

**Submission to the UK Strategic Defence and Security Review:
Peaceful and resilient societies abroad are at the heart of UK security and defence
August 2010**

Introduction

We congratulate the government on its decision to have a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). Conciliation Resources¹ supports a broader more comprehensive approach to setting defence and security priorities.

Since the publication of our policy report '[Bridging the Gap: Improving UK support for peace processes](#)' in June 2007, Conciliation Resources (CR) has had high levels of engagement with HMG on its conflict, security, defence and development policies. An example of this engagement was the role played by our Executive Director in the review of the last government's Public Service Agreement on conflict (PSA30).

We welcome the Secretary of State for Defence's statement during the June parliamentary debate on the SDSR that he wants to ensure the process will "benefit from the expertise in the wider defence community, including partners in industry, academia, non-governmental organizations and the charitable and voluntary sector".²

We would like to respond to this invitation and share with the National Security Council some conclusions based on our work in some of the world's most fragile states and regions.³

1. Peaceful and resilient societies abroad are in the UK's national interest

Helping warring parties to resolve their conflicts and build peace can enhance global security by addressing the grievances that fuel insecurity and instability. By prioritizing constructive and supportive actions in the world's protracted conflicts HMG can help reduce the justifications for terrorism, as well as opportunities for extremist groups to consolidate.

We understand that the SDSR will be based on a new National Security Strategy (NSS), which is defining the UK's interests and considering the international and domestic threats to those interests.

In defining the UK's interests it is important to consider the drivers of insecurity that affect us in a networked world. Though underlying drivers of insecurity are largely global in nature, they directly threaten the UK's long-term national interests. The UK must support long-term resolution of conflict in order to address sources of threat proactively rather than responding only to their manifestations. Defining security interests purely in

¹ Conciliation Resources is an independent charity working internationally to prevent violent conflict, promote justice and build lasting peace in war torn societies. www.c-r.org

² Dr Liam Fox, Secretary of State for Defence, House of Commons Hansard Debates for 21 June 2010

³ One of the key resources for this submission is our policy brief '[Ending war: the need for peace process support strategies](#)', which distils lessons from CR's practical work and from our series Accord: an international review of peace initiatives.

terms of direct military threats and prioritizing military solutions will not equip the UK to face 21st century challenges.

There are negative consequences to leaving conflicts unresolved, even if they appear relatively stable. The long-neglected conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia erupted into armed confrontation in August 2008 and subsequent tension between NATO and Russia. Conflicts in Cyprus, Kashmir, Kosovo, Nagorny-Karabakh, to name but a few, indicate the ongoing risks and social and economic costs they generate in slow and suspended development, even if battlefield deaths are minimal. Protracted conflicts like the Middle East become sources of unrest and violent threat in the broader region.

In evaluating threats to the UK it is also crucial to understand conflicts as systems that have cross-border and regional dynamics. As the conflicts affecting Afghanistan, the Middle East and Somalia show, conflict dynamics exceed national boundaries. Strategies focusing on countries as individual units that do not incorporate the cross-border or regionalized dimensions of conflicts undermine their effectiveness.⁴

➔ ***Giving HMG the means to do it:***

- ◆ Prioritize joint research and analysis across HMG;
- ◆ Develop a comprehensive HMG conflict strategy that flows from the NSS;
- ◆ Ensure HMG develops specific strategies to support peace and political settlement support for all conflicts that include a cross-border or regional perspective;
- ◆ Prioritize opportunities for having an impact by having flexible deployable assets.⁵

2. The greatest threats and opportunities come from Non-State Actors

Many threats to Britain and the world's security derive not from other states but from non-state armed groups. Equally the greatest burden of responding to conflict, hosting the displaced and traumatised, promoting return, reintegration and reconciliation again is not carried by states or multilaterals but by civil society groups and communities. HMG's security and defence strategies and capabilities must reflect this new context.

Strategic and principled engagement with non-state armed groups is a key policy instrument to end violent conflict. Yet in the context of the 'war on terror', UK and international policy has been incoherent on how to talk to armed groups or whether to engage with them at all. The SDSR should be an opportunity to look into these issues and ensure that mediation and provision of principled advice to engage armed groups in peacemaking is clearly exempt from

When counter-terrorism legislation undermines dialogue

In our work we have found that the proscription of armed groups can present an obstacle to engagement in mediation processes, as they are essential protagonists in building sustainable peace. In the UK, the Terrorism Act 2000 makes it illegal to arrange, manage or assist in managing a meeting to support, further the activities or be addressed by a proscribed organization. The only caveat to this is that you are allowed to organize "genuinely benign meetings". While potentially leaving room for interpretation with vague terminology, this law still discourages conflict resolution charities from seeking to hold dialogue meetings with members of proscribed groups. See: [BBC News](#) and [Open Democracy](#)

⁴ CR will publish lessons on this issue in November as part of our Accord series. We would be happy to provide a briefing.

⁵ The Conflict Prevention Pool (CPP) is a good example of a cross-Whitehall tool that has enabled HMG to undertake timely and innovative initiatives in difficult conflict contexts that frequently demand flexibility with relatively small budgets.

prosecution and lies at the heart of British foreign and defence policy.

People in countries affected by conflict must be at the heart of its resolution. It is not up to the UK to 'deliver' resolution or security but the UK can play a role in promoting peace and supporting the participation and active involvement of civil society groups in these processes. Greater emphasis needs to be given to building the capacities of people in fragile and conflict-affected societies to prevent emerging crises, resolve ongoing disputes and engage in the state-society negotiation that can underpin responsive states.

The SDSR should also be an opportunity to take stock of progress on the UK's commitments to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security particularly to prioritize, enable and strengthen the participation of women in conflict resolution.

Structuring broader opportunities for public participation in peace processes can:

- Widen the range of issues addressed, including the structural causes of conflict;
- Help produce peace agreements with broader legitimacy and durability;
- Strengthen societies' resilience by creating the capacity for inclusive political participation in governance;
- Facilitate political reconciliation at multiple levels.

→ Giving HMG the means to do it:

- ◆ Research and analysis across HMG should ensure that the 'voices' of the people directly affected by conflicts are heard and included⁶;
- ◆ Ensure counter-terrorism legislation does not undermine peace processes;
- ◆ Strengthen the specialist capacities of HMG and international institutions through developing the tools and architecture to engage with non-state actors effectively;
- ◆ Provide reliable, flexible funding.⁷

3. Put politics at the heart of Defence, Diplomacy and Development

We welcome the government's commitment to a cross-Whitehall approach that is looking at the "diplomatic network, the intelligence agencies, security elements of the Home Office's work, such as counter-terrorism, and the UK's support for international development where it is also contributing to international security and stability".⁸

The UK has played a leading role in building capacities for international interventions and civil-military cooperation towards 'stabilization'. But it has paid less attention to how it can support processes to avert the descent into violence and to develop effective peace and political settlements in a strategic and coherent way.⁹ The SDSR should be an opportunity to put politics back at the heart of defence, diplomacy and development.

⁶ Ensuring HMG has the right networks and contacts with civil society groups is key particularly when it comes to early warning analysis as those on the ground and affected will have the clearest analysis of the situation and the conflict.

⁷ In our experience with the CPP for example, we have found that it worked best when it supported initiatives that complemented the Government's work in the three "D's" of Defence, Diplomacy and Development – and focussed on working with what has been called the Third Sector, or in conflict resolution terms, Track II or Track III initiatives. We feel this is an essential dimension of HMG's engagement in a world where non-state actors, be they business or religious or traditional leaders or peace NGOs or armed groups, play a central role in conflicts, their prevention and resolution.

⁸ <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/PolicyStrategyandPlanning/SDSR/StrategicDefenceAndSecurityReviewsdsr.htm>

⁹ Conciliation Resources, *Bridging the gap: improving UK support for peace processes*, June 2007

In places where the UK is involved militarily that are seen as areas of “direct” strategic priority like Afghanistan or Iraq, the government is today more than ever aware that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through the exercise of force alone. However, diplomacy is still the weakest link in the UK strategy; there needs to be more investment in the politics and the promotion of endogenous political settlements. Political and diplomatic leadership should be as clear as leadership for HMG’s security services.

In addressing the challenges of conflict and insecurity in countries and regions where conflicts are protracted and unresolved, the UK needs to have a coherent strategy that puts the politics at its centre. Conflict is not a linear process. Conflict prevention should not necessarily take place only before violence occurs, it can take place at different stages of the conflict cycle. Resolving conflicts to develop more peaceful, resilient societies overseas for a safer UK should be a priority. As such, the SDSR gives the UK an opportunity to:

- Give greater priority to supporting peace processes that lead to an inclusive political settlement, through increased political will and policy coherence both within government and multilaterally;
- Work towards sustainable outcomes through inclusive settlements that pave the way to more responsive and accountable governance;
- Improve the quality of support to these processes through mediation support and technical and financial resources.

Sanctions need to be used within a political strategy to be effective

Eleven case studies in our Accord publication on [*Incentives, Sanctions and Conditionality in Peacemaking*](#) reveal how these tools have been ineffective and fuelled conflict when they have not been part of a broader strategy aimed at resolving conflict: “The absence of a clear and consistent strategy for peace, meant that these instruments were used unsparingly but ineffectively. Even when they did have an impact, as with the case of US targeted sanctions in 2007, the lack of a political strategy meant that the outcome was modest.” (Alex de Waal, Programme Director, Social Science Research Council, Darfur case study)

→ Giving HMG the means to do it:

- ◆ In supporting peace and political settlement ensure a strategic engagement at all levels of HMG, from trade, counter-terrorism measures, foreign policy, development, which should enable HMG to use its levers and sanction in a comprehensive way;
- ◆ Invest in diplomacy by having a lead diplomat facilitating endogenous political settlements and peace processes;
- ◆ Strengthen the specialist capacities of HMG and international institutions to offer state-of-the-art support for confidence building, mediation, and other peace and political settlement support strategies;
- ◆ Coordinate approaches with regional and international organisations to increase effectiveness. Uncoordinated approaches in the case of Cyprus meant that an opportunity was missed to link the unification of the country with the accession to the European Union (EU) for example.¹⁰

¹⁰ This is particularly relevant with the increased diplomatic role played by the EU in the context of the establishment of the European External Action Service.