Submission from the Campaign Against Arms Trade to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy on the next National Security Strategy

1. The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) in the UK is working to end the international arms trade. This has a devastating impact on human rights and security, and damages economic development. CAAT believes that large scale military procurement and arms exports only reinforce a militaristic approach to international problems.

2. CAAT is pleased that the Joint Committee is to look at the issues raised as the new National Security Strategy (NSS) is developed, inviting views from the public. As security is an issue which affects everyone, every effort should be made to make the process as open as possible with Committee hearings held in public and documents published.

3. Discussion of UK national security is handicapped by the considerable degree of homogeneity between the leaders of the three main UK political parties. Narrowly focussed, they all support the armed forces, nuclear weapons and the arms companies. This consensus is exacerbated by the media, particularly the broadcast media, which sees balance largely in party political terms. This makes it difficult to challenge the "establishment" view.

4. A further impediment to useful discussion is the conflation of "security" with "Defence". This predisposes thinking towards military responses and can pigeon-hole the subject within the Ministry of Defence and the Defence teams of political parties, even when it is being argued that security is a much broader issue than this. Any actions that the Joint Committee can take to encourage public, political and media discussion on security issues, particularly from a broader perspective, would be welcome.

How broadly should the NSS define national security?

5. As was the case in 2010, the NSS should look at all kinds of threats to UK security, not only those which are military. The 2015 NSS should go further and also examine the deeper roots underlying these threats, and consider what contributes to and exacerbates them.

6. Climate change, unequal trade policies and authoritarian rule are just some examples of the causes of insecurity. The NSS should contain a full examination of them and how they feed into each other, compounding the problems.

What should be the UK’s national security priorities for the next twenty years, and how should these steer the next NSS

7. Tackling these problems, the underlying causes of insecurity, over the next twenty years should mean a shift in focus right across Government. Human rights, tackling climate change and global development need to be consistently at the centre of policy; human needs must take priority over commercial concerns.

8. A major component to the UK’s security policy should be a commitment not to make the underlying threats worse. Overseas military interventions should be removed as a policy option. The UK government's continued support for arms exports is a 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.
9. 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 and continue today with sales to repressive and authoritarian leaders such as those in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. With the arms goes a message of UK support and international credibility for oppressors.

10. Saudi Arabia is the largest customer for UK arms, giving it huge power to mute any UK criticism of its policies. Although it may say it wants democracy or to end corruption, the UK governments have continued to act as the sales department for BAE Systems and the other arms companies. If the UK wants to want to be seen as a power of good in the world it needs to stop prioritising arms sales. 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.

11. 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.

12. Should the UK plan to maintain its global influence? Should we aim for a national consensus on the UK's future place in the world?

13. The maintenance of UK global influence seems to have become, as illustrated by some of the discussion about Scottish independence, conflated with military might, the possession of nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. This is a negative definition of UK influence that appears steeped in the primacy of hard power. Military intervention, arms sales and armed forces collaboration by the UK can also leave many of it citizens feeling ashamed.

14. There are plenty of ways the UK could, and does, already have a positive influence, not least because the English language has become the global one. Music, theatre, scientific invention, sport and the example of the National Health Service are all illustrations of this. Another beneficial role the UK might consider is becoming a leader in the development and promotion of renewable energy and low carbon technologies.

15. It is also 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.

16. How can the next NSS be made most useful in guiding decisions in Government and long-term spending decisions?

17. The 2010 NSS identified fifteen major threats to UK security. Only two of these involved a military attack by another state on the UK and just three more had any military component at all. The others were non-military such as cyber attack and terrorism, as well as energy security and natural disasters, including flooding.

18. The allocation of resources since 2010 has not matched the identified threats. Instead, the status quo has prevailed, suiting the armed forces and arms companies. They have successfully argued for military spending of 2% of Gross Domestic Product, meaning that the UK has the world's 6th largest military budget without any explanation as to how such spending enhances security. Inside that budget, equipment costs have been prioritised over personnel showing the influence of arms company lobbying.

19. To tackle the underlying causes of insecurity, vested interests need to consciously be set to one side. As well as ending tax-payer support for the arms trade, UK military spending should be
reduced. Resources should, for example, be shifted from developing new nuclear-armed submarines, or building and operating new aircraft carriers, towards environmental work to minimise flood risks or greater support for renewable energy development.

18. Many of those employed in the arms industry are skilled engineers, and there is a generally acknowledged shortage of these. Sectors that could benefit from these skills include renewable energy and low carbon technologies. The public funds which support the arms trade should be redirected to investment in renewable energy and low carbon technologies. Since energy security and climate change are acknowledged threats it would seem to be a win-win situation to use the skills of current arms industry workers as well as those seeking employment to address this.

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