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National Strategy for the Next Generations.

(Concept note)

#NSxNG

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UK National Strategy for the Next Generations (NSXNG)

"The universe as a whole is behaving in a way that is completely unpredicted by the behavior of any of its parts. Synergy reveals a grand strategy of dealing with the whole instead of the tactics of our conventional education system, which starts with parts and elements, adding them together locally without really understanding the whole."

R Buckminster Fuller, *Synergetics: Explorations in the Geometry of Thinking*, p.9, 1982

1. As we seek to define the UK's post-Brexit global role, this country will almost certainly undertake a global National Strategy 'refresh' to develop a new national strategy.

- Moments of National Strategy-making — re-setting orientation at the highest strategic level — typically occur when, as now, there are both extensive uncertainties in the external (global) environment and internal division over how to proceed.
- As we come to the end of a turbulent decade, capped by the growing disunity of the Brexit period, now more than ever there is a need to discuss what our vision is for the role of the United Kingdom in a very different future world.
- Soon after Britain leaves the EU, there will probably be a process to develop a new national strategy document within HMG, a successor to the 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR).

2. But at this crucial juncture in its history, Britain needs National Strategy – shaping to be different to any previous process: we need a National Strategy for the Next Generations

- We need more than a new strategy document developed in the same old, closed-door, top-down way and closely held at the heart of Government. A ‘National Strategy’ should represent not a *moment* in HMG strategy-formation or decision-making, nor a *document*, but should set the *overall orientation* and *direction of travel* for the country’s future direction, and be emergent, capable of change as conditions change.
- There is clear evidence of change in generational attitudes to a raft of issues, from democracy to climate change to the role of the state. All this makes this moment ripe for a new strategy for the Next Generations, which covers a different (longer) timeframe and seeks to help ‘sense’ change on the ‘second and third’ horizons, i.e. looking beyond the assumed future to wider, emerging possibilities.
- It should also transcend traditional policymaking and departmental boundaries in covering not just external affairs and national security issues, but also the full range of domestic and economic policy.
- We need a more coherent overall policy approach prepared to tackle competing and conflicting interests across departments or siloed areas, so that a National Strategy takes into account not just foreign and national security policy priorities but also other areas of national interest and policy: a truly “comprehensive approach” or “fused” doctrine. Previous PACAC reports have identified the lack of incentives for Government to force more policy coherence across government (including ministerial turnover, financing, capability short-falls, HR systems); these analyses remain correct, but the Brexit ‘moment’ may facilitate a breakthrough.

“To look ahead, one must first look back twice as far”

Paul Saffo, *Six rules for accurate effective forecasting*, 2007

3. The three component parts of a National Strategy for the Next Generations.

To shape a grand national strategy; and, no less importantly, to keep the strategy 'live' once developed – we need Government to do three things differently: to bring in more foresight, more sense of history, and more meaningful public engagement.

- Governments need to be clear-headed about national pasts and potential futures
- And harness citizen engagement as a powerful source of ideas and innovation.
- These changes need to happen both in the strategy 'shaping' stage and in keeping an emergent strategy 'live' once developed.

4. SOIF has been making the case for a more emergent, long-term and participative approach to national strategy for a decade, including in previous PACAC inquiries. The case in favour has been building steadily, with:

- Changes in the global and domestic environment for strategy development: the sheer scale of international challenges and opportunities; the extent of global interdependencies and complexities and need for more long-term thinking; seemingly flimsier alliances; and the impact of global hyperconnectivity (economic and technological interconnectedness expanding the battleground of geopolitics).
- Changes in the nature of politics: erosion of the post-war social contract, social fragmentation, decline in moral authority of institutions, rise in identitarianism all making a cohesive national strategy ever more needed.
- Changes in the nature of policy development: ever more illegitimate to produce 'closed' policy in an environment where government can and should no longer 'command and control'; increased need for policy coherence to address complex systemic challenges; rise of citizen engagement and co-creation.

5. But Brexit has made this all more urgent. This time, the national grand strategy needs not only to direct the country's future endeavours. It also needs to bring people together.

- The Brexit moment offers a once-in-a-century opportunity, the potential to significantly reshape the centre of government with the coordination of cross- government and departmental roles and even the constitutional settlement (such as the powers of parliamentary committees or citizens' assemblies) potentially up for grabs.
- It is at moments of drama that dramatic change becomes possible.

6. There is now groundswell behind all three of these suggested elements in shaping a National Strategy. Let's examine them in turn.

- **First, an informed and clear-sighted understanding of Britain's global past.**

We are seeing increased interest in the UK in understanding history as a way of comprehending the present. This often happens in times of crisis – where we feel we are in uncharted waters or conditions of discomfort.

But instead of historical analogies being bandied around — referring to 20th century fascist regimes, suspensions of parliament or constitutional crises — we need clear, rigorous, analytical thinking about Britain's past, including the colonial past, and how it is perceived in different ways, both around the world and among domestic groups; and a more informed debate about the domestic and international comparisons. We must be aware of how other countries see the UK, both from the perspective of a historical relationship and in terms of how we are viewed contemporarily.

- **Second, understanding of the potential global and domestic futures that will set the context for Britain's future role**

Never has the need been so great to use structured ways to think about uncertainty, given the extent of uncertainty that Brexit brings across all policy areas and the social tensions and political and constitutional questions it has unearthed.

A huge range of long-term future issues are bubbling up, from the impacts of climate change on younger generations to new frontiers in space; from the need to regulate emerging technologies to mitigate potentially egregious forms of hyper-social and economic inequality to geopolitical (in)stability; from post-carbon transition glidepaths to the future of the UK's political system.

We envisage that the next Government will naturally bring a desire to analyse external forces that are going to affect the country. We are seeing appetite across the political spectrum to think long-term and innovatively about the country's future (from current Conservative interest in Philip Tetlock and political forecasting to Lord Bird's new Future Generations Act to Labour's commitments to create Future Generations Champions at local levels, to the Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Scotland).

The capability within Government will need to be built: to go beyond acting on known-knowns or trend analysis (projecting the future based on the past or present) towards greater resilience to change and shocks, and greater ability to act in uncertainty.

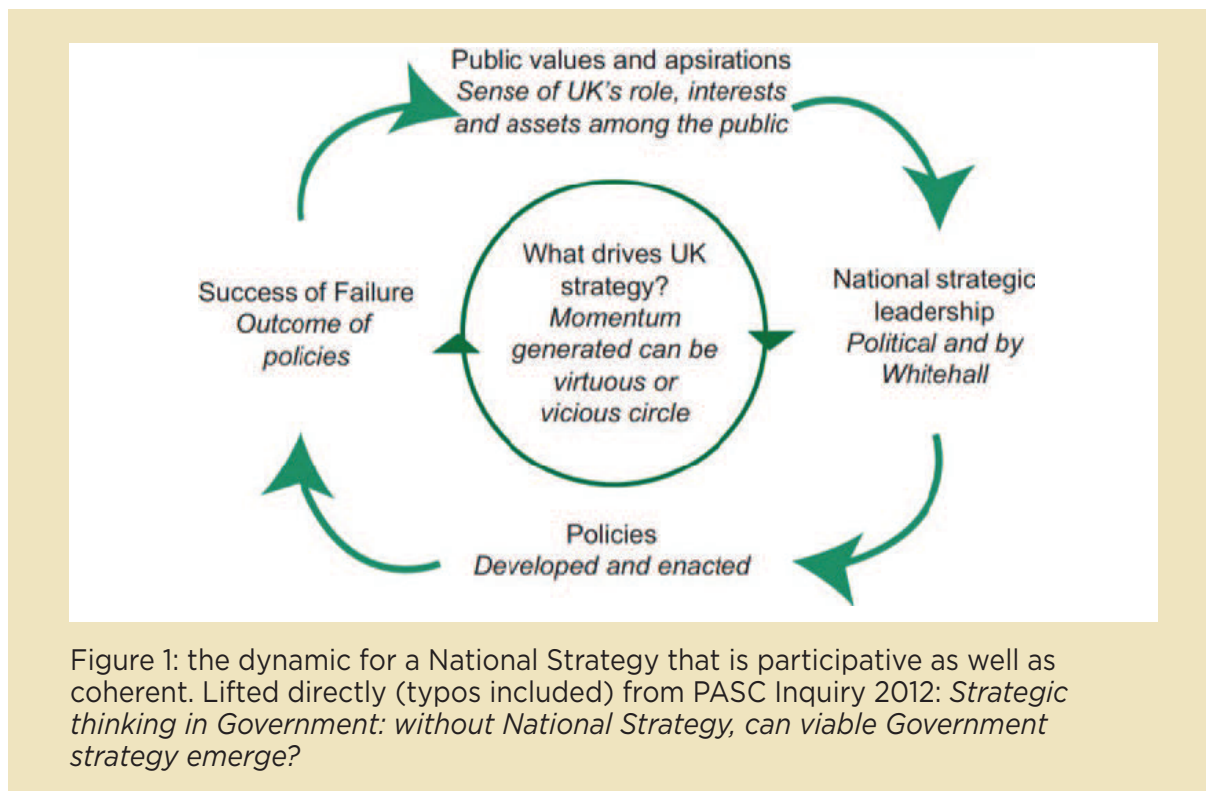
- **Third, embracing a different kind of decision-making and strategy-shaping built on public participation and a greater role for parliament and other institutions beyond the executive.**

A national strategy must be 'held' at the centre of government to ensure it is 'owned' and implemented by the Executive, but both citizens and wider institutions must have a meaningful role in its development and in continual review (keeping it 'emergent'). The NSC must not be the start and end point for development and ownership of national long-term strategy.

Citizens' assemblies and other initiatives (eg the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland, the Citizens' Assembly on Constitutional Reform) are exciting and welcome initiatives for those of us interested in public participation in policy. Citizens' assemblies are in political vogue both in the UK (e.g. the climate change CA, proposals for a Brexit CA), and being used on issues including in cities' strategic visioning for planning locally (Manchester, Liverpool) and internationally (Ireland, France, Canada).

But it is important that:

- a) those working on citizen engagement factor in foreign policy and national strategy to these conversations, and design them so that participants think about long-term, not just immediate issues: i.e. with local strategic foresight endeavours at city and regional level;
- b) those focused on foreign policy and national security issues think to harness the benefits of citizen engagement (as done successfully in Sri Lanka on their 2016 constitution or Canada on its budgeting priorities);
- c) public engagement informs policymaking: and that there's a feedback loop to citizens as a result.



10. Together, these three pillars create the basis for a UK National Strategy designed and implemented to be fit for 21st century realities and the citizens of tomorrow

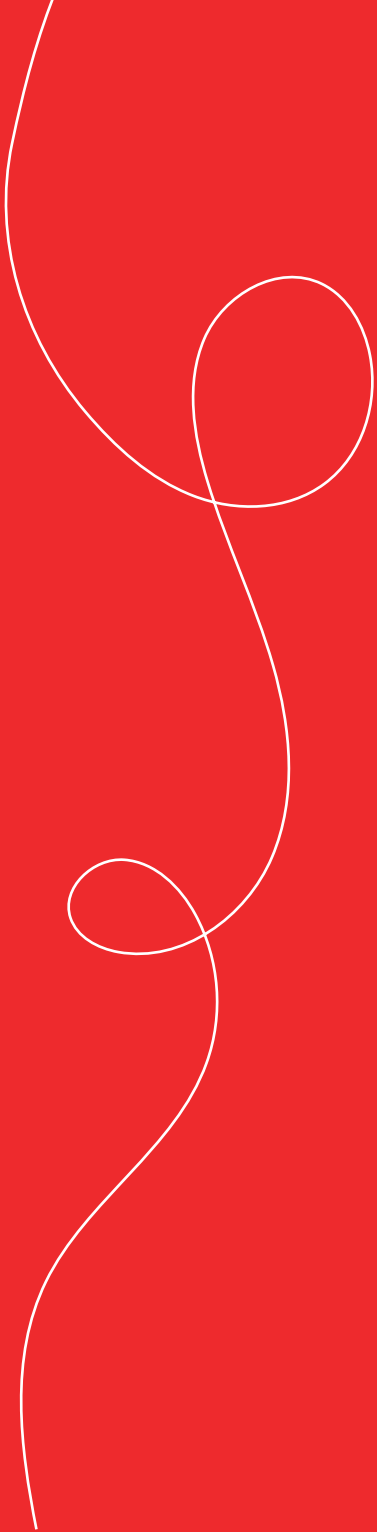
- **The design of the process:** national strategic leadership at a government level must be influenced and informed by public values and aspirations for the UK's role and interests. Participative and policy-led dialogues informed by rigorous historical and forward-looking insights will drive a dynamic for policy-making for the longer term.
- **Implementation will require innovation in government institutions and practice.** Public servants will require capabilities to lead, respond and act on this process, including soft skills around design, horizon scanning, network tendering, as well as harder skills including harnessing digital, data analytics and other quantitative and qualitative approaches, such as forecasting tournaments and distributed deliberation. It is important too to expand the role for our institutions beyond the executive in strategy development and ownership.

Parliaments will have a role in not only holding governments to account on implementation of national strategies but in helping to shape the strategy (reflecting views from across political divides — making for more resilient long-term strategy), and in revising the strategy over the years ahead in an 'emergent' way. Finland is a leading example: its parliamentary Committee on the Future acts proactively to recommend long-term policy approaches (instead of just reactively commenting on government proposals).

The civil service have a role as guardians of the longer-term future interests of citizens and the nation (see the Gulbenkian Foundation's intergenerational fairness project, which is developing a framework to allow frontline policy practitioners to perform an intergenerational impact assessment of policies).

Other bodies of state can also have a role in shaping a more long-termist national strategy, such as National audit agencies (which globally we are increasingly seeing looking at the long-term future preparedness of policies, not just short-term VFM); and the judiciary (for example, the Dutch appeals court judgement mandating stronger action on climate change than Government policy planned). These innovations can be applied at devolved levels of governance, regional and cities — connecting up into a national dialogue.

11. Conclusion: This is an exciting time, with the chance to shape a new kind of National Strategy for the Next Generations. With these three focuses (informed by history, potential futures, and public participation) it could be genuinely long-term and strategic for the first time, promoting national interests widely defined through more joined-up and long-term thinking, improving social cohesion through better use of participative mechanisms, and protecting the interests of future generations. Without a new approach, the UK risks being fractured, irrelevant and ignored — caught in the thrall of a hazy past.



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