home Secretary who is responsible for another one—should do more to explain and defend the agencies and thus give people a sense of why their work is so important, then yes, I agree with that. We should do more. I am very worried about the damage that Snowden has done to our security and I would encourage the newspapers that are endlessly dallying in this to think before they act because we are in severe danger of making ourselves less safe as a result. But I think that the public reaction, as I judge it, has not been one of shock-horror; it has been much more along the lines of, “The intelligence agencies carry out intelligence work. Good”.

Q27 The Chair: With hindsight, Prime Minister, is there anything you think the NSC has missed?

Mr David Cameron: I think there are some specific subjects of quite a technical nature that organisations like yours and others have drawn to our attention. I am not a scientist with knowledge of EMPs and space weather. It would have been useful to have been able to get politicians to challenge the officials and the machinery with questions like, “Have we got this covered and that covered?”. We need to go faster with work on examining Whitehall’s plans, whether they concern the DfID budget or the conflict pool—can we do more to make the organisation really drive policy rather than just strategy? I think that we should probably do more on that.

In terms of missing things, I think that there are lots of things that the pundits, politicians and experts have not foreseen in the development of global affairs. That is why, yes, you must have a strategy, but you must also recognise that you need to adapt it to changing circumstances.

Q28 The Chair: One thing that we missed in the original national security strategy, because we are about to move on the next one, was the question of the Americans announcing their pivot to Asia, which has enormous strategic consequences. That was not touched on at all in the security strategy.

Mr David Cameron: When was the great Obama pivot speech? I think I am right in saying that it was in 2010 or 2011? The first thing I would say is that we are doing our own pivot. If you look at the amount of Foreign Office activity in south-east Asia—I mentioned the ASEAN countries—and what we are doing in China and India, there is real evidence that William is changing that department and focusing it on high-growth emerging powers and all the rest of it. We have not mentioned our Gulf strategy, which is actually quite a big breakthrough too, to recognise that there is a whole set of countries with which we have

enormous amounts of history, very strong relationships and very strong defence relationships, and we should really try to build on those relationships. So I think we are doing our own pivoting.

If I had a wish to replay it all, the things that the SDSR did such as moving us away from battle tanks in western Europe towards flexible, deployable future technologies, cyber, drones and the rest of it, I wish we had done more of and faster. I suppose that I would apply that to the foreign policy side as well. On the prosperity/trade/diplomacy agenda, which is now being driven very hard across government, I would have like to have done even more even sooner, because I think it will be part of our future national success if we can massively increase exports to China and investment from China. If we can link up with the fastest growing countries, that is going to be a big part of Britain's future success story. You will remember from being Foreign Secretary trying to get the tanker of Whitehall to move. You always think afterwards, "I wish I had pushed it harder and faster".

The Chair: Thank you. We are going to move on now to the preparation for the next national security strategy.

Q29 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Thank you very much, Chair. When Sir Peter Ricketts was in the role, he told us that we would take two years to prepare a new strategy. Since then, there has been a staff cut of 25%. The work on the strategy has not started, so was he wrong and can you tell us when it will start, how long it will take, and when it will be ready?

Mr David Cameron: The work is now beginning on the national security strategy, and more particularly on the SDSR, because we need to start planning the next SDSR now. You can argue for ever about how long these things take, but I am so keen on implementing what we have said we are going to do that I put more weight on that. As I say, my fear is that if you move faster on writing new strategies, all the people who are trying to deliver what we need in Libya and Syria will come off that and start writing strategies again.

Q30 Sir Malcolm Bruce: But will it be fundamentally different, or will it follow the same model? Am I right in assuming that it will not be finished until the next Government are in place?

Mr David Cameron: Which one—the NSS and the SDSR both?

Sir Malcolm Bruce: The NSS, certainly.

Mr David Cameron: I think that is right. I think they will span the period of the next election. We should be starting now. The national security strategy needs a refresh. I do not think it will be a complete overhaul. As I have hinted to Margaret, if I am responsible for its eventual outcome I think it will have that trade/prosperity agenda perhaps even more strongly at its heart, but I would not expect a huge change in either the national security strategy or, indeed, the SDSR. We took the very difficult decision in the SDSR to have a gap in carrier capacity, and the exciting thing as we come into the next SDSR is that that gap is going to come to an end and we are going to have a fantastic new aircraft carrier sailing out on to the high seas pretty soon.

Sir Malcolm Bruce: With planes.

Mr David Cameron: With planes on them, and people in them.

Q31 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Between the three of us on this panel, can we look at some of the specific future things? In particular, we have talked about the pivot for America, but what about the European Union? We will not know in the next strategy whether the UK will be a member of the European Union or not, yet it is absolutely central to most of our strategic decisions. Will the implications of being in or out be spelt out? Indeed, specifically, how will it change if the UK ceases to be a member of the European Union?

Mr David Cameron: My strategy, which is linked in with the national security strategy, is that we secure for Britain a reform in the European Union and a referendum. I want to recommend that we remain part of a reformed European Union, and I plan on the basis of

success rather than on the basis of anything else. This goes to the broader point that we have not dealt with European issues in the National Security Council; we have dealt with them elsewhere in government. I accept that this has important implications for the UK, but, as I say, I think we should plan on the basis of what we want to achieve.

Q32 Sir Malcolm Bruce: Yes, but it is a democratic vote, and if people are going to vote the other way despite your recommendation, it has strategic implications. We have a vote this year on Scottish independence, so the Government have produced a series of papers setting out their case, basically as to why the UK is better together. Would you not do the same thing for the European Union?

Mr David Cameron: We have looked at the various areas with the balance of competences review, but once the negotiation is complete there will then be a period before an “in or out” referendum where the two sides in that debate can set out their arguments. As you know, we are in a coalition Government. The coalition partners have slightly different views about Europe. My judgment is that if we had used the NSC to debate and discuss Europe issues, we would have had quite a lot of Second Reading debates in the NSC, as it were, rather than what I want, which is agreeing a strategy and the actions necessary to deliver it. I think it has been better to keep Europe out of the NSC.

Q33 Sir Malcolm Bruce: All right. There is another specific, and I will be very quick about this. We heard in the past about our food security that we are essentially about three days away from a food crisis at any one time, because most of our food is in transit. We found that out with the truck drivers’ strike. Do you believe that you have addressed enough how some disruption of our communications could lead to a food crisis and how it would be responded to? Is that central to the security strategy, because clearly food shortages could leave the country in a very severe crisis in a very short space of time?

Mr David Cameron: We have had a review of government plans for handling threats to a resilience of food supplies. Oliver Letwin carried out a 2013 review of emergency planning, and it concluded that there was relatively good resilience in the UK food supply chain. We also carried out a UK food security assessment in 2010, so it is part of our critical national infrastructure plan. You are definitely right that as a country that imports food and that has a lot of just-in-time delivery and all the rest of it, dislocation, whether in the form of volcanic ash from Iceland, a truck drivers' strike or what have you, impacts those things relatively quickly. I am satisfied that we have examined the issues, but that is not to say that you do not get effects when infrastructure is threatened.

Q34 Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: Prime Minister, in the annual report on the NSS and the SDSR, which was published last December, there was a paragraph that started with the sentence, "It has been a Government priority to introduce a programme to preserve the ability of the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies to have the access they require to communications data". It goes on and ends, "Changes to the existing legislative framework may be required to maintain these vital capabilities". I understand that the Interception Commissioner Sir Anthony May is reviewing the fitness of our legislation and will no doubt report to you, but I wondered whether, in view of the maelstrom that has hit us all from Edward Snowden's leaked material, there was anything you could share with us today to comment on the position of the United Kingdom in the light of what was said in this report.

Mr David Cameron: First of all, I agree with the report that over time we are going to have to modernise the legislative framework and practice when it comes to dealing with communications data. It is obviously politically a quite a contentious topic. I am not sure that we will make progress on it in the coming months in terms of legislation. There may be some things short of legislation that we can do, but we politicians, police chiefs, the

intelligence services have a role in explaining what this is all about. While I will not go back to what I said earlier, I do not think that Snowden has had an enormous public impact, although it inevitably raises questions such as, “Who has access to my data and why?”, but I am absolutely convinced that proper rules for communications data are essential, and I do not think that we have got across to people yet the absolute basics of this, which are that in most of the serious crimes, such as child abductions, communications data—about who called who and when and where the telephone was at the time, not the content of the call—are absolutely vital. We need the police chiefs, the investigators and the politicians to explain what this is about. I love watching crime dramas on television, as I should probably stop telling people. There is hardly a crime drama where a crime is solved without using the data of a mobile communications device. That is not about the content. The problem that we have to explain to people is that as you move from a world of people having fixed telephones to mobile phones, Skype, phones on the internet and all that, if we do not modernise the practice and the law, over time we will have the communications data to solve these horrible crimes only on a shrinking proportion of the total use of devices. That is a real problem for keeping people safe.

I do not know whether that was the clearest explanation I could give, but we have to make this explanation very clear, really get it out to people and then build, perhaps at the start of the next Parliament, a cross-party case for sensible legislation to deal with this issue. I think it is possible, but it will take a lot of work by politicians across parties to try to take the civil liberties concerns seriously but to get them in proportion so that we can then make some progress.

Q35 Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: Thank you, Prime Minister. I think we would all agree with that, and I think it follows on very well from what Lady Taylor raised. Perhaps the

NSC could look at how to get over to the general public what you have said about the difference between data and content, and so on and so forth.

Mr David Cameron: The best attempt I have seen so far was by one or two police chiefs, who wrote some articles for newspapers explaining just how much is involved in solving child abduction cases, murders and other serious crimes. I absolutely see in my work with the security services how vital it is in preventing terrorist attacks. I feel passionately about this, because I feel that the first responsibility of my job is to help to keep people safe. The fact that it is used in so much crime is a very straightforward and understandable thing that people can get hold of.

Q36 Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale: Yes, thank you. I want to ask you about something else. Prime Minister, we all understand the desirability of foreign investment for the good of our economy and so on, but has the NSC looked closely enough at the issue of foreign ownership of parts of our critical infrastructure. I am thinking of energy, nuclear power, waste, water and so on. Are you confident that there is no reason to be concerned about whether clearer red lines should be drawn in foreign ownership?

Mr David Cameron: We do have a proper system in place for examining whether inward investments into things like infrastructure are in our national interest, but—Sir Kim and I were discussing this earlier—there is going to be a proper NSC consideration of this because we have slightly different procedures for some slightly different parts of our infrastructure, and it would be good to have a proper collective discussion about whether we are happy when it comes to telecoms, electricity networks, gas networks and what have you that we have all the rules that we need in place. So we will do that. When we have had a specific issue such as the Huawei issue, we have properly examined and responded to the ISC report.

I would not underplay, though, Britain saying to the world that we welcome inward investment, and inward investment into key parts of the infrastructure. The fact that the Chinese are going to be investing in Hinkley Point power station is, I think, a good thing. It means that we can free up more of our own capital to spend on roads, railways and other things. It is also a very good message for Britain going around the world that we are not embarrassed that Tata owns Jaguar Land Rover, that we are delighted that Indian capital is rebuilding the British car industry combined with British craftsmanship, and that we are beating the world. We are delighted that the Chinese are going to own part of Thames Water and are investing in Heathrow. It is one of our calling cards that we are an open economy that encourages people to invest. So yes, by all means let us check that if there were security issues we could act properly and appropriately, and we will do, but do not let us lose our position as a great open economy.

I was very struck by what Wanda, one of the large Chinese investors, said last week: that America is more open than Europe but Britain is best of all. I thought that was a good endorsement.

Q37 Lord Sterling of Plaistow: Prime Minister, I was very glad when you were saying that you wished that you could spend even more time and effort on Asia. It is worth remembering that, with the Commonwealth, some of us have been involved in Asia for well over 200 to 300 years. With a history of trade in this country, we were there before the Americans even turned up. I just wanted to get your views on the background to that, because Mr Gates, the former Defence Secretary in America, made a comment the other day that caused quite a lot of comment. Could I put this to you: that to ensure global reach in support of our long-term and historic trade and security interests, it is particularly important, together with fulfilling our part of a crucial relationship with the United States Navy, to guarantee that the Royal Navy has high-end capability with the necessary number

and mix of ships? You stated on 31 January 2013, Prime Minister, that your “strong view” was that the defence budget will require “year-on-year real-terms growth ... in the years beyond 2015”, and that as a leading member of NATO, we are “fully committed” to no less than 2% of our GDP for our defence budget. I hope you are able to confirm that this is still very, very much your view and intention, and that it will be emphasised at the NATO conference this September.

Mr David Cameron: I do not resile from what I said about the importance of our defence budget and what that should mean for the future. Where I slightly take issue with former Secretary Gates is that the equipment programme for our Royal Navy is an absolutely full spectrum programme. The two carriers are under construction; the Type 45 destroyers, among the most modern and effective warships anywhere in the world, are coming into action. We have the future frigate programme and hunter-killer submarines increasingly rolling off the stocks in Barrow. We have the pledge to renew the Trident submarines, and obviously the immense ability of the Royal Marines. I think that the Navy has a very bright future with a full spectrum capability from the nuclear deterrent at one end to smaller vessels right at the other end. I do not accept that we are shrinking the Navy or that it does not have full spectrum capability, because absolutely it has that.

I agree completely with what you have said about Asia. We have seen a big increase in our exports to China, for instance, but we still represent only represent 1% of Chinese imports. If we could get to 2%, that would be great for us without there being a huge change.

Q38 Lord Sterling of Plaistow: To achieve a little more flexibility, Prime Minister, there are some who suggest that having more Type 26 frigates would help us in the global reach you are talking about. They would be more than useful.

Mr David Cameron: I have this debate with the Navy all the time. Clearly we have fewer but more expensive ships. The Type 45s are close to £1 billion each. They are phenomenally

expensive but, as I have said, they are our most modern and effective ships. One of our Type 45s is making a tour of the Far East at the moment and is getting quite a lot of attention. Obviously there is a discussion to be had about whether there is a role for other sorts of vessels and whether we should be building them as well. What is the trade-off on these multi-purpose ships that can do everything from drug interdiction in the Caribbean right through to carrier escorts and complex warfare? Is it right to do that or should you try to have more ships carrying out different tasks? I think that this is a debate which will continue, but until now the answer has been to have the multi-role ships that can do everything.

Q39 Lord Sterling of Plaistow: Thank you. Perhaps I can switch to another subject which I feel must be very much the role of the NSC, and that is our energy policy. It seems to us that there are two aspects to it—the shorter-term policy and the longer-term policy. On the longer-term policy overall, would I be right in saying that the only real energy security strategy is set out in the Department of Energy and Climate Change document, which obviously leaves out foreign policy, planning and a range of other issues and, frankly, looking 50 or 100 years ahead? Is that not something which ought to be at the top of the agenda when thinking about our needs in the years to come? I shall come back to the short term in a moment.

Mr David Cameron: Clearly, energy security is vital. I talked earlier with Lord Waldegrave about how to define security. Clearly, energy security and the ability to power the economy, homes and businesses are absolutely key aspects of security and are taken seriously by the National Security Council. We have discussed this and taken papers. I would argue that we have a good strategy in place. We are renewing our nuclear capability with Hinkley Point and Wylfa to follow. We have set out a clear strategy so that everyone knows what the rules and the costs are for investing in renewables. We are also moving ahead not just with new gas plants as appropriate, but also with onshore shale gas, which I think could be a major

industry for Britain in the future. I think that we have a long-term plan and we have to make sure that every piece of it is put in place.

Q40 Lord Sterling of Plaistow: I think that our being an island does put us in a different position over the long term. We are reliant on so much that must come in from overseas.

Mr David Cameron: When you look at our energy penetration of imports compared with other countries, because of North Sea oil we have a relatively good record. We have the interconnector with France and there is the potential of an interconnector with Norway. If we make the most of shale gas then, as North Sea gas runs down, we will have a new national resource. So when I look at our position in Europe and consider how reliant we are on imports, I think that we are in a relatively secure position. We must keep it up, and that is why our relationship with Qatar and others in terms of imported gas is important, as is our relationship with Norway. We must make sure that we get a decent contribution from renewables and we must make the nuclear programme work. We must not slip up on all that.

Q41 Lord Sterling of Plaistow: Can I bring up what I think is a serious problem? We believe that, as we speak, our country is facing a potentially serious crisis of supply because of competitors. Are you prepared to set aside the targets in the Climate Change Act 2008 in order to get through this period? If you are unable to act unilaterally, would you openly seek a consensus among the major EU economies for a moratorium on the 2020 commitments? Prime Minister, what I would like to ask you in connection with that is this: do you accept in retrospect that the targets, which although they were set by the former Government have been endorsed by you, were a huge mistake that threatens to severely damage the UK's growth prospects in the years to come, as indeed they are already doing in Europe?

The Chair: Before you answer that question, Prime Minister, perhaps I can just say that this is a subject of interest and one that we have discussed, but the view that Lord Sterling has just expressed may not be shared by everyone on the Committee.

Mr David Cameron: Of course. There are two questions here, the first of which is whether the Climate Change Act framework can work for us in the long term. My answer to that is yes, it can. We have set these carbon budgets and we have to make sure that they are achievable and deliverable. I support the Climate Change Act and I think that we can continue to make it work. The second question concerned the European targets, which I think we are capable of meeting. If you go back over the history and argue whether it was right to have as many specific targets, you might come to a different answer and, indeed, the EU is reviewing at the moment whether those specific targets are correct. The question I ask—I got the energy industries, the National Grid, Ofgem and everyone else around the Cabinet table so that I could eyeball them and check absolutely that our situation is robust—is this: are we content that, with the rules and everything else we have in place, we are energy secure over the short, medium and long term, or are there any changes that we need to make in terms of decommissioning coal plants, bringing on gas more quickly or anything else? The answer I got was that the rules, regulations and capacity mechanisms are in place so that we have the energy security we need. I have answered your question because it is very important, but I do not think that either the Climate Change Act or our own situation, while clearly we need to be concerned about them, are areas where we need to make major changes.

Q42 Lord Sterling of Plaistow: Taking account of what the Chair has rightly pointed out, I should say that this is not just my view, but that of Dr Fatih Birol, the head of the Paris-based International Energy Agency. He was in London the other day and we discussed

the subject of European competitiveness, which is one that will be of deep and critical concern over the coming years.

Mr David Cameron: The countries of the European Union will debate this issue at the March Council. The EU has got to think very carefully about international competitiveness and energy prices. We ought to be comparing, for instance, our position with that of the United States, which now has 10,000 shale gas wells, while in Europe we have around 100. I agree completely that we need to think about the competitiveness picture, but that does not mean throwing out of the window the concern about carbon emissions reduction. What it means is completing the energy single market in Europe, which would be a very good thing. It means making sure that we make the most of shale gas. It means making sure that as well as being committed to green energy, we are committed to cheap green energy, so that we keep on driving down the price of these new technologies. If we do all those things, we can be green and competitive.

Q43 The Chair: We are almost out of time. Before Mr Pritchard comes in briefly, I want to take you back for a moment to something you said about the maritime effort and the Navy. Perhaps I may remind you of what the Chief of the Defence Staff said recently, which was to the effect that unless we change our current course, we may have exquisite equipment but not enough people to staff it. He said that the Royal Navy in particular was perilously close to its critical mass. I applaud what you have said about the Navy, but I would like you to respond to this point.

Mr David Cameron: To be fair to the CDS, I think what he said was that if spending reductions went further, there would be a danger of what he called “hollowing out”. I do not think he actually said that we were in danger of that happening with what we have. The point I would make is this. In the SDSR we made decisions with the chiefs of staff around the table that were about the future capabilities of the UK. A very strong argument was made,

which I agree with, that we need a Navy that is full spectrum, one that has everything from the new hunter-killer submarines to the Type 45s to the future frigates and everything else. That was a real priority. We have taken on the gap in carrier capability, which we will refresh with the new carriers, and that is incredibly important. Obviously we have to do all we can on value for money and efficiency, but if we do that, I see no reason why we will not be able properly to run and crew these excellent assets. Also, I think that all this will encourage people to join the Navy. The absolutely world-beating, first-class equipment that is coming out of our shipyards at the moment is a terrific advert that will encourage people to join up.

Mr James Arbuthnot: I applaud what you have just said about the gap being filled in by new carriers.

Q44 Mark Pritchard: Going back to Sir Malcolm's earlier question about Scotland—this is a question I put to Sir Peter Ricketts prior to his departure for Paris and to Sir John Sawers at an open public meeting—if the separatists get their way and break Scotland off from the United Kingdom, what are the national security implications of that? I think you have stated publicly, and indeed in Edinburgh, some of those implications, but I wonder whether you could elaborate a little more.

Mr David Cameron: In a nutshell, I profoundly believe that we are more secure together, as well as more prosperous and so on. Scotland makes an enormous contribution to the UK's defence. I shall be making a speech about that soon. It is important that everyone in the rest of the United Kingdom emphasises how much we benefit from Scotland staying in the United Kingdom. That is an argument I feel very passionately about.

Q45 The Chair: We are very grateful to you, Prime Minister. We have been pretty disciplined so we have got through most of what we wanted to do. I think you will have gathered that we are anxious. There is a lot that is good in the national security strategy, but

we are anxious that the next one should be even better, and we want to contribute to it. One point that we have made repeatedly is how much we would like to see it draw on outside experts who have other views. That is without any disrespect to the excellent people we have in Whitehall. A couple of times it has been suggested that the Government might consult this Committee. We hope very much that they will, and we will do our best to be co-operative and helpful.

Mr David Cameron: We are very keen to hear the views of others. In the end the Government have to own this document and so it must reflect our collective view but, frankly, the more input and identification of gaps and weaknesses by this Committee, the better.

The Chair: That is very kind of you. Thank you very much indeed. The meeting is now adjourned.