



submission

Joint Select Committee on National Security Strategy inquiry: ‘National Security Capability Review: A Changing Security Environment’

Saferworld submission, February 2018

Introduction

Saferworld welcomes the opportunity to feed into the Joint Select Committee on National Security Strategy’s inquiry into the National Security Capability Review. This is an important moment to reflect on the UK’s strategy for achieving national security, and its capabilities for delivering it, in order to ensure coherence and sustainable results.

Saferworld is a conflict prevention and peacebuilding organisation working in over twenty conflict affected and fragile contexts around the world. This submission will set out some of the trends in the global security environment that inform our work. It will also explore the balance between short term securitised approaches to conflict and longer-term peacebuilding which addresses the root causes of conflict. This submission also examines the role and effectiveness of DFID and the CSSF in supporting these approaches.

The evolving threat since 2015 – and response implications

1. 2016 was the fifth most violent year since the end of the cold war.¹ The last two years have seen intensifying geopolitical competition between global powers – such as the US, Russia and China – and regional powers – including Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel. In this context, internationalised civil conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen have escalated and grown more intractable. The conditions that created these wars – largely tied to abusive, divisive, corrupt and exclusionary governance – persist. For this reason, they and comparable contexts are likely to continue generating profound instability and forced displacement challenges. The terror threat in the UK, which rose markedly in 2017, is linked to or inspired by these conflicts and the grievances underlying them.²
2. At the same time, hardline state responses to instability – in contexts such as South Sudan and Egypt – alongside the stagnation of reform processes in contexts like Kenya and Tunisia, have the clear potential to generate further instability and conflict in the long term.
3. The rules-based international order - including long-established norms of behaviour codified in International Humanitarian Law and the UN Refugee Convention and more recent international legal treaties including the Arms Trade Treaty - is being further eroded by the actions of states, their proxies and the non-state actors engaged in such contexts. Those bearing the brunt of indiscriminate or direct military operations continue to be civilians in conflict zones, while communities and civil society organisations are threatened by the closure of civic space in the majority of UN Member States.³
4. Global evidence and policy frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have established that lasting, just solutions to these conflicts require addressing issues such as people’s access to security, justice, livelihoods and services, tackling corruption and ensuring people have a voice in decision making. Many of these issues were rightly made a focus under the 2015 SDSR.
5. However, at the same time, the SDSR prescribed both reinforcing the security capacities of problematic allies, and boosting UK defence exports. Both these policy commitments had the potential to undermine the UK’s efforts to prevent conflict by promoting inclusive, accountable governance and to embolden the aggressive posturing of global and regional powers. Since 2015, the UK has had a significant role in arming, supporting and emboldening states whose repression has the potential to generate more security

¹ Depuy et al, ‘Trends in armed conflict, 1946-2016’, (Prio, 2017).

² Attree L, ‘Counter terrorism: new UK strategy must learn obvious lessons’, (Open Democracy, 11 February 2018).

³ See Civicus, ‘Executive Summary’, 2017 *State of civil society report*, p 7 (Civicus, 2017) <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2017/state-of-civil-society-report-2017-executive-summary-en.pdf>.

threats for the UK. In doing so, the UK has in some cases undermined the rules-based international order and aggravated problems of corruption, repression and abuse of human and women's rights in countries such as Yemen and Egypt. According to the more visionary sections of the SDSR – it should be doing the reverse.

6. The UK should promote continuing and strong engagement in protecting the rules-based international order through support for multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, ensuring that its allies constructively engage in collective global policy processes and conflict prevention efforts.
7. From 2000 to 2016, global casualties from terror attacks increased seven-fold.⁴ The ranks of violent Islamist movements are thought to have more than tripled from 2000 to 2013.⁵ With five terror attacks hitting the UK in 2017, and many more foiled, it is clear that the threat from such attacks has been rising. It will be crucial, however, that the UK's response to this threat is informed by active learning about why this threat has been rising and the results of past counter-terror efforts.
8. Globally, terror attacks are overwhelmingly concentrated in conflict zones and repressive environments,⁶ and – even in the case of attacks launched in the UK – connected to the problems and grievances at play in such contexts. The foreign policy dimensions of the UK's, and its allies', counter-terror responses, can also improve or diminish UK national security.
9. Since 2016, Saferworld has published nine studies of the impact of counter-terror approaches overseas, and our conclusions suggest that the UK must strive for greater coherence between its different tools for responding:
 - relying less on military options,
 - ensuring greater attention to tackling key conflict drivers (in particular security force behaviour, exclusive governance and corruption),
 - working to ensure that communities and civil society have a stake in the peace processes and political transitions needed to bring conflicts to a lasting end.

To act on this evidence, it would be vital for the UK to revisit strategies framed around the elimination of terror threats – through direct military action or via partners – and scale up its work on addressing drivers of conflict.

10. Overall, while the UK has been doing much laudable work on resolving conflict and addressing its causes through DFID and the FCO, the contradictions in the SDSR have detracted in important ways from UK policy coherence for peace and conflict prevention.
11. The Joint Committee, which has oversight of the strategic direction of the UK's approach to National Security, could usefully examine how the UK could improve the coherence of its overall approach and whether short-term responses could undermine a long-term approach to build a more stable world, address the root causes of conflicts and prevent new tensions from arising. Has the UK put in place the appropriate resources and skills to meet today's challenges, and struck the right balance between them?

Rebalancing peacebuilding and military approaches to conflict

12. The world's military spending continues to soar (in 2016, it reached nearly \$1.69 trillion).⁷ Peacebuilding (\$10 billion) and development (\$142 billion) remain chronically underfunded.⁸
13. The UK needs to be less reliant on military approaches to the deep social and political problems that underlie conflict and insecurity. In the debate over whether the UK should increase defence spending to counter Russia, it is important to note that the UK spends 2.2% of its GDP on defence already.⁹ This exceeds the NATO target for defence spending – and that of France, Germany, Italy, Spain or any other EU country. Likewise, NATO military expenditure dwarfs that of Russia by a ratio of 10 to 1.¹⁰ Although Russia's behaviour (as in Syria)¹¹ is driving instability that threatens the UK, increased military expenditure by NATO countries could add to Russian fears and feed further problems.
14. It would be a useful contribution to this issue if the Joint Committee were to examine the potential for savings in the defence budget in relation to capabilities that no longer correspond to credible threats to UK

⁴ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2017*.

⁵ Goepner E, 'Measuring the Effectiveness of America's War on Terror', (*Parameters*, 46(1) Spring 2016).

⁶ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2017*.

⁷ SIPRI, 'Military expenditure', <https://www.sipri.org/research/armament-and-disarmament/arms-transfers-and-military-spending/military-expenditure> [accessed 15 February 2018].

⁸ International Alert, (2017). *Redressing the Balance*, 20.

⁹ Chalmers M, 'Decision Time: The National Security Capability Review 2017–2018 and Defence', (RUSI, February 2018)

¹⁰ The Ammerdown Group, 'Rethinking Security – a discussion paper', (November 2016), p 27, <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/files.wordpress.com/2016/10/rethinking-security-a-discussion-paper.pdf> .

¹¹ Keen D, 'Syria: playing into their hands', (Saferworld: November 2017).

- security.¹² This could enable greater investment in peacemaking tools that offer the UK more sustainable and better value options for pursuing national security.
15. Peacebuilding, governance and development efforts are the most strategic tools the UK has to address conflict and promote lasting peace in the long term. The UK urgently needs to put greater emphasis and resources into these efforts. DFID has recently developed an updated Building Stability framework,¹³ and has vital capacities for advancing its vision for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Clear support for this flagship policy, a cross-departmental vision for building long-term stability informed by this thinking, and a programme to build the capacity of government and civil society to build peace would better position the UK to deliver on the SDSR.
 16. At the same time as spending more on peacebuilding, it is important to spend resources well. The UK's conflict analyses and response strategies need to be developed through meaningful consultations with communities and civil society (rather than behind closed doors). On the ground, peace and development actors have learnt that broad buy-in within society and across institutions is vital for overcoming 'capability traps'¹⁴ that routinely stymie development and conflict transformation processes. Aid, diplomacy, economic and security engagement needs then to be a logical response to the key drivers and opportunities identified through inclusive conflict analysis, and strategies need to build momentum for change through engagement with conflict-affected societies.
 17. For such strategies to achieve progress, they must be supported by overall policy coherence. Arms sales to conflict parties and other actions that may undermine the higher order objective of achieving sustainable peace need to be scrupulously avoided. In this regard, reinvigorating UK adherence to the global Arms Trade Treaty, and restraint in defence exports to unstable countries and regions, is urgent and essential for UK national security, and important for restoring the UK's standing as an advocate of the rules-based international order.
 18. Unclassified versions of National Security Council country strategies should be made available to allow greater public and parliamentary scrutiny and enable partners to better ascertain how peacebuilding responses can be aligned with UK strategy.
 19. When resourcing humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts, for the UK to pursue the developmental approach to achieving peace and stability, it will need to maintain the trust and partnership of civil society / non-governmental agencies. To do so, it should respect the humanitarian principles of its partners (humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence) and ensure that policy and programme decisions uphold international norms and standards. There are significant risks to humanitarian actors when the lines between security and humanitarian operations are blurred. Therefore the UK must also ensure that at the operational levels humanitarian, development and peacebuilding action retain sufficient independence from 'harder' security programming.

Supporting DFID to address conflict drivers

20. DFID's support for the inclusion of peace, justice and inclusivity in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – most notably reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 16 - is highlighted in its most recent Single Department Plan. The UK worked hard to help build a global consensus on this transformative agenda that put peace at the centre of global development efforts.
21. To live up to this vision, it is important to revitalise DFID's focus on peace, security and justice, and to invest in an empowerment agenda that gives societies the opportunity to shape peace, reform and governance processes that are the only viable foundation for their future security. DFID is specialised in conflict settings and governance issues. Its systems for delivering programming overseas are the most evolved available to HMG. DFID's capacity still needs reinforcing and HMG must reaffirm its important perspective and lead role on conflict prevention, promotion of people's security and access to justice and governance as a key capacity supporting the UK's pursuit of sustainable security under the NSS.
22. DFID's capacity to work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding should be maintained and strengthened, and it should have a leading voice on ensuring the quality of all UK aid spending, including quality programming on peace and conflict issues, and ensuring that the UK's wider aid portfolio does no harm in conflict settings – and contributes to peace whenever possible. People's security and access to justice are part of development and the UK must continue to prioritise them within its aid work. DFID's focus on

¹² Such as in areas set out by Chalmers M, 'Decision Time: The National Security Capability Review 2017–2018 and Defence', (RUSI, Feb 2018).

¹³ Department for International Development - Building Stability Framework 2016, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5968990ded915d0baf00019e/UK-Aid-Connect-Stability-Framework.pdf>.

¹⁴ Andrews, M., Pritchett L., and Woolcock, M., (2012), Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) - Working Paper 299, CDA, <http://www.cgdev.org/publication/escaping-capability-traps-through-problem-driven-iterative-adaptation-pdia-working-paper>

people’s interests and well-being is crucial for informing a cross-departmental approach to addressing the root causes of conflict.

23. There is a need for smarter spending to ensure that intended results of sustainable peace are achieved. As the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) has observed, consolidating aid spending into fewer, bigger projects may not yield results in fragile states, and it is important not to overlook ‘small and not-for-profit implementers, who may enjoy greater local knowledge and legitimacy’.¹⁵ ICAI has also criticised the pursuit of spending targets at the expense of fitting strategy and spending to the demands and opportunities presented by the context.¹⁶ Addressing these issues could enable more effective peacebuilding responses.
24. The decision by DFID to drop core funding for civil society organisations that contribute to relief, development and peacebuilding programmes, particularly those in conflict-affected and fragile contexts, has negatively impacted their ability to offer agile, sustainable and strategic support to broader UK efforts to promote peace and stability overseas. Such efforts are highly relevant to delivering the bottom-up, people-focused vision in the SDSR and to a coherent and long-term approach to address current security threats. The Joint Committee could usefully consider the impact of this policy decision on peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts that are essential pillars to the UK’s national security capabilities.

The Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF)

25. As outlined in our submission on the Conflict Stability and Security Fund to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy inquiry,¹⁷ work funded under the CSSF should be as ‘bottom up’ as possible and responsive to the complex and rapidly changing dynamics that characterise conflict-affected and fragile spaces. Its processes for developing strategy should be more inclusive and transparent, less driven by top-down priorities and more responsive to the realities on the ground. This means greater decision making by country teams and more engagement with local civil society as key local agents of sustainable change.
26. The CSSF should avoid overly focusing on short-term intelligence and counter-propaganda communications, support to counter-terror and other national security initiatives, and concomitantly increase its focus on long-term transformation of the factors that drive conflicts. This requires consistent support to societies to push for constructive change, before, during and after crises occur. If the UK national security interest is too narrowly defined, it could miss opportunities to address core conflict drivers preventatively, and neglect a critical focus on securing just, lasting peace overseas through support to non-violent change.

Could the 2015 NSS & SDSR have prepared the UK better to meet evolving threats?

Our analysis supports the view that there are clear contradictions inherent in the SDSR. The National Security Capability Review thus represents a useful opportunity for reflection and course correction, refocusing on the capabilities the UK has for promoting and achieving sustainable security and reasserting political support for the UK’s significant peace-making tools and assets.

In addition to this submission, we align ourselves with and commend the inputs provided by our partners, Conciliation Resources and International Alert.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. We believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict. We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

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¹⁵ Independent Commission on Aid Impact, (2015). Review of UK Development Assistance for Security and Justice. Paras 6.17-9.

¹⁶ Independent Commission on Aid Impact, (2015). Assessing the Impact of the Scale-up of DFID’s Support to Fragile States. Para 6.5.

¹⁷ Saferworld (2016), Conflict Stability and Security Fund, Saferworld submission to the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy inquiry, September 2016.