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# **The British Defence and Security Election Survey**

Introduction and analysis by Michael Clarke

The views expressed in this paper are the authors' own, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI or any other institutions with which the authors are associated.

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# Introduction

By Professor Michael Clarke, Director, RUSI

A defence review has been pledged by both main political parties and defence officials, senior military and ministers, no less than the interested public, have been anticipating the importance of such a review for well over a year.

Soon after the UK general election on 6 May 2010, the incoming government will face important questions and mounting challenges to defence and security policy.

This survey asked RUSI's distinguished network of defence specialists to give its reactions to six particular propositions on defence and security. These statements were chosen for their importance to the context in which a defence review will take place.

The Government's Defence Green Paper, *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for a Strategic Defence Review* (Cm: 7794) in February laid the foundations of the big questions UK defence planners will have to face and the specialist community has had some time to ponder them since.

It is unlikely that these questions will arise explicitly in an election campaign, but they will certainly form an intrinsic part of the defence review that follows.

The majority agreed with the notion that the UK

needs a radical reassessment of its place in the world according to its means and interests.

Other responses included powerful endorsement of the idea that terrorism is the most immediate security problem and the need to prevail in the operations in Afghanistan.

Opinion was more equivocal on the centrality of the UK's partnership with the United States, over the Trident nuclear deterrent and the substantive differences between the political parties in the election campaign.

In addition to presenting the results of the survey, this occasional paper offers analysis based on the reactions given by the survey's correspondents. The paper outlines the policy challenges facing an incoming government.

## Methodology

This survey was conducted online between 15 April and 19 April 2010. 2,024 members of RUSI's defence and security community took part in the survey. The anonymity of contributors was preserved.

In addition to giving their reactions to the six statements posed by RUSI, our network was invited to offer its qualitative contributions. More than a third of those who took part offered their views, which we distill in this paper.

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### Proposition One

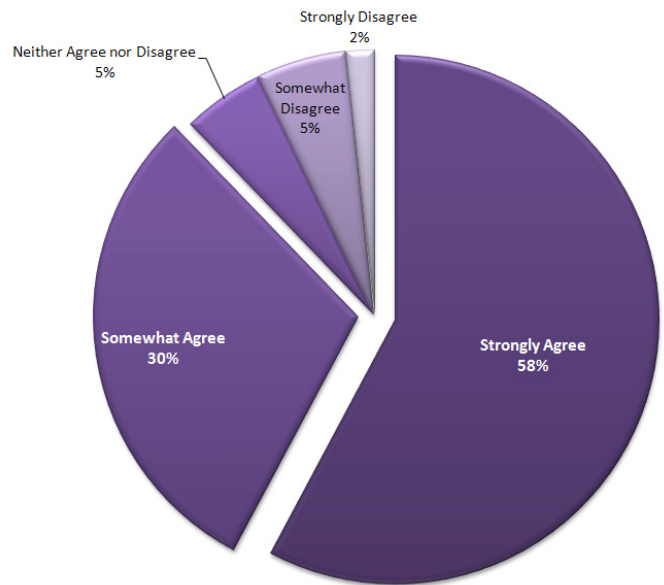
The UK needs a radical reassessment of the position it wants, and is able, to play in the world.

No fewer than 88% of the respondents felt that the UK now needs a ‘radical reassessment’ of the position it wants to play, and is able to play, in world politics. Respondents obviously felt that we are approaching a big moment for the UK’s foreign and defence policy.

The word ‘radical’ is important here. Fewer than 7% seemed to opt for mere continuity; the overwhelming feeling among defence and security professionals is that the time has come for something radical.

The survey question deliberately did not specify what ‘radical’ might imply. It was designed to assess the appetite for something obviously different in UK defence policy among the specialist community.

Throughout discussions on the forthcoming defence review it has been generally accepted that the ‘role in the world’ question is the most fundamental and yet is not easy to frame, still less to generate a public debate around. The Government’s Green Paper noted that the question should be addressed but there has been little public reaction to date on such a fundamental issue.



Answer Options	Response (%)	Response Count
Strongly Agree	57.8	1169
Somewhat Agree	30.0	607
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5.0	102
Somewhat Disagree	5.5	112
Strongly Disagree	1.7	34

### Proposition Two

The UK’s interests are best served by maintaining a special relationship with the United States, ahead of all other strategic partnerships.

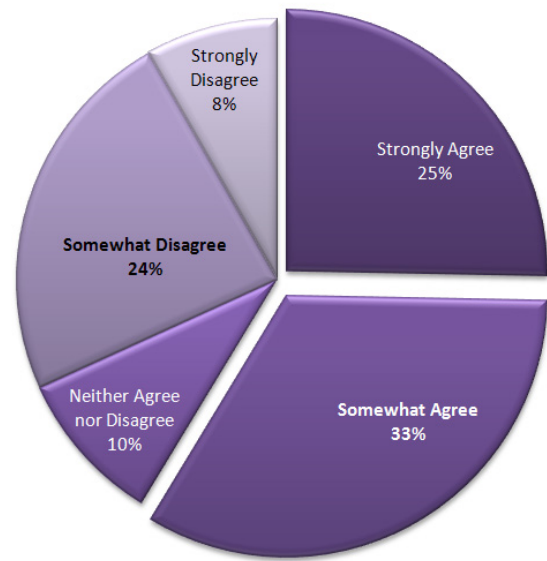
The idea that the relationship with the United States – a bedrock of all British defence and security policy since 1941 – will continue to serve the UK’s interests ahead of all other potential strategic partnerships, is supported in this survey, though not overwhelmingly so; 58% agree as against 32% who disagree.

Something close to a two-to-one majority on this critical issue is certainly convincing, but it does not represent unanimity and may chime somewhat against the overwhelming proportion of respondents who feel it is time for a ‘radical reassessment’.

Of course, it is possible to argue that a radical reassessment is necessary precisely in order to maintain the value of the strategic partnership with the United States.

The two findings are not necessarily inconsistent. But they may indicate an undercurrent of change in the mindset of the defence and security community.

The Government’s Green Paper stresses that the UK must be prepared to engage in greater partnership with more allies and friends around the world, though there is no doubt that the US partnership remains most central. This question posed the notion of that centrality as a potential trade-off against other potentially beneficial partnerships.



Answer Options	Response (%)	Response Count
Strongly Agree	25.3	512
Somewhat Agree	33.4	677
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.5	192
Somewhat Disagree	23.6	478
Strongly Disagree	8.2	165

### Proposition Three

The security and political benefits to the UK of the Trident nuclear deterrent system clearly outweigh its diplomatic and economic costs.

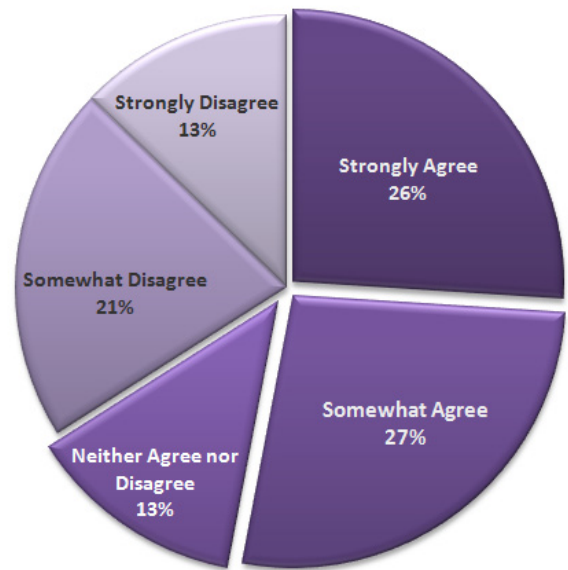
Attitudes to the Trident nuclear deterrent system are obviously equivocal, roughly in line with trends of opinion among the public as a whole. RUSI asked respondents to decide whether the security and political benefits of the Trident system ‘clearly’ outweighed its diplomatic and economic costs.

Some 53% agreed that it did; 34% disagreed and 13% were undecided. In the past, the independent nuclear deterrent has polarised opinion in the United Kingdom; people tended to hold strong opinions whichever side of the argument they took.

The specialised defence and security community has tended to endorse the utility of the Trident system fairly strongly. This is less obviously the case in the RUSI survey. The independent nuclear deterrent has also tended to polarise opinion whenever it has been discussed.

In this survey, however, of those who either agreed or disagreed with the statement, those who ‘somewhat’ held a view outnumbered those who held their view ‘strongly’ in both cases.

The question was posed in such a way that related the Trident system to an implicit conception of the UK’s role in the world; balancing in part its ‘political benefits’, implying status and reassurance to allies, against its ‘diplomatic costs’, with its implications for nuclear arms control and the image of the UK as a nuclear ‘have’ state.



Answer Options	Response (%)	Response Count
Strongly Agree	26.0	526
Somewhat Agree	27.0	546
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13.0	263
Somewhat Disagree	21.2	429
Strongly Disagree	12.8	260

**Proposition Four**

**Current operations in Afghanistan play an intrinsic part in maintaining the UK’s security.**

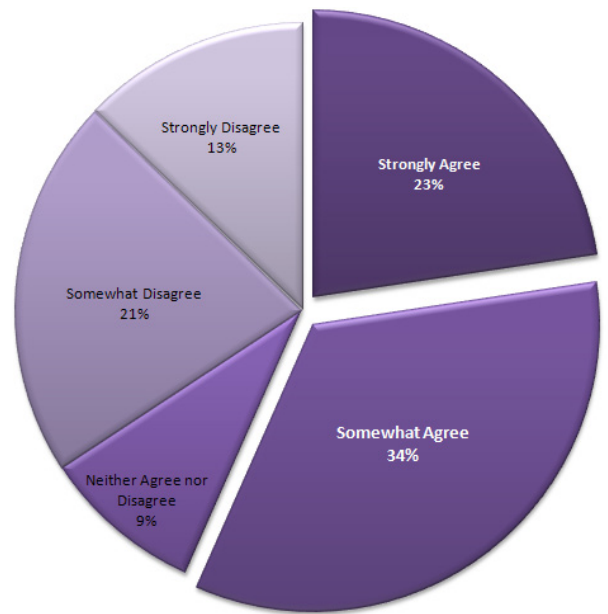
RUSI asked whether respondents felt that operations in Afghanistan played an ‘intrinsic’ part in maintaining UK security – investigating opinion on the link that is made between keeping terrorism off our streets and contributing to stability in the region from where most of the terrorism that affects the UK originates.

Some 57% of the survey agreed that Afghan operations were intrinsic to the security of the UK, while 34% disagreed.

This is perhaps not such a surprising result since the specialist community is more likely to take a close interest in the linkage between military operations and strategic outcomes and to consider the direct utility of military operations.

The rationale of the Afghan operation has been controversial from 2005 when the present build-up began.

In thinking about a forthcoming Defence Review, there is no disagreement that the planning horizon will go far beyond the implications of Afghan operations over the next few years; but Afghanistan is the most immediate operational challenge facing the defence forces and its outcome, for good or bad, is likely to have a profound effect on defence and security policy in the UK for some time to come.



Answer Options	Response (%)	Response Count
Strongly Agree	22.6	458
Somewhat Agree	34.0	688
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.1	185
Somewhat Disagree	21.4	433
Strongly Disagree	12.8	260

### Proposition Five

## Tackling terrorism will continue to be the most immediate security priority for the next government.

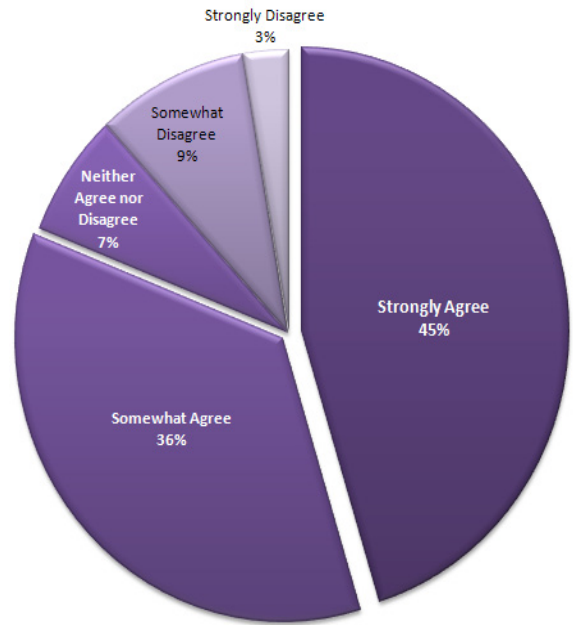
The majority opinion on Afghanistan is supported by a very strong majority of 81% who feel that tackling terrorism will continue to be the ‘most immediate’ security priority for the next government.

This is not the same as saying that terrorism should be seen as the greatest or most serious security problem, but the survey was clear by almost seven-to-one that it was the most pressing.

This response may also chime with the sense that operations in Afghanistan are intrinsic to the UK’s security.

Terrorism and stability in South Asia are inextricably linked for the UK, and in the view of this survey may provide the most immediate imperative for current policy, whatever longer-term issues emerge.

Countering terrorism is not an issue that has generally involved the defence forces in a direct way; it is fundamentally an intelligence and policing responsibility. Nevertheless, terrorism is regarded by the government as a critical threat to national security and one of the few ways in which the UK is physically vulnerable in the current climate. This question was asked in a stand-alone fashion.



Answer Options	Response (%)	Response Count
Strongly Agree	45.3	916
Somewhat Agree	35.7	723
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7.1	144
Somewhat Disagree	9.2	186
Strongly Disagree	2.7	55

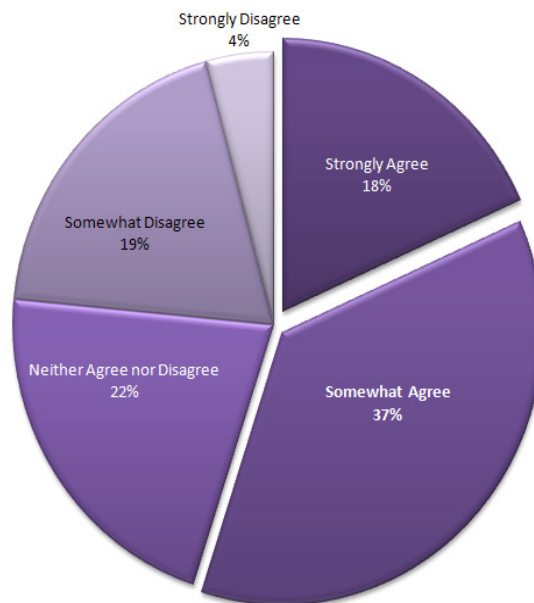
## Proposition Six

When it comes to defence, there are some significant differences between the main political parties.

Finally, 55% of the RUSI survey agreed that there were ‘some significant differences’ between the main political parties on defence. The proportion of those who disagreed with this view was only slightly higher at 23% than those who had no view on the issue.

Before the election campaign began, there had been a widespread expectation that there would be no discernable difference between the parties on defence and security, and indeed the party manifestos are more similar than they are different on most issues save that of the nuclear deterrent.

But the survey nevertheless detects some sense among respondents that there is a meaningful choice to be made on defence and security. Certainly it suggests that there is something for the parties to compete for in this policy area.



Answer Options	Response (%)	Response Count
Strongly Agree	18.3	371
Somewhat Agree	36.7	742
Neither Agree nor Disagree	21.5	436
Somewhat Disagree	19.3	391
Strongly Disagree	4.2	84



## The Results in Context

The three party leaders have all written for the *RUSI Journal* on their defence and security policies in the election. We reproduce their contributions in this paper.

The RUSI survey provides welcome support for some of their key positions, but will make uncomfortable reading on others.

The prime minister talks about continuity in the way the UK's defence role is conceived and executed. 'We have shown our willingness to change and adapt', he writes, 'to pay constant close attention to a complex and fast moving security landscape, and to learn hard lessons from our experience'. The reassessment process is, in effect, ongoing. The government is already on top of the problem. But this is not the view of the vast majority in the RUSI survey. The Conservative leader, David Cameron, has nothing to say in this article about the national role the UK should play but leads, instead, on the policymaking changes a Conservative government would initiate. The Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, may be nearer the view of the survey when he says that this election, 'is about Britain's place in the world'.

On the other hand the survey generally supports the way Gordon Brown assesses the relationship between terrorism at home and policy overseas. His

view of the National Security Strategy and its 'span across domestic and foreign spheres' appears to be in line with the trend of the specialists' thinking. So too is the view of both Gordon Brown and David Cameron that Afghanistan is, in some sense, a 'must win' campaign. Nick Clegg merely calls the Afghan strategy 'hopelessly under resourced', but both the Conservative and Labour parties seem to be nearer the mark of the survey by expressing it in strategic terms.

All three leaders outline their parties' policy on the nuclear deterrent. The prime minister describes why the Trident system is to be regarded as 'out of scope' of the forthcoming Defence Review. This is only slightly more assertive than David Cameron who states that 'we need to maintain our independent nuclear deterrent' alongside a 'need to counter the growing menace of nuclear proliferation'. Nick Clegg challenges both these assertions, chiefly on cost grounds and the fact that the nuclear deterrent is dependent on US infrastructure. He will find some comfort in the RUSI responses to the way in which the question was asked – as an overall cost benefit calculation. Some 34% of the survey do not seem to regard Trident as a good deal for UK security. But the Labour and Conservative leaders still know that they have a clear majority of the informed public – 53% – behind their nuclear stance.



## The Party Leaders



THE  
LABOUR PARTY  
GORDON BROWN

The most fundamental responsibility of government is to protect the security of its citizens. In the last two years we have re-shaped the way we work together to discharge this responsibility. We have shown our willingness to change and adapt, to pay constant close attention to a complex and fast moving security landscape, and to learn hard lessons from our experience. A re-elected Labour government would seek to build on this record, making the necessary investment and the tough decisions to keep our country safe in the present and prepared for the future.

Over the last decade we have had to respond above all to a new form of international terrorism: intent on causing mass casualties without warning, driven by global networks, exploiting modern communications, and using a single narrative based on a distorted view of Islam to radicalise alienated young people including in our own communities. But at the same time we have had to deal with a wider realisation that many countries were too quick to bank a 'peace dividend' after the Cold War. Today's threats are all too real even if some of them come from less familiar routes or sources. Power is shifting downwards and outwards to non-state actors – both positive and malevolent. Many of the challenges we face are caused or exacerbated by the weakness of states rather than their strength. Governments and global institutions – from NATO to the UN to the IMF and World Bank – must reform and adapt to this new reality, working to become more effective and more inclusive. National sovereignty will remain fundamental but must be matched with responsibility – the responsibility to oppose extremism, support shared values, and act together to uphold a rules-based international system.

Strong defence will always begin at home, and we have trebled spending on domestic counter-terrorism since 9/11, doubling the size of the Security Services and adding thousands more

counter terrorist police. We have modernised our terrorism laws, set up a single Border Agency, and brought in electronic border controls to count people in and out of the country and check passengers in real time against watch lists. We have transformed our approach to engaging the private sector, communities and citizens in the work of resilience at local level.

We have reformed government structures. Three years ago we set up a new National Security Committee bringing together all the relevant ministers, defence and police chiefs, and the heads of the intelligence agencies – meeting once a fortnight on Afghanistan and Pakistan, and separately on other security issues. It is supported by a new secretariat in the Cabinet Office – which two years ago produced Britain's first ever National Security Strategy, bringing a more joined-up response to the wide range of interconnected security issues from terrorism to organised crime to nuclear security to energy security – as well as identifying gaps or new challenges. For example, a new maritime centre has just been established to cover piracy and maritime terrorism, and a new operational and strategic centre for cyber-security was set up in September 2009.<sup>1</sup>

In its span across domestic and foreign spheres, the National Security Strategy also reflects our firm belief that strong defences at home must be combined with action overseas to tackle terrorism and extremism at source, including particular concerns in places like Yemen and Somalia, and wider work to tackle the causes of instability, including poverty and resource scarcity. In the Middle East – vital for world security – we continue to urge all countries to deliver the vision of the Arab Peace Initiative – normalised relations between Arab states and Israel alongside a Palestinian state.

But it is the Afghan-Pakistani border areas which remain the main source of the terrorist threat to Britain. This is why the job our military is doing in Afghanistan, helping to build up the Afghan forces and government to ensure the Taliban and Al-Qa'ida can never return, is so vital – not just to building stability in this volatile region but also to making

the people of Britain more secure. Eight times as prime minister I have had the privilege to visit our forces serving in Afghanistan: each time I have been moved by their courage, skill and dedication. After the difficult last twelve months, I came back from my most recent visit in March with a sense of cautious optimism. I was fortunate to meet and talk to hundreds of young servicemen and women who had been involved in Operation Moshtarak – one of the most impressive operations in recent British military history – including those involved in the equally important job of training and mentoring the Afghan security forces. We have a clear strategy of Afghanisation, a target of 300,000 trained Afghan Army and Police by the end of next year, and an agreed process for handing over districts and provinces to an Afghan lead starting later this year. Joint patrolling with Afghan forces is bringing more intelligence and contributing to a higher rate of finds of deadly improvised explosive devices. Now that American forces are in Helmand in much greater numbers, it makes sense to think about how best to divide up lead responsibility for security, and so British forces are concentrating in the central populated areas of the province, achieving a better ratio of security forces to the population.

Labour's commitment to supporting our forces in Afghanistan, and to defence and national security more widely, is non-negotiable. This year's defence budget is over 10 per cent higher in real terms than in 1997, and in addition we have spent over £4 billion in the last year from the Treasury Reserve on the military campaign in Afghanistan – we estimate that will rise to over £5 billion next year. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have never stated they intend to spend more on defence, at any election or spending review, including today – and in fact the last Conservative government cut defence by 20 per cent in real terms, with the current shadow defence secretary admitting that this left the armed forces unprepared for the challenges they have had to face in the last decade.

Nevertheless, with the increased funding in the last decade, and the reforms of the Strategic Defence Review in 1998, our Armed Forces have shown their worth as a 'force for good' in Bosnia, Sierra

Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan – in tasks ranging from counter-terrorism, to conflict stabilisation and prevention, to counter-piracy. The growth in the core defence budget has enabled us not only to ensure our forces have the latest equipment, from new generation protected vehicles to Chinook and Merlin helicopters, Typhoon jets and Type-45 destroyers – but also to guarantee fair pay for all our service personnel, especially the lower paid, and to strengthen our support for their welfare across the board. We have invested hundreds of millions of pounds to reverse a decades of neglect of forces' accommodation, and we are helping service personnel get onto the housing ladder. The new NHS Queen Elizabeth Hospital which I visited recently will have – as well as a military-run ward – the largest single-floor critical care unit in the world, offering the kind of support and expertise that the old military hospitals could not hope to provide.

But despite this record of consistent investment and significant achievement, serious challenges remain, including cost pressures due to the rising cost of major defence projects. To address this we are reforming defence procurement, making further reductions in civilian staff, and cutting lower priority spending in areas like headquarters costs, travel and consultancy – enabling us to increase investment in the kinds of capabilities which will be vital not just for Afghanistan but also for the longer term, including the additional Chinook helicopters, additional C17s, doubling of Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles, and additional dismounted infantry equipment and communications equipment we ordered in December.

We have committed to a Strategic Defence Review after an election which will clearly involve further tough choices. All major projects and capabilities other than Trident will be reviewed, but a Labour government would go into the Review committed to strong, balanced armed forces as our insurance policy for the future: a strong, hi-tech army, vastly better equipped than in 1997; a navy based around the aircraft carriers for which steel is already being cut; and an air force based around two state of the art fighter fleets as well as additional helicopters, unmanned drones, and strategic air lift.

The Review will also capture the lessons of recent experience, in particular to strengthen our ability to prevent, defuse and stabilise conflict and build stability in fragile and failing states. This will include both capacity-building overseas and improvements to our own capability in areas like intelligence and language skills. The National Security Secretariat will ensure coordination between this Review and wider foreign and security policy, including work on the long-term causes of instability. We have already committed to spend at least half of our new bilateral aid in fragile and conflict-affected states, and we have shown in Afghanistan and elsewhere that our military, diplomats and development staff can set an international standard for joint working including on 'hot stabilisation' in hostile environments. Reflecting our belief that in national security and foreign policy as elsewhere, the state must partner the best of the private and voluntary sector, we have launched a new group of over a thousand skilled and experienced civilians – the Civilian Stabilisation Force – which recently put a team in the air to Haiti just twelve hours after receiving a request from the UN – showing how Britain can act for good and at the same time enhance our reputation abroad and at home.

We remain committed to the objective of a world free of nuclear weapons. We are proud of our record in reducing our warheads by almost half compared to the last Conservative government's plans - and we would look at further reductions as part of the international discussions this summer. But in the uncertain world we live in, we remain committed to an independent deterrent – which is why Trident will be out of scope of the Review. We are looking again at whether we could reduce the fleet of missile-carrying submarines from four to three, but our decisions on our deterrent will be based on national security and multilateral discussions not on cost.

We will continue to lead international efforts against proliferation, including the threat of nuclear material falling into the hands of terrorists, while also setting out global standards for safe development of civil nuclear power. In particular we will continue to work multilaterally to prevent

the acquisition of nuclear weapons by Iran – the gravest of current nuclear threats. We support both engagement and pressure on the Iranian regime, which is threatening its own people and the people of the region as well as global security and stability.

Underpinning all our activity in national security and Defence, Labour's manifesto sets out our fundamental commitment to human rights and democracy. We believe human rights are universal, and that it is the job of strong and mature democracies to support the development of free societies everywhere, while upholding their own legal and moral obligations. We condemn torture, we will never engage in or co-operate with torture, and we have committed to advocating a new international convention to enable the prosecution of the perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Labour believes in combining our values and our strengths – our armed forces, diplomats, intelligence services and development and stabilisation experts – with our alliances and networks to achieve national and global objectives across economic prosperity, development and climate change, or security. The choice at the election is between a party committed to and experienced in multilateralism, and opponents who offer a false choice between an alliance with Europe or America. Labour believes that our relationship with America is fundamental, especially in the realm of defence and security, but also that Britain is stronger in the world when the European Union is strong, and that Britain succeeds when it leads in Europe – whether in economic policy or co-operation on security. So it comes down to this – Labour's experience and proven commitment to multilateral co-operation, versus the Conservatives who are stuck in the past, spurning alliances in Europe and helpless to defend our interests or secure the reform of global institutions.

### NOTES

- 1 An update on these and other elements of progress since the first NSS, published in March 2010, is available on the No. 10 website: <<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page22899>>.



THE  
CONSERVATIVE  
PARTY  
DAVID CAMERON

At this general election, Britain will face a big choice about the future and about how we can put this country back on its feet. We need radical changes right across our politics – in our economy, our society, and in the way our political system works. But we must never forget that the first duty of government is to protect our way of life and provide security for our citizens.

So it is important that people are clear as to how a Conservative government would meet this responsibility. During the television debates, people will have a chance to see Gordon Brown, Nick Clegg and I answering questions about foreign affairs and national security. Of course, there will be much that separates us. But I also believe we must be frank and straightforward that, on a number of issues, we agree.

That begins with Afghanistan. Whoever wins this general election will immediately be confronted with the ongoing operations in Afghanistan that are vital to our national security. The strategy which has been in place since the end of last year is, I believe, broadly the right one; we must give it the necessary time and support to succeed. That is how we can continue to reverse the Taliban's momentum, build up the Afghan armed forces, and create the conditions for transition to Afghan control. Where we need to go further and faster is in ensuring the right balance of troops across Helmand and in forging a new political settlement. In so doing, we will help to bring greater security to the wider region – and in particular, to Pakistan.

Alongside this immediate priority, there are a number of other areas where a Conservative government would sustain existing national security goals. NATO must remain the cornerstone of transatlantic defence and security. We need to maintain our independent nuclear deterrent. We must continue to play an active role in international institutions, while pressing for their reform. We need to counter the growing menace of nuclear

proliferation – particularly the challenge posed by Iran's nuclear programme. We must provide active support for President Obama's initiatives for a lasting Middle East peace settlement. And we must work to ensure a secure Olympic Games in 2012.

In order to meet these priorities, we must play an active and influential role in the world. Britain at its best has always been an open, outward-looking trading nation. We must never overstate our role, but we do have a position of authority that greatly exceeds our size. It is in our national interest to preserve and extend this influence, because the size of the problems and the scale of the opportunities we face demand our continued active engagement in the world.

Where we differ from the current government is how we should go about these tasks. For years it has been clear that the way the world works is radically changing. We have seen the rise of global terrorism, the spread of pandemics and new kinds of problems in the form of environmental hazards and climate change. Older problems such as piracy and lawlessness have returned with new fury, appearing alongside more modern challenges such as nuclear proliferation, cyber warfare and serious organised crime. In this new age of insecurity, the boundaries between foreign and domestic policy have been eroded. Events in one part of the planet can trigger a crisis in Britain within just a few hours.

But Labour has struggled to adapt to this dramatically altered scene. During the past decade we have fought two wars, been attacked by terrorists, and faced plots connected to Pakistan and carried out by British nationals attempting to blow up transatlantic planes. But we still do not have a fully functioning National Security Council; we have not had a comprehensive Strategic Defence Review since 1998; and we have had four defence secretaries in as many years – including one who was part-time even while we were at war. We will not have an effective national security policy if we carry on like this. So a Conservative government would do things differently. We would bring in a new joined-up way of thinking and a new national security approach.

Part of this is about new machinery. For several years we have been arguing for a proper National Security Council at the heart of government, supported by a full-time National Security Adviser. If we win this general election, such a National Security Council would start to meet from day one of the new Conservative government. The new Council will be responsible for all decisions on national security. It will oversee a long-overdue Strategic Defence and Security Review.

But it is not just new machinery we need. We need a new method which considers the links between foreign and domestic policies, addressing national security issues in the round. And as William Hague has been arguing, in order to do this we also need to rebuild our economy. Unless we deal with our debts more quickly, restore confidence in our economy and send a signal that Britain is once again open to business, we face a future where Britain only looks smaller and smaller in the world.

Four years ago, I set out the vision that would bring all these themes together. It is a philosophy of liberal conservatism. It is liberal, because I believe in freedom, human rights and democracy, and I want to see more of these things in the world. But it is also conservative, because I am sceptical of grand utopian schemes to re-make the world, and my instinct is to work patiently with the grain of human nature – with the flow of culture, tradition and history. This philosophy would guide my approach to national security and foreign policy in government.

A key part of this is about conflict prevention. We need to focus much more closely on the causes of conflicts and the full range of things – such as energy insecurity, poverty, pandemics and state failure – which feed international insecurity. The Foreign Office, DfID, the MoD and other departments across Whitehall need to work together to deliver a well co-ordinated, preventative approach. If we act early to deal with these problems, we can avoid the need to spend vast sums on large-scale interventions and reconstruction later on. This approach is both moral and sensible.

If, however, the situation arises where a foreign crisis breaks out and we do send troops to intervene, we need to make sure that we have the right blend of civil and military capabilities to bring about progress on the ground. The lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan are that we need to go even further in making sure that as a country we can contribute rapidly and in full measure to stabilisation operations as soon as the intense fighting is over and when the battle for hearts and minds must still be won. That is why a Conservative government will create a Stabilisation and Reconstruction Force that will bring together the skills necessary to carry out this task.

Alongside this smarter approach to international insecurity, we need a new emphasis on our domestic security. We need to involve the military more closely in domestic emergency planning by setting up a permanent military Homeland Command. We need a new dedicated border police force to prevent the entry into Britain of extremists, terrorists, criminals and illegal goods. And we need to pay much greater attention to our critical national infrastructure, and in particular, to what I believe is a growing cyber security threat.

We know that there are hundreds of thousands of cyber-attacks and crimes against British businesses every year. We just have to consider the effect of the electronic attack against Estonia in 2007 for a sign of how serious a major attack on our whole country could be. I want Britain to be prepared, proactive and ready to deal with all kinds of cyber-attacks. So a Conservative government would create a new Cyber Threat and Assessment Centre to provide this capacity.

But above all, in this new approach to national security, we must be true to our values. In an age when many of the biggest threats to our security stem from extreme, illiberal ideologies, we must uphold our own liberal ideals. As William Gladstone put it in the run-up to another general election more than 130 years ago, ‘even when you do a good thing, you may do it in so bad a way that you entirely spoil the beneficial effect’. In other words, a moral mission requires moral methods. That is why we would review all anti-terrorism legislation

on coming into office to ensure that there is the right balance between security and securing our civil liberties. We would ensure that all government departments and agencies honour our obligations in respect of human rights and the prohibition of torture. And we would stand by our commitment to increase overseas development aid.

By making these changes, we will be able to fix a lot of the problems we have seen in last few years: a failure to weigh carefully the consequences of intervention and plan for the aftermath; a failure to equip our forces properly when we send them into harm's way; and above all, a failure to tackle domestic and foreign security issues in the round. Our national security approach will be a big cultural change from what we have seen over the last decade. By putting it into practice, we can become safer, stronger, more resilient – and together we can make Britain stand tall once again in the world.



There is a myth about the upcoming election. It is that this election is not about defence or security. A myth that, despite the fact we are a nation at war facing new threats in an increasingly complex global environment, this election is only about the economy. Or politics. Or social reform.

This election is most certainly about all of those things. But it is about Britain's place in the world too. And it is not the case that the passing of the Iraq War has closed the divides between the political parties. The differences remain stark, as do the choices now facing the British people.

So what is at stake on polling day? First, this election is an opportunity to turn the page on the default Atlanticism of successive British governments, for which our national interests have been repeatedly sacrificed. Second, this election will have a direct impact on Europe's role on the world stage. Britain is one of the few countries capable of filling the

leadership vacuum currently preventing Europe from exerting the influence it should. Any new government can either embrace that opportunity, or continue to gaze longingly across the Atlantic while Europe's political failings become increasingly entrenched.

I would never advocate a churlish rejection of the UK's historic alliance with the US. All international challenges depend on American engagement, from countering international terrorism, to averting runaway climate change, reforming international financial infrastructure, establishing stability and protecting human rights.

Yet, since the Suez Crisis, UK governments have elevated the 'special relationship' above all else, giving it priority even when it is against our national interests to do so. The US recognises that the special relationship has had its day. President Obama has made it clear that while he values Britain, it is primarily as a gateway to forging a strong partnership with Europe. British politicians should now recognise that an over-reliance on the UK/US relationship is neither realistic nor desirable in a multi-polar world where power is fast transferring from West to East, and the growing influence of nations like China, India, Brazil and South Africa stretches the international balance of power in different directions.

In government, Labour has lacked the self-confidence to act against the wishes of the White House. That deference played out most dramatically in Tony Blair's decision to join the invasion of Iraq, but there have been many instances of British interests and values being similarly relegated: the government's silence on Guantánamo Bay and extraordinary rendition; the limp response from senior British politicians to Israel's offensive in Gaza last year, explained in part by a reluctance to contradict US policy in the Middle East; neither Labour nor the Conservatives are prepared to question spending tens of billions of pounds on a like-for-like replacement of Trident – a Cold War-scale system dependent on Pentagon support; and, crucially, we have pursued a hopelessly under-resourced strategy in Afghanistan for years, largely because of the Bush-Blair obsession with Iraq.

We must now repatriate British foreign policy, recognising that we are better served by multiple partnerships. America will always remain one of those partners, one of our closest and most important partners, but any new UK government must learn to stand tall in our European backyard too.

As a liberal, I am a proud internationalist. I spent ten years working in Europe, first administering development aid projects in some of the poorest countries in Asia, then negotiating trade deals with China and Russia on behalf of the EU, before becoming an MEP. So I have had first-hand experience of Europe's collective clout. But I am under no illusion about the weaknesses that dog the European project. As a result of years of internal naval gazing and a lack of clear leadership from nation states, as well as the Presidency and Commission, the EU has been rendered increasingly erratic and uncertain on the global stage.

The evidence is everywhere. There has been failure of European states to speak with one voice to Russia, notably on energy policy. In the Middle East, the EU has failed to exert meaningful pressure on either the Israeli government or Hamas, and the response to Egypt and Israel's continuing blockade of Gaza has been woeful. Almost one and a half million Palestinians are imprisoned on a wretched piece of land the size of the Isle of Wight, where they are deprived decent water, basic medical supplies and the construction materials necessary to rebuild the homes destroyed in Operation Cast Lead last year. The suffering amounts to a humanitarian catastrophe – one that is not in Israel's strategic interests. Yet the EU has refused to employ its economic leverage over Israel to end the blockade. It is an economic giant that has chosen to act like a political pygmy. While it is true that the planned upgrade in EU-Israel relations has been suspended, that decision has not halted new and extended bilateral agreements, for example on aviation, agriculture and fisheries.

The EU has been disappointing in Afghanistan, too. While recent attempts have been made by the international community to co-ordinate military

and civilian strategies more coherently, there is still a long way to go. That lack of a properly co-ordinated strategy cannot be attributed to European states alone, but it has been made worse by the EU's failure to get to grips with its responsibilities. The lacklustre commitment to training Afghanistan's national police force is a notorious example. The EU is meant to lead on this objective – a key element of the international community's exit strategy. However, despite a pledge to put 350 police trainers in place by this month, only 273 have been provided so far.

European states simply have not woken up to the need for deeper integration on security and defence. Despite active encouragement from Washington, member states remain locked in twenty-seven individual defence markets. In 2006, aggregate EU defence spending amounted to almost a quarter of global defence expenditure, but due to fragmented national policies, recent spending levels are capable of delivering only a small fraction of US military power. Member states have 2 million men and women in uniform. Yet they are capable of deploying no more than 5 per cent of them outside their own territory.

I believe Britain must now show leadership in pushing for greater co-ordination. With an estimated £36 billion funding gap in the MoD equipment budget, and with our brave forces already stretched to the limit, the next defence review must look at how European member states can work together more effectively, to improve capabilities and reduce costs. It is fanciful to claim that the UK can continue to purchase, by itself, all of the military equipment currently planned. Liberal Democrats have already ruled out like-for-like replacement of the Trident system and Tranche 3B of Eurofighter. The future of all other major projects must be re-examined as part of a strategic security and defence review, and in light of a more rigorous assessment of the possibilities for increased equipment co-operation with our European allies.

Washington is comfortable that EU defence co-operation is not a threat but an opportunity to improve NATO capabilities. The Conservatives,

however, remain opposed. William Hague recently confirmed that his party is committed to pulling the UK out of the European Defence Agency; a move likely to infuriate Presidents Sarkozy and Obama.

The Conservatives fail to understand that so many of the forces affecting the security and prosperity of British citizens are supranational in character – terrorism, crime, immigration, international finance, trade – and we will only succeed in meeting these challenges if our political and regulatory responses are supranational too. Few would dispute the enormous advantages of the single European market. Our task now is to replicate these economic successes in our external goals for the EU. It may still be too weak on the foreign policy stage, but it remains our best bet for a safe, prosperous and sustainable future.

Let us not forget that one of the greatest strategic advancements of recent times has been the quiet, unglamorous liberalisation of national economies in Central and Eastern Europe, coupled by the strengthening of their democratic political institutions. Equally, let us not forget that Europe has a huge role to play in the strategic challenges

of the future. Iran is an important example. Europe has the opportunity to counter a future Iranian threat in a way that America simply cannot, and in a way that China and Russia are unlikely to. Again, it is economic leverage that Europe will have at its disposal. According to official figures the EU remains Tehran's largest commercial partner, with trade totalling \$35 billion in 2008.

The implication for British politicians is this: if you have no Europe policy, you are ill equipped to face the challenges ahead. The Conservatives' withdrawal from the centre-right European People's Party in the European Parliament makes clear that they will be isolated in Europe. A returned Labour government will retain its policy of ambivalence. And it can only be assumed that both of the other parties would continue the policy of default, and often submissive, Atlanticism. The Liberal Democrats seek a different approach. Our vision is of a self-confident Britain in a more effective Europe, ready to play its part in creating a world that is more peaceful and more prosperous.

*These leader statements appeared in the April 2010 issue of the RUSI Journal.*

## Summary of Results

### Proposition One

The UK needs a radical reassessment of the position it wants, and is able, to play in the world.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	57.8	1169
Somewhat Agree	30.0	607
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5.0	102
Somewhat Disagree	5.5	112
Strongly Disagree	1.7	34

### Proposition Two

The UK's interests are best served by maintaining a special relationship with the United States, ahead of all other strategic partnerships.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	25.3	512
Somewhat Agree	33.4	677
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.5	192
Somewhat Disagree	23.6	478
Strongly Disagree	8.2	165

### Proposition Three

The security and political benefits to the UK of the Trident nuclear deterrent system clearly outweigh its diplomatic and economic costs.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	26.0	526
Somewhat Agree	27.0	546
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13.0	263
Somewhat Disagree	21.2	429
Strongly Disagree	12.8	260

### Proposition Four

Current operations in Afghanistan play an intrinsic part in maintaining the UK's security.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	22.6	458
Somewhat Agree	34.0	688
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9.1	185
Somewhat Disagree	21.4	433
Strongly Disagree	12.8	260

**Proposition Five**

Tackling terrorism will continue to be the most immediate security priority for the next government.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	45.3	916
Somewhat Agree	35.7	723
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7.1	144
Somewhat Disagree	9.2	186
Strongly Disagree	2.7	55

**Proposition Six**

When it comes to defence, there are some significant differences between the main political parties.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	18.3	371
Somewhat Agree	36.7	742
Neither Agree nor Disagree	21.5	436
Somewhat Disagree	19.3	391
Strongly Disagree	4.2	84

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As the UK electorate go to the polls in 2010, RUSI highlights the issues and options facing the next government and the next parliament.

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