

BRITAIN'S STRATEGIC DEFENCE AND SECURITY REVIEW General Tim Cross,
Brigadier Nigel Hall, RECENTLY RETIRED FROM THE BRITISH ARMY

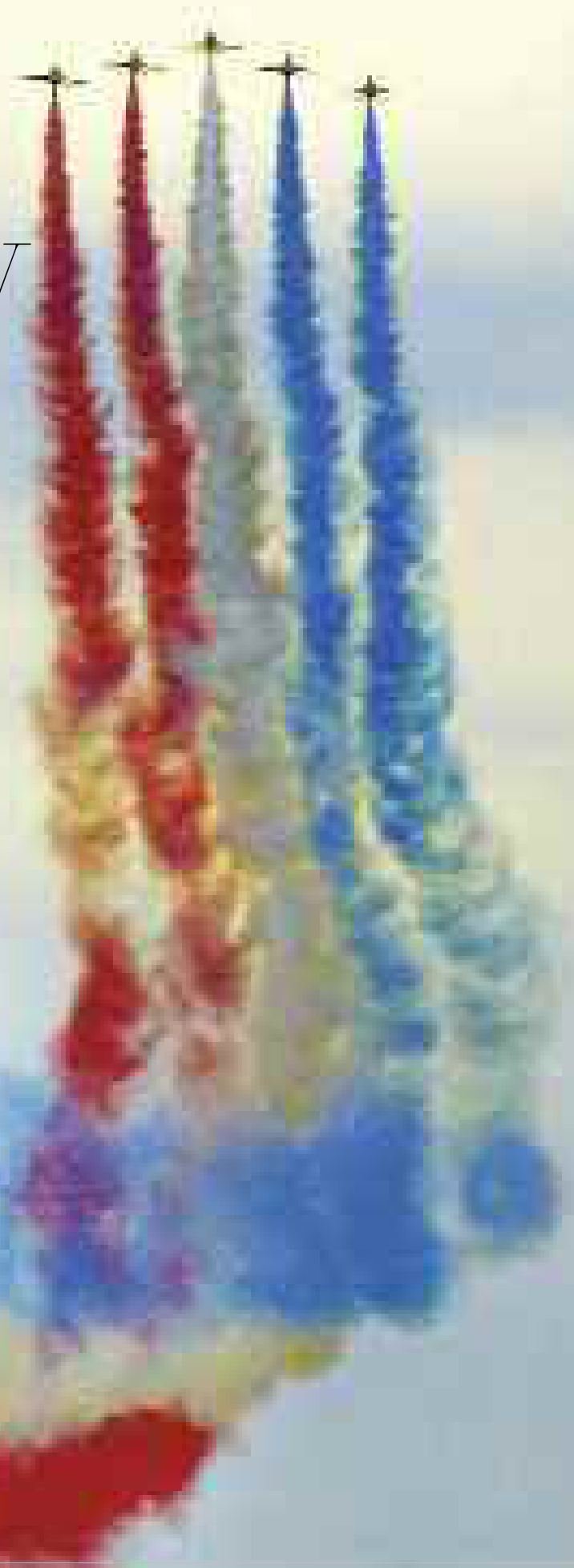
Fixing Security Failure

The world is rapidly becoming more dangerous, complex, and interconnected. Australia and America recently responded by increasing defence spending and enhancing their overall security effort. In Britain, the outcome will be different, and London's failure to manage its wars and defence and security budgets effectively raises profound questions about its ability to deliver the right outcome in the current Strategic Defence and Security Review.

CLIMATE CHANGE; BURGEONING POPULATION growth; competition for essential resources including energy; food and water; cyber and electronic fraud; and economic collapse elsewhere, now converge with familiar natural disasters and man-made security risks and wars to produce a much wider span of threats.

The new British coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats is correct to make the Strategic Defence and Security Review and its implementation its second priority after economic recovery. But has it grasped how much it has to change the central bureaucracy and decision-making machinery?

The 'right' Review must result in a radical shift of mindsets, bureaucratic culture, and practices which are mainly focussed on defence and the Ministry of Defence. They need to move towards a much broader whole-government approach.



The country needs much better risk and situation awareness, more enhanced scientific and research support, a savvier balancing of soft – non-military – and hard, lethal military power and resources, and significantly more agility and adaptability across government departments, decision-making bodies and force structures.

The public is getting used to the armed forces working closely with police, diplomats and development people, but a much broader cooperative effort must now be fashioned across sectors, government departments and civil society to meet the new challenges. Energy, food, climate, education personnel, non-governmental organisations and the media will all have increasingly important roles and influence.

This new radically different security context demands the most rigorous Review and then a determined implementation of uncomfortable new approaches and priorities. A wider acceptance of the broader view of security threats has to shift the reluctant parts of the machinery from paying lip service to committed engagement.

LOOKS RIGHT

There is plenty to suggest the new coalition government understands this. One of its first acts was to create a National Security Council consisting of the crucial senior cabinet ministers, with flexible attendance from a broader range of experts beyond to deliver much better coordinated top level direction and priorities across all departments. Likewise, government talk of wide consultation and radical thinking looks and sounds right.

However, there is a real danger that a public relations exercise will hide an outcome that has already largely been determined. Rather than a truly policy-led review as claimed, the Review could become an exercise in reduction and cuts to fit the new radical review of government spending. This is likely to see defence cut by around ten to twenty percent, with some other departments facing thirty percent reductions. This would be a Review merely shaped, rather than led, by policy and considerations of Britain's place and ambitions in the world.

AGILE GOVERNMENT

If central government is to change, and succeed in following through on the right Review, a host of major changes must give operational reality to the new concept of comprehensive security. The Review must fit into a broader new approach that emphasises agility across the whole government machine.

Britain cannot afford to do everything, and nowadays the right priorities at the beginning of the

year may turn out to be wrong only months later. The civil service must be able rapidly to shift some of its best brains and funding between departments in a way previously achievable only in wartime.

A big-hitting senior cabinet minister, probably Foreign Secretary William Hague, should therefore take control of the Review and its implementation on behalf of the prime minister and National Security Council. An external commission should then help review leadership at Secretary of State, senior military and senior civil service official levels, assessing the decision making processes applied since the 1982 Falklands war. The lessons produced by a body of eminent radical thinkers independent of the establishment will be essential to balance in-house strategic judgements that have all too often been seriously flawed since September 11 2001.

An all-disciplines national research centre should be established, closely linked to the Government Office For Science's Horizon Scanning Centre which identifies and addresses key pan-government strategic issues, and has acquired world-class recognition. Both bodies must attract the very best from across the public and private sectors, including looking beyond Britain.

The threat from nuclear proliferation and cyber attack is growing at a worrying rate, and now is the time for national arms control and disarmament efforts to be significantly increased. Britain should push for global progress in both areas – some would even include aspects of the Trident nuclear weapon replacement – so effort and funding can progressively switch to addressing the other new major global security risks.

Funding and effort must also increase in research, innovation and education, for the new, more complex twenty-first century security environment. A percentage of gross domestic product target should be set, rather like the Cold War defence spending target that helped overcome the last major threat to our way of life, from the Soviet Union.

All eyes are focused on potentially painful manpower cuts and numbers of ships, tanks, and aircraft. Yet the centre of gravity for the Review is the central government machine itself, which has proved incapable of reforming itself. The coalition government must show its mettle. It should start by putting its own house in order.

Across the world, security experts are watching to see how Britain adjusts its defence and security posture. How many other countries will follow its path, as opposed to the very different approach taken by Australia and America? There is a wide consensus regarding the once-in-a-generation importance of the Strategic Defence and Security Review.

