



The role of conflict prevention in 21st century defence Saferworld's submission to the Labour Party Shadow Defence Review, March 2012

Saferworld welcomes this opportunity to provide input into the Labour Party Shadow Defence Review.¹ This submission builds on the recommendations made in a previous briefing, *The role of defence in preventing overseas conflict*, submitted to the Shadow Defence Team in December 2010, which is included as an annexe to this paper.²

Saferworld also welcomes the commitment by the shadow defence, foreign affairs and international development teams to working closely together in the process of reviewing party policy. This reflects the widespread recognition that defence, diplomatic and development capabilities are more effective when they work towards shared objectives on the basis of shared analysis. At a minimum, this should prevent different and potentially competing policy objectives from undermining each other; ideally, they should be mutually supportive.

Saferworld is an independent international NGO that works to prevent violent conflict and promote co-operative approaches to security. Through our research and programming work in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, we seek to understand and influence the relationship between conflict, security and international development. As such, rather than seeking to answer every question raised by the consultation paper *21st century defence* in this submission, we focus on those areas that relate to the UK's engagement with conflict and fragility overseas.

Immediate Pressures and Priorities

- *How can and should this list be expanded?*

The consultation paper identifies 'tackling extremism' as an immediate priority area for UK defence policy (p16). It sets out a number of suggestions as to the drivers of extremism – urbanisation, political exclusion, a lack of economic opportunity, ungoverned spaces and fragile states. Yet the suggested response is to place "greater emphasis on counter proliferation efforts, counter-insurgency operations and plans for the long-term stabilisation of Afghanistan." While Saferworld recognises that it is often necessary to take measures such as these to prevent violent extremism from threatening UK national security, it is also vital that steps are taken to address the drivers of extremism, such as those identified above. While the paper later references interventions which might help address these drivers, such as supporting the development of more democratic systems of government, these are not explicitly linked back to tackling extremism. If the drivers of extremism are not taken into account in efforts to tackle it, there is a danger that counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency interventions may inadvertently exacerbate the problem.

The consultation paper implicitly recognises that conflict overseas can present a threat to UK national security. However, while the paper identifies 'countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)' as an immediate priority, it is largely conventional weapons, and particularly small arms and light weapons (SALW), which continue to fuel conflicts around the world. As such, bringing the global trade in conventional weapons under control should be a key security priority, both for the UK and internationally. The UK can contribute to this objective in a number of ways: by

¹ This submission responds to the consultation paper *21st Century Security*, <http://jimmurphyp.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/21st-Century-Security-Consultation1.pdf>.

² http://www.saferworld.org.uk/101210_The%20role%20of%20defence%20in%20preventing%20violent%20conflict%20overseas.pdf

improving UK arms transfer controls; by advocating for strengthening of the EU Common Position³; by leading international efforts to secure a robust and effective international Arms Trade Treaty at the UN in July 2012.

- Which government strategies to tackle these threats are in need of reform or investment?

UK arms transfer controls

Significant positive steps were made under the Labour government to strengthen UK arms transfer controls, by establishing the 2002 Export Controls Act and its revision in 2008. As a result, the UK has strong criteria according to which export licence applications are assessed, contained in the UK Consolidated Criteria. However, in practice these criteria are not robustly applied. In 2011, this led the parliamentary Committees on Arms Export Control to conclude that “both the present Government and its predecessor misjudged the risk that arms approved for export to certain authoritarian countries in North Africa and the Middle East might be used for internal repression.”⁴

In response to the Arab Spring and the questions it raised about UK arms export controls, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) announced a review of strategic export licensing processes in March 2011⁵, which concluded in October 2011.⁶ It is yet to be established how the conclusions of the review will be implemented, and Saferworld, as part of the UK Working Group on Arms, has set out a number of concerns about its content.⁷ The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) is now conducting a review focusing on three specific aspects of the export licensing process, the results of which are yet to be announced.⁸

The Government has set out on multiple occasions its intention to make the promotion of UK defence and security exports a key priority, as part of a wider export promotion drive. Saferworld notes in particular the Government’s intention to use its Diplomatic Service to promote defence and security exports, and that all UK Ministers will be “more personally involved in supporting defence and security exports”, including the expectation that, as part of every overseas trip, they will engage in export promotion.⁹

Saferworld is concerned as to how the Government will reconcile this with the potentially competing priority, set out in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), of utilising the Government’s diplomatic capabilities as part of an integrated approach to conflict prevention. As Saferworld and its partners in the UK Working Group on Arms have set out in past briefings, we are concerned that prioritising the establishment of a more commercial culture could come at the cost of conflict prevention due to a reduced emphasis on ensuring the robust application of arms transfer controls.

Saferworld recommends that Labour uses its position in opposition both to lobby for stricter application of the export licensing criteria, and to closely scrutinise the impact of the Government’s increased export promotion drive on the application of those criteria.

Arms Trade Treaty

³ *EU Common Position 2008/944/CFSP defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment*, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:335:0099:0103:EN:PDF>.

⁴ Committees on Arms Export Control, *Scrutiny of Arms Export Controls (2011): UK Strategic Export Controls Annual Report 2009, Quarterly Reports for 2010, licensing policy and review of export control legislation (2011)*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmquad/686/686.pdf>, p11. For Saferworld’s response to the report, see <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/media/news-article/526>.

⁵ Foreign Affairs Committee, *Developments in UK Foreign Policy - uncorrected evidence -16 March 2011 (2011)*, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmcaff/uc881-i/uc88101.htm>.

⁶ *Hansard*, 13 October 2011, column 41WS-42WS, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm111013/wmstext/111013m0001.htm#11101330000005>.

⁷ See the UK Working Group on Arms’ written evidence to the Committees on Arms Export Controls, published 23 February 2012, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmquad/writev/export/ae04.htm>.

⁸ *Hansard*, 7 February 2012, column 7WS-9WS, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120207/wmstext/120207m0001.htm#12020767000002>.

⁹ Ministry of Defence, *Equipment, Support, and Technology for UK Defence and Security: A Consultation Paper (2011)*, http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/F4ACE80C-BFD7-463D-99A6-2B46098BB0C4/0/cm7989_Eqpt_supp_tech_ukdef.pdf, p33.

Saferworld welcomes the reference to the ATT in the consultation paper (p30) as an example of where the UK can exercise leverage within multilateral institutions. The Labour Government led efforts to kick start the ATT process at the UN, the final negotiations for which will take place in July 2012. While the current Government has made a strong policy commitment to support the negotiation of a strong treaty¹⁰, there is much that Labour can do to apply pressure on the Government to put these strong policy commitments into action.

For example, States are now in the process of developing their negotiating positions on the substance of the ATT. While the UK Government has outlined its broad policy objectives and at the same time indicated that “compromises must be made”¹¹, it has not yet articulated what will be its red lines at the negotiating conference in July. Labour should put pressure on the Government to push for a treaty which prevents arms being transferred where there is clear risk of them being used to violate international human rights law or international humanitarian law, and not to compromise on this point.

Building Stability Overseas Strategy

In July 2011, the Government published UK’s the first cross-departmental conflict prevention strategy, in the form of the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS). This incorporated many key elements of the approach to conflict prevention which was developed under Labour. The BSOS sets out a vision of upstream conflict prevention which involves supporting “political systems which are representative and legitimate, capable of managing conflict and change peacefully, and societies in which human rights and rule of law are respected, basic needs are met, security established and opportunities for social and economic development are open to all”.¹² It also suggests that this type of “structural stability” is “built on the consent of the population, is resilient and flexible in the face of shocks, and can evolve over time as the context changes.”

This represents a bold vision. However, it must be more than a just piece of paper. It is now vital that the Government lives up to its commitments by putting BSOS into practice. Doing so will mean considering how this vision can be integrated into all the UK’s overseas engagements and Labour has an important role to play in ensuring this happens. Further detail on the challenges to implementing BSOS is given in the following section.

Labour’s Values and Approach

- *Are these principles the right ones for the circumstances we face given the values we profess?*

Saferworld strongly welcomes the commitment to conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction expressed in the consultation paper (p24). It is also very welcome that the paper prioritises peaceful and diplomatic means of averting conflict over the use of military force, and emphasises the importance of preserving and protecting human rights (p23).

Preventing violent conflict may sometimes involve short-term diplomatic crisis management to avert violence at the ‘eleventh hour’, or military interventions to prevent mass atrocities such as the recent intervention in Libya. But, crucially, ‘conflict prevention’ can also be understood as the process of supporting longer term societal change – helping countries to become more cohesive, resilient and able to manage conflicts without resorting to violence. ‘Upstream’ conflict prevention is about developing a thorough understanding of what generates conflict within or between societies, then developing responses that aim to address the underlying causes and drivers of both this conflict and violence, rather than focusing only on the incidents of violence itself. This vision of ‘upstream’ conflict prevention was adopted by the Labour government, and Saferworld

¹⁰ See, for example, Nick Clegg, *We can lead from the front in disarming*, Independent on Sunday, 19 February 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/nick-clegg-we-can-lead-from-the-front-in-disarming-7174368.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² HM Government, Building Stability Overseas Strategy (2011), <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/Building-stability-overseas-strategy.pdf>, p 5.

recommends that this approach should remain at the heart of Labour's approach to conflict overseas.

- *Where are the policy dilemmas likely to be most acute in seeking to apply these principles in practice and what lessons can we learn from past efforts to operationalise them?*

As the consultation paper acknowledges, addressing conflict overseas requires an approach that integrates defence, diplomatic and development capabilities in pursuit of shared goals. The BSOS provides a set of principles around which this whole-of-government approach should be framed, however there are many practical challenges to actually implementing it. Taking an integrated approach requires officials in all relevant parts of government, both in Whitehall and in country posts, to buy into and prioritise BSOS. However, the BSOS currently enjoys widely varying levels of awareness, buy-in and prioritisation between and within MOD, FCO and DFID. Unless a concerted effort is made to ensure that BSOS is prioritised by all relevant officials, there is a danger that departments will revert to prioritising their departments' own separate objectives. This prioritisation will require a high level of political leadership on the issue, and clear accountability mechanisms for those charged with implementing the BSOS, including country teams, the BSO Board and the National Security Council.

- *Where can and should the current Government do more through defence policy to advance the elements of this approach?*

The paper rightly acknowledges that defence assets and defence diplomacy have a role to play in conflict prevention. We understand that the Government's vision for what role the MOD will play in conflict prevention will be set out in the forthcoming Defence Engagement Strategy.

In the 2010 briefing paper *The role of defence in preventing overseas conflict*, Saferworld set out a number of ways in which the defence community can contribute to conflict prevention efforts, including: assisting with defence transformation; security and justice sector reform; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration; countering the proliferation of small arms; and monitoring the implementation of arms transfer control arrangements. Further detail on each of these is included in the annexe.

Defining Our Role

- *What forms can 'intervention' take, and in what circumstances can and should it be used? In which circumstances do we expect the UK and allies to be called upon to intervene?*

It should be remembered that 'intervention' by the defence community need not and should not be limited to combat operations. The BSOS sets out an intention to "direct more non-operational defence engagement to conflict prevention"¹³, and we have set out in the annexe some examples of the types of engagement which could be included in this.

It is easy to think of upstream conflict prevention as suitable for countries that are 'pre-conflict' whilst stabilisation is appropriate for countries immediately 'post-conflict'. However, in reality most contexts are a complex tangle of 'pre-', 'mid-' and 'post-' conflict at any one time. The defining feature of an 'upstream' approach is that it seeks to address the underlying drivers of conflict, and in theory interventions to do this can be undertaken at any point during the conflict cycle, even at the same time as short term measures to address the symptoms of conflict are also being carried out.

Any decision on whether and when to intervene in a conflict situation – be it through diplomatic overtures, humanitarian or development assistance, or military means - should be based on a thorough analysis of the conflict context which is shared across government departments.

¹³ *Op cit* HM Government, p 27.

International Co-operation and Alliance Relationships

- *In which specific areas of defence policy should the UK be seeking to deepen cooperation, and with which nations?*
- *With which other nations and regional groupings of nations, in particular emerging nations, is it important for the UK to foster stronger relationships?*

Emerging regional powers

While the consultation paper makes reference to the EU, US and NATO as the UK's key allies, it is welcome that the paper also states that the UK's bilateral defence relationship with China should continue to be developed (p11). Saferworld recently published a policy briefing on opportunities and challenges for co-operation with China on engaging in conflict-affected and fragile states, which provides recommendations for developing this relationship: for example, by engaging proactively with China during its current phase of policy development on issues of conflict and security, and through increased co-operation with China on multilateral processes such as the Arms Trade Treaty.¹⁴

Defence diplomacy and arms exports

In relation to alliance-building through defence diplomacy Saferworld notes that the current Government has set out an intention to use defence and security exports as a diplomatic tool for building relationships with other countries. Saferworld would argue that the pursuit of any such strategy should not come at the expense of the rigorous application of UK export licensing criteria and the need to conduct thorough risk assessments. As the UK Working Group set out in its 2010 submission to the CAEC, the use of defence and security exports as a diplomatic tool "should be applied with extreme care given that it is not necessarily consistent with the UK's obligations as set out in the EU Common Position."¹⁵ These state explicitly that considerations relating to "defence and security interests [including] those of friendly and allied countries... cannot affect consideration of the criteria on respect for human rights and on regional peace, security and stability".¹⁶

Pursuing a strategy of using defence exports to advance diplomatic relationships with other states also carries inherent risks. In situations where the Government is seeking to build closer ties with another state through defence co-operation, diplomatic imperatives may lead to an increased pressure in favour of licensing inadvisable transfers, and away from strict application of the Consolidated Criteria. In the past, this has led to ill-advised transfers of equipment to authoritarian regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia and Libya.¹⁷ Saferworld believes that it is sometimes necessary and even advisable to engage with authoritarian regimes. However, the UK Government has a wide range of defence, diplomatic and development tools at its disposal to engage with such states; selling arms should be at the bottom of the list.

Combining Hard and Soft Power

- *What are the challenges in combining hard and soft power?*
- *What are the most effective diplomatic, preventative soft power tools that are not currently being deployed or maximised by the UK?*
- *What are the attributes and deficiencies in how UK defence policy interacts with UK development policy?*

¹⁴ Saferworld, *China and Conflict-Affected States: Risks and Opportunities for Building Peace* (2012), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/China%20&%20conflict-affected%20states%20briefing%20double.pdf>.

¹⁵ UK Working Group on Arms, written evidence to the Committees on Arms Export Controls (2011), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmquad/writev/arms/m5.htm>.

¹⁶ Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP (2008), Article 2.5.a, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:335:0099:0103:EN:PDF>.

¹⁷ For more detail on the use of defence and security exports in defence diplomacy with Saudi Arabia and Libya, see Saferworld, *Responsible export controls for UK security and conflict prevention* (2011), http://www.saferworld.org.uk/Saferworld_MODsubmission.pdf.

Co-ordinating defence, development and diplomatic tools

The consultation paper states that “the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan has taught us more clearly than ever before that the use of the military instrument needs to be coupled with developmental and diplomatic tools, both in pre-conflict planning and to achieve any post-conflict settlement.” However, this is true not only in contexts where the UK is engaged in combat operations: defence, diplomatic and development capabilities can and should be co-ordinated in contexts where the UK’s engagement is non-military, or where the military is engaged in a non-combat role, such as the through deployment of military advisers. Furthermore, this applies not only to pre-conflict and post-conflict planning phases but also to efforts to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict.

Using aid to meet security needs

It should be recognised there are risks associated with this integrated approach. The paper references one such example, acknowledging that “defence and development strategies play different and importantly distinct roles. That must continue and issues such as the militarisation of aid are vital to avoid.” It is right to guard against what is sometimes called the ‘militarisation’ or ‘securitisation’ of aid, but in doing so we must not lose sight of aid’s potential to promote genuine security and justice for poor people.¹⁸

In Afghanistan, the military has been directly involved in giving aid in order to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of local populations, often through ‘Quick Impact Projects’ intended to consolidate combat gains by ‘doing development’ in areas that have been cleared of insurgents. This approach shows little understanding of what development means, the time frame it involves, or what kind of engagement with local communities produces successful development outcomes. Indeed, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that such approaches are largely ineffective and often counter-productive to even short-term military ends, let alone the long-term wellbeing of the communities involved. In addition, the distribution of UK development assistance across the world should not be skewed towards countries or regions where the UK’s national security interests are at stake, at the expense of populations which may be in greater need of development assistance but which are not deemed to pose a threat to UK security.

These examples demonstrate some of the risks associated with the securitisation of aid. However, it is important to draw a distinction between the use of development assistance to further the UK’s own national security objectives, and the use of aid to meet the genuine security needs of vulnerable populations. Poor people want to feel safe just like anyone else, and security and access to justice for poor people are development goals in their own right.

Saferworld believes that aid should always be given first and foremost to meet the needs of the world’s poorest or most vulnerable populations, in accordance with the International Development Act 2002. However, working with these populations to ensure aid supports genuine, locally-owned measures to address insecurity, along with broader poverty reduction, is a crucial step in supporting the development of more stable, resilient societies better able to manage their conflicts without resort to violence – and so contribute to a more stable world order. In this way, effective aid may well have ‘knock on’ benefits for donors’ own security over the long-term, but to actually be effective in this way, aid should always be targeted primarily at the genuine needs of poor and vulnerable populations. Therefore, when the consultation paper suggests (p26) that “the UK can and should better integrate development as a tool to help meet security objectives”, the key questions are about whose security it is intended to promote, how it is to be used, where, and for what purpose.

Advocacy for conflict prevention

The consultation paper states that “the EU and US are the world’s largest investors in conflict prevention. There should be an advocacy campaign, ideally run by the United Nations, on the benefits of preventative action and investment to encourage other nation states to commit resources.” Saferworld would support greater advocacy efforts to promote investment in conflict

¹⁸ These issues are explored in greater detail in Saferworld’s report, *The securitisation of aid? Reclaiming security to meet poor people’s needs* (2011), <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/Securitisation%20briefing%20pages.pdf>.

prevention, but this should not just be about the level of resources committed, but also about how they are spent. There is growing recognition in the international community of the need to invest in conflict prevention, but what is missing is a clear, shared vision of what effective conflict prevention looks like. Saferworld suggests that the UK should promote a progressive vision of upstream conflict prevention such as that contained in the BSOS. A crucial component of this advocacy effort will be to demonstrate through the UK's own conflict prevention efforts that this approach works, and Saferworld recommends that, though careful monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of the UK's interventions, the Government should contribute to and help disseminate a solid evidence base supporting this upstream approach to preventing violent conflict.



The role of defence in preventing overseas conflict

December 2010

Introduction

The UK's defence budget, like many departmental areas, has recently been subject to serious cuts. The Coalition has committed to withdrawing combat troops from Afghanistan by 2014 and, post-Iraq and Afghanistan, there may be little public or political appetite for future 'boots on the ground' intervention overseas. At the same time, the UK's relative power in the world continues to decline – though its reputation and influence allow it to 'punch above its weight'.

Given this context, what should the UK's international conflict prevention role be, and what contribution can the defence community make?

This briefing argues that a concerted, coordinated approach to preventing violent conflict 'upstream' (addressing the underlying causes and long term drivers of conflict) would play to the UK's strengths. It looks at what the contribution of the UK's defence community might be to such an approach, relevant Coalition commitments, and how Labour could use its role in opposition to set a proactive agenda on conflict prevention, sharpen HMG's approach to 'building stability overseas', and encourage the Coalition to successfully complete negotiations towards an international Arms Trade Treaty.

'Upstream' conflict prevention and the role of defence

Preventing violent conflict may sometimes involve peacekeeping interventions that physically prevent violence, or at least shield civilian populations from its worst effects. But, crucially, 'conflict prevention' can also be understood as the process of supporting longer term societal change – helping countries to become more cohesive, resilient and able to manage conflicts without resorting to violence.

This kind of long term, upstream conflict prevention requires a coordinated range of activities, tailored to individual contexts. The UK's defence community has a central, positive role to play in such an approach, in partnership with development and diplomatic actors. For instance:

'Defence transformation' that helps countries to right-size their defence assets and transition towards civilian control and oversight of the armed forces

Over 20 years of conflict has left southern Sudan with a large army and a range of armed militias. If future conflict is to be prevented, the state must be supported to provide its population with security, the currently excessive level of military spending reduced to a more appropriate level, and the role of security actors within society brought under civilian control. In 2005, an 'International Military Assistance Team' (IMAT) was established to 'support the security elements of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement [by] developing regular, professional and non-partisan armed forces that will respect the rule of law, civilian government, democracy, basic human rights and the will of the people.'¹⁹ The IMAT comprised military and civilian advisors from the US, UK, NL and Norway and – although political difficulties caused the project to be disbanded before it could complete its work – provides an illustration of one role the defence community might play in such defence transformation at the strategic level.

Support for the development of 'security and justice services' (such as the police, armed forces and judiciary) that are not only capable but also democratically accountable, transparent and responsive to those they serve

It is important to recognise that promoting security and justice sector development should be designed and implemented as a civilian intervention, led by civilian agencies. Equally, such interventions should not only focus on the 'supply side' of reforms (supporting the development of capable, accountable security services), but also on the 'demand side' from the perspective of the 'users' of security and justice services – encouraging and empowering local populations to be active and engaged in the way their security services are provided.

However, the reality is that, in many contexts where the armed forces enjoy privileged access to power or influence, UK defence representatives may enjoy greater traction in working to support democratic reforms than their civilian counterparts. By working jointly across different arms of government, to one common strategy, HMG can ensure it is matching its approach to the needs of the context.

At the same time, the UK already provides training for the armed forces and civilian defence figures of other countries. The UK should ensure that such trainings successfully embed genuine respect for such issues as human rights, democratic principles, gender equality, and conflict sensitivity as well as providing practical skills. The UK could also leverage maximum value from such trainings by using them to identify progressive champions for change and developing an ongoing relationship with these individuals.

In its training of both UK and foreign defence actors, the UK should also ensure that it looks at how the armed forces engage with local populations – recognising both the benefits to be had from close, constructive engagement but also the reality of how armed forces may be perceived by communities and the implications this has.

The successful 'disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration' (DDR) of ex-combatants into everyday civilian life, or the security services

After fighting has ceased and a peace settlement been agreed, what do the combatants who were actually prosecuting the conflict do with themselves?

In Nepal, there are currently tens of thousands of Maoist ex-combatants living in cantonments awaiting a government led process to either 'rehabilitate' them back into civilian life (providing vocational training and financial support, for instance) or 'integrate' them into Nepal's security services (such as the Police, Armed Police, and Army). The successful completion of this process is critical to Nepal's prospects for future peace.

The majority of DDR initiatives should be civilian led and developmental in character. But providing technical assistance to the integration of combatants into national security services is an area where the UK's defence community could potentially play an extremely useful role.

¹⁹ OECD DAC case book on conflict, peace and security activities: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/21/39967978.pdf>

Measures to control the proliferation of illicit arms within conflict prone countries

Readily available small arms (SALW) not only exacerbate the risks of violent conflict, but may also facilitate human rights abuses, terrorism and other forms of armed criminality (such as piracy in Somalia, for instance). The defence community could contribute to measures to control SALW by, for instance, providing support to countries introducing 'marking and tracing' programmes to keep track of legitimately held firearms; or providing advice on securely managing or destroying stockpiles of arms so they do not find their way into the illicit market. However, to make a meaningful difference to the impact of illicit SALW proliferation on ordinary people's lives, this type of technical intervention needs to come as one element in a coordinated package of measures implemented by a range of actors. The armed forces may also have a valuable contribution to make in supporting de-mining efforts or the clearing of other explosive remnants of war, such as cluster bombs.

Monitoring arms transfer control arrangements

Defence representatives posted overseas, such as defence attaches, can play an invaluable role in monitoring countries compliance with arms transfer control agreements – such as international arms embargoes, or the standards of the international Arms Trade Treaty due to be negotiated at the UN in 2012. Defence attaches are also a vital link in the UK's export control regime in terms of assessing the risk associated with potential UK arms exports to the country where they are posted. With the increased focus on UK overseas staff promoting UK commercial interests and bilateral trade, it is important that this role is not neglected.

Even this, definitely non-exhaustive list, represents a wide array of potential interventions and it is vital that the UK does not apply a 'template' approach to conflict prevention, but looks at the individual characteristics and realities of each context it is working in and uses these as the starting point for its efforts to prevent conflict. Afghanistan is not Yemen and neither of these places are Somalia. For this reason, any conflict prevention initiatives should always begin with the context and involve the people they affect.

Begin with the context

All long term conflict prevention efforts should be based on a thorough understanding of the context, gained from in-depth analysis which is continually updated and shared between relevant actors. This contextual understanding should look at several levels – it is not enough to understand the high level political dynamics or international diplomatic issues in isolation, though these are important. We must also understand what the perceptions of ordinary people and communities are. This is a lesson neatly captured by the former head of ISAF, US General Stanley McChrystal:

"In Afghanistan, things are rarely as they seem, and the outcomes of actions we take, however well-intended, are often different from what we expect... If you build a well in the wrong place in a village, you may have shifted the basis of power in that village... If you build a well and contract it to one person or group over another, you make a decision that, perhaps in your ignorance, tips the balance of power, or perception thereof, in that village. Therefore, with a completely altruistic aim of building a well, you can create divisiveness or give the impression that you, from the outside, do not understand what is going on or that you have sided with one element or another, yet all you tried to do is provide water."²⁰

A range of actors can bring different competencies and comparative advantages to context analysis, including the armed forces – who may often have access to areas / information that other parts of HMG do not. But bringing together all these various analytical elements into one comprehensive context analysis, shared across government, will be crucial to ensure that UK interventions are most effective.

²⁰ General Stanley McChrystal Address, IISS, October 2009

Ensuring local ownership and participation

Closely related to understanding what local people really think is ensuring that they are involved meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives. This is not just a moral issue: conflict and insecurity is a product of people's choices and, to a large degree, plays out at the local level. Neither the UK nor any other part of the international community can 'provide' security or 'deliver' stability – we cannot simply turn up with governance (or security, or development) 'in a box'.

Instead, the UK can use its resources and influence to *promote* peace and security, but achieving lasting stability and sustainable security will rely on not just the consent of local people, but also their active input and ownership²¹. As the MoD's February 2010 green paper suggested, "... *local people must be at the centre of our policy. Only local people will determine whether, in the long-term, a country or region will establish self-sustaining stability.*"²²

What has the Coalition committed to?

Saferworld made a submission on the above model of upstream conflict prevention to the Coalition's recent Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR)²³. Our submission built on a dialogue begun with the MOD during the development of its February 2010 green paper.

When the SDSR was published in October 2010, it contained a number of welcome commitments – including to significantly increasing support to an 'integrated approach' to conflict prevention. Inter alia, these commitments included:

- 'Directing more non-operational defence engagement overseas towards conflict prevention, security sector reform and capability building in priority countries, including through: establishing new training teams; running joint exercises; attaching senior civilian policy advisors to foreign defence ministries, and increasing our arms control engagement so as to promote regional stabilisation and reduce the risk of conflict.'
- Developing a 'Building Stability Overseas Strategy' (BSOS) to be published in Spring 2011 which will set out the detail of governments approach to overseas conflict
- Earmarking £300 million for the Conflict Pool (to fund both upstream conflict prevention and post-conflict stabilisation)
- Expanding the remit of the Stabilisation Unit to include upstream conflict prevention
- Creating a cross-government board to oversee the development and implementation of the BSOS.

However, these commitments are currently at the stage of headline announcements – officials and ministers are now working, through the development of the BSOS, to elaborate the details of this overall approach.

Beyond stabilisation, beyond Afghanistan

Much of the public and private discussions around the UK's role overseas have drawn from recent experience in Afghanistan and highlighted an ambition to enhance the UK's capacity for 'post-conflict stabilisation'. Saferworld would support a more coordinated and effective approach to post-conflict stabilisation, but we must be clear about what we are trying to achieve.

If 'stabilisation' in this context is to mean a relatively short-term activity with a strong military involvement (such as recent engagements in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Kosovo for instance) then we would stress that this must be complemented by a coherent and effective

²¹ The 2008 conflict in Georgia, for instance, was at least as much a product of local level conflict dynamics as it was of high level 'real politik'. Many analysts were surprised that this conflict centred around South Ossetia rather than Abkhazia and it has been suggested that this may be, in large part, down to the years of sustained and concentrated peacebuilding efforts that have been undertaken in Abkhazia.

²² MOD, Adaptability and Partnership, Issues for the Strategic Defence Review, February 2010

²³ <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/smartweb/resources/view-resource/466>

long-term preventative approach designed to promote the development of more resilient, peaceful societies. Helping to stabilise the patient must not come at the expense of helping to treat their ailment.

Similarly, whilst there are certainly lessons to be learnt from the UK's engagement in Afghanistan, it is not the case that these lessons will be applicable across all conflict-affected countries, or that they alone will be sufficient to inform the UK's overall approach to addressing overseas conflict.

'UK Plc' and the strategic use of defence and security exports

The SDSR was welcome in referencing the Coalition's commitment to continuing UK support for the international Arms Trade Treaty initiative, which the UK has championed at the UN since 2005. As mentioned above, the SDSR also talks of increasing defence engagement on arms controls, which is very welcome.

However, questions remain about whether HMG can successfully balance these ambitions against a concurrent desire to dramatically increase UK defence exports, and to more overtly use defence and security exports as a tool of foreign policy²⁴.

Conflict prevention and national security

As Saferworld set out in our submission to the SDSR, we believe that coordinated and effective efforts to prevent violent conflict 'upstream' by supporting the development of resilient and peaceful societies *can* make a significant contribution to the UK's own national security – as part of promoting a more benign global environment, increased respect for the rule of law, and addressing people's genuine socio-economic and political grievances.

But we must be sure to get the causation right when thinking through our approach to conflict prevention. Upstream conflict prevention may have knock on benefits for the UK's national security, but must not be *led* solely by national security concerns which may risk the UK taking a perspective that is too short term, or focusing only on a small selection of countries that the UK currently deems to be in its immediate strategic interest.

What can the Labour defence team do?

Labour has a proud record on many areas related to upstream conflict prevention – including a statement of ethical foreign policy, the development of the 2002 Export Controls Act to regulate the export of UK arms, leading efforts to establish an international Arms Trade Treaty at the UN, establishing DFID and publishing a 2009 White Paper outlining a world class approach to doing development in conflict-affected and fragile countries, recognising in its National Security Strategy that responding to the threat of global instability 'has to be rooted in helping states and the societies within them become more secure, with a capable and responsive government, and the rule of law'²⁵, and setting public spending targets on conflict prevention (PSA 30).

There are a number of ways in which Labour generally, and Labour's defence team specifically, can continue this work in opposition – ensuring that the UK's approach to overseas conflict always has a concern for those people affected by conflict and insecurity at its heart.

- **Setting a proactive agenda on conflict prevention**

Using the range of contacts within the defence community developed over the last 13 years of government to unpack and explore the contribution defence may play in upstream conflict prevention and setting a proactive, positive agenda on this area. There is currently rapidly growing interest in this area from many within the defence community, partly inspired by the

²⁴ SDSR, page 66: "...working with the MOD and Home Office, specifically to promote defence and security exports for good commercial reasons and where this will build the capacity of our partners and allies..."

²⁵ Security for the next generation, Cabinet Office, June 2009: Page 11

question of what role the UK's armed forces will play 'after Afghanistan'. With combat troops due to withdraw from Afghanistan by 2014, this would be just within the life of the current Parliament.

- **Sharpening HMG's approach to 'building stability overseas'**

Working closely with civil society groups to provide a forensic level of scrutiny to HMG's developing plans for conflict prevention. For instance, calling for parliamentary involvement in the development of the BSOS strategy and providing oversight to HMG's performance in meeting its objectives, or pushing for the Defence Select Committee to hold an inquiry into the role of the UK defence establishment in overseas conflict prevention. It will also be important for Labour to ensure its shadow teams are appropriately coordinated – effectively addressing overseas conflict will require effective cross-departmental working: and so will providing effective scrutiny to this policy area. Labour could consider setting up a 'shadow National Security Council' to provide oversight of the Coalition's strategic decision making, for instance.

- **Encouraging the Coalition to successfully complete negotiations towards an ATT**

The UK has championed the ATT at the UN since 2005 and, thanks in large part to this contribution, an actual treaty will be negotiated in 2012. But the period between now and then will be critical in ensuring that the final treaty negotiations produce a robust and comprehensive treaty. Labour could provide proactive scrutiny of HMG's support to an ATT in the run up to the negotiations. On a related note, as the official opposition, Labour could ensure it is vigilant for any signs that standards may be slipping in the implementation of strategic export controls, and raise any instances of bad practice for public examination.

Saferworld would welcome further opportunities to work with the Labour party on these and other ways of helping to ensure that the UK plays the most effective role it can in effectively addressing overseas conflict and fragility.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent, international NGO that works to prevent violent conflict and promote cooperative approaches to security. We believe everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives free from insecurity and armed violence.

Through our work in the Horn of Africa, South Asia and Eastern Europe we aim to understand what causes violence by talking to the people it affects and then bringing together communities, governments, civil society and the international community to develop solutions. Using this experience, we also work with the UK, EU, UN and others to develop ways of supporting societies address conflict and insecurity.

We always seek to work constructively with others and do not usually engage in public campaigning. While we are not a traditional development agency, we seek to understand and influence the relationship between conflict, security and international development.

We have over 60 staff based in London and abroad – with registered offices in Brussels, Colombo, Juba, Kampala, Kathmandu, Nairobi and Pristina, and a permanent staff presence in most of the countries we work in. Our funding for 2008-2009 was around £4.7million – mainly in the form of government grants from Canada, the EU, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK.