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1. Does the UK have the equipment, personnel, infrastructure and skills to implement the military strategy set out in the SDSR?

As things currently stand, the UK does not have sufficient resources to meet the military strategy. To its credit, SDSR goes part of the way in catching up. It invests in hard capabilities to close the gap, in particular maritime reconnaissance, intelligence and cyber, anti-submarine and fast jet capability.

There remain serious deficiencies in terms of manpower, especially in the Royal Navy. If the security environment continues to deteriorate, there are also likely to be difficulties with aligning a stretched navy with the ambitious global role that SDSR envisages.

As scenario simulation and 'red teaming' ought to examine, a reduced escort fleet and insufficient personnel means that, in an age of access and area denial where precision anti-ship munitions and sensors enable states to raise the costs on surface fleets, the UK would struggle to mount an opposed landing or to protect its (coming) carriers without thinning out the rest of its fleet. Limitations on scale, with a reduced fleet, mean that there is a lack of redundancy, which will probably mean we cannot afford to make mistakes. As things stand, the Royal Navy could become a risk-averse force, fielding a limited number of exquisite capabilities that it dare not gamble with.

2. The National Security Strategy states that "our Armed Forces increase our influence in regions that matter to us." What do our partners and competitors actually think of the current scale and capabilities of the UK Armed Forces?

With only access to open source evidence, I would say that in general, observers reckon that Britain's investments in capabilities represent a serious effort to match means and ends and reassert itself as a major power. At the same time, they clearly recognise that the UK's aspirations still exceed the scale of its material strength, and that it remains essentially a 'coalition' actor that would struggle to mount independent action.

This question raises two difficulties. Firstly, SDSR is a very 'globalist' document, which classifies almost every region as strategically consequential. This flows from an unexamined assumption that globalisation means that 'everything matters' and is interconnected, making it hard to rank interests and priorities. Which regions matter more or less? It is unclear.

Secondly, SDSR 2015, like SDSR 2010, tends to conflate 'inputs' (or activities) with 'outputs' (or outcomes/effects). The claim that Armed Forces increase influence in regions may or may not be sound. But it is made more as an article of faith, when a prudent review ought to measure and test these kinds of propositions. There ought to be 'metrics' formulated by which these kinds of claims can be judged.

One method may be to track the ability of Britain to persuade states in 'vital regions' (say, Western Europe) to do what it wants, and compare that with the relative level of defence investment. Is Britain's influence in France, an important ally, now greater or less than it was over the past 15 years? Has Britain's commitment to 2% defence spending actually had any visible effect on its capacity to influence Turkey, a NATO partner that engages many of Britain's security interests?

More broadly, SDSR describes Britain as an effective 'soft power', but how can this be measured? One way is through the extent of cooperation from allies and partners who have been exposed to British influence (the BBC, trade, Chevening Fellowships, etc), and whether increasing exposure correlates with greater influence. If the claim has any substance, we would expect to see a pattern.

This poses a further problem, about the purpose of the NSS and SDSR: is it primarily a 'signalling' document, designed to communicate a particular vision about Britain's global role? Or is it genuinely a reassessment of the alignment of its power and its commitments? The assumption that the 'means' or instruments of power necessarily generate desired effects lurks in the document, and deserves further testing.

3. On the face of it, Joint Force 2025 would give the UK a true expeditionary capability. Why might the UK require such a capability?

The Joint Force 2025 does confer an expeditionary capability. Expeditionary capabilities, though, take different forms. The one envisaged in Joint Force 2025 does not seem to be optimised for sustained, costly armed nation-building projects or costly counterinsurgency missions. It is more geared towards warfighting, at high scale and tempo, with a light logistical footprint.

The UK requires the ability to project power over land because it has interests, sometimes first-order, sometimes real though limited, that are worth protecting and advancing over land. To take only two dangerous scenarios today, the possible subversion of NATO's eastern flank by proxy forces backed up by Russian forces, and the unravelling of Afghanistan with the potential spillover effects into nuclear Pakistan. Operating in both environments to uphold the status quo would require the ability to hold, or recapture ground.

5. **The NSS states that "The UK's independent nuclear deterrent will remain essential to our security today, and for as long as the global situation demands." [That statement has recently been subject to political challenge for the first time in a generation.] Are there sound strategic arguments for re-examining the case for nuclear deterrence?**

There are arguments for re-examining the case for nuclear deterrence in every generation. It is a significant and costly investment that carries opportunity costs elsewhere. Britain is a democracy, so it is right and proper for dissenting voices against what are genocidal weapons being heard, for those who believe we should disarm and trust in American extended deterrence, and for those who believe such weapons are irrelevant in the twenty first century environment.

The case for a continued British nuclear deterrent remains compelling, however. Nuclear technology and know-how cannot be finally abolished: the nuclear revolution cannot be undone. We also live in a 'recursive' world, where states react to one another's moves. Disarmament by major powers would present opportunities to 'the other guy.' A graver threat that possession by multiple states is of one predatory state or actor having a nuclear monopoly, and going undeterred. The world can be thankful that the last time the world was pre-nuclear, it was not Adolf Hitler but President Harry Truman who was the first ruler to acquire the bomb.

Reliance on American extended deterrence would threaten the credibility of the threat of retaliation. NATO's collective deterrence draws strength from the 'layers' of nuclear states, so that there are multiple centres of decision that complicate the calculations of an aggressor.

Major powers like Britain should bear responsibility for possessing and controlling a minimal stockpile of weapons with a secure second-strike capability, while doing everything possible to mitigate against the risk of accident, miscalculation or inadvertent escalation.