

# Written submission to the UK's Strategic Defence and Security Review

October 2015

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1. Conciliation Resources welcomes the opportunity to inform the development of the UK Government's 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). This document builds on the arguments put forward in a joint submission to the SDSR by the peacebuilding, human rights and development agencies that make up the Conflict Policy Group of BOND, the UK's leading network of international development, humanitarian and peacebuilding organisations.
2. This submission articulates our organisational vision for the SDSR, based on our experience as an international peacebuilding organisation supporting people through dialogue and mediation in conflict-affected contexts for over 20 years. We see the review as an opportunity for the UK Government to put forward an agenda, in partnership with its civil society, regional and multilateral partners, of how the UK can achieve national security based on a progressive vision of peace and security overseas.

Through the next SDSR, we call on the UK Government to:

## **Prioritise long-term, preventative action to address the root causes and drivers of conflicts**

3. The UK Government iterated in its 2010 SDSR<sup>1</sup>, and in the 2011 Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS)<sup>2</sup>, the importance of investing in upstream prevention as a key pillar of its strategic response to instability and conflict. Since 2010 new and specific threats to global stability have emerged, in particular out of the civil war in Syria and conflicts in Ukraine. Furthermore, the number of armed conflicts has increased since 2010 and the gap between those countries enjoying relative peace and those suffering prolonged conflict is increasing.<sup>3</sup> The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide has reached record levels - nearly 60 million.<sup>4</sup>
4. Faced with specific immediate threats, there is a risk that Government responses become reactive and crisis driven, more reliant on military force and ultimately more costly in both economic and human terms. Yet the majority of armed conflicts arise from deep-rooted political, social and economic inequalities and injustice. In setting its priorities for national defence and security, the UK Government should keep sight of these causes and drivers, maintain a long-term perspective and commit to finding political solutions to political problems. Long-term support to the reform of key security and justice sectors, particularly the police, are essential. Military and

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<sup>1</sup> *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: Strategy Defence and Security Review 2010:*

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-and-security-review-securing-britain-in-an-age-of-uncertainty](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-and-security-review-securing-britain-in-an-age-of-uncertainty). In particular, *Section 4B: Instability and conflict overseas* (pp44-45)

<sup>2</sup> *Building Stability Overseas Strategy 2011:* [www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-stability-overseas-strategy](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/building-stability-overseas-strategy). In particular, *Investing in upstream prevention* (pp24-29)

<sup>3</sup> *Trends in Peace Infographic*, as part of the Institute for Economics and Peace's *Global Peace Index 2015:* [www.visionofhumanity.org/#/page/news/1247](http://www.visionofhumanity.org/#/page/news/1247)

<sup>4</sup> *World at War - UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014:* [www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html](http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html)

intelligence capabilities should serve political objectives and military deployment should be considered as the route of last resort.

5. The new SDSR should acknowledge that there are no shortcuts to building lasting peace and security in conflict-affected countries. The SDSR should uphold conflict prevention and peacebuilding as an integral part of a strategy that serves our national security. Conflict prevention should form a core strand in a successor BSOS that will guide the National Security Council, including in its decisions on spending under the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CSSF).

## **Invest in the full range of conflict resolution tools as an effective response to conflict**

6. Given the urgency of the trends in and international consequences of conflict, the UK Government should embrace in the SDSR and the new National Security Strategy the full range of tools that exist to prevent or resolve conflict.<sup>5</sup> There should be commitment to strengthening capabilities for prevention, resolution and peacebuilding on the part of the Government with its bilateral, multilateral partners, including the United Nations and regional organisations, as well as those of non-governmental organisations. These capabilities include better analytical capabilities as well as diplomacy, conflict analysis, dialogue, negotiations, mediation and mediation support, and post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation.
7. Any forward strategy should draw from the wealth of knowledge and innovation that exists within and outside government in the peacebuilding and mediation fields. These practitioners understand that from experience interventions by external actors will be more effective if they are based on a thorough understanding of each conflict context,<sup>6</sup> as well as the needs and motivations of the actors involved in, and affected by, the conflict.<sup>7</sup> This includes consulting UK communities with connections to conflict contexts. Strategic support to locally led or endorsed initiatives in finding non-violent solutions to conflict is more likely to lead sustainable peace and greater national security.
8. Non-governmental organisations' accompaniment and support is more relevant than ever, given the fact that the majority of conflicts are now within states, rather than between states, caused by exclusionary politics and poor governance and exacerbated by other transnational and global dynamics. As we see in Syria, there has been proliferation of armed groups, operating fluidly and across borders. International and local civil society actors have access to and relationships with local communities, leaders and organisations and with non-state armed groups, are able to understand the local dynamics and opportunities for peace, and have a commitment to long-term engagement and accompaniment. They are adept at

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<sup>5</sup> This argument is also made in the submission to the SDSR made by Common Security Initiative, entitled *Towards a common security strategy*

<sup>6</sup> *Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People: Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* makes some strong points to this effect, notably in the sections *The Primacy of Politics* (paragraph 51) and *Engaging with communities* (paragraph 234):

[www.un.org/sg/pdf/HIPPO\\_Report\\_1\\_June\\_2015.pdf](http://www.un.org/sg/pdf/HIPPO_Report_1_June_2015.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *The United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation* provides a good overview of the characteristics that define good mediation, in particular its sections on 'Consent', 'Inclusivity' and 'National Ownership':

[www.peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation](http://www.peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation)

working with excluded and marginalised social groups and can play independent third party roles in facilitating and supporting mediations, negotiations and dialogue. They can amplify the voices of those living with conflict, who often have the greatest insight into their resolution.

9. The UK Government has made significant investment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes over the last few years, including through the Conflict Pool and has built up a globally recognised expertise and leadership in this area. It is important that the SDSR restates and reaffirms the importance of building on this investment.

## **Ensure the coherence of UK Government strategies and policies to prevent conflict and protect national security**

10. The SDSR should commit the UK Government to greater rigour in ensuring coherence between foreign policy decisions and the means to counter security threats facing the UK. In particular, the SDSR should include means to check that strategies, methods and tactics designed to counter a terrorist threat do not risk indirectly exacerbating the threat or limiting the space and ability for those who can address the root causes of conflict and extremist violence, in particular at civil society level.<sup>8</sup> The means to address conflict should not erode a popular belief in the possibility of a peaceful and just society based on the rule of law.
11. As a member of the UN General Assembly, the UK Government in September adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>9</sup> Goal 16 commits states to *inter alia* 'significantly reduce all forms of violence' and 'ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels'. Globally there has been a steady decline in civic freedoms – Freedom House has recorded the longest consecutive decline in the 50 years since its records began.<sup>10</sup>
12. Counter-terrorism measures and legislation have been used in some contexts and by autocratic regimes as a pretext to clamp down on civil society and freedom of speech. Often women are the most active at these levels in furthering peace and democracy and are disproportionately affected by these measures. The UK Government is committed to supporting full women's participation in peace and security efforts through the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, and other related Women, Peace and Security commitments.<sup>11</sup> It is important that the SDSR and its implementation strikes the correct balance between its strategic policy commitments. It should also base its decisions on an informed and agreed understanding of the root causes of security threats and the best means to address them, drawing on the full range of non-violent and military means available.

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<sup>8</sup> This argument is also put forward in the submission to the SDSR made by the BOND Conflict Policy Group entitled *Towards the next National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security*, specifically in the paragraph 'Rethink hard security responses to political problems'.

<sup>9</sup> *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*: [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld)

<sup>10</sup> See the global trends listed in Freedom House's report: *Freedom in the World 2015*: [www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/01152015\\_FIW\\_2015\\_final.pdf](https://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/01152015_FIW_2015_final.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2014-2017*: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security)