Submission from the Campaign Against Arms Trade to the Defence Committee inquiry into the Strategic Defence and Security Review & the National Security Strategy.

1. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) in the UK works to end the international arms trade. Around 80% of CAAT’s funding comes from individual supporters.

2. CAAT’s response to the National Security Strategy (NSS) and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) focuses on the underlying problems shared by both and the extent to which they represent a real review of UK security.

3. CAAT considers that the review is a continuation of past policy and does not offer the wider perspective and action that are required to address the known threats to UK security. There is little evidence that a real review has taken place even in terms of military strategy, let alone the “wider security” that is stated as an aim of the documents and that is urgently needed.

4. This submission begins with a consideration of the extent to which the NSS and SDSR are dominated by military thinking, then contrasts the lack of military threats (heavily resourced) with the known non-military threats (minimally resourced). It also raises concern over the way that the military approach to security itself threatens UK security. It finishes with a consideration of the influence of arms companies in the policy-making environment and the way in which this exacerbates an already biased approach to security, helping to entrench it.

5. CAAT’s recommendation is for a new review that is a full and genuine evaluation of UK security and allocates resources proportionally in relation to threats.

Military-dominated view of security

6. The NSS is dominated by military thinking. It talks of “wider security” and identifies the non-military threats as those that are highest priority, but these do not escape the shackles of the military-mindset that governs the official view of security. Claims that the NSS and SDSR consider “national security issues in the round” and that a “radical transformation” has taken place, are shown to be false within the first few pages of each document. Opening statements of principle and stated priorities relating to “wider security” are either unaccountably transformed into military issues or abruptly sidelined:

- In the NSS foreword, the values the UK believes in are given as “the rule of law, democracy, free speech, tolerance and human rights.” Immediately, and bizarrely, we learn that the way to uphold these is “to project power”.

- the SDSR foreword follows a similar pattern. In three paragraphs (on page 4) it covers the identified priority threats of natural disasters, terrorism, cyber attacks, organised crime etc. Having listed these threats without a consideration of the capacity to address them, the document turns to the armed forces. In striking contrast, this is all about capacity, with no threat in evidence (apart from “the threats of the future”). This capacity against no defined threat is then considered in detail for the remaining two pages of the foreword. This is mirrored in the rest of the document. “Defence” and “The Deterrent” are given 22 pages, and the eight “Wider Security” risks, which supposedly dominate the priorities, follow on with a couple of pages each.

7. This perception of the prominence of military matters in the SDSR appears to be widely shared within Government and parliament: the 4 November House of Commons debate on the SDSR rarely strayed from military concerns; the Treasury’s Spending Review (October 2010) took it for granted that “Britain’s Armed Forces are the backbone of its national security”; and the Defence Committee itself stated its concerns in advance of the SDSR that “Inclusion of broadly defined security concerns within the Review does, however, risk the dilution of the defence contribution” (HC 345, 15 September 2010). In response, the Government was able to be confident that its approach “did not mean that the Defence contribution was diluted” (HC 638, 6 December 2010).

8. There is no evidence of a change of thinking around security and even less of a change of practice. There might even be a step back in terms of a wider security analysis compared to that of the
previous Government. In the National Security Strategy 2008 and its 2009 update “drivers of insecurity” received a high profile and was, potentially, an extremely useful concept. (Although this progress did not result in a move away from a military-dominated perception of security or a realigning of resource allocation.) The present Government has stated (HC 638, 6 December 2010) that it drew on previous documents in preparing to the SDSR, specifically referring to the MoD's Global Strategic Trends (February 2010). This document identified “The 4 key drivers for change that will affect the lives of everyone on the planet”: Climate Change, Globalisation, Global Inequality and Innovation. However, this approach has not been carried into the Government's security strategy.

9. **World role**: Even within the confines of the military-dominated approach to the review that we have seen, there is no suggestion that the UK’s “world role” has been assessed. This “world role” entails high military spending that supports power projection. Hartley and MacDonald at the University of York [1], having compared UK military spending to that of European NATO countries, suggest that the UK’s “world role” might be costing almost 1% of GDP. One percent of GDP would be around £15 billion. Throughout the debate in the run-up to the SDSR, the emphasis was on cuts rather than the nature of the UK's world role and the high human and financial costs that it entails.

The “age of uncertainty”

10. It is impossible to meaningfully relate the identified Priority Risks to the Defence budget. The result is that both NSS and SDSR are forced to rely on uncertainty, or “the age of uncertainty”, for their justifications for the overwhelming military emphasis. It is as if the public are needed to feel militarily threatened, regardless of the acknowledged lack of a known threat. Astonishingly, the Defence Secretary stated in the House of Commons SDSR debate in November that “... the world is a more dangerous place than at any time in recent memory.”

11. Friedman and Sapolsky at the MIT Security Studies Program [2] have termed the “uncertainty” approach ”You Never Knowism”. They offer that “You Never Know is a phony. It is an antidote for another threat: the threat of no threats. The threat of no threats is not a threat to most of us, who are glad to go unthreatened. But no threat is a threat to those who work to protect us from threats, the military services, defense contractors, defense think tanks, Congress, foreign policy pundits, even security studies programs. Without plausible threats to worry us, they champion merely possible ones by saying, essentially, ’You never know.’ “

12. Put even more bluntly by Simon Jenkins in the Guardian, “The truth is, we are now spending £45bn on heebie-jeebies” (9 June 2010).

13. It is not news that the military and arms industry will identify and promote new threats to justify their funding. So it seems obvious that a real security review requires that their vested interests are consciously set to one side.

In contrast: clear threats

14. What is striking is that while it seemed impossible to identify a realistic military threat, there are known, real, imminent threats. These do not appear to fit with the current or past Governments’ real priorities and receive little consideration and fewer resources.

15. The first page of the NSS acknowledges that “Our security is vulnerable to the effects of climate change and its impact on food and water supply”, and climate change does turn up a couple more times, for example on page 17 as “a ‘risk multiplier’, exacerbating existing tensions around the world.” But considering the massive impact that climate change could, realistically, have on the way of life in the UK, the consideration of the threat is token. The response to that threat is even thinner, with the paragraph “tackling” climate change going no further than vague “striving for an effective response, including a global deal”. There is the feeling that references to climate change are a required inclusion, but are an inconvenience.

16. The reality of climate change demands an urgent move towards an ultra-low carbon economy. While the promotion of low carbon technologies is discussed in the SDSR, it relates only to energy security and has little sense of urgency or the required scale. This is surprising even from a purely energy
security perspective, given the security benefits a move away from Middle East oil would have.

17. Moving rapidly to an ultra-low carbon economy would start to address the most obvious present and future threats to the UK. In addition, 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.

18. Global threats stemming from climate change, resource depletion and income inequality would be far more effectively addressed by fully committed, preventative action rather than relying on containing outcomes. National threats such as crime (including cyber attacks and terrorism) and natural hazards do not require armed forces. The emphasis should be on building-up civil services to more specifically address the identified Priority Risks and providing genuinely preventative measures for the wider international threats.

Creating instability and insecurity

19. But it is not just the failure of the current policy to address known non-military security threats that is wrong with the current strategy. The thrust of the strategy means that military action is likely to be prioritised as a means of addressing problems, with positive conflict-resolution approaches being marginalised and attempts to address the drivers of insecurity being under-resourced. The strategy itself leads the UK down a path that fosters instability and insecurity.

20. The ventures in Afghanistan and Iraq are appalling illustrations. It is hard to conceive of a sensible basis on which a terrorist outrage, of whatever scale, or issues around WMD verification should lead to the invasion of states. The resulting loss of hundreds of thousands of civilian lives, loss of hundreds of lives of UK military personnel (and thousands more seriously injured), waste of billions of pounds of taxpayers’ money each year, and increased threat of terrorism in the UK should be sufficient to motivate a change of approach. But being “drawn in” to an “international military crisis” remains a Tier One threat.

21. “Nuclear proliferation is a growing danger” (NSS foreword), but attempts by the UK to limit proliferation are hampered by the UK’s retention and “renewing” of its nuclear weapons. This policy invites the charge of hypocrisy on a basic intuitive level, but also given the UK Government’s lack of intent regarding Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations. These state that each party should “pursue negotiations in good faith…. on a treaty on general and complete disarmament”.

22. **Arms exports**: Within the SDSR, the Government has promised “greater promotion of defence exports”. However, arms exports are not governed by security concerns or needs but by the requirements of business.

23. The security justification for arms sales hinges on the way arms exports might assist in protecting what the Defence Committee termed “sovereign industrial capabilities” (HC 638, 6 December 2010). However, the arms companies that are envisaged as supporting the UK armed forces are international businesses and it is unrealistic to expect their international shareholders to prioritise the UK armed forces over those of another market. The whole idea of sovereign capabilities is no longer relevant in that all major UK capabilities are dependent on other suppliers. Even the Government seems to be beginning to accept this awkward reality: in its response to the Defence Committee’s report, it replaced the Committee’s terminology with “industrial capabilities associated with our sovereign requirements”. This is the situation for arms production overall, with the role of arms exports being one step further removed and further complicated by the tendency for arms contracts to require local production. An obvious case is that of the sale of Hawk jets to India. It formed the centrepiece of the Prime Minister’s trade mission in July, but the aircraft are all to be built in Bangalore rather than Brough.

24. Against this, the indiscriminate sale of arms around the world (to over 100 countries each year) would seem to be a recipe for instability and antagonism. Regional stability is threatened by arms races and the UK is, except in the circumstances of a rare international embargo, willing to provide arms to all state parties. Current examples include arms to both China and Taiwan, and India and Pakistan. An obvious past example is the sale to both Iran and Iraq while they were at war in the 1980s.
25. Sales to authoritarian regimes also account for a sizeable proportion of UK arms trading. Through these, the Government provides both materiel and moral support to regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Egypt and Libya. It is hard to reconcile these activities with the Foreign Secretary’s recent statements about supporting “free and open societies” (FCO news release 8 February 2011). Unfortunately, with a military approach to security and Foreign Office policy “placing the promotion of British business at the core of the work of the Foreign Office” (William Hague speech, 3 October 2010), the values of democracy and human rights are subordinate.

26. But apart from the moral abhorrence of supplying such regimes, arms sales have had an impact on UK values and institutions. Influence relating to arms deals is overwhelmingly with the buyer – it is a buyers' market. A striking example took place in December 2006 when the Serious Fraud Office investigation into BAE-Saudi arms contracts was terminated. The then Prime Minister put the relationship between BAE and Saudi Arabian princes ahead of “the rule of law”.

27. UK power projection has fed antagonism of the UK and increased the terrorist threat, and major arms deals would be seen as part of the same package. 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 the call for a Jihad.

28. Even the knowledge that UK arms could be used against UK forces (a delivery of naval spares for Argentina was approved just 10 days before the 1982 invasion of the Falkland Islands [3]) does not seem to be a concern. Certainly, it is not just “allies” that receive UK weaponry.

29. An outsider’s expectation of a security strategy might expect non-proliferation of weaponry to be a significant element. However, the opposite is the case for conventional arms.

**Arms company influence**

30. In the NSS foreword, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister stated that “We have been left a litany of scandalous defence procurement decisions, which have racked up vast and unfunded liabilities, without delivering the type of equipment our forces actually need to fight modern wars.” But this has been the nature of arms procurement for decades. The remark of former Minister of State for Defence Alan Clark comes readily to mind, that Eurofighter was "essentially flawed and out of date ... we must find a less extravagant way of paying people to make buckets with holes in them" (Hansard, 9 July 1997). It is the vested interests and influence of arms companies that ensure the continuation of this situation and, while this influence continues, procurement practices and security policy cannot change. Unfortunately, there is no sign of a rethink of the relationship with arms companies.

31. This was well evidenced by the Government’s response to the Defence Committee’s “serious concerns that the defence industry has only been formally consulted in very few areas” (HC 345, 15 September 2010). The Government stated that “Ministers and officials had numerous discussions with industry representatives whilst the SDSR was in progress. This included a full meeting of the National Defence Industries Council (NDIC), chaired by the Defence Secretary, and various sub-group meetings. There were also many meetings of Ministers or officials with individual companies. This included a series of sessions with key suppliers inviting them to offer innovative cost-effective solutions to providing current and future Defence capabilities.” (HC 638, 6 December 2010).

32. That is the nature of it. There are formal consultations with arms companies, but the influence is far more pervasive than that. It builds though a web of day-to-day relationships including procurement relationships, arms export relationships (not least through the Government’s dedicated arms sales unit: UK Trade & Investment’s Defence & Security Organisation (UKTI DSO)), lobbying company efforts, and personnel contacts, not least via the “revolving door”.

33. The relentlessness of the revolving door is as much a symptom as a cause of the insidious relationship. One of the more blatant examples is that of Kevin Tebbit who was the MoD’s Permanent Secretary from 1998 until 2005. Just months after retiring from the MoD he joined the Board of Finmeccanica UK and is now the company’s Chair. He is also Chair of the Defence Advisory Group of UKTI DSO and sits on the National Defence Industries Council, the “most senior” Government-
industry forum. More recent revolvers include Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Torpy to BAE Systems last month, Baroness Taylor to Thales Corporate Services in December, Lt General Richard Applegate to Niteworks also in December, General Sir Richard Dannatt to Control Risks Group in September, and Paul Boateng to Aegis Defence Services in 2009.

34. That something is deeply wrong with the relationship between the Government and arms companies became evident to the wider population during the lead up to the SDSR and fall-out following it. The debate about the aircraft carriers barely mentioned strategy. There is no doubt that if the contracts hadn’t been so lop-sided in BAE’s favour at least one of the carriers would have been cancelled. The operation and servicing costs of these ships seemed to be out of the equation, as was the impact their existence will have on future security policy.

35. Arms companies are not a neutral, disinterested party. They want decisions that will bring shareholder return rather than those that are in the interest of security or most cost-effective. Their presence at the top table helps crowd-out non-military voices and means that money is more likely to be wasted on arms and that militaristic solutions to international problems are more likely.

36. Rather than being courted, the influence of arms companies should be assiduously monitored with a view to preventing the obvious vested interests skewing security policy. Unfortunately, as the status quo appears to suit the Government, armed forces and arms companies [4], there seems to be little scope for a more objective consideration of security that could seek out wider views. UK policy is stuck in a rut that suits some very well but threatens UK security.

Conclusion

37. A “real review” of UK security has patently not occurred. It is questionable whether there has been a real review of even military strategy, but there has clearly been no progress towards a broad view of security that addresses genuine threats and allocates resources accordingly. We are left with a security review that does little to address non-military threats but retains a military-mindset that actively creates insecurity.

38. The NSS and SDSR should be re-started, on a balanced and rigorous basis. In order for this to happen there needs to be a blank-sheet assessment of all threats to security with no preconceptions that these are military, the full range of opinions gathered on each of these, then an appropriate allocation of resources. Such a review would need to have everything on the table (Trident, carriers, “world role”, arms export promotion) and limit military and arms company input to that accorded other viewpoints.

39. A review of this nature is inconceivable in the present circumstances but it is imperative for UK security that a radical change takes place. CAAT recommends that the Defence Committee presses for that reappraisal to begin.

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[2] Benjamin H. Friedman and Harvey M. Sapolsky, Breakthroughs, Spring 2006, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Security Studies Program (the article can be found at www.comw.org/qdr/fulltext/06friedman.pdf)


[4] Friedman and Sapolsky have commented that “The famous military-industry complex is not a conspiracy,
but an alignment of political self interests that promotes an enemy and expenses to confront it. This process occurs not by conscious design but through incidental construction of collective belief.”