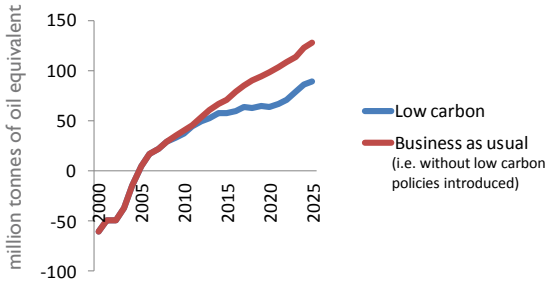
Fact Sheet 19: Energy, Resources and Climate Change

The UK faces national security challenges in its ability to secure the energy it needs

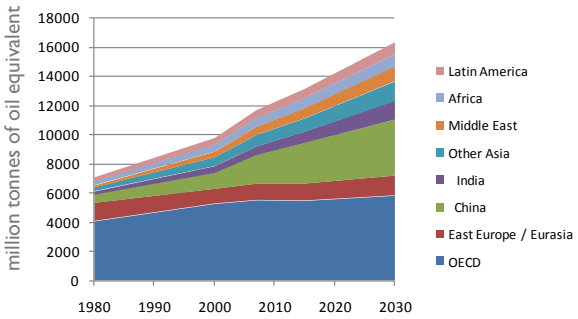
The National Security Risk Assessment, set out in the National Security Strategy, assesses energy security risks to be important for national security, although these risks are judged to be lower relative to other challenges facing the UK (e.g. international terrorism). Key energy security challenges include:

- potentially disruptive events, such as industrial action, severe weather and malicious attacks;
- the closure of electricity generation capacity in the UK over the next decade – a third of coal and oil electricity generation capacity by 2016 and all but one nuclear power station by 2023;
- rising energy import dependence, reflecting depletion of North Sea reserves;
- greater global competition for energy driven by rising global demand, combined with supply constraints such as market imperfections and lack of infrastructure;
- underinvestment by key producer countries leading to underproduction of oil and gas and volatile prices – judged to pose a greater threat to energy security over the medium / long term than the risks of any single supply interruption.

Net UK imports of oil and gas



Global demand for primary energy



The SDSR introduces new measures to ensure these challenges are manageable

In the future, imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is expected to become a more important part of the UK's energy mix (Photo: Centrica plc)

The National Security Tasks and Planning Guidelines, set out in the SDSR, focus future efforts on ensuring resilient supply and distribution systems across all sectors of critical national infrastructure. Key policies include:

- prioritising bilateral diplomatic relationships with key supplier states and those that use the most energy, and strengthening support for UK companies working overseas;
- enhancing the physical security of supply sources and routes to mitigate transit disruption;

The SDSR introduces new measures to ensure these challenges are manageable (cont.)

Thanet Wind Farm in Kent – the world's biggest offshore wind farm – will reduce the UK's need for imported energy (Photo: Vattenfall)

- new powers for the regulator (Ofgem) to improve the functioning of domestic energy markets to further enhance security of supply;
- removing unnecessary obstacles to investment in nuclear power, such as planning barriers, so that energy companies can come forward to build new nuclear power stations without public subsidy;
- promotion of low carbon energy and energy efficiency;
- stronger measures to ensure energy infrastructure resilience.

The security risks to the UK posed by other resources and climate change are generally less intense and more indirect – so our policy response focuses on coordinating actions

Competition for resources – such as energy, water or food – among or within other countries can result in instability which may impact on the UK's national security, for example in the form of conflict or increased migratory pressures. Furthermore, climate change has been identified as a "threat multiplier", exacerbating these existing security threats.

There are also potential threats to accessing other natural resources (including important minerals, such as "rare earth metals", an essential component of various low carbon and defence technologies), although constraints on access to these materials are considered to be a lower risk than energy security challenges.

Darfur refugee camp in Chad. According to UN General Secretary Ban Ki Moon, amid the diverse social and political causes, the conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising at least in part from climate change (Photo: Mark Knobil)

The SDSR makes recommendations for improving the coordination of Government work on these issues, and establishes clear governance structures and accountability.