A new RUSI briefing by Prof Malcolm Chalmers warns of the risks of steep spending cuts in UK departments and agencies responsible for tackling illegal migration, organised crime and supporting UK diplomacy. It can be download here https://www.rusi.org/sdsr15missinglinks

Were the 25% or 40% cuts now being considered by the Treasury in these areas to takeÂÂ place, the 'implications for national security could be considerable'. Such cutsÂÂ would cast doubts on the credibility and coherence of the forthcoming StrategicÂÂ Defence and Security Review, despite the assurance of rising real-terms budgets forÂÂ defence and aid. The briefing suggests that an additional £400 million in annualÂÂ spending, by 2019/20, would provide real-term protection for each of theseÂÂ capabilities.

Entitled '"The 'Missing Links" in SDSR Financing: Organised Crime, Migration andÂ Diplomacy', and authored by RUSI's ResearchÂ Director, Professor Malcolm Chalmers, the paper argues that, ahead of theÂ forthcoming Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), the government has madeÂ commitments that the UK 'is willing to devote the resources necessary to remain aÂ serious power on the international stage, backing up its ambitions with realÂ increases in funding for both defence and development.'

However, 'if the SDSR were to be accompanied by steep reductions in spending on theÂ diplomatic network, or by significant cuts in the resources available for combatingÂ organised crime and illegal migration, it could risk undermining the wider coherenceÂ and credibility of the review. The government would be open to the criticism that itÂ was prepared to devote substantial resources to meeting international norms forÂ defence and aid spending, while cutting spending in areas more directly related toÂ national security, foreign policy and prosperity objectives.'

The report identifies how the government has not been willing to match the budgetaryÂ protection for defence and official development assistance (ODA) with similarÂ commitments to other security-related departments which, at least in part, also fallÂ within the SDSR - specifically, the Home Office and Foreign Office. Instead, theseÂ two departments - as with most unprotected ministries - have been asked by theÂ Treasury to model the effects of reducing their recurrent budgets (ResourceÂ Departmental Expenditure Limit, DEL) by either 25 or 40 per cent over the next fourÂ years.

Despite the emphasis placed in the SDSR on the value of international partnerships,Â the key department charged with realising this aspiration - the Foreign Office - hasÂ seen a 19% fall in core recurrent spending in real terms and is being asked to modelÂ further cuts of 25% and 40% in its budget. The paper suggests that ' If the coreÂ departmental budget was to be subjected to take cuts comparable to the 25 and 40 perÂ cent scenarios currently being discussed with the Treasury, the consequences couldÂ well dominate perceptions of the 2015 SDSR, just as cuts in defence dominatedÂ coverage of the 2010 review.'

The briefing identifies how 'no budgetary protection has been provided for HomeÂ Office capabilities for tackling organised crime'. For example, the National CrimeÂ Agency's £427 million budget is considered to be part of the Home Office's baselineÂ budget, while local police forces have seen their budget fall by 25% in real terms -Â both play a big part in tackling organised crime.

The RUSI briefing suggests that tackling migration has not been a major issue forÂ the SDSR so far, 'but there is a strong argument that issues of illegal immigrationÂ and refugee flows should be, given their close relationships (respectively) toÂ organised crime and conflict.' 'Given the pressures that they now face, it is hardÂ to believe that cuts of the magnitude that the Border and Immigration DirectoratesÂ have made since 2010 could be repeated in the next Spending Review withoutÂ significant adverse consequences for the ability of these agencies to respond to the
national security problems created by poorly regulated movements of people.'

The RUSI briefing has estimated that an additional 2019/20 allocation of £400Â million would be required to provide real-terms protection to the agencies with leadÂ responsibility for combating organised crime, managing migration and conductingÂ international diplomacy. This might well be possible given that the Chancellor hasÂ some room left for relaxation in the pace of departmental spending reductions, whileÂ still keeping to his objective of generating a substantial budget surplus byÂ 2019/20.

'Such protection would not be a magic bullet. But, alongside the much largerÂ investments now being promised for defence, development and counter-terrorism, itÂ would go a long way to financing the three 'missing links' in security provisionÂ that could otherwise emerge as a result of the Spending Review.'

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