

Contribution ID: 1779 Contribution code: FR05

Type: Roundtable

National Security under Labour: Strategy in an era of radical uncertainty

Friday 5 June 2026 13:15 (1h 30m)

For decades, scholars of British politics have argued that national security rarely features as a salient topic in electoral politics or public debate, owing to a durable strategic consensus and an assumed public focus on domestic matters. However, the past five years have shattered this assumption. From Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and escalating tensions with China, to the reverberations of Israel's military operations in Gaza, national security has become a visible and contested arena in the UK political sphere, demanding public scrutiny and intellectual renewal.

This roundtable gathers contributors to the forthcoming edited volume *National Security Under Starmer* (Palgrave Pivot) to consider what this shift means for International Studies. Centred on the UK Labour government's 2025 Strategic Defence Review and National Security Strategy, each expert examines a key dimension of Britain's security orientation: the evolving state identity and public legitimacy of security policy (Martin), the elevation of cyber and digital sovereignty (Devanny), the strategic integration of the space domain (Balm), the long-term evolution of the Strategic Defence Review process (Reynolds), and the embedded role of gender in security statecraft (Kirby).

Together, we offer the first academic forum to examine the Starmer government's national security policy-making across interconnected domains –from space and cyber to gender and public opinion. By unpacking different forms of evidence (from defence reviews to citizen sentiment) and contrasting state-centric and society-centric perspectives, we explore how to study national security as a whole-of-system enterprise rather than a series of siloed issues.

In doing so, we open a conversation about how to renew security studies for the next 50 years: methodologically (through multi-domain, mixed-method approaches), pedagogically (through teaching security as a public, not just governmental, concern), and conceptually (by breaking down the walls between strategic analysis and democratic accountability). This roundtable reflects BISA's commitment to critical debate and disciplinary innovation –asking whether Starmer's government, and those of us studying it, are truly ready for what comes next, and what needs to change if not.

Track Classification: Security Policy and Practice