Note for the Cabinet Office as its team works on the next National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review

1. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) in the UK is working to end the international arms trade. CAAT believes that large scale military procurement and arms exports only reinforce a militaristic approach to international problems.

Need for greater consultation and wider range of views

2. There are few issues as important as security. Everyone can agree that it is vital though what is understood by it, and consequently views on how it can be achieved, vary greatly. Against this background, it is disappointing that the views of organisations such as CAAT have not been actively solicited as work proceeds on the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). It is also of concern that the online public engagement poll seems designed rather more as a tick box exercise and less as meaningful consultation. It is good, however, that following complaints and publicity, the ludicrous limit of 1,500 characters (or about 200 words) for the poll was scrapped.

3. CAAT has attempted to make its views on the NSS known. It made submissions to relevant inquiries of the Commons' Defence Committee and the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy. Together with other organisations working on peace, environmental and development issues, CAAT wrote to the leaders of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. However, it does not feel as though those developing the NSS are interested in views that deviate from those which currently prevail.

4. As people's security is so important, CAAT would like the publication of the NSS to be delayed to allow a full open and public discussion of the issue.

Narrow vision of security

5. The introduction to the public engagement poll says: "This review (sic) is important because it will:
   * be driven by our national security and foreign policy objectives, and the complex risks we face in a rapidly changing world;
   * ensure Britain remains a leader on the world stage and that we have the networks necessary to promote our interests, protect our people and values and to tackle threats in a domestic and international context;
   * maintain our world-leading Armed Forces; intelligence agencies; police; diplomatic and development capabilities.

6. The public consultation form starts by asking the respondent to "select the area to which your comment most closely relates" and then gives a choice of Defence, International Development, Foreign Policy, Homeland Security and Other.

7. The email CAAT received on 20th August 2015 in response to an inquiry about the consultation on the NSS came from a member of the "Cabinet Office SDSR Team". In it he said that: "Generally submissions should be directed at the department which has the policy lead ...".
8. Taken together, these are a very clear indication that the vision of security informing the NSS is narrow and compartmentalised. The fact that the SDSR Team is also handling the NSS gives rise to concern that "security" has been conflated with "Defence". To pose a choice of areas for comments ignores the fact that the threats, and their solutions, concern all the options, including "Other". Little room has been left for what should be a "blank sheet" assessment of all threats to security, with no preconceptions that these are military or easily pigeon-holed as the responsibility of one department. At the moment, from the information that is publicly available, it does not appear that a real security review of this kind is taking place.

The wide range of threats

9. The review should be looking at the many global threats that stem from climate change, competition over resources and income inequality. These threats, and the impact, damage and hurt that arise from them, would be far more effectively and humanely addressed by fully committed, preventative action rather than relying on containing outcomes.

10. The reality of climate change demands an urgent move towards a low carbon economy. Substantial investment in renewable energy technologies could, given the UK's wind, wave and tidal resources, give domestic companies a major role in a sector with vast market potential. It would also enhance energy security.

11. Human rights and tackling inequality need to be consistently at the centre of policy; for a secure world human needs must take priority over commercial concerns. It is vital that the UK be seen to consistently encourage democratic participation and uphold the rule of law in the UK and overseas. Those who flee injustice to the UK should be treated with respect.

The UK must stop creating insecurity

12. The idea that the maintenance of UK global influence requires military might, the possession of nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council locks UK governments into policies and decisions that make the world a less secure place.

13. A major component to the UK's security policy should be a commitment to reduce and resolve conflict, rather than to exacerbate it. The consequences of UK military action in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have been disastrous. Besides the loss of life, injuries and destruction, these actions have led to regional instability and major movements of refugees. The overseas militarisation has also alienated sections of the UK and other western publics, some of whom have, unfortunately, resorted to violence to make their anger known. Real security demands that overseas military interventions be removed as a policy option.

14. UK government's continued support for arms exports is another major factor in the general cynicism about UK foreign policy. Successive UK governments have called for universal human rights, but this has been totally undermined by their commitment to promoting arms sales.

15. The UK government has had an arms sales agency since 1966. In this time weapons have been promoted and sold to many human rights violators and countries involved in conflict. These include Pinochet's Chile, Galtieri's Argentina, Saddam's Iraq and Gadaffi's Libya; the UK ended up in conflict with the latter three. Sales continue today to repressive and authoritarian leaders such as those in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. With these arms goes a message of UK support and international credibility for oppressors.

16. Saudi Arabia is the largest customer for UK arms, giving it huge power to mute any UK criticism of it policies. Although it may say it wants democracy or to end corruption, UK governments have continued to act as the sales department for BAE Systems and the other arms companies. No lessons have been learnt from the fact that a Fatwa issued by Osama bin Laden in 1996 ("Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places") cited corruption in Saudi Arabia and arms purchases by the Saudi government as justifications for his call for a Jihad.
17. The military and arms industry are practised at promoting new threats to justify their existence and funding. If the UK government wants to make the world a more secure place it needs to put their vested interests to one side. It should switch from helping despotic regimes remain in power to supporting those struggling for democracy and human rights. The consequences for improved UK security will be immense as the UK will come to be seen as a force for good in the world.

18. One particular cause of injustice urgently needs tackling as part of a strategy for UK and global security. Jewish people were treated appallingly for millennia in Europe. This history should not, however, mean that the state of Israel, set up in response to this, should be allowed to flout United Nations’ resolutions and international law while the UK and the West do nothing. In July and August 2014, while television screens and social media showed horrific deaths and injuries and smashed infrastructure in Gaza, the UK government did not even impose an arms embargo or sever its military links with Israel. Such inaction in the face of catastrophe was inexcusable.

19. Nuclear weapons remain a threat to human existence. It is immoral to threaten to incinerate millions of people, and the NSS should prioritise nuclear non-proliferation. The UK should set an example by ridding itself of its nuclear weapons. The idea that Trident should be replaced defies belief as a rational policy decision by anyone seeking a more secure world.

Resources should be allocated to tackle identified threats

20. Only after the threats to security have been identified and agreed should the resources be allocated to tackle them. The Chancellor of the Exchequer's commitment in July 2015 to spend 2% of the UK's GDP on the Defence Budget can be seen as his commitment to militarism. His August 2015 announcement of £500million funding for the Trident nuclear submarine base shows his contempt for the NSS process.

21. Security is vitally important to everyone. It is not synonymous with military spending. It is essential that resources are made available to tackle the real threats to our security and well-being rather than wasted on counter-productive military 'solutions'.

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