

# Security for the future – In search of a new vision

*We are a group of people involved in peace-building work who are increasingly concerned about the future of peace and security here in the UK and worldwide. We believe that our own government is not responding effectively to the challenges of the new century, but with a marked change of course, it could be. We would like to begin a public conversation about this in the UK. We have outlined some initial thoughts on a vision for a more peaceful, less insecure world. A summary is below; the full text (8 pages) is at [www.opendemocracy.net/ammerdown-invitation](http://www.opendemocracy.net/ammerdown-invitation). These thoughts are just one contribution among many possible others; we would welcome your responses and your own ideas.*

Anxiety about the future is growing. Violence is escalating in the Middle East and beyond. Financial worries and concerns about our changing society are widespread. Consumer economies are dangerously damaging the earth's ecology, rapidly depleting natural resources, and driving rich and poor people further apart. These major drivers of insecurity are disrupting societies across the world, but governments have been unwilling or unable to respond, or have made matters worse. A number of governments, including our own, are investing heavily in their armed forces, expecting to control the global security environment by projecting power abroad.

Our political class has yet to adapt to these realities. The devastating failures of the US-led, UK-supported wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya have shown that sustainable security will not be achieved by strategies centred on military intervention. At home, 'counter-terrorism' policies have curtailed hard-won rights and liberties. The government's approach to dealing with 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' is deepening alienation and mistrust between communities.

We believe that a more peaceful, less insecure future is possible. Although the challenges are severe, they are not beyond the imaginative, intellectual, and practical resources available. But for a change of course we need to begin from the recognition that we share a common humanity with fundamentally the same needs, desires, hopes and fears, and that we can live only as part of a planetary ecology, which is now straining under our weight. Whether our world becomes more or less secure could well come to depend on the kind of future we choose to believe in.

We think that a strategy for sustainable security would take account of the following points:

- What does security mean? The government's strategy views security mainly in terms of military responses to perceived threats. We believe that the true meaning of security is deeper and broader: freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity. This suggests societies in which everyone has access to decent work, food, health care and education, a safe place to call home, and communities of people who support each other.
- On what does this depend? Our future security lies not in rugged individualism and the survival of the strongest, but in recognising our common interdependence. We believe that our better future will depend on greater social, economic and ecological responsibility. Instead of using power to control and dominate, it must be used more to achieve shared goals equitably through cooperation and negotiation. This involves us all, not only governments, in responsibilities that are local, national and global.

- How could we move towards this now? Since the greatest drivers of insecurity include climate change, economic inequality, social and political marginalisation and loss of natural resources, a strategy for sustainable security would respond far more vigorously to these challenges. It would invest strongly in state and civic capacities for conflict prevention and peace-building. And it would work to convert the arms industry to socially useful production, draw back the UK's heavy defence spending, and decommission its nuclear weapons. Rather than follow the lead of the world's predominant superpower, the UK's foreign policy would seek progressive alliances with like-minded governments and people's movements.
- And in the longer term? Our future security can only grow from social, political and economic arrangements that are fairer and more ecologically responsible than those we have now. We have to ask: Who makes the decisions, how, and in whose interests? Power is increasingly concentrated in international institutions and corporations that are far from our democratic reach. Ordinary citizens are disenfranchised; democratic forums nationally and globally need urgent reform and renewal.
- Can it be done? We are not proposing a utopia, just a different direction of travel. Our multiple global crises gravely threaten our common security, but are also an unprecedented incentive to renew our democratic institutions and foster cooperation between peoples, leading towards a worldwide sense of humanity as a global community. From our experience of peace-building work, we believe that only a public conversation, to which people from all backgrounds contribute, is capable of ushering in the substantial changes in thinking that are needed.

We would like to begin this conversation now, and we hope you will join us to share your views.

## Questions

1. What does 'security' mean to you? How does this compare with your understanding of the term 'national security'?
2. Should security begin at home, or does our security depend on security elsewhere in the world?
3. The UK is the sixth-largest military spender in the world. To what extent does this help to keep us safe? To what extent is it part of the problem?
4. The government's national security strategy is focused primarily on 'projecting power' abroad. We believe that security depends more on tackling the underlying causes of insecurity, such as economic inequality, social and political marginalisation, climate change, reckless exploitation of natural resources and global militarisation, among others. What do you think?
5. Who do you think is responsible for building security? What roles should the government play? What roles do you see for citizens?
6. Do you agree that a change of course is needed? If so, what can be done now, and how will it be achieved in the long term?

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<sup>i</sup> Text prepared by a group of people with experience of peace-building and working with conflict, who met in 2014 at the Ammerdown Centre, a retreat and conference centre in Somerset, to share perspectives on the future of global security. To see the list of signatories, visit [www.opendemocracy.net/ammerdown-invitation](http://www.opendemocracy.net/ammerdown-invitation). Note: The views expressed in this document do not necessarily represent those of the Ammerdown Centre or its Board of Trustees.