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Letters to the Editor

Strategic thinking

Sir, "Government is seizing up" admits a very senior insider. Whitehall should be doing so much better. It is the same old story.

The Government has to be much more strategic. For whatever reason, it does not do strategy. It clearly does not understand it. It needs to do much more than set deficit reduction as the overriding purpose and manage all other business on the basis of each department's current "worry and do" lists. Good discussion among the gang of four and in the National Security Council is no substitute for a capstone doctrine and practice that ties together all major national activity within an approach that focuses on the long term and the most important issues. Whitehall is repeatedly caught out by avoidable disasters because the latest orthodox view takes all. A year ago we urged the appointment of a senior Cabinet minister for national security and strategy. Someone who owned the collective and long-term national interests. We also recommended that a former Cabinet heavyweight be appointed as a "go anywhere, ask any question" independent stress-tester. We repeat these ideas knowing that their implementation would potentially have prevented some recent disasters, including the riots and the Border Agency debacle. One looming disaster is open global markets. Who is looking after our resilience if protectionism takes root? We are the single most vulnerable nation in this eventuality.

Brigadier Nigel Hall;
General Tim Cross;
Brett Lovegrove, former head of
counter-terrorism, City of London
Police;
Cat Tully, formerly Prime
Minister's Strategy Unit