

Rethinking Security

for a just and peaceful world

Ben Wallace MP
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall, London
SW1A 2HB

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Dear Mr Wallace,

We wish to offer our congratulations on your recent appointment as Secretary of State for Defence.

As experts in the fields of peace and security, we share your awareness of the many challenges of the current international context and the complex choices facing government. Equally, we recognise the significant opportunities that exist for the UK government to make a vital contribution, alongside others, to creating the conditions for peace, security and sustainable development.

While noting the many existing work streams in progress within your Department, and the priorities they have been accorded, we wish to encourage you to bring a fresh perspective to your expanded portfolio. The current flux created by both the changing international context, and the domestic Brexit debate, create a rare opportunity for the UK to rearticulate its core values, redefine its place in the world, and reset its approach to shared global challenges.

We acknowledge that the government's Global Britain agenda is intended to capture that opportunity. However, we believe that this agenda has so far lacked sufficient attention to some of the key priorities for peace and international security to which your Department can contribute. Specifically, we suggest the following areas of action:

- 1. Combat global militarisation.** Using its influence in NATO, the government could work to harmonise military spending with the European context and release policymakers from the arbitrary target of 2% of GDP. It should resist pressure for further increases to the MOD's budget, and commission an inquiry into the feasibility of rebalancing military forces away from a focus on expeditionary capabilities and towards territorial and cyber defence.
- 2. Review nuclear weapons policy.** The government should advocate and facilitate multilateral nuclear disarmament initiatives in close collaboration with other states, to promote further progress in establishing the mechanisms that make up the disarmament and non-proliferation regime. As part of a robust strategy for urgent multilateral disarmament, the UK should reassess its programme to renew the Trident system and its relationship with the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
- 3. Re-set arms export policy.** With the UK potentially operating outside the EU Common Position in the event of Brexit, the government should reaffirm its commitment to the

Arms Trade Treaty. It could demonstrate this in practice by introducing a presumption of denial when considering applications for licenses for the export of military equipment to repressive governments, states where there are credible allegations of human rights violations or areas of violent conflict.

- 4. Diplomacy for peace.** The government should prioritise and advocate for political and economic strategies to address enduring violent conflict. It could harness and build the UK's diplomatic capacity for peace, by increasing political and financial support for peace processes and mediation, investing in local capacities for peacebuilding in conflict contexts, and further developing of knowledge and skills in this area.
- 5. Peace operations.** Future UK contributions to UN Peace Operations must promote the 'primacy of politics' as the basis for such interventions, as recommended by the UN High Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO). They must also prioritise civilian protection as well as developing greater civilian capacity to address causes of conflict.
- 6. Prioritising prevention: tackling climate breakdown, inequality and marginalisation.** Many of the world's most serious challenges – inequality, climate change, marginalisation – require intensive international cooperation as well as action at home. Government departments could give these challenges greater strategic priority and investment, and be monitored and evaluated accordingly, including for the effectiveness of their collaboration with international partners.
- 7. Conflict-sensitive analysis of new trading relationships.** As the UK prepares to renegotiate trading and other relationships with individual states and multilateral institutions, we would like to see a cross-government approach that assesses how these interactions might contribute to either exacerbating global insecurity and violence, or building peace and respect for human rights. We believe that your Department, alongside DFID and the FCO, have important expertise to contribute to these decisions.

We appreciate that many of these proposals would represent a course alteration with regard to current government policy. Yet over **half of UK adults oppose the use of UK troops in other countries and almost two thirds consider the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia unacceptable**. With this in mind, we urge you to give these proposals careful consideration, and encourage you to engage with the many organisations, like ourselves, who will be willing to work with you to make them a reality.

We would very much welcome a meeting with you to discuss these proposals further.

Yours sincerely,



Celia McKeon, Co-ordinator, Rethinking Security

Rethinking Security is a network of academics, campaigners and non-governmental organisations including: Campaign Against Arms Trade, Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament, Conciliation Resources, Forces Watch, Oxford Research Group, Peace Direct, Quaker Peace And Social Witness, Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network and Saferworld.